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# DETECTIVE

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## LITTLE MISS MURDER

A DOC EGG NOVEL

by DAY KEENE

A NEW

SHERIFF LOVATT

NOVELETTE

by HENRY NORTON

GAULT-HARRISON  
POWELL-GORDON  
ANDERSON  
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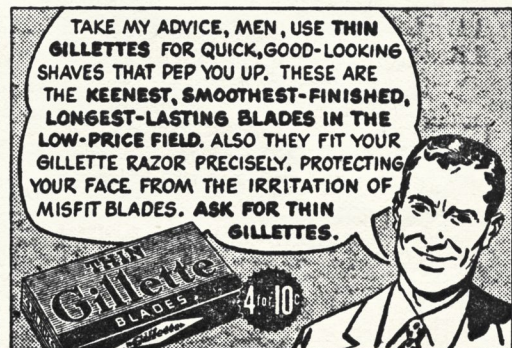
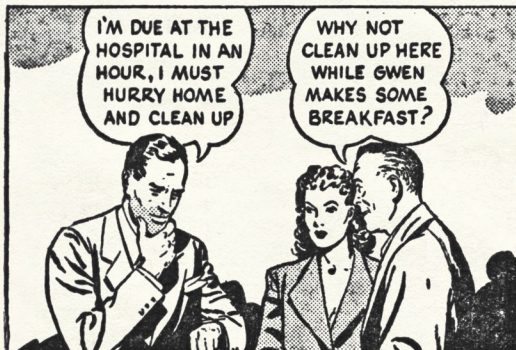
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GET BUSY ON THIS SHOULDER, DOC. ONE FUNNY MOVE AND THE GIRL GETS IT





# DETECTIVE

**12**  
STORIES

**TALES**

**15**  
CENTS

VOL. THIRTY-FOUR

NOVEMBER, 1946

NUMBER FOUR

## Compelling Feature-Length Novel

1. **LITTLE MISS MURDER**.....*Day Keene* 10  
—she *should* have been christened; Doc Egg decided, when he learned she was slated for a fast arsenic exit—with his name next on the list for a strange homicide hay-ride!

## Three Spine-Tingling Murder Novelettes

2. **CURTAIN CALL FOR THE CORPSE**...*William Campbell Gault* 40  
—was nearly taken by me, and even as it was, when that pay-off went wild, I was still marked for low man in death house row!
3. **COME HOME TO THE CADAVER!**.....*Cyril Plunkett* 56  
—because it's still there waiting for you, Georgia, and I think *you* know how it got there!
4. **DIANA AND THE MONKEYFIST**.....*Henry Norton* 80  
—made a strange pair of homicide companions. But there they were, and there was Luke Barnes—dead as a duck to prove it!

## Five Thrilling Short Stories

5. **SHARP GUY**.....*Daniel Gordon* 29  
—you'd better learn quick that a sirloin—or a killer—is only as tough as your knife is sharp!
6. **PHOTO FINISH**.....*C. William Harrison* 34  
—caught that strictly-a-dish dick, Thelma Matthews, leading the killer by a nose in a mad race for the hot squat!
7. **URGENT BUSINESS**.....*Don James* 50  
—can't wait, so better bet your head off now, Dorr—Tomorrow you won't have one!
8. **A GIFT FOR JEANNIE**.....*Talmage Powell* 68  
—a proper and fitting gift, thought Willie, would be literally worth its weight—in blood!
9. **JOHNNY'S ON THE SPOT!**.....*Allan Rütner Anderson* 74  
—where he had to learn quick that one good corpse deserves another!

—AND—

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12. **THE FINGER POINTS TO MURDER!**.....*Stookie Allen* 73

December Issue Published October 25th!

THIS SEAL PROTECTS YOU



AGAINST REPRINT FICTION

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# WHAT TO DO IF LOST IN THE WOODS AT NIGHT

Common sense and your flashlight can bring you through, says Adirondack guide Edwin Young, of Star Lake, N. Y.



**1** First—take it *easy*! You're never really *lost* until you lose your head! *Don't travel at night.* Instead, use your flashlight to gather boughs and leaves for a bed, near a stream if possible. Build a signal fire; it will warm you and protect you. Then—



**2** Flash the S.O.S. signal with your flashlight—three short, three long, three short—to guide searchers. Long-lasting "Eveready" batteries will send *hundreds* of such brilliant, penetrating light signals. Save your strength for daylight. Then—



**3** Stay where you are until help comes. But, if you *must* travel, put out fire, head *downstream* along *any* running water; it will generally lead you to safety. When out of the woods, resolve: To *always* carry matches in a waterproof case, a compass, and an "Eveready" flashlight on *every* outing!



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# THE CRIME CLINIC.

**“W**HO knows a murderer?” Understand, the question is not, “Who is acquainted with a murderer?” but, “Who *knows* one?” The chances are plenty hot that you don’t. Very few people do. So few in fact, that it would be the neatest business trick of the week to make book at 20 to 1 that you don’t.

You may remember that the odd Mr. Smithers who lived down the street was hauled off by the cops back in July, but you probably didn’t learn too much about what you really wanted to know from the newspaper accounts. And very probably, aside from the batch of wild rumors which flooded the town for the next few days, you never did learn. The point is that average guys like you and me never seem to get close to that final and complete degradation of man known as murder. Of course, I hope we never do, and so do you. But that doesn’t stifle *curiosity* one whit.

For that reason, you and I like to read dramatic stories of murder. Particularly if they have that little twist that highlights the real motive behind them. We came across one the other day while digging through our archives, that has just that element of revealing the guy behind it—the guy caught in the middle.

Suppose you suddenly discovered that your wife was a murderess? What would you do? Take a look at this one and see if you don’t agree with us that LeRoy was on a really red-hot spot.

**H**IS old man was dead. That was the inescapable fact. LeRoy Green had been able to think of little else since they’d found him lying on the railroad tracks he’d tended for thirty-five years, with the bullet holes in his head. There he had been with the glaring

eye of the gusting locomotive fixed unmercifully on his body. LeRoy hadn’t been there, but they’d told him about it. Old Forty-seven, the engine that had been the old man’s friend—if such things be.

She’d stood there then, hissing vengefully, her great eye having discovered the killing, enabling her engineer to stop her just in time. She’d looked down on old Bob Green for the last time, snorting her impatience, tongueless, waiting for them to find out what else she had discovered. And in the light of her great orb they found it at last, the deep, thin imprint of a woman’s high heel and, some distance away, a glistening, cheap rhinestone shoe buckle. That was the devil of it. The old man had been fifty-five, the age for high-jinks, but he hadn’t been like that. It couldn’t be anything like that.

*You think I did it?* a voice seemed to say right out of his thoughts, and LeRoy Green looked up at his wife. Winona was beautiful, with the face and eyes of a dusky Madonna, and right now he thought she looked at him oddly. As if she wondered if he really could doubt her.

He shook his head no and she smiled a little. *Then what are you worrying about?* her eyes seemed to ask. Nothing—he shook his head again, this time in answer to himself. But he was worried still.

There was the insurance and there was the woman angle. The police had checked both. They hadn’t yet found the woman, but the insurance went right to the old lady, his mother. Ten thousand dollars, and she’d needed it. Naturally they didn’t think she was guilty, nobody could ever really think that, but the police were desperate. And living right here in Little Rock, the old lady didn’t have too

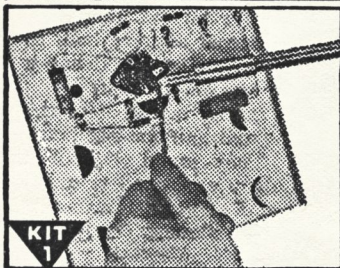
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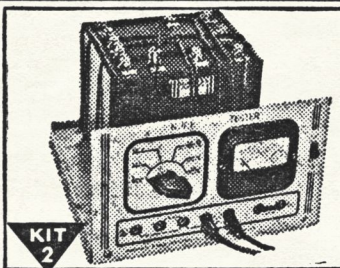


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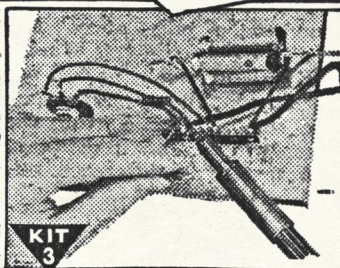
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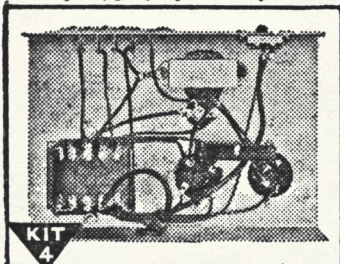
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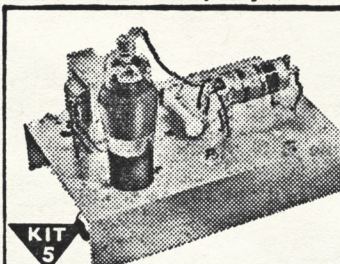
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Early in my course I show you how to build this N.B.I. Tester with parts I send. It soon helps you fix neighborhood Radios and earn EXTRA money in spare time.



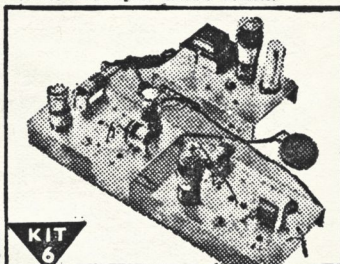
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(Continued from page 6)

ironbound an alibi. Unlike himself and Winona, she was on the spot.

But nothing like the spot he was on now, LeRoy thought. Again he looked up at his wife, and perhaps there was appeal in his eyes.

"Look, honey, if everybody's got to come clean, why don't you let me tell them about us?"

"About my leaving home early?"

He nodded. They lived in another state, hundreds of miles away. They'd planned to visit the old folks, and Winona had left a day early, the day old Bob had been killed. She'd been met at the station by the old lady. When she stepped off the train the old man was already dead. So it didn't really make any difference. No difference, other than simply telling the truth.

"Why?"

He tried to meet her eyes. There was accusation in them, and puzzlement, too. She really wanted to know. As much as anything, he supposed, she wanted to know what sort of man she'd married—whether he'd stand by her now.

He tried to explain, haltingly. "It'd maybe take some pressure off—mother. It's hell to see them doing what they're doing to her. Suspecting her of—"

"And you'd rather see them do it to your wife?"

There was no answer to that. He'd known there wouldn't be. He could see her point, of course; but could she see his?

*You know I don't mean that, he thought. They couldn't hurt you, naturally. It's just that it might open their eyes to other possibilities. And if they look around they're bound to find whoever—*

She shook her head and he stopped. On her face was an expression every husband knows—the look of a woman whose mind is made up.

"I never heard anything so silly in my life," she told him. "You'd just give them another bad lead and make them waste more time. And in the meantime the real murderer, or murderer, gets farther and farther away. No, I've got a better idea." She came over and perched on the arm of his chair. "We'll go home to Colorado and take mother with us. If they haven't got her here, they'll have to find another suspect. They're not holding her, yet. We'll go home and forget about all this."

He looked up at her and relief washed over him. She was right, of course, he'd been nuts to think he could help the old lady by refusing to alibi his wife. Still, it'd been one hell of a spot for a guy to be in.

But it was over now. Or would be as soon as he was far away from here.

The cops would have to find somebody else. . . .

The cops didn't, though. Instead they found that LeRoy's mother had owed Winona a considerable sum of money, and that the two had laid nebulous plans for "getting it out of the old man"—though not necessarily plans involving murder. They also found the owner of the rhinestone shoe buckle, which the killer might or might not have worn. And they found a telegram which destroyed one person's alibi.

In the meantime, LeRoy had taken his problem and his family for an extended outing. Gradually the change of scenery had, so he thought, set his mind at rest. He'd had a chance to think, and he was off the spot.

It wasn't until more than a month after the old man's death that he and Winona got home to Pueblo, Colorado. They found the police waiting for them. LeRoy explained that his mother had left them at Red Fork, Oklahoma, to continue her vacation alone. The police were unimpressed, though interested; they had other matters on their minds.

They showed Winona a telegram she'd sent to Little Rock, Arkansas, proving that she'd been in town in plenty of time to kill her father-in-law; they said they'd traced the shoe buckle to her.

He watched the Madonna face smile. He heard her soft, almost lilting confession.

"Sure—I killed him. . . ."

Well, they had a trial, back in 1934, this was, and LeRoy recalled that, during their trip, at the time his mother had decided to leave them, Winona had gone off with the old lady. The two had had a money argument and had parted.

It wasn't until after she'd been convicted of killing the old man that Winona called over the detective who'd gotten the goods on her. Again the Madonna smile, beguiling, sly, heart-catching:

"I think you ought to stop looking for mother," she whispered. "I killed her, too!"

LeRoy's spot vanished.

\* \* \*

Well, how did you like it? Do you agree with us? We hope you did, and we also hope that you'll keep your eyes peeled for next month's big issue with its thrilling lead novel, *Murder Time Gal*, Earl Pierce's murder-mystery novel. In it you will meet as strange and unusual a pair of sleuths—along with a bevy of beautiful babes—as you've ever seen trying to pin the tag on a killer. Watch out for Barron and Son, they're on the loose!

You'll also find a host of novelettes and short stories by such well-known authors as W. T. Ballard, Ken Lewis, Don James, and Thorne Lee.

The December issue will be published October 25th!

THE EDITOR.



# What keeps YOU from making more MONEY?



**J**ust what is the matter—why aren't you making more money? Look around you. Probably many of the people you know are doing a lot better than you are.

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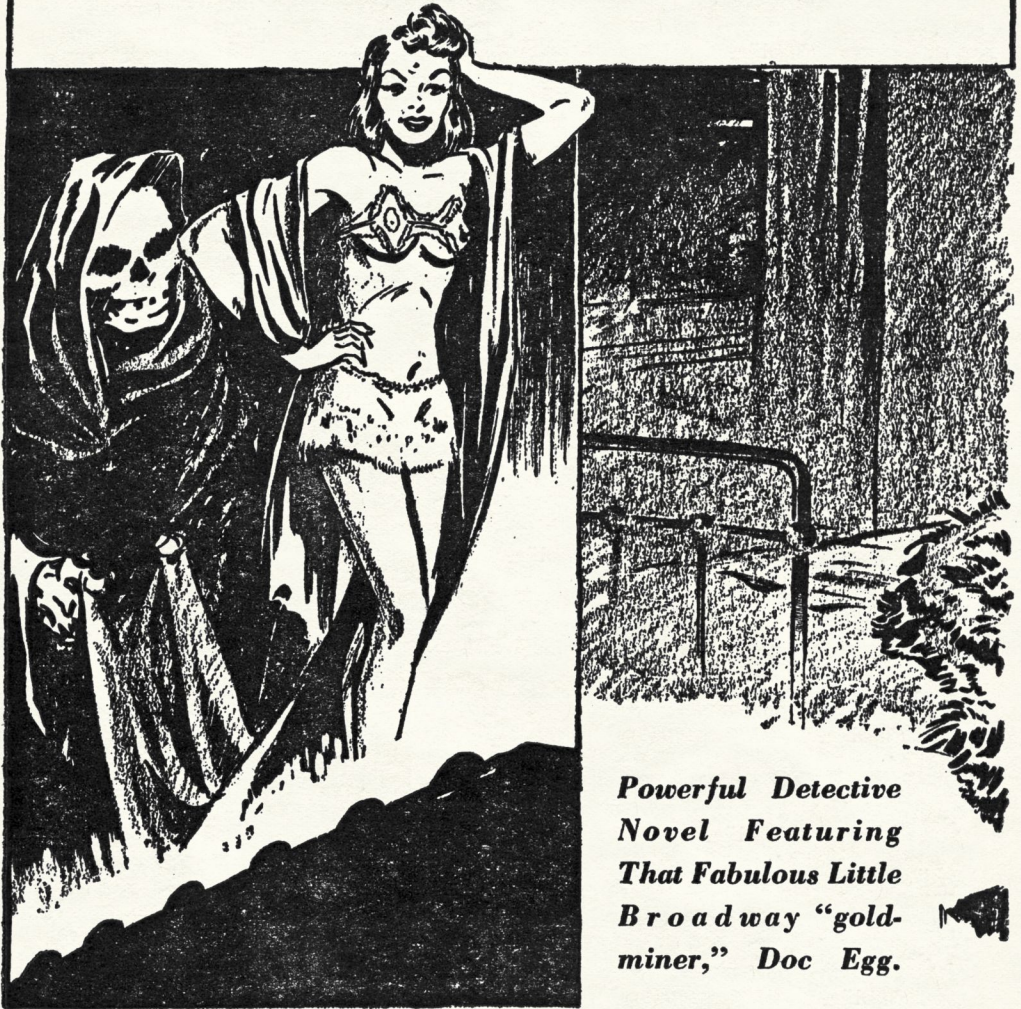


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# LITTLE MISS MURDER

By DAY KEENE



*Powerful Detective  
Novel Featuring  
That Fabulous Little  
Broadway "gold-  
miner," Doc Egg.*

## CHAPTER ONE

### Death in a Capsule

**H**ER name was Vera Reynolds. She was a show girl. Time was when she had been beautiful. She still was young, not more than twenty-five, and possessed of a certain gamin charm.

Bare legged, wearing a pair of high-heeled evening slippers, a fur coat that had seen better days, and not much of anything else, she walked into Doc Egg's gold mine on the corner of 44th and Broadway a few minutes after eight o'clock on the night she was to die.

Ray Harley, Egg's head pharmacist, both knew and liked her. "Hi there, Gorgeous. What can I do for you?"



*"You've done fine till now, Doc, but you're tired. You've taken two beatings that would have killed any other man. Go on home and let us handle the arsenic exit of this peacheroo. All Broadway knows that dames are your weakness. Why, you can't see murder for legs!"*

In order to light a match for her, he had to use both hands. That gesture cost him his life.



The girl tried to smile, and couldn't. Her face under her make-up was haggard. "Hi, yourself." She fumbled a prescription from her purse. "Fill this. And step on it, will you, Ray? I've a curtain in twenty minutes and my head is splitting."

The pharmacist glanced at the prescription, then over his glasses at the show-girl. "Where did you get this, Vera?"

She tapped one toe impatiently. "Where do you think I got it? Doctor Hanson gave it to me. Come on. Come on. I have a curtain to make."

DR. HANSON ...  
OFFICE HOURS BY APPOINTMENT

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*Rx* For *Murder*

*E. D. M.* *Ases As*



Harley looked back at the prescription. It was written on a standard prescription blank put out by a large pharmaceutical firm and was signed Einar Hanson M.D. It was the chemical symbol *As* that bothered Harley.

"Well, this should cure a headache," he admitted. He sifted the crowd in the store with his eyes until he found Doc Egg's bald spot. The little druggist was up in the front of the store selling an expensive pen and pencil set to a visiting fireman and his wife. "Sure. Just a minute, Vera," Harley said.

He disappeared through the swinging doors into the prescription department, filled a half dozen capsules with sodium bicarbonate, boxed them, typed a label, and returning, handed them to the girl. "That will be forty cents Vera."

She paid him without comment, walked to the soda fountain, asked for and received a glass of water, and took two of the small capsules.

Watching her, Harley shuddered. One ran into the damndest things. Someone was out of his mind, most likely the young Doctor Hanson. This was something Egg had to know.

Harley followed the girl to the front of the store. She seemed to be drugged or in pain. As she passed the fountain pen display, her coat caught on a counter and pulling open revealed her dressed in nothing but a jeweled dancing belt and bra. She closed it mechanically and walked on.

The visiting fireman whistled. His wife gave Vera a dirty look. Egg kissed the sale goodbye. "One of the girls from the revue just up the street," he attempted to explain. "That's her first act costume."

The woman pursed her lips. "Come, John. I thought this was a drug store. But it seems I was mistaken."

The druggist grinned after their backs, saw Harley and demanded gleefully, "Did you see that strip tease, Ray? Wow! What the well dressed dancer *doesn't* wear. It was worth losing the sale." He sobered slightly.

"Why so sour? Something wrong?"

Harley handed him the prescription. "I don't know. This is my problem, Mr. Anthony. Since when do reputable physicians prescribe *Arsenious oxide* for headaches?"

Egg studied the prescription. "What the hell. Where did you get this?"

"Vera," Harley told him.

The druggist creased the prescription between his fingers. His eyes were worried. He knew and he liked young Hanson. "It's a gag of some kind," he decided. "No druggist would fill that prescription. What did you do, cap up some seidlitz powder?"

"Sodium bicarbonate. I thought it might be advisable."

"Yeah," Doc Egg nodded. "One never car. tell. Show girls dropping dead all over the floor might give the store a bad name. She took one?"

"She took two."

Egg reached his hat from under the cigarette case. "There is something screwy here. No doctor, unless he's crazy, is prescribing arsenic in capsules. Hold down the store, will you, Ray? I want to talk to Vera, also my friend Doctor Hanson."

THE Fall night was cool. Both Broadway and 44th were crowded with hurrying, well-dressed men and women. There was a growing insistence of taxi-cab horns as the before theatre rush neared its peak. A bright-eyed, bald little man pushing forty, Egg paused briefly in the shelter of the doorway of his store to light a cigarette.

To out-of-towners, it was merely another drug store, better stocked than most, at the cross roads of the world. To those in the know, it was a gold mine. To Doc Egg it was a dream come true, a dream he had punched out of human flesh. Born Egbert Thistlewaite into the poverty of New York's lower East Side, he had earned his pharmaceutical education and his start in life with his fists. As a leading featherweight contender, he had fought the best of his weight. He still could when occasion demanded.

Broadway called him a good egg. It liked and respected him. He never forgot a favor or forgave a wrong. His private pension list was as long as his arm. His drug store was a mecca for the theatrical and sporting crowd, and for the cream of the underworld as well.

His cigarette lighted, he walked briskly up 44th Street toward the lighted marquee of the theatre in which Vera was playing. The prescription worried him. Now that he considered the matter, so did the girl's face. She was either ill or drugged, or worried.

"But did I notice it at the time?" he muttered. "No. I was too busy looking at white space."

He strode down the theatre alley-way and tugged the stage door open. Murphy, the doorman, stopped him, saw who it was and grinned. "You're kind of early, ain't you, Doc? Stage door Johnnies are supposed to wait until—"

Egg punched him lightly in the shoulder. "I'll stage door Johnny you. Where does Vera Reynolds' dress?"

The doorman consulted a list. "She's down in twelve. But it's almost curtain time, Doc. Don't you think—?"

"No." Egg cut him short. He turned to buttonhole Mason the stage manager. "Hold up, Johnny. You're just the lad I want to see." He walked him to one side. "What



do you know about Miss Vera Reynolds?"

Mason was puzzled. "What do you mean, what do I know about Vera? She is doing a specialty in the show. Why?"

"That's not what I mean," Egg told him. He searched his mind for a fragment of conversation that he had overheard in the store. "Didn't I hear somewhere that she had put out her torch for Jack by lighting one for young Hanson?"

"That's right," Mason nodded. "And a lot of good it did her. I hear now that he's trying to give her the gate for some society wren with a bundle of mullah like that. You know, the Dawson kid, of the Dawson-Farnsworth tribe."

The orchestra began the overture.

"Tough, eh?" Mason added. "One of her guys gets killed and the other one goes high hat." He pushed the button to raise the asbestos curtain as he talked. "Why?"

"I'll tell you later," Egg said. "I want to talk to Vera if I can do it before the show goes on."

He walked down the metal steps leading to the basement dressing rooms only to be engulfed in a bevy of chattering chorus girls as a buzzer sounded loudly and someone shouted, "Places."

At any other time it would have been a pleasant experience. Most of the girls knew him. All of them were pretty. But he pushed on, resolute, determined to see Vera. Her face lined with pain, she came out of her dressing room as he reached it.

"Look, Vera. About that prescription—" he began.

"That's what I want to know," she said thickly. "What did Ray put in it?" The girl was deathly sick. It showed in her anguished eyes. "I can hardly stay on my feet. I—"

"Places, Vera. Come on," Mason called sharply from the head of the stairs. "You can hold hands with Doc after the show."

Shaking off Egg's attempt to restrain her, the dancer mounted the stairs, sweat standing out through her rouge in beads and staining the coating of powder on the white satin flesh of her body.

Egg followed closely behind her. "Hold that curtain," he ordered Mason. "This girl can't go on. Take a look at her face. She's sick."

"You run your drug store," the dancer said thickly, "and let Johnny run his stage. I'm all right," she insisted, to Mason. "I'm just sort of sick to my stomach from those damn headache powders that Ray sold me. There should ought to be a law."

Mason studied her face. "You're sure you're all right now?"

"I'm fine," Vera lied. "Just fine." A set

smile on her face, she danced on stage to a smattering of applause as the orchestra began her number.

Mason watched her with worried eyes. "Shes sick all right," he admitted. "You, Murphy. Get Doctor Hanson on the phone and ask him to come over."

Egg pushed his way through the group of girls clustered in the wing for their entrance and descended the stairs again. Something was radically wrong. A small capsule of sodium bicarbonate didn't turn its taker's face green.

THE hall outside the dressing rooms was deserted. Vera's dressing room door was closed. One of a string of semi-private dressing rooms, it was connected with the others by two inner doors that could be opened for ventilation. He pushed open the door to the hall and walked in. Her street clothes, pathetically shabby for a specialty dancer in a New York show, hung neatly on hooks against the wall. There was an illusive scent of perfume in the air. The box of capsules that Harley had given her, bearing his own store label, was on the make-up shelf next to her pot of rouge. Egg took a capsule from the box, broke it in his fingers and touched his tongue to the substance. Harley had made no mistake. It was sodium bicarbonate.

His eyes thoughtful, he returned the box to the shelf and took the prescription from his pocket. Over Hanson's signature, it called for six capsules of arsenious oxide, each of sufficient strength to kill a horse. Even as a gag it wasn't funny.

That definitely was something that Hanson would have to explain. Egg pondered Mason's statement concerning Vera's lighting a torch for Hanson.

"That's right. And a lot of good it did her. I hear now that he's trying to give her the gate for some society wren with a bundle of mullah like that. You know, the Dawson kid, of the Dawson-Farnsworth tribe."

The druggist lighted a cigarette from the stub of the one he was smoking. Arsenic was one way for a man to get rid of a girl he no longer loved. But why attempt to make some poor dub of a druggist the goat?

He placed the prescription in his wallet, walked to the hall door and stopped short with his hand on the knob.

The scent of perfume had grown stronger. The door to the adjoining dressing room on the left had suddenly cracked open. Someone was watching him. He could feel the heat of eyes boring into his back.

He turned, puzzled, and faced the door. "What's the idea? Why peep through a crack? Come in."

There was no answer. Annoyed, he



walked to the door and pushed it open. He expected to see a curious wardrobe mistress, or perhaps one of the members of the cast not on in the opening scene.

He saw no one. The room was dark.

"What's the idea?" he repeated. He took a quick step into the room, feeling for the light switch—and that was a mistake on his part.

He sensed the blow in time to duck, but not quite far enough. The sap missed the top of his skull and struck him back of the ear with murderous impact. Half out on his feet with pain, he closed instinctively with his assailant and felt soft, yielding, flesh under some silken substance.

"A woman! A girl!" Egg swore.

He attempted desperately to hold her, felt her slither eel-like out of his grasp. Then the sap found his head again, flush on a temple this time.

The room leaped into dazzling brilliance—then as suddenly blacked out. . . .

Seven. He'd wait for a count of seven. Then he'd get up. No. He'd better make it nine. Every second counted. He had walked into one that time. The crowd was roaring for the kill. Well, let them roar. He'd get up fighting at the count of nine.

Five—Six—Seven—Eight.

Egg tensed his muscles, pushed himself up to one knee—and stared into total darkness. He wasn't in the ring. He was still in the unlighted dressing room and a girl with the strength of a man had knocked him out. He shook his head to clear it. The roaring of the crowd was applause. Vera had finished her number.

He got groggily to his feet, staggered into the dancer's dressing room and looked at himself in her mirror. Both blows had broken the skin. Both blows had been hard enough to cause possible concussions. It was impossible to tell if they had. He didn't think so. But, whoever the girl had been, for reasons best known to herself, she had tried sincerely to kill him.

"Little Miss Murder," he smiled wryly.

His face was a bloody mess. He washed it as best he could in Vera's basin but blood continued to trickle. He would have to have either Hanson or Harley dress the wounds. He looked at his watch. He had been out for perhaps five minutes. There was no need for haste. If the girl was one of the cast she could still be in the theatre. If she had been an outsider, she would be gone by now.

His back to the stage door, Murphy was still at the phone, attempting to contact Doctor Hanson. He glanced at Egg, told him, "You were right, Vera is bad sick. She got through her number fine but collapsed when she came off stage." He swore at the

phone. "And all I get is the busy signal."

"What did the girl look like who just went out?" Egg asked him.

Murphy continued to click the cradle of the phone. "I wouldn't know. I haven't got eyes in the back of my head." He looked at Egg, saw the blood, and his eyes went round. "Holy smoke! what happened to you?"

"It wasn't an accident," Egg said crisply. "Some dame just tired to kill me."

**H**E CROSSED back-stage to the group surrounding the sick girl and forced his way through it. The dancer was lying on a prop sofa under the harsh white glare of a stand lamp. Her face was grey. Her knees were drawn up in agony. Her bare abdomen was rigid to Egg's touch.

"Where the hell is Hanson?" Mason swore.

"Never mind Hanson," the druggist said. "Get a doctor—any doctor. Stop the show if you have to and ask if there's one in the house."

"She's that sick?" Mason wanted to know.

"She's dying," Egg snapped. "You," he ordered a stage hand. "Get down to my store as fast as you can. Tell Harley I want some Emetic of Mustard, some Hydrated Oxide of Iron and Magnesia, a bottle of olive oil, and thirty grains of Potassium Bromide in water solution."

The stage hand looked blank. "Hell. I can't remember all that."

The dying girl on the couch said, distinctly, "Those damn pills," gave a final agonizing, convulsive shudder, and lay still.

"Never mind," Egg said quietly. "It's too late now." He felt for a pulse. There was none.

Mason said, incredulously, "She can't be dead!"

The druggist lighted a cigarette with fingers that trembled slightly. "But she is."

The girls around the couch began to cry. Murphy joined the group. "I just got Doctor Hanson's nurse. She says the doctor is out on a call but as soon as he comes in—" The old man glanced down at the silent figure and his voice trailed off. "Oh no, oh no," he protested, instinctively making the sign of the cross.

A trickle of blood ran down Egg's cheek into the corner of his mouth. He spat it out. Death wasn't uncommon on Broadway. Actors and actresses were no more immune to it than other people. But there was more to this, far more than had boiled to the surface so far. This wasn't death. It was murder. The dancer had been dying when she had walked into the store with a prescription for the poison that he believed had killed her.

He touched his own bloody temple. But



who? And why? Why had he been attacked? Who was the girl who had slugged him and what had she been doing in the dressing room adjoining Vera's?

On stage the music turned 'sweet' and the male star of the show began a love song. Lovely in old fashioned crinoline gowns, make-up streaked with tears, the chorus lined up for its second entrance. The public had paid its money, the curtain was up, the show had to go on. In a chorus of fifty beautiful girls, one dead dancer would not be missed.

Mason covered the girl's white body with a crimson cape. "Now what do we do? Call the police?"

Egg nodded. "Right."

"She took whatever killed her herself? It was suicide?" "I doubt it," the druggist said. On a sudden hunch he slipped his wallet from his pocket, swore softly. One thing at least was clear. He knew, or thought he knew, why he had been slugged. The prescription for Arsenious oxide was gone. It would be his word, and Ray Harley's, against Hanson's. But it hadn't been Hanson who had slugged him. It had been a girl.

"You'd better call Lieutenant Dan Carter directly," he told Mason.

Mason gasped. "But Carter is from Homicide."

"That's right," Egg said dryly. "Who would you expect to investigate a murder, the Bureau Of Missing Persons?"

## CHAPTER TWO

"Come In, Sucker!"

IN THE foyer of the theatre, and spilling out onto the walk, laughing men and women ducked into Sardi's for a 'quick one,' panned and praised the first act, discussed the state of the nation.

Back stage there was no laughter. Vera Reynolds no longer cared how the show was going, politics no longer mattered.

There would be a longer and more exhaustive investigation. But Lieutenant Carter saw no reason why he should stop the show. As Mason stood by, his watch in hand, the lieutenant gave the cast a quick once over between acts.

This girl had danced in other shows with Vera. That girl had lived in the same rooming house. Billy Anders, the comedian, had known her well, and liked her.

"She was a swell kid," he told Carter. "When she was up there she wasn't high hat. I know. I did a skit in the Scandals the year that she was starred. That was six, no seven years ago. She and Jack Reynolds had been married about ten months when he was mur-

dered. And it hit her pretty hard, I guess. Vera wasn't ever the same after that. She—well, nothing seemed to matter to her."

"And you know of no reason why anyone should want to poison her?"

"I do not."

Mason pointed at his watch. Lieutenant Carter told him, "If I let the show go on, you can hold the second act curtain for five minutes. Now shut up and get out of my hair." He addressed the assembled cast. "Anyone here got anything to tell me that might bear on the case? Any of you know of Vera taking pills for anything?"

"She was always taking pills," a red-haired show girl told him. "She was one of them, what do you call it, hypo something."

"Hypochondriac?" Doc Egg suggested.

"Yeah. That's it," the girl beamed. "You know, all the time taking pills on account she 'maged she didn't feel so good."

The Deputy Medical Examiner finished with his task. "Egg is right," he told Carter. "It's arsenic, and lots of it. I'll do a post of course, but it's rather a waste of time."

Carter looked at Egg. The two men had been boys together. Their friendship had turned adult with them. It was a Broadway gag that whoever hit either man had both a cop and a druggist to fight. "And you are sure it was a dame who slugged you, Doc?"

Egg said he was positive.

"Okay. That's all for now," Lieutenant Carter told the assembled cast. "But stick around after the show. And stay out of Miss Reynolds' dressing room."

Mason returned his watch to his pocket with a deep sigh of relief. "Then I can ring up the curtain now?"

Carter shrugged. "You can do a fan dance for all I care." He swung around to the aged doorman. "You, Murphy. Come here."

As the M. E. sterilized and bandaged the deep cuts on Doc Egg's head, Carter questioned Murphy without learning a thing that he didn't already know.

A girl might have come up the stairs and gone out the door while he was attempting to get Doctor Hanson. He had been too excited to notice. He had tried to get Hanson's office on the phone for at least six minutes, possibly seven or eight, before he had succeeded in getting his nurse. The line had been busy from the time that Vera had begun her dance until sometime after Doc Egg had asked him what the girl who had gone out the door had looked like.

"And when you did get through to his office, Hanson was out on a call but his nurse said that as soon as he came in she would send him to the theatre. That right?"

"Yes, sir."



Carter asked Egg how he felt.

"I feel fine," Egg told him.

"Good," Carter said. He posted a guard in front of the dead girl's dressing room, talked briefly to several of the tech squad men and returned to the druggist. "Come on. Let's go over and talk to Hanson. There is something screwball here, but how. And don't get me wrong." He held the stage door open for Egg. "I'm not doubting your word about that prescription. But if it was Hanson who slipped her the white stuff, say in capsule form so it wouldn't get to her for an hour or so—that could be done?"

Egg said it could.

"I can't imagine," Carter continued, "him being so dumb as to call attention to himself by writing a prescription for the stuff."

"No," Egg admitted. "But on the other hand all you have is Ray's word and mine that such a prescription ever existed."

Carter said that was good enough for him and crossing the street cut through the Schubert Theatre alleyway to 45th Street. Egg kept pace with him, thinking of Vera.

A sensational dancer and star of the Scandals at seventeen, at eighteen Vera had married Jack Reynolds, a free spending Wall Street broker and play boy. So far as Doc Egg knew, Reynolds had been the only man in Vera's life. And she hadn't known him long. He had been kidnapped and murdered within ten months of their wedding day.

As Egg recalled the affair, one hundred thousand dollars ransom had been asked. By selling the jewels that Reynolds had given her, Vera had managed to pay it. But she had never seen him again either dead or alive.

**H**IS car, the front cushion sodden with blood, of his known type, had been found on the outskirts of White Plains. A bum had tried to sell his expensive watch in a Bowery pawnshop, claiming to have found it near the approach to the Hell Gate bridge. Underworld rumor had it that Reynolds, resisting his abductors, had been killed the night he disappeared; that by the time Vera had left the ransom at a designated spot, he had already spent three days directing ship traffic in the East River, his feet encased in a tub of concrete.

Candy Eagan had been named as the brains behind the job but there had not been sufficient evidence for the State's Attorney to bring him to trial.

In a sense Reynolds' abduction and death had been convenient for the play boy. An audit of his books had disclosed a half million dollar shortage in his customer's account. His partner, a man by the name of Harry Tedder, had been sentenced to two to ten years in Sing Sing for his part in the

affair. Death had saved Reynolds a messy trial, and prison.

"Whatever happened to Harry Tedder?" Egg asked Carter.

His friend glanced sideways at him. "Funny you should ask that. He was released two weeks ago. But what has that got to do with Vera's death? Tedder had no grudge against her. Or Reynolds either. As I recall it, they looted the accounts together."

"With none of the money recovered."

"With none of the money recovered." Carter said. "What's the matter, Doc? Oiling a hunch?"

"No. I just wondered," the druggist admitted.

Doctor Hanson's office and living quarters were the entire first floor of the sole remaining brown-stone front in that block on 45th Street.

A plainclothes man standing in a shadow of an unlighted store door stepped out as Carter neared the house. "Hanson hasn't shown," he reported, "but a dried up little lug who looks like he might be an ex-con just went in a few minutes ago."

The lieutenant nodded, walked up the stairs and into Doctor Hanson's waiting room. A grey little man, poorly dressed, was banging a scrawny fist on the receptionist's desk. The girl looked frightened. "But I tell you," he was saying, as Egg and Carter walked in, "the doctor has got to vacate the premises. I own this house. I've been away, true. But I'm back now. I want to move into it myself. And the agent had no right to—" He saw Lieutenant Carter and Egg and left his sentence unfinished.

"If you don't mind, mister," Carter said, showing him his badge, "you can continue the argument later. Right now, I want to talk to the young lady. Police business."

The man glanced sharply at Doc Egg and scurried from the waiting room. Egg watched him down the stairs. "What's his name?" Egg asked the girl.

She adjusted her thick-lensed glasses. "I'm certain I don't know. I think he's insane. He says he owns this house and he demands that the doctor move." She smoothed the skirt of her stiffly starched white uniform apron. "Now what was it you gentlemen wanted? You say you are from the police?"

"I'm a cop," Carter admitted. "Lieutenant Carter of Homicide. Where's the doctor?"

The girl removed her glasses and wiped them on a paper tissue. Her face was innocent of lip stick or rouge. Her nose was shiny. Her hair, which might have been pretty, was done up in an unbecoming bun on the back of her neck. "I'm certain I don't know." She replaced her glasses. They gave her a prim, school-mistress, look.



"And I'm worried about him. He never stays away from the office like this without giving me a phone number where I can reach him." She sniffed. "Usually Miss Dawson's. And there have been a dozen calls." She glanced down at her pad. "Two from the Astor Hotel, one from the 44th Street Theatre, one from—"

"That's where we're from," Carter stopped her. "The 44th Street. The Doc got a patient by the name of Vera Reynolds?"

"He has. She's a dancer."

Carter sat on the edge of the desk. "Was a dancer. She's dead."

"Dead!"

"That's right. What was he treating her for?"

The girl's face colored. "I'm afraid you'll have to ask the doctor that," she said tartly.

"But he was treating her?"

"Y-yes."

"Giving her pills and prescriptions?"

She repeated, "You'll have to ask the doctor that."

Carter tried another tack. "They were just doctor and patient? And don't tell me you're certain you don't know. Miss Reynolds died tonight of arsenic poisoning. And we are pretty damn certain it was murder." He threw the last words at her.

Miss Storm gasped, "Murder!" and fainted.

Egg walked on into the inner office, found a bottle of spirits of ammonia, uncorked it, and held it under the girl's nose. Women, God bless their little hearts, were his one weakness. But he was willing to make an exception of Doctor Hanson's nurse. He liked his women fancy. She was too plain, and clean. She even smelled of soap.

With returning consciousness, she talked, some of it relevant, most of it not. Her name was Mary Storm. She had been born in Albany. She was a registered nurse and a graduate of St. Elizabeth's. She had been with Doctor Hanson for a year, ever since his return from the Army and his purchase of Doctor Glendale's practice. Before that she had been with Doctor Glendale for five years.

"In these same offices?" Carter asked.

SHE said she had, that it was her understanding that Doctor Hanson had also purchased the lease. That was why she had been so worried when the little man who said he owned the building insisted that the Doctor had to move, just when he was becoming so nicely established. It wasn't fair. She knew a nurse who knew a man who worked for the O.P.A. And she intended to—

Carter brought her back to the subject of Vera Reynolds and Doctor Hanson. "Were they just doctor and patient?"

Blushing, Miss Storm admitted she believed there had been more to their acquaintance than that. The Doctor's living quarters were just in back of his office. He had entertained Miss Reynolds in there—often. In fact, she had had her own key.

Doc Egg asked, "This entertaining taking place, of course, before Hanson lighted a new torch for Miss Dawson?"

Miss Storm did not approve of Miss Dawson either. "That is correct," she said primly. "That is, if you mean by 'lighting a new torch' before Doctor Hanson transferred his attentions to Miss Dawson." She was reluctant to say more.

Carter said it looked like the same old story to him. "Boy meets girls. Two is company. Three is one too many. But having had one bad break, Vera refused to be pushed around. Or maybe she loved the guy. Meanwhile the society dame is leading Hanson toward the altar. So, what does Hanson do? The Dawson tribe is filthy with dough. And rather than lose the money, Hanson loses his head and slips Vera a lethal mickey finn." Carter asked the wide-eyed nurse if Vera had been in the office that evening and if Doctor Hanson had given her either a pill or a prescription.

The nurse admitted that Vera had been in the inner office from seven o'clock until approximately seven thirty but pointed out that she had no way of knowing what had taken place inside the office.

"Seven thirty," Carter mused. "How would that check for time, Doc?"

Egg told him that an hour was about the limit that any capsule would last. He added, thoughtfully, "But I can't believe that Hanson would be that big a fool. He'd know the first thing Homicide would do, would be to back trail her."

Carter said he didn't know. "No man who commits, or who attempts to commit, a murder is entirely sane. And, as for that prescription, it could have been a red herring. In the first place it no longer exists. In the second place I can just hear a defense attorney—'The State claims that my client, a graduate of one of the oldest and most famous medical schools in the country, a former Lieutenant Colonel in the United States Army Medical Corps, caused death to the deceased by means of an orally administered capsule, or capsules, containing arsenic, and then was stupid enough to call attention to the means of murder by giving the deceased a signed prescription for enough of the same deadly substance to kill everyone in this courtroom. Gentlemen, I leave it to your common sense. Would any man be that big a fool?'"

"That sounds," Egg admitted. "You may have something. How about quarrels, Miss



Storm? Did you ever hear Doctor Hanson quarreling?"

She said she had. "Many times."

"And when Miss Reynolds left here this evening?"

"She was crying."

"It would seem to stack up," Carter said. "Check his medicine cabinet for me, will you Doc? I wouldn't know arsenious oxide if I saw it."

Miss Storm began a protest, thought better of it. Her lips a thin blue line, she reminded herself, "This is murder."

"That's right." Lieutenant Carter patted her shoulder. "But you play ball with us and you have nothing to worry about."

Egg returned from the inner office with a jar of white crystalline powder. He crumpled a piece of paper in an ash tray, sprinkled some of the powder over it and set the paper afire. A strong smell of garlic filled the office.

"Arsenic?" Carter asked.

"White arsenic," Doc Egg nodded. "It is used for certain skin diseases and some forms of anemia."

Carter got up from the desk. "That, with Hanson seemingly having taken a powder, would seem to tie things up. I'll put out a pick-up on him and take my chances on getting an indictment."

He asked Miss Storm for Miss Dawson's address, told her to contact the Bureau if Doctor Hanson should return, and left the office. Out on the walk he asked Doc Egg if he wanted to tag along while he talked to the society girl. "There's a bare chance she's the one who slugged you," he tempted. "Some of them society dames are hell on wheels when the man they love is in a jam."

Doc Egg hesitated. "I'd like to," he admitted. "But I have to get back to the store and check the registers. Give me a call, will you, Dan, as soon as you've talked to her."

Carter said he would and stopped to instruct the plainclothes man watching the building while Egg walked east to Broadway and down the one block to 44th. The little druggist was troubled. The case against Hanson was too pat, too perfect. And, at the same time, there were too many loose ends dangling. There was a faint aroma of *camembert potage* with too many chefs stirring the soup.

No doctor, whatever his provocation, would use arsenic to kill. It was a layman's poison. There were too many other subtler means of death ready to a doctor's hand.

Instead of entering the store, he stood leaning against the window watching the passing crowd. The grey little man who had insisted that Doctor Hanson vacate the building intrigued him. The man's face had been

vaguely familiar. He had said he had been away. The plainclothes man had summed him up as an ex-con. He looked like one.

"The thing to do," Egg told himself, "is mind my own damn business. I should go in and check the registers."

He didn't. He walked out to the curb instead and looked up at a third story window bearing the legend—

#### BROADWAY REALTY COMPANY PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

There was a light in the window. Three minutes later Al Klein one of the partners in the firm was telling him, "I know the building you mean, Doc. I could sell it tomorrow morning. But it's tied up in a trust of some kind. You remember that broker, Reynolds, that was killed in a snatch about six years ago, the one that was married to a dancer? Well, as I understand it, he owned the building with his partner, Harry Tedder, and his wife, Vera, has been turning over the rent as well as a good portion of her salary in an attempt to pay off the customers he clipped before he was snatched."

Doc Egg lighted a cigarette. That explains the shabby clothes. Vera had been attempting to pay off Reynolds' debts. It might also well explain her murder. Perhaps it hadn't been Doctor Hanson who had given her the arsenic. Prison did strange things to a man. The building was probably all that Harry Tedder had left of what had once been a comfortable fortune. It had been Tedder in the office, an older, greyer, Tedder, minus his mustache and shrunken by five years in prison.

He asked Klein for permission to use his phone and called Doctor Hanson's office. Miss Storm was sorry but the man who insisted he owned the building had never given his address.

Egg hung up and called the Detective Bureau. The fifth officer he talked to, a probation officer, told him that Tedder was living at the Emmet Hotel on Eighth Avenue, in the block below the Pennsylvania Station.

"What gives?" Klein wanted to know in parting.

"Murder," Doc Egg said dryly. "Vera Reynolds was poisoned tonight."

Klein wanted to know why.

"I'm damned if I know," Egg admitted. "So far, it's one of those things. . . ."

THE hotel was old, patronized mainly by permanent guests. The desk clerk, a thin-faced youth, eyed Doc Egg suspiciously. "Yes. We have a Mr. Tedder stopping with us. Why?"

"I want his room number," Egg told him.

The desk clerk shook his head. "Mr. Tedder left instructions that he did not wish



to be disturbed. You'd better come back tomorrow."

The druggist creased a five dollar bill between his fingers. His head throbbed dully.

He was tired of shadow boxing. He had a feeling of frustration, of being pushed around. "Which would you rather have," he asked the clerk, "this five dollar bill for the number of Tedder's room, or a good swift poke in the nose?"

The clerk looked at him, startled, decided that he meant it, and chose the five dollar bill. "I'm sorry. I didn't know it was urgent. Mr. Tedder is in 205."

There was no elevator. Egg climbed the stairs and walked down the dimly lighted hall. There was nothing about the place to distinguish it from any other fourth or fifth rate hotel. Tedder had fallen a long way since the firm of Reynolds and Tedder had failed. A long way.

There was a 'Please Do Not Disturb' sign on the doorknob of 205. He considered it briefly. He had no official standing. His friendship with Dan Carter didn't make him a member of the Force. He was acting strictly as a John Q. Citizen. Tedder had every right to attempt to punch his face in. Egg hoped

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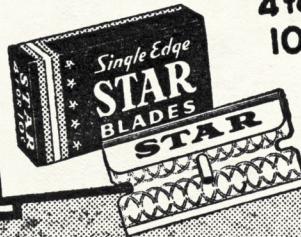
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that he would try to. He drummed his knuckles across the panel.

A moment of silence followed, then a sleep-fogged voice asked, "Yes—?"

"You may, or may not, know me," Egg said frankly. "My name is Thistlewaite and I want to talk to you about that building you own on 45th Street. The one occupied by Doctor Hanson."

A second silence followed, then bed springs creaked and feet padded across the floor. "Come in," the man said, as he opened the door. "By all means, come in, sucker. Step right in!"

A heavy hand caught at Egg's coat front, pulled him into the room, off balance, and sent him spinning against the far wall.

"Sucker!" a girl's voice repeated.

The only light in the room came from the street, around the edges of the drawn shade. It was not enough to disclose the faces of either the man or the girl. But it was enough to light Tedder's body. It lay sprawled in a grotesque angle on the bed. He would never be worried about being disturbed again. That was sure.

"Now wait," Egg stalled for time.

"Wait, hell," the man who had pulled him into the room breathed hoarsely. "There's one in every pool room. But no noney little druggist is going to be able to send me to the chair!"

A huge, deeper blob of black, against the grey of the room, he strode across it and drove a hard right at the former little feather-weight's chin.

Egg rolled with the blow and countered with a short left to the pit of the other man's stomach. It was like hitting a brick wall. It was Tony Canzoneri fighting Dempsey. It was a jeep against a tank.

He followed the left with a right, then tried a long right for the jaw. The big man grunted in pain and backed away. But the blow hadn't even stunned him. Egg was out of his class and he knew it. Furious, he followed the punch with a sharp tattoo of short rights and lefts to the body. If he couldn't hurt the other man, he could at least mark him.

The girl's voice was coldly disdainful. "Stop stalling, Einar, and clip him."

The scent of the same perfume he had smelled in Vera's dressing room, stronger now, stoppered Doc Egg's nostrils. He stopped his flurry of blows and backed toward the drawn shade, hoping somehow that the girl would follow and allow him to see her face. "Now, wait."

She didn't. Secure in the shadows, she said coldly, "Why should we? Go ahead. Kill him, Einar. And then let's get out of here before some noney cop butts in." Doc knew she meant what she said.

## CHAPTER THREE

### One Hundred Dollars an Ounce

October 17, 1946  
Tel. Typewriter  
Telephone X  
Radio

Bureau of Telegraph Shall Transmit by:

To: P. Comm.

Ch. Insp.

Asst. Chief Insp.

Borough Comm.

Manhattan Det. Commr.

Homicide Sq.

Photo Gallery and Fingerprint

D.A. Office

Medical Examiner

Night Inspector

MURDER. HARRY TEDDER, FORMER PARTNER OF JACK REYNOLDS OF STILL OPEN REYNOLDS' CASE, IDENTIFIED. LOCATION EMMET HOTEL, BETWEEN 31st AND 32nd ON 8th. REPORTED BY PATROLMAN CASEY OF PENN STATION SPECIAL DETAIL. PICK-UP ON AIR FOR CANDY EAGAN AND EINAR HANSON M. D. ALL CONCERNED NOTIFIED.

Signed Jhn. Harley

Title Lieutenant H.Q.

FORTHWITH X

Rec. at Bur. of Tel. by Levy T. C. 17/10/46 12.42 P.M.

Trans. frm Bur. of Tel. by A. Cody Serg. 17/10/46 12.45 P.M.

The night was older now, and cold. The big shots, stepping from their official Cadillacs to the walk in front of the Emmet Hotel, turned up the collars of their coats as they gathered in little clusters before crossing the walk to the lobby.

The pick-up order on Eagan and Hanson was two hours old. Squad and prowls cars crossed and re-crossed Manhattan, their sirens tomcatting through the cold, clear night as they sought the objects of their frenzy.

Car radios droned incessantly—

"... Candy Eagan, wanted for questioning, H. Q. There is no charge against this man ... Code 34 on Hanson. Approach him carefully. He is not known to be armed but is believed to be insane ... approach this man carefully ... Code 34 ..."

"Crazy? Of course he's crazy," Assistant Chief Inspector Judson told Manhattan Detective Commissioner Kendrick outside the door of the room in which an over-worked Deputy Medical Examiner was patching up Doc Egg's contusions as best he could. "This is the second murder Dan has pinned on him in three hours. And if Doc wasn't such a tough little Egg, he'd have made it number three."

Kendricks wanted to know if there was anything new on either man.



"Not that I know of," Judson told him. "But I got a flash on the two-way coming down that Lieutenant Carter has picked up the Dawson girl. She showed at the 45th Street address as bold as brass, claiming she'd had an eight o'clock date with Hanson and she had been waiting for him for four hours and was afraid something had happened to him."

"It will, when we get him," Kendrick said.

Inside the room, the D.M.E. wanted to know how Doc Egg felt. "Lousy," the druggist admitted. "It was like fighting Joe Louis while Billy Conn stood by with a sap and picked up the punches he missed."

"You're lucky," the M.E. said, "to be alive."

The druggist considered the matter. He had been mentally debating the subject since consciousness returned. There was no reason for him to be alive. The last he remembered of the affair, he had been down on the floor with both the man and the girl belting him. He hadn't expected to come to.

He got up from the bed and crossed the room to see if his legs still worked. He could walk, after a fashion. He put on his shirt and coat and crossed the hall to the room where the dead man lay. Tedder had been covered with a sheet. The dead man's personal possessions lay in a heap on the dresser.

"As we see it," Kendrick told Egg, "Tedder walked in on something and Hanson had to kill him. He was the Reynolds girl's husband's partner and it is only logical that he would contact her when he was released from prison."

Egg said that sounded okay.

Kendrick expounded his theory. "Maybe she told him that Hanson was trying to give her the air. It could even be he knew he was slipping her pills. So Hanson had to kill him to shut his mouth."

"It's a theory," Egg admitted. Personally he didn't think much of it. It was too much on the far fetched side.

Inspector Judson wanted to know why he had come to the hotel in the first place.

There was nothing in Tedder's pocket trivia to interest Egg. "Strictly on a hunch," he told Judson. "When I found out an hour or so ago that Tedder owned half of the building and that Vera was turning over her share of the rent as well as a part of her salary in an attempt to clear up Reynolds' debts, I thought I might have something. The building is probably all he had left, he probably held it in joint tenancy with Reynolds and with Vera out of the way he could sell it for a sufficient stake to stage a come back."

A reporter chuckled. "He came back all right. It was Hanson and the Dawson girl who slugged you, Doc?"

Egg told the truth. "I don't know. I couldn't see their faces. But, whoever she was, she was the same girl who slugged me in Vera's dressing room and she called him Einar."

The reporter said that was good enough for him.

Someone asked if Candy Eagan had been picked up yet and Doc Egg wanted to know what Eagan had to do with the case.

Inspector Judson shrugged. "That's strictly a hunch of mine. You remember, at the time that Reynolds was kidnaped we worked on a theory for a time that Tedder had hired it done to get him out of the way. After all, their firm failed for half a million and not a dime of it was ever recovered."

Jensen, a leg man for the Brooklyn *Eagle*, suggested, "Maybe that's why Hanson killed both Tedder and Vera. Maybe the dough is hidden in that building somewhere. And maybe Hanson found it. A doctor makes good money, sure. But not up in the half million dollar class."

Kendricks said, "Nuts. I was on the Times Square detail at the time and we did everything to that building trying to find the money but peel the paper off the walls."

HIS eyes thoughtful, Egg wanted to know what form the money had been in. Kendrick said no one knew. "It could have been cash or bonds, or almost anything. All we ever found out was that a half million dollars that was supposed to be in their customer's account was missing. But both men were high livers and it could be that they blew it. Tedder's defence, as you may recall, was that he didn't know anything about it. He tried to pin the whole thing on Reynolds."

One of the fingerprint men reported that there didn't seem to be any prints in the room but those of Doc Egg and the dead man. "Not even the maid's," he reported. "All plane surfaces have been wiped clean." He held up a wisp of fragrant cambric. "But the girl did drop her handkerchief."

"It wouldn't be monogrammed?"

"It isn't. But it reeks with some perfume that shouldn't be difficult to identify."

Doc Egg took it from his hand and sniffed it. "It isn't one of the standard brands. Probably custom made at around a hundred dollars an ounce." He started to hand it back, held it to his nose again. That was the trouble with murder. Just as one theory was established, a man ran into something else that threw it all off again. And what his nose told him was screwball.

"Tell you something?" Kendrick demanded.

The little druggist shrugged. Before he



could speak there was a minor commotion in the hall and Lieutenant Carter and two of his squad entered with an expensively dressed, flashing-eyed brunette, handcuffed to one of them. The fragrance of her perfume filled the room. It was the same perfume as that on the handkerchief.

"She drove up to the 45th Street address in a cab as bold as brass," Lieutenant Carter reported to the inspector. He fingered five deep scratches on his cheek. "And she swears she's going to have my job."

"I will," the girl said hotly. "This is an outrage. I have done nothing against the criminal or civil code."

"Nothing but murder," Lieutenant Carter said dryly. "You deny you were ever in this room before?"

"I do."

"And I suppose it wasn't you who slugged Doc in Vera's dressing room?"

The society girl began to cry. "I don't know what you are talking about. Believe me. Please allow me to call my father, or at least the family lawyer."

"In due time," Carter said. He grinned at Egg. "You identify her as the dame who slugged you, Doc?"

The druggist studied the girl's face. It was pretty and intelligent with no trace of viciousness. She was frightened but it wasn't a guilty fear. It was the fear of a person caught in the toils of something she didn't understand. "She's the right size and her voice and perfume are familiar," he admitted. "But I didn't see her face either time." He smiled at her. "Take it easy, kid. If you aren't mixed up in this, you haven't a thing to worry about. If you are, that's another matter. Where do you claim to have been while all this was going on?"

She said, "Waiting for Einar."

"Where?"

"On a bench in Central Park."

Inspector Judson made a mental calculation, scoffed, "In the middle of October you waited on a bench for over five hours. Why?"

"Because Einar asked me to. He called about seven thirty, said he had something vital to discuss with me and asked me to meet him in the Park and to wait no matter how late he was."

Carter shook his head. "As an alibi, that stinks."

The girl searched the faces in the room. Only Doc Egg's was friendly. He asked, "Doctor Hanson called you in person?"

"He did, about seven-thirty."

"But he didn't say what this important 'something' was?"

Color crept into her cheeks. "He did not. But I assumed it was something about Miss Reynolds. They had been, well, friendly be-

fore we met and she had made several scenes when she learned that we were engaged."

The druggist said, "I see. In other words Vera threatened Doctor Hanson that she would see him in hell before she would give him up to you."

Miss Dawson's color deepened. "Something like that."

Detective Commissioner Kendrick shrugged. "That would seem to tie up the Reynolds' murder. Now all we have to do is pick up Hanson and have him tell us why he killed Tedder."

The girl began to cry. "He didn't. I know he didn't. Einar hasn't killed anyone."

"Then where is he?" Lieutenant Carter demanded.

"I don't know," she sobbed. "I don't. All I know is that he told me to wait—and I did."

"Better take her down to the Bureau," Judson told Lieutenant Carter. "Have a matron search her but don't let her phone anyone yet. After a few hours in a cell, she may feel more like talking."

"Right," Carter nodded.

Doc Egg had made up his mind. As fantastic as his new theory was, it made more sense than the belief that the well-bred, wealthy, cultured, sobbing, society girl, could have been mixed up in the orgy of murder just past. "I wouldn't do that if I were you," he suggested. "You boys are letting yourselves in for a peach of a suit for false arrest if she isn't mixed up in this."

**"BUT** she has to be," Carter protested. Egg admitted, "So it would seem, but I don't believe she is. Now my theory—"

"Nuts," Carter cut him short. "You're a grand little guy, Doc. You're my pal. But a pretty dame can pull the wool over your eyes every time. Everyone knows dames are your weakness. And when the smoke gets in your eyes, you can't see murder for legs."

"But look, Dan," Doc Egg protested. "Why—?"

Carter patted him on the shoulder as one might pat a child. "You've done fine up 'till now, Doc. But you're tired. You've taken two beatings that would have killed any other man. Now you go on home to your apartment, crawl into bed, and let us handle this. After all, you are a druggist, and we're detectives."

The little man began a hot retort, thought better of it. "Okay. But tell me this before I go."

"Yes—?"

"You are working on the theory that Hanson killed Vera Reynolds because he wanted to marry Miss Dawson and move in on the Dawson money?"

"That's right."

"And both he and Miss Dawson, here, killed



Harry Tedder either because Tedder had somehow discovered that Hanson had poisoned Vera, or because Hanson had discovered the money the firm of Reynolds and Tedder was short, and in search of which Detective Commissioner Kendrick says he, personally, did everything but peel the paper off the wall of the 45th Street house that Reynolds and Tedder held in joint tenancy."

Commissioner Kendrick looked at Egg shrewdly. Inspector Judson rubbed his jowl with the palm of his hand. Lieutenant Carter wasn't so certain. "Well, yes."

Doc Egg grinned. "And either Miss Dawson or Hanson being phychic, they looked in a crystal ball and learned that despite the fact I hadn't seen or thought of Tedder for years, I would immediately connect him with Vera's death and come here to question him. So, after having beaten me to the punch by killing him to close his mouth, with no one in the hotel being the wiser, they sat down and waited for me to show."

"That *was* stupid of them," the homicide man admitted.

"It was idiotic," Egg agreed. "But not half as idiotic as leaving me alive when they might just as easily have killed me with the same scalpel with which they killed Tedder. You boys have theories, yes. But I am the only man in New York who can send them to the chair by simply pointing a finger and saying, 'Yes. They are the pair who slugged me in Harry Tedder's room.' But, with the whole night at their disposal, do they spare a few seconds to make certain I'll never identify them? No. They do not. Why?"

Carter looked from the corpse on the bed, to the sobbing girl. "That is a sticker," he admitted. "Why didn't they kill you?"

A twisted smile on his battered face, Doc Egg shaped his hat gingerly to his equally battered head. "I think I know," he admitted. He picked up the perfumed handkerchief and sniffed at it thoughtfully. "In fact I'm positive I do."

"Why?" Lieutenant Carter demanded.

Egg walked out into the hall and looked back through the doorway. "And nuts to you. You're a detective. Find out. What the hell. I'm only a druggist. Besides, everyone knows dames are my weakness. When the smoke gets in my eyes, I can't see murder for legs."

His usually smiling eyes hot with anger, he strode down the hall and the stairs and out of the hotel.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### "Here's Smoke in Your Eye"

HERE the morning was even colder. There was a smell of the sea in the air. Fog horns moaned mournfully in the near distance. A slim man, given to nerves, Candy Eagan started from the rumpled but unslept in bed at every footstep on the walk and on the stairs.

"Damn her. Why didn't she come? This was all her fault. She had promised faithfully that the case would never be reopened. And here it was, splashed over the front page of every morning paper and every prowl car in New York was looking for him. . . .

True, there was no more evidence against him than there had ever been. But the police had ways of making a man talk. He might not be so lucky this time.

"There is five grand for you in it, Candy," she had told him. "And all you have to do is pick him up and drop him off at my place in White Plains. I'll take care of the rest. Please, Candy. Please."

Eagan buried his face in his hands. What a fool a man could make of himself for a few kisses. He hadn't killed Reynolds. All he had done was punch him around a bit to keep him quiet during the ride to her place. What had happened after that was entirely up to the girl. But an accessory to murder was just as guilty as the trigger man, and kidnaping was a burning matter.

**TOPS  
FOR  
QUALITY!**





"I want to teach him a lesson," she'd told him.

A lesson in dying, he thought grimly. He had never seen Reynolds again. He had never seen the girl for that matter and the cottage in White Plains had been unoccupied when the police had finally released him. But he had seen the blood stained car. The police had insisted he see it.

Damn her. Why didn't she come? After five years of worry, five years of momentarily expecting Reynolds' body to be found she had phoned him out of nowhere. He could still hear her voice, slyly sensuous even over the phone—"This is you know who. And something has slipped up, Candy. Get a room at the Globe Hotel down on Water Street and wait for me. Register as Mack Brown."

And here he was. But where was she?

He skimmed through the papers again. Who the hell was this Doctor Hanson? Where did he fit in? Why had both the dead man's wife and partner been murdered. So far as he knew, they hadn't known a thing about it. Someone was doing something to someone, just as it had been done to him. She had paid him off in peanuts and kisses and collected a hundred grand.

There was a click of high heels on the worn tile of the hallway and the man on the bed sat erect. This could be her. It was.

"Let me in, Candy," she whispered. Her knuckles rapped lightly on the door.

One hand in his side coat pocket, Eagan opened it. She was as he remembered her. Her lips were a scarlet slash across her dead white face. The five years hadn't aged her greatly. She still used the same perfume. Eagan closed the door and leaned against it. Her body soft and alive against his she put her arms around his neck and tried to kiss him.

"Nix," he pushed her away. "Don't do me any favors. What's all the murder about? What's gone wrong?"

"Everything," the girl admitted. She sat down on the rumpled bed and slid back her fur coat, exposing satin white shoulders and throat rising out of an evening creation. "Give me a cigarette, will you, Candy?" She fumbled in her purse, large for an evening bag. "No. Never mind. I've some of my own. Just give me a light."

Eagan eyed the girl's bare shoulders. His mouth was dry. His throat was tight. His heart began to pound. Damn her! She *was* a lovely thing.

Outside the window a heavy produce truck rumbled over the cobble stones. A second car backfired sharply in the frosty morning.

The girl on the bed took a cigarette from her bag and put it between her too red lips. "Hey you, mister," she smiled. "How's about a match. Remember?"

"Sure." Eagan smiled. To light a match from the book of matches he took from his pocket, he had to use both hands. The gesture cost him his life. As he bent over the girl, the match in his cupped hands, she drew a gun from the over-sized evening bag, pressed it against his chest and shot him through the heart.

"Sucker. You sucker," she said coldly.

He stood a moment, weaving, crumpled to the floor at her feet. The match fell on the bed. She put it out, stood up. This was the trouble with murder. It went on and on and on. You killed, then you had to kill again to cover. But this was the end, thank God. With Candy dead she was safe. No one could identify her now. No one could point a finger and say, "There is the woman."

She knew a moment of weakness and clung to the foot board of the bed for support. Outside the window, the car continued to back fire. The shot had gone unnoticed. At least there was no commotion in the hall, or in the rooms on either side.

**R**EPRESSING a shudder, the girl dropped the gun back in her bag, changed her mind, wiped any possible fingerprints from it with a fragrant square of cambric, and pressed the gun into Eagan's hand. With luck it would pass as suicide. Now that the pay-off was so near, they couldn't afford any slip-up.

The aged desk clerk snored suddenly as she passed him. No one had seen her enter. No one had seen her leave. The shot had passed as a backfire. The last obstacle had been hurdled. She stood a moment on the walk drawing her coat more closely around her. Then she walked to the back-firing car at the curb and the car and girl and man were swiftly swallowed by the fog. . . .

\* \* \*

The milk man wasn't too eager to talk. "No. I don't deliver there," he said in answer to Doc Egg's question. "But they have lived in the house for some years. A brother and sister, as I understand it. Solid, respectable people. No. I never see either of them close up. But he works nights, I believe. At least I see his car pull in a lot of times when I get this far on my route."

He walked on, his rack of bottles clinking. He was obviously suspicious of the little druggist's motives. Egg stayed where he was in the shadow of the locked garage. He was cold. He was tired. His head hurt. It was none of his affair. He shouldn't have allowed his temper to get the best of him. He should have told Dan Carter what he knew, at least what he suspected, and gone on home to bed. They didn't give druggists citations. The best he could expect was another beating. He blew on his bruised knuckles.



Curiosity egged him on. He moved out from the shadow of the garage and tried the basement windows. The address hadn't been difficult to find. It had followed the name in the phone book.

The first two windows were locked. So was the third and the fourth. He paused before he tried the fifth and last one to glance up the sleeping street. It was one of a hundred others, a substantial middle class street of small homes. It wasn't the type of street where one would expect to find a thief. That, perhaps, was the reason why they had chosen it.

The fifth window raised a few inches and stuck. By using all his strength he raised it high enough for him to squeeze his body through the opening. If he was wrong, this well could mean his neck. This was illegal entry.

He struck a match and found himself in a well-equipped game room. There was a full sized billiard table and a well stocked leatherette bar. Encouraged, he unlaced his shoes and tiptoed up the stair leading to the second floor. At the head of the stair he struck a match. The door at the head of the stair opened into a living room. Here the furniture was more in keeping with the street, shabbily middle class. He was certain that none of the neighbors had ever seen the game room. He walked down a small hall, opening the doors he came to. There were two bedrooms. Both were shabbily furnished but the suits and dresses in their closets were another matter. All were expensive and new. The whole reminded him of a crabs about to burst from its cocoon. It had been a clever idea, clever enough to fool four million people, including a swarm of nouse reporters and the Metropolitan police.

A fair sized kitchen and bath completed the first floor. There was no attic. Puzzled, Egg lighted a cigarette. There should be a body somewhere. There had to be a body. They had been kept too busy to have time to dispose of it. He walked through the rooms again, looking under the beds and into all the closets. Time was growing short. He couldn't stay much longer. They might return at any moment. The thing to do was to swallow his pride and call Dan Carter. So he couldn't see murder for legs. In a pig's eye. He had spotted this one when all of the big shots of the Force were still beating their gums on theories. The only mistake he had made had been in riding Johnny Mason. This had been a case for the Bureau Of Missing Persons, along with Homicide.

He walked back down the stairs to the game room and out into the basement proper only to see the lights of a car sweep up the drive and blaze on the locked doors of the garage. The open window was on the far side. He still

had time to wriggle out. He turned back toward the game room, stopped, the short hairs on the back of his neck tingling as a determined thumping on wood began at the far end of the unlighted basement.

There could only be one explanation. The man for whose body he had been searching was still alive. The druggist debated briefly, then made his way through the dark to the coal bin from which the sound had come. He no longer dared to strike matches. The garage doors had squeaked open and the car had passed inside. They would enter the house in a moment, and having killed twice before they would have no hesitation in adding a third one to their score.

He felt frantically for the man he knew had to be in the coal bin. He was lying almost at his feet, his body bent back in a bow, his wrists tied to his ankles, a gag spreading his lips apart. Egg tore at the gag, removed it and began to work on the knots only to spring to his feet, his hand searching behind him for some weapon as a key grated in the basement door and the basement was flooded with light.

The man in the doorway was tall, and blond, and handsome in a weak, dissipated way. His face was lined with strain. His chin quivered as he saw Egg. He looked like he was about to cry but he slipped a gun from a shulder holster as he said, "Damn you, Egg. How did you get in here?"

His hand still groping behind him for a weapon, Egg said truthfully, "I came in through a window."

The girl with the two red lips crowded in behind the man, closed the door and leaned against it. "You are alone?" she demanded.

"No," Egg lied. "I'm not."

"He's lying!" the girl cried shrilly. "If there had been a stake-out, we'd have seen it."

Egg noted what he had failed to see before. All of the basement shades were drawn. The faint light escaping around their edges would not be noticed by the neighbors. They were accustomed to early morning lights in this house. The man of the house worked nights. He had cut it too fine this time. He doubted that he would ever leave the basement. Now that they were in this deep, one more murder wouldn't matter. His hand ceased groping for a weapon. A club was useless against a gun.

"So," the blond man demanded of the girl. "What do we do now?"

"There's only one thing we can do," she said coldly.

"Little Miss Murder," Egg said wryly. "And you're pretty good at it, kid. It wasn't a bad set-up at all. And if it hadn't been for me, you'd have gotten away with it clean."

"We'll still get away with it," she taunted. "Candy Eagan was our one loose end and we just took care of that. Now we'll take care of



you. We should have done it in Tedder's room but we tried to play it too clever."

His eyes bright, poised on the balls of his feet, Egg said, "That's always a mistake."

Her eyes never leaving his face, she held out her hand to the man. "Give me the gun. I'll do it if you are too chicken hearted. We're too deep in this now for another dead man or so to matter."

He put the gun in her hand.

His throat dry and tortured from the gag, the bound man on the floor had been making inarticulate sounds. Now he found his voice. "For God's sake," he demanded. "Someone tell me. What is this all about?"

"Money, Doctor Hanson," the little druggist told him. "It's about a hell of a lot of money. To be exact, a half a million dollars."

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Leg-Man

**N**O LONGER pretty, the girl leveled the gun at Egg's middle. Her eyes were narrowed to slits. "So you know so much. You won't know it for long. And you won't pass on the information."

The man on the floor of the coal bin twisted futilely against the ropes that bound him. "Mary! Miss Storm! You must be out of your mind. Put that gun away and untie me."

The big blond man crossed the basement and kicked him. "Shut up! You don't get it yet, do you, Doctor?"

The bound man admitted. "No. Frankly, I do not. If I have been kidnaped for ransom—"

"You haven't," Miss Storm said dryly. "In fact you haven't been here at all. You've been too busy committing murder."

"Murder!" the physician gasped.

Egg said quickly, "That's right." His only hope was to stall for time and take any break that might come. Whatever happened, he meant to go out fighting. "That's right. I know of two murders they have committed, possibly three, and they're all pinned on to you." He raised his eyes to those of the big blond man. "But I don't believe that you know our host. Permit me to introduce the alleged dead Jack Reynolds, Vera's former loving husband."

"A wise guy," Reynolds said. "There's one in every pool room."

Doc Egg nodded. "So you informed me in Harry Tedder's room when I walked in just after you and Mary had killed him. Killed him and left me alive to identify Miss Dawson and Hanson, here, as his slayers."

The physician strained at the ropes. "If you've hurt Grace—"

"They haven't, not physically," Egg said. "But right now she's down at Central Bureau

charged with murder and every detective in New York is combing the town for you."

Hanson shook his head. "But I don't understand. I don't." He attempted to sit up, failed. "All I know is that when I left the office shortly after Vera left this evening, that man forced me into a car at gun point and drove me here." He scowled at Reynolds. "You say he's Vera's former husband."

"Fresh from his grave," Egg said wryly. "And all the time that Vera was eating her heart out and attempting to pay off his debts, he has been living here in comfort on the ransom money that he and little Miss Murder collected."

"And that's just the start," the girl jeered.

Egg studied the girl. The transformation was startling. Her youthful figure released from the tight girdle and bra that had made her shapeless, the thick-lensed glasses discarded, her hair done up becomingly, and her lips a slash of carmen in a dead white face, she was exotically beautiful.

"Like what you see?" the girl taunted.

"Pretty is as pretty does," Egg countered. "No. I don't like what I see. I liked you much better as Doctor Hanson's plain but honest nurse. It was you who poisoned Vera. And it was you who gave her that forged prescription for six arsenious oxide capsules. And it was forged. That's why you slugged me to get it back. It was just to call attention to Doctor Hanson. And once it had served its purpose, it had to disappear."

"Call attention to me," Hanson puzzled.

"That's right," Egg nodded. "You are supposed to have poisoned Vera to get her out of the way so you could marry Miss Dawson."

Hanson swore bitterly. "But that's not so. I admired and respected Vera. But there never was any question of marriage between us. She was still in love with her dead husband and when I told her our friendship was finished and that I was engaged to Miss Dawson, the only thing hurt was her pride. True, she made several scenes but the last time I talked to her she told me that perhaps it was all for the best as she could never really love any other man but Reynolds, that he was her first and only love."

"How does it feel to be such a heel?" the druggist asked the big blond man.

"Shoot him," Reynolds ordered the girl. The knuckle of her trigger finger whitened.

"I'm hard to kill," Egg warned her. "You'll have to shoot more than once. And the neighbors will hear the shots."

The girl hesitated. The air in the basement grew static. Egg continued to needle Reynolds. "I've met a lot of lice in my time. But you take the D.D.T. Not content with robbing your partner and breaking Vera's heart—"

His nerves strained to the breaking point,



his face crimson with anger and shame, the former broker swore, "Damn you anyway, Egg. If it hadn't been for you—" His anger stronger than his fear, he strode the few feet that separated them and swung viciously at Egg's jaw.

It was what Egg was waiting for. He sidestepped the blow and brought up his own right hand. He could see what he was doing now. The blow landed flush on Reynolds' chin. His eyes glazing, the broker's knees began to sag. Egg caught him as he fell, turned him and held him as a shield. "Now shoot and be damned to you," he told the girl. "One slug should go through us both."

Cursing the unconscious Reynolds for a fool, she sidestepped in a half circle, attempting to get a clear shot at Egg. The little druggist circled with her. All that was exposed was his arms wrapped around Reynolds' middle.

"In every ointment there's one fly," he taunted her. He edged closer as he spoke. If he could get within diving distance of the gun before he released the man in his arms, he and Hanson might still have a chance. "And it would seem I'm the one in yours. Too bad, isn't it, Mary? Just when everything was so lovely. Go ahead. Why don't you shoot? You don't need Reynolds. You know where the money is. You've been playing watch-dog to it for five years."

The girl stopped cursing Reynolds and cursed him.

**H**E WAS within six feet of the gun—now five—then everything went wrong for Egg. Regaining consciousness, the big broker clasped Doc Egg's hands in his own and throwing himself forwards, hurled the smaller man over his head. Egg landed heavily, rolled as lead chipped the concrete floor inches from his left shoulder.

"Kill him!" Reynolds roared. "To hell with the noise. I'll go out and start the car and we can pass off the shots as back-fires."

A second, a third, and a fourth slug screamed off the concrete floor; then there was a glass crash somewhere in the basement. The roar of a heavy calibered gun followed and Mary Storm's screams suddenly drowned out those of the ricochets as she pressed her bleeding fingers to her lips.

Reynolds froze where he was with one hand on the knob of the basement door. But not for long. It opened in his face, Lieutenant Carter strode in, cuffed him to one side and walked directly to the little druggist, picked him up, and set him on his feet. "You're not hurt, Doc. Tell me you're not hurt."

Doc Egg examined himself for wounds and found none. "Well, I don't seem to be punctured," he admitted. "But who knows. Maybe I'm bleeding to death internally from fear. I've always been delicate."

Other officers were crowding into the basement now. The one who had fired the shot climbed in through the window he had shattered. A half dozen more came in the basement door. One handcuffed Reynolds to the girl. Another one freed Doctor Hanson.

Carter slapped the girl lightly. "Stop screaming. You aren't hurt."

Doc Egg lighted a cigarette and puffed at it eagerly. It was good to be alive. "She can dish it but she can't take it."

One of the plainclothes men whipped out a pad and a pencil, grinned at Egg. "Well, let's go on with the story. Let's see. The last I got through the window was—'You don't need Reynolds. You know where the money is. You've been playing watch-dog to it for five years.'"

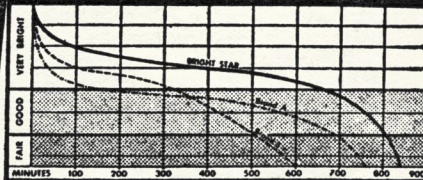
The druggist accused Carter, "You've been out there all the time."

"Nearby," the Homicide man admitted. He grinned. "Knowing you, after that blow off of yours at the hotel, I knew all we had to do to crack the case was tail you. In fact both Judson and Kendrick threatened to get my shield if I lost you. We saw you talk to the milk man, saw Reynolds and Mary drive in, but the

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fireworks came almost too fast for us to stop them." He hesitated. "But how did you know that Reynolds was still alive?"

"I didn't," the druggist admitted. "That is, not at first. But I knew that the girl was a phoney after that brawl in Tedder's room."

She stopped crying and wanted to know, "How?"

Doc Egg told her quietly, "Because outside of Al Klein, from whose office I made the call and who could have no possible interest in the matter, you were the only person in New York who knew I was interested in Tedder. And you were afraid to have me talk to him."

"Why?" Carter demanded. "Was he in on the steal?"

"I don't know," Egg admitted. "That is something that Reynolds and his girl friend will have to tell us. But I doubt if he was. It is more likely Tedder thought that Reynolds was dead and had to die because he would have put up a squawk when his former partner came back to life again."

One of the plainclothes men, puzzled, "When Reynolds came back to life again?"

"What was to stop him?" Egg asked. "He had nothing to fear from the police. The law of limitations had taken care of that." He told the story as he saw it.

Reynolds had planned the steal for some time. Over a period of months he had extracted the securities from the customers' account, converted them into cash, and made his preparation to 'die.' No one would suspect a dead man. The onus, if any, would fall on Tedder—and it had. Either he or the girl, most likely the girl, had sold Eagan on the phoney snatch. All had worked out as arranged. The money hidden where it could not be found, Reynolds had allowed himself to be 'snatched' and had then collected his own ransom money for himself and the girl to live on until it was safe for him to come to life again.

Doc Egg continued: "All went fine until it was time for him to come to life again. Then everything went sour. Instead of forgetting about him, Vera still loved him, in fact had been attempting to pay off his debts and he knew that she would raise hell if he came to life and attempted to marry another woman. Then Tedder showed up on the scene and demanded possession of the building that was all he had left from the crash."

"Damn Tedder," Reynolds swore. "It was his getting out of prison four years sooner than we expected that pushed us into this. If he had gotten possession of the building we were sunk."

**L**IEUTENANT CARTER was puzzled and showed it. Doc Egg ignored the statement to continue: "They got rid of Vera first. It

wasn't difficult. The girl was Doctor Hanson's nurse. Vera trusted her. She took what she gave her without question, including the forged prescription that was to do two things for them. One, pin her death on Doctor Hanson. Two, give him a logical reason to disappear, feet first into the East river, so they could recover the money at their leisure. It was Miss Storm, of course, who slugged me in the dressing room. Leaving the office receiver off the hook so anyone phoning Doctor Hanson would get the busy signal, she was after the forged prescription."

Carter studied the girl, then pictured her as she had looked when he and Doc Egg had first seen her. "But why the Orphan Annie make-up she was wearing in the office?"

The little druggist grinned. "Men seldom make passes at girls who wear glasses. Especially thick-lensed ones. It gave her two identities. By using Miss Dawson's perfume and leaving her handkerchiefs behind her, she was Miss Dawson, when anything went wrong."

The girl had long since stopped crying. Hard-eyed, she told Egg. "All right. So we gambled for half a million dollars and it would seem we've missed. But what first made you suspicious of me?"

Egg grinned. "Soap."

"Soap?"

"That's right. The kind that floats," he told her. "In your character as a capable doctor's nurse, you reeked of it. You had to. And soap, in its way, has as distinctive an odor as perfume. The handkerchief you left in Tedder's room was filled with it."

"I smelled that," Carter admitted sheepishly. "But it didn't mean a thing to me." He stopped short, swore. "You, Phillips. Get on a phone and call the Bureau. Tell them to release the real Miss Dawson, with apologies. Tell them to lay down a carpet of roses, give her the building if she wants it."

Doctor Hanson chuckled. "I'll square things with Miss Dawson." He shook hands with Doc Egg. "And thanks a million, Doc." He hesitated. "But there is only one thing that still puzzles me. Why was it so important to them to get me out of the way? The stolen money is in my office?"

"It is."

Carter protested.

"We did everything to that building but peel the paper off the walls."

Egg assured him. "But that's where the money is, under the paper in the office. That's why she kept her job. That's why they needed time and lots of it to recover it. If you have ever tried to steam open an envelope you know that even in fifty and one hundred dollar bills, a half a million dollars would be a lot of money to steam off a wall."

THE END



# SHARP GUY

By  
**DANIEL  
GORDON**

Tolson was clumsy with the gun, but he got it out.



*Ask Sammy Francis, he'll tell you that a sirloin steak—or a killer—is only as tough as your knife is sharp!*

He stopped looking at the poolroom and began to polish the already immaculate marble counter.

"He's coming over," he said.

"But he gave you a week—" There was the sound of worry in Jane's voice. She had lived in the neighborhood all her life and she knew Nate Tolson's reputation.

"Makes no difference anyway," Sammy Francis said with a shrug. "In the Army I saved and planned for a long time so I could open a place like this. Now I'm stayin'."

Nate Tolson spoke from the doorway. He guarded his words, seeing Jane at the fountain. He said: "Kid—you remember that talk we had?"

"Yeah."

"Don't forget it," Nate Tolson said. "I figured you might—thought I'd drop over and remind you."

Sammy Francis was small and he looked frail. With his eyes unwinkingly on Nate Tolson's, his mind went back to the war. There

**S**TANDING behind the fountain, Sammy Francis could see the poolroom across the street. Through the clean, polished glass of his ice-cream parlor, he watched Nate Tolson waddle through the swinging doors.

Sammy Francis smiled at Jane, then wondered why he smiled. He wasn't happy—that was for sure. But he smiled anyway, from habit, maybe; and tried to think of the pleasant tinkle the new cash register made, instead of worrying over the fact that Nate Tolson had given him a week to close the place and get out of the neighborhood.

He didn't know why he liked the location. Maybe the peace and the quiet. Maybe because Jane came in every afternoon for pepsi.



had been mostly dark nights and rainy—and this was a crisp, sunny afternoon. Still, there was something the same. Something that sent a swift trickle of excitement along his spine. People said you got the habit after a while—and God knows he'd done enough of it to get the habit if it were likely . . .

His eyes shifted to the knife, the knife lying there on the sandwich board. He should have bought another knife, of course. But with money so short, and him used to the feel of the knife in his hand, he'd kept it. And it made wonderful sandwiches . . . Sammy Francis closed his eyes and said: "Get out, Tolson."

He heard Tolson chuckle, then the door slammed.

"Saved!" Jane said cheerfully.

And hearing her, Sammy Francis knew that she spoke lightly to hide the fear in her heart. He said: "Week's up tomorrow."

"What then?"

"He'll be back, I guess." He'll be back and he may be a tough baby; tough and used to having things his own way around here. The thoughts and the knife and the war moved in a confused circle in Sammy Francis' mind. But Jane was talking.

"Are you going to the game?" she asked.

"Huh? What game?"

"The football game, silly. Stafford High is playing Alton. You can take me, if you want to."

"I dunno," Sammy Francis said doubtfully. "I'm gonna be busy." And *how* he was going to be busy! Something about Nate Tolson needed doing. But either way he'd lose . . .

Jane got up. "I'll keep the date open, anyway. P'raps you can close up just after the game starts; leave in time for the rush after the game."

"Maybe," Sammy Francis agreed.

He watched her slim, straight figure through the window. She was a pretty girl. He hummed the song as he went about the business of making a batch of simple syrup. You had to be careful to stir it. The sugar'd burn if you let it settle in the bottom of the pan . . . *A pretty girl—is like a melody—that haunts you—night and day—* Without meaning to, he stirred in time to the music, glancing up now and again to enjoy the new and gleaming freshness of his store. He saw the knife, his old knife, lying upon the sandwich board. Abruptly, he stopped singing, got the knife and put it in a drawer. Damn Nate Tolson. Damn Nate Tolson anyhow!

The door opened and a man came in. Sammy Francis turned down the gas so the syrup wouldn't burn.

"Afternoon," he said with a smile.

The man didn't smile. He said: "Son, I'm acting for the Board of Health. They've had

a complaint at the office about your place."

So it was starting. And this was only the beginning. Well, they couldn't knock him out unless they swung harder than this. The place was as clean as a whistle.

"Have a look around, Doc. I'll bet you this is the cleanest store in town."

The man grunted and went behind the fountain. He opened the freezer and poked experimentally behind the coils. Sammy Francis watched him, grinning a little. He could see that the man didn't like the job.

"Find anything?" Sammy Francis asked at length.

"Nothing," answered the inspector. "Everything is in order."

"Let's drop the hanky-panky, Doc. Did Nate Tolson send you?"

**T**HE man drew himself up haughtily. "The Board of Health sent me. Someone entered a complaint against your place, stating that unsanitary conditions were prevalent."

"And are they?"

"No. As I said, I find that everything is in order."

"You going over to Tolson's pig pen next?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"There's been no complaint about his place."

"Okay. I'm complainin'—now."

"But all complaints must be official—made at the courthouse."

"You mean you don't know what kind of joint Tolson runs? You think a poolroom's a place for kids to hang out?"

"I'm sorry," the inspector said stiffly. "I'm really very busy. Good day."

The next day the men took the juke box away. Sammy Francis watched incredulously as they loaded it in the van.

"But why?" he asked the driver.

"Search me, son. Guess it ain't takin' in enough."

It was the purest hokey. The kids from the school poured nickels into the machine in an endless stream. Why, the juke box paid more than the soda fountain. High school kids would come in for a nickel coke and stay to dance to boogie numbers. They'd skip lunch for a heavy ration of Harry James.

"Look," Sammy Francis said desperately, "call the boss. Tell him we can come to some kinda terms on this thing."

The driver shook his head sympathetically. "I'll call," he said, "but it won't do no good."

He was back soon. "Boss said bring the machine," he stated. "Sorry, kid. But I gotta keep this job."

Sammy Francis went outside to watch the truck drive away. Nate Tolson was standing in the doorway of the poolroom, wiping his



hands on his apron. Sammy Francis thought he saw him smile but he couldn't be sure. . . .

With the music gone, there wasn't much to bring trade into his place. Ice cream could be bought at any drugstore. What the kids liked was music, and space to try out a few new steps. Sammy Francis took off his white coat and hung it in the back room. He put on another coat, hung a back-in-an-hour sign on the door and walked to the district police station.

Mike Webb, the policeman who had the beat, said: "You're imagining things, son. Nate Tolson has been here for years. We never have any trouble at his place and I never heard of him bothering anybody."

"He gave me a week to get out of town," Sammy Francis said slowly.

"Well," the officer grinned. "You're still here, aren't you?"

"Sure. I'm still here. But like I told you, my juke box is gone."

"You own the box or was it put in your store on percentage?"

"Percentage."

Mike Webb shrugged. "Nothing I can do for you then. Owner's got a perfect right to put it wherever he pleases."

"Okay—and thanks, anyway," Sammy Francis said wearily.

Saturday was a clear day, a brisk day, an ideal day for football, surging cheers, and pretty girls like Jane. Thinking of it, and thinking of missing it all, Sammy Francis swung the mop a little harder than was really necessary, considering that the floor wasn't very dirty. Youngsters and their parents had been passing since noon, but now the street was empty. If he opened the door he could hear the faint whisper of band music coming from the high school grounds.

He put away the mop and emptied the pail. If anything was going to happen, it ought to happen now. It did.

The door of the poolroom opened and Nate Tolson came out. He looked up and down the street, then moved slowly and deliberately

toward Sammy's place. Sammy Francis watched his lumbering gait. The man looked soft—but you couldn't tell . . .

Tolson didn't speak at once. He looked at Sammy across the sandwich counter. Sammy Francis thought of a burly member of the Gestapo who he'd once seen nerving himself for an execution. It was an unpleasant thought and he shook it quickly. He said: "What's on your mind, Tolson?"

The sound of the voice seemed to do it. The moment of indecision was gone. "I told you to clear out," Tolson said slowly. "You didn't."

"But why? Any of your pool sharks taken the pledge?"

"I used to get a nice play from the kids before you opened this joint."

"Might help some if you scraped the grease off the walls," Sammy Francis said tauntingly.

"That's my business. It's also my business to see that young punks like you do as they're told."

**W**ITHOUT meaning to, Sammy Francis had been fingering the knife, his fingers caressing the long blade.

Tolson said: "Put down that knife!"

A little shock as Sammy Francis consciously observed his wandering fingers, then the hardening resentment at Tolson's tone—"Make me," he said quietly.

Tolson was clumsy with the gun. But he got it out.

In one swift, eye-dazzling movement, Sammy Francis chopped down on the gun with the side of his hand. With the other hand he swept up the knife from its place on the sandwich board and halted the shining point one inch from Tolson's throat. "Drop the gun, Tolson."

But there was little satisfaction for Sammy Francis in the clatter the gun made as it dropped. He vaulted over the counter while Tolson stood stupidly, bewildered by the speed of it all.

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Nate Tolson said in a hoarse whisper: "What ya gonna do?"

"I don't know, Tolson, I really don't know."

"We could call it square—" Tolson said hopefully.

"And have you plan a good, careful job next time?" Sammy Francis shook his head. If only Tolson hadn't quit so easily. If he'd tried harder with the gun the thing would be over by now.

He said: "Back up, Tolson, over against the wall."

"What for?" Tolson asked nervously.

"So I can give you a demonstration." As he spoke, Sammy Francis twirled the knife, his supple fingers wandering along the bright length of the blade.

Sammy Francis indicated a pumpkin carved into a jack-o-lantern. "Between the eyes," he said, "watch it!" His arm moved quickly. There was a flash, a shimmering flash, and then the hollow, plunking sound of the knife as it slit the pumpkin.

Deftly, Sammy Francis unloaded the gun, tossed it to Tolson. "I been throwing knives since I was twelve years old," he said, "but there's no future in it. The demonstration was to warn you not to get ideas. You do like I tell you and you got a chance. I haven't made up my mind. But one phony move and I'll treat you like a pumpkin!" He stepped back, slipped the knife up his sleeve and motioned toward the door. "Get going," he said.

Nate Tolson shuffled past. Outside he said: "Which way?"

Which way? Sammy Francis was wondering, too. The railroad yards? The lake? *Where* didn't seem very important. Killing Tolson meant the end of sunny afternoons with Jane, those afternoons when the sun slanted in through the clear windows and touched the chromium fittings on the fountain. Hiding the body was going to be tough . . . So was playing innocent. Mike Webb hadn't paid much attention when he'd complained about Tolson, but if Tolson turned up missing, Mike would remember it soon enough.

"That way," he said.

They walked in file. The lake was a mile on the other side of the school grounds. And as they neared the grounds, Tolson, encouraged by the noise, turned, as if to speak.

"Save it!" Sammy Francis warned him.

"You make one move and I'll carve you!"

Tolson walked on. There was a sudden roar as they came abreast of the field. The first half had ended.

Sammy Francis thought of Jane. I'll keep the date open, she had said. And he thought of the kids, of the fine, clean, wild kids who were his customers, who were in the game and in the stands today . . . He couldn't do it. Bad as Tolson needed it. Thinking fast, rejecting

ideas even as they came to him, he racked his brain. Beating Tolson was out. Soft Tolson might be; he was too big and heavy. Anyway, he'd soon get over a beating. There must be something else . . . Shame! If he could make a monkey out of Tolson, shame him before a crowd! Swiftly, he made his plan. He'd try to heap the shame high. Might as well, Tolson would never forgive him anyhow. The football game! Everybody in the neighborhood looking on! It seemed worth a try.

Walking rapidly, herding his captive to the remote end of the field, Sammy Francis issued final instructions. "You hold the gun like this," he said, illustrating by placing his forefinger against his temple. "There's two things you want to think about: The gun isn't loaded and you're getting off easy. Make that three things. I'll be walking down the sidelines within easy throwin' distance of you all the time. Go through with it and you get away. Start to run or put up a squawk and this knife'll tickle your ear. Now!"

**T**OLSON wavered for a long moment, then, holding his arm awkwardly aloft, the revolver pointing at his own head, he began a slow walk down the center of the field. As he neared the goal line, a woman tittered nervously. Another screamed. A murmur swept the crowd.

With the noise of the crowd mounting in his ears, the horrified screams of women and the hoarse shouts of men, Sammy Francis saw a uniformed figure detach itself from the player's bench and speed toward Tolson. The player left the ground in a flying tackle. He hit Tolson low and hard. The gun went spinning in the air. Sammy Francis drifted up.

A voice came at his elbow: "What do you know about this?"

Sammy Francis turned, his eyes wary as he recognized the face and badge of Mike Webb. "Why—nothing," he said. "The guy must've jumped his trolley."

"Mebbe," Mike Webb grunted heavily. "Let's go see."

Tolson's clothes were ripped and his face was covered with mud. Beside himself with rage, he pointed accusingly at Sammy. "That's the man! But watch him—dangerous—got a knife!"

Sammy Francis looked at Mike Webb and shook his head. "I don't like the guy, you understand. But it's sad, very sad."

The officer looked at him closely and Sammy could almost hear wheels turning in Mike Webb's mind. Mike Webb said: "I dunno—" and his practiced hands patted Sammy.

"Nuthin' on him," Mike Webb said; then, indicating Tolson: "Take him away. Not to the jail, though. The guy's probably a hospital case. Call the state people." He turned his



eyes on Sammy Francis. "If you had anything to do with this, now's the time to say so."

Sammy Francis shrugged: "To me the guy never did look too bright. But I didn't think he was *this* whacky. It goes to show you—"

"Okay," said Mike Webb. "Okay . . ."

Sammy Francis sauntered away. Once off the field he walked rapidly, putting distance between himself and Mike Webb.

Back at the store he worked swiftly and methodically to serve the crowd that jammed the place after the game. Snatches of conversation drifted to him from the booths and tables. Nate Tolson's dramatic entrance had stolen the afternoon show. There was much talk of him; little of the game. Yesterday, the rush of business would have made Sammy Francis most happy. But this afternoon he kept one eye on the door, expecting momentarily to see Mike Webb walk in. For Sammy Francis didn't have the knife. And Mike Webb was smart, smarter than he seemed to be.

The crowd had gone and darkness had come. Sammy Francis left the store unlocked and walked swiftly to the football field, past the goal line, down the sidelines, retracing the steps of the afternoon. He knelt and fumbled in the short, trampled grass.

"Looking for something?"

Sammy Francis watched the shadow detach itself from the blur of benches and become the threatening figure of Mike Webb. He'd been a fool to come here. He knew that now. But anyway, it was only a question of time. They'd have checked the muddy field this afternoon if Tolson hadn't looked like a wild bull.

Mike Webb threw the flashlight beam full in Sammy's eyes. "Looking for something?"

"My—my pen," Sammy Francis said lamely, fumbling at his breast pocket. "I must've dropped it during the excitement this afternoon."

Mike Webb clucked sympathetically and swept the ground with light. "It's a big field to search," he said, adding pointedly, "with no light . . ."

"I didn't think of the light. Matter of fact I was in a hurry—left the store unlocked. Guess I'd better be gettin' back."

"I'll go with you," Mike Webb said. "I could use a sandwich."

Jane was there, sitting on a stool. She wore a soft wool sweater and a tweed skirt. Her face was flushed from the cool night air. Sammy Francis thought he'd never seen her look so beautiful. He wanted to tell her so. But not now—not with Mike Webb at his elbow . . .

Jane was happy and sparkling. She nodded a greeting to Mike Webb, then said: "Sammy! It was wonderful!"

"It was good," he admitted, wondering if it had been worth it.

**H**EEDLESS of Sammy's frown and Mike Webb's interest, Jane rattled on. "Oh, but Tolson looked like a fool, pointing a gun at his own head—and in front of all those people."

"What are they going to do with him?" Sammy kept his voice even and low.

"Father says they'll send him to the state hospital for observation, perhaps keep him there for the *longest* time."

"I don't think so," Mike Webb said to her, "I really don't think so." Then to Sammy: "That sandwich of mine—make it a ham on rye. And would you mind trimming off the crust?"

Numbly, with Mike Webb's eyes upon him, Sammy Francis started the sandwich. He didn't need to watch his hands. He'd made too many ham-on-ryes for that. His practiced finishers performed the task while his eyes and his mind were on Mike Webb. Webb's shot had been shrewd—and lucky. *Would you mind trimming off the crust?*

Carefully, getting the edges even, Sammy Francis stacked the sandwich, slid a plate beneath it and put it on the counter.

Mike Webb smiled at him. "Perfect," he said, "except I wanted the edges trimmed. Remember?"

Sammy Francis shifted his gaze helplessly to Jane. She returned the look but there was a strained urgency in her stare. Opening his mouth, ready to speak, fumbling nervously among the jars and plates beneath the counter, Sammy Francis touched it and incredulously touched it again.

Slowly, he brought the knife into the light. It shone cleanly, without mud or dirt. He almost lunged for the sandwich, neatly amputated the crust.

Mike Webb inspected the sandwich, glanced at the knife. "Thanks," he said casually. "I'll eat it as I go." With a pleasant nod to Jane, he left.

Still holding the knife, Sammy Francis regarded it unbelievably. "But I left it on the football field," he mumbled, "buried in the mud!"

"I know."

"What?"

"I said I know. I saw you. I thought you'd want it back again, so I remembered the spot. Soon as the crowd left I dug it up, took it home and cleaned it."

Sammy Francis bestowed a loving look upon Jane. Without the knife Tolson would never be able to back his story. Life had suddenly become calm and uncomplicated—peaceful, that's what it was!

That look and the smile in her eyes—something told Sammy Francis that everything would be all right.



*That strictly-a-dish dick, Thelma Matthews, had to make sure that Rhyne Norbert caught the next Reno-bound plane. But when Rhyne bailed out, she left Thelma her nice, unused ticket — on the hot-squat express!*



A blow, like the heel of a hand, struck my shoulder and sent me plunging against the low terrace wall.

I WAS sitting at my desk having myself a whale of a time giving myself a manicure. There wasn't much else to do. I had read everything there was in my office to read, from Vogue to the latest list of criminals wanted by the police. Vogue didn't merit re-reading because I didn't have any money to spend, and the wanted dodgers didn't tell me where the criminals were hiding so I didn't stand much chance of collecting a reward for the capture of the crooks described thereon.

It was just another idle day in the life of Thelma Matthews, that's me, girl detective. Clients had stayed away in droves ever since I had inherited Shadow Arts Agency.

I was preening the nails of my left hand



when the man entered. He opened my office door and walked in, hesitantly, like a salesman who hadn't yet learned how to win friends and influence people.

He looked more like the male lead for a magazine collar ad romance. Pretty isn't an adjective to use on a man, but at the moment



# PHOTO FINISH

By C. WILLIAM  
HARRISON

I couldn't think of a better one word description for him. He was rather tall and had features as smooth as a baby's south side. He had wavy blond hair and a smile that was almost shy. He must have been close to forty, but he didn't look it.

I knew he was a gentleman because he didn't once give obvious attention to the sweater I was wearing. I wasn't sure that I liked that quality in him. A woman likes to have her charms noticed even if frank interest does make her pretend to resent men's roving eyes.

The man helped himself to the customer's chair, and picked a cigaret out of a gold case that would have bought the strapless gown I had drooled over in the fashion magazine. He asked if I would like to have a cigaret. I said I wouldn't, thank you.

I asked, "Are you selling something?"

He flickered his boyish smile and shook his head. I put my manicure set away. The man spoke in a tone that would have gone well with soft lights and sweet music.

"As a matter of fact, Miss Matthews, I came here to buy something from you—your services."

I began to get my guard up. I wondered if I should ask him what kind of 'services' he had in mind.

"Perhaps I should have said the services of your agency," he smiled. Then he stopped smiling. He looked away uncomfortably, like a small boy caught slipping a girl's pigtail into an inkwell. Only that wasn't quite the exact expression that came into his face. It was more of shame or remorse—I couldn't catalogue it with certainty.

Then he blurted it out. "I want to hire you to help me get a divorce from my wife."

So that was his ticket! Now I was beginning to get the picture of him. He was a throw-back, a gentleman of the 1890 school, with a complete set of mid-Victorian morals. Undoubtedly his wife was thoroughly modern, and she had bought a black chiffon nightie, and now he was convinced she was cheating.

I ignored the past-due office rent, and said firmly, "I'm sorry, but the Shadow Arts agency doesn't handle that kind of work."

He opened guileless eyes for me. "But why, Miss Matthews?"

Jealous, mistrusting wives and husbands, snooping into private matrimonial affairs—I had a half a dozen personal reasons for not wanting that kind of work, but I saw no reason to explain to this would-be client.

"We just don't, that's all. You can proba-

bly find some other agency which will take your case." I reached for my small manicure set.

HIS smile told me not to be too hasty in making my decision. His voice said he needed me for the job because I was a woman as well as a detective.

He said earnestly, "My wife is a very beautiful woman, Miss Matthews. And very smart. If I were to send a man to investigate her, it wouldn't take her five minutes to have him, well . . ."

He searched for the word. I handed him a cliché old enough to use crutches, and he grabbed it like a new-born.

"Have him in her clutches?"

"Exactly, Miss Matthews. My wife would have any male detective blinded by her beauty so that he could never give me an honest report. But being a lady yourself, you wouldn't be susceptible to another woman's wiles. All I want is for you to attend a party my wife is having tonight. You can watch her, study her during the evening, and form an opinion whether or not she is having an affair with another man. That's all I'm asking from you."

It sounded simple, and I was tempted. I could earn a twenty-five dollar fee by doing nothing more than attending a party, drinking free drinks, and seeing what there was to see. But I didn't like the idea that such a haphazard opinion as mine would have to be helping influence a man to divorce his wife.

"I'm sorry, Mr. . . ."

"Norbert. Ralph Norbert. I'll pay you well, Miss Matthews. It's worth five hundred dollars to me."

I tucked a loose strand of hair behind my ear. "I don't think I understood you, Mr. Norbert."

He took a fat wallet from his pocket, removed five picture bills, and put them on my desk. "Five hundred dollars, Miss Matthews."

"You're the most persuasive client I've ever had, Mr. Norbert. You just talked me into taking your case."

\* \* \*

The elevator boy let me out on the twelfth floor of the Wycke-Arms. Even the corridor had an expensive aura to it, discreetly lighted and with all the fawning silence that money can buy. If the pile of the carpeting had been any deeper I would have needed snowshoes.

I pressed the button at the door numbered 2-C, but I didn't hear anything. It was one of those silent jobs where you wonder if the button operates chimes you can't hear, a signal



light somewhere inside, or brings down an angel from above with a gilt-edged scroll announcing that a visitor is at the door.

The man who opened the door was short and round and had an expression like a successful politician the day after election. He didn't know me from Eve, but that didn't stop him.

"Hello, sweetheart." He held a highball glass in one hand. "I mixed this just for you."

I gave him my worst worldly-wise smile, accepted the highball, and let him guide me possessively into the apartment. The place was furnished like a dream, with walls the color of old parchment, and I thought that the price tag alone of the tapestry covered Chesterfield had probably been printed in the mint.

A record player was giving out the latest Sammy Kaye number, and the couples in the middle of the room were swaying their dancing rather than swinging it. Others in the more shadowed nooks of the room appeared very satisfied with just their own company. I thought that all the place needed for a finishing touch was the smell of Lotus blossoms.

The man who had let me in began to try to get chummy. He came close, and even if his ideas were young his method wore whiskers.

"Where have you been all my life, baby?"

I sparred with his hands. "Trying to stay clear of you, pop."

I searched the room, trying to pick out Rhyna Norbert by the description her husband had given me. Tall, slender, dark hair, very dark eyes, a strange, vibrant woman in whom passion and unpredictable temper walked hand in hand.

The man beside me said, "I've been missing you tonight, baby."

"Don't let me keep you from it, pop."

Petulance clouded his eyes. "Don't be that way."

"What way?" The woman dancing with the redhead would be Mrs. Rhyna Norbert, I decided. I was supposed to look her over, use my woman's intuition to conclude quickly and decisively whether Mrs. Norbert was cheating on her husband. The whole deal was silly. But it was also five hundred dollars.

"Stop being what way, pop?" I asked.

"So . . . well, so evasive," the short man said. "I'm not so old. You don't have to be afraid of me, baby."

"My name isn't baby," I told him. "My name is Thelma Matthews, and I've got a husband nine feet tall and weighing three hundred pounds. Good-bye now."

The music ended, and the couples who had been dancing looked toward us.

**R**HYNA NORBERT called out in a husky voice, "Who's your new doll, Paul?" The short man said, "She's not my doll. I

let her in, but she says she's got a husband nine feet tall and . . ." Even as he spoke I saw the strange surge of anger run through Rhyna Norbert's features. She started toward us.

" . . . three hundred pounds," the short man was saying. "She says her name is Thelma Matthews."

If there was anything uncertain about Rhyna Norbert's hatred it vanished with the mentioning of my name. Her cheeks whitened, and her mouth, lovely until now, became suddenly ugly in its contemptuous twist. Dark fires of fury were in her eyes.

She said, harshly through the silence of the room. "You've got nerve, coming here tonight."

I didn't understand. She acted as though she knew me and had every reason to hate me, but I didn't know why. I smiled, and tried to keep calm against her soaring rage.

"It didn't take so much nerve, Mrs. Norbert. You see . . ."

"I suppose my husband sent you here," she cut in.

I nodded. "Why, yes, as a matter of fact . . ."

"You brazen little hussy," she spat out at me.

Being a lady, I didn't knock her teeth down her throat as I should have. I turned to leave the apartment, but she caught my arm and jerked me back around. Her face was white with anger.

"I'm not through with you yet. No woman can play around with my husband the way you have and get away with it. We'll go in the next room and have this out once and for all."

By now I was beginning to get my own temper up. Play around with her husband? Had Rhyna Norbert accused me of that? *Me?*

I followed her through an open door, heard the spring lock snap as she kicked it shut. We were alone now, in a dimly lighted room that was little more than an extension to the terrace overlooking the street twelve floors below. We were near the parapet, and I had a vague uneasy thought about how easy it would be to fall over that wall. Or to be pushed. But that thought made no distinct impression on me.

Playing around with Rhyna Norbert's husband? Things and stuff! I hadn't even seen Ralph Norbert until that afternoon. I told her so.

She spat back at me. "Don't give me that, sister. I have a picture of you and my husband together. I found it in Ralph's wallet this morning."

"Why, you're crazy!"

She was just that, a woman insane with jealousy and cut pride. She came at me like a cat, with her claws slashing at my face. I



pushed her back, and she tripped and fell. I said, "I don't know what this is all about, Mrs. Norbert, but I never met your husband before this afternoon and I've never had my picture taken with him."

She got to her feet, slowed but not stopped. Even in her wild anger she was a beautiful woman, beautiful and deadly.

She said venomously, "Maybe seeing the picture will refresh your memory. After that I'm going to mark you so you'll never look at another woman's husband."

"You won't look so good either with your teeth out," I told her grimly. "Stay away from me, honey."

She got the photograph out of a desk drawer. I took it, a 4 x 5 contact print, and moved out on the terrace where there was more light. Rhyna Norbert followed me.

I halted at the parapet, the woman watching from a few feet away. Twelve stories below traffic grumbled on the black ribbon of the street, but those sounds were in the deep dark distance, a part of another world. I wondered if Rhyna Norbert was wondering how easy it might be to push me over the wall into that dark and silent space. A sudden push, a swift final plunge...

I tilted the photograph to pick up the moon's light on the glossy surface. I saw

the sharp-cut image of a man—Ralph Norbert standing intimately close to a woman who was me. Even in the moon's dim light there was no mistaking the identity of those two figures. Obviously this was a fake, a paste-up of Ralph Norbert's picture and one of myself. Some photographer had pasted together two separate pictures into faked intimacy, and copied it on the negative from which this print had been made. I knew that, but how could I prove it?

Argue it out with Rhyna Norbert? I could try. Or if necessary I would slap some sense into that firebrand. A sense of swift and silent danger suddenly struck me. I had no time to raise my eyes, to cry out. A blow, like the heel of a hand, struck my shoulder, sent me plunging against the low terrace wall. Instinct sent me reeling back, and as I started to fall, a fist—it could have been only that—crashed against the back of my neck.

THE terrace floor rushed up at me, and with it came oblivion. Before I passed out I heard Rhyna Norbert scream.

"Don't! Please..."

The cry, thin and futile and sharp with horror, faded swiftly as if into some deep dark distance. I knew nothing more.



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I was a mile above the earth, lost inside a black storm cloud. Thunder was booming and it hurt my head, and I kept groping around in black nothingness trying to find my way out. I was getting close to the edge of the cloud. I could hear voices, low and vague at first, then more clearly, but I couldn't break through the wall of blackness and see who was talking.

A voice said, "She's a cute little trick."

A woman said cattily, "You always were a sucker for a low neckline, Lee. You make me sick. I'm going home."

Another man's voice, lazy and yet forceful, broke in. "I'm afraid you can't leave here for a while, Mrs. Raeger."

"I don't see why. I've already told you my story, haven't I?"

"Yes, but—"

I wished they would show a little more consideration for my headache, and be quiet.

But the woman, Mrs. Raeger, kept talking. "I don't see why you should detain us, officer. You have your murderer. Or should I say murderess?"

It was like being suddenly awakened from a frightening half-sleep. Only being conscious and again remembering was even more frightening. I was still on the terrace, lying not far from the parapet over which I had almost been pushed. Pushed? By whom? And why?

And where was Mrs. Rhyna Norbert?

I sat up. The faces in the background just watched me. Nobody said anything. I tucked my feet under me, stood up uncertainly. Nobody offered to help me. I thought bitterly, "Ask them and they'd say chivalry is a four cylinder General Motors product. Or was it six."

An empty chair was just behind me, and I used it. My knees were as weak as grandma's fourth husband the day they got married. Those staring faces watched me sit down. My head felt like an oversized pulse.

I asked irritably, "Well, say something, somebody."

Nobody said anything. They didn't ask why I had been lying unconscious on the terrace floor, or how I felt, or if they could bring me a drink of water. They just stared at me, silent and with a strange sort of detached curiosity.

Then suddenly I *knew*! All of Rhyna Norbert's party members were there, and a uniformed cop stood guard at the French doors, and the tall lank fellow watching me so steadily had the look of a homicide detective. But I couldn't see Mrs. Norbert anywhere.

I added the presence of police to the woman's panicstricken cry which I remembered hearing just before being knocked un-

conscious, and from these I subtracted the fact that Mrs. Rhyna Norbert was nowhere in sight. The answer I got was like a cold hand squeezing all the blood out of me.

"Why—why, you thing I killed her."

The lank fellow with the steady gray eyes said, "Killed who, Miss Matthews?"

I realized then that I had talked myself out on a limb. Silence, refusing to talk further could not help me. Yet answering that question would only plunge me deeper.

"We think you killed who, Miss Matthews?"

"Mrs. Norbert, of course." I tried to hold back the fear that was beating against my brain. "This is Rhyna Norbert's apartment, and I don't see her anywhere. And the fact that police were called—" the words tumbled out—"means she must be dead."

The lank man said mildly, "Does it? You must have some reason more conclusive than that for believing Mrs. Norbert is dead."

I said, "Just before I passed out, I remember hearing a woman's scream that seemed to . . . to sort of fall away out of hearing."

"Fall away, Miss Matthews?" The lank man pointed into the dark depths beyond the terrace wall. "Like falling down there?"

I held my breath. "Yes."

The lank man smiled queerly. "You wouldn't also remember pushing Mrs. Norbert into that fall, would you?"

"My god, no!"

"That's what we think happened, Miss Matthews. For some reason you fought with Mrs. Norbert, and in the scuffle she was pushed over the parapet. Either that, or you deliberately murdered her."

I SAID frantically, "I never saw Mrs. Norbert before tonight. When I came into her apartment she acted as if she knew me and had a good reason to hate me. She accused me of taking her husband away from her, and I told her she was mistaken. She even had a photograph of me and Mr. Norbert together, but it was a fake."

The detective murmured, "Fake?"

"It was a paste-up of two separate pictures—one of me and one of Mr. Norbert. The paste-up had been re-photographed and printed to look like an original picture."

The detective said gently, "I didn't find any photograph like that here. You're pretty good on alibis, Miss Matthews, very good."

"But it's true!" I said angrily. "I had the picture in my hand when . . . when this happened."

"When you pushed Mrs. Norbert over the wall?"

"No. When I was knocked out by the murderer just before *he* pushed Mrs. Nor-



bert over the wall. Do you think I knocked myself out for an alibi?"

"It has happened," the homicide man said. His voice was as gentle as falling snow, and as cold. "But more likely you tripped during the excitement, fell and knocked yourself out. Why did you come here in the first place, Miss Matthews? I understand from papers I found in your purse that you run a private detective agency. Did you come here on a job?"

I nodded. "Mr. Ralph Norbert came to my office this afternoon and hired me to help him get a divorce from his wife."

A voice in the background said sharply, "That, Lieutenant, is a lie. I've never seen this woman before. I was separated from my wife, true, but I still loved her. I have any number of friends who will tell you I was trying to get Rhyna back."

I cried out, "But you gave me five hundred dollars to help you get a divorce. I've still got the money with me, in my purse."

The detective spoke with soft finality. "Why keep on lying, Miss Matthews? Mr. Norbert denies knowing you. There was no photograph like you described. And there was no five hundred dollars found in your purse when I examined it."

He was transparent to me, but I could do nothing about it. Rhyna Norbert had been a woman who would sell a divorce at only the highest cash price, and her husband had wanted to be rid of her without the expense of a small fortune. He had had that suggestively intimate photograph of himself and me faked to play on the jealous temper of his wife. He had known she would flare into fury when I came into her apartment. He had knocked me out on the terrace, and pushed Rhyna over the parapet to her death. He had stolen the faked photograph from me, and he had taken the five hundred dollars which was to have been my fee. He had destroyed all evidence, making me a liar and a murderess.

He had been hiding somewhere on the terrace all the time I had been with Mrs. Norbert. But where? I looked around. Behind one of those lounge chairs, of course. The night's darkness in itself had been enough cover for him.

But how had he got on the terrace? Not by coming through the apartment, that was certain. He wouldn't have risked being seen by the members of his wife's party. I looked at the fire escape at the far end of the terrace. It was a counter-balanced affair that serviced only the Norbert suite, made so that it would swing down under the weight of a person and give passage to the main fire escape a floor below.

Then I remembered. I had not noticed the horizontal ironwork of the fire escape when I had first stepped out on the terrace. I hadn't noticed it because it had not been horizontal at the time. It had been slanting down to the landing below, tied down so it would give quick and easy passage for Ralph Norbert to and from his wife's apartment. He had climbed up the fire escape to his hiding place on the terrace; he had knocked me out, murdered his wife, and climbed down to the lower landing again. Then he had released the counterbalanced steps so it would swing up again, offering no hint to the route he had taken.

I looked at the homicide detective, angry and bitter and desperate.

I said, "You won't believe me, but there is your murderer." I pointed at Ralph Norbert. I told what the man had done, how it had to be, but I made no impression on the detective.

I SAID, "You don't believe me, I can see that, but maybe I can give you proof. When Norbert came up that fire escape tonight he was bound to have touched the iron work at some time. Did you ever hear of the

(Continued on page 91)



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# CURTAIN



*Lovely Judy Erling was the only reason I took that pay-off job. Right or wrong, she was for me, since I'd seen her first show. But fifty grand that Judy didn't want, plus a billow of cordite, made me look too much like low man in death house row!*

At ten o'clock they had said, and it must be later than that now.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Without Love

THE air was damp; from the river, nearby, came the melancholy wail of a tug. Nothing had substance in the mist, nothing had shape. The lights of the bridge formed an elliptical dim glow against the starless background. I stood near the entrance to a deserted warehouse, waiting.

Once, I thought I heard a voice, but no one approached me. Once, I thought I heard footsteps, but I was wrong. Or maybe I wasn't;

maybe I should have been more alert, after that.

With fifty thousand dollars on me, I had reason to be alert.

But I hadn't planned on a cross. I was just a name in the telephone book to the principals in this business, just an intermediary. With something of a reputation for honesty, perhaps, and that's why I'd been chosen.

The tug wailed again, as though repeating a question. There was no other sound, except the sound of my breathing.

It was a nasty business. It was something for the F.B.I. and a private operative would



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# CALL FOR THE CORPSE

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*Spine-tingling Broadway Crime  
Novelette*

**By WILLIAM  
CAMPBELL GAULT**

need to be a damned fool to have anything to do with it. Which made me one of those. But she could afford the fifty grand, and it might mean the kid would be returned without injury. I had argued with her to no avail. This was her decision, and this was her money and I was working for her.

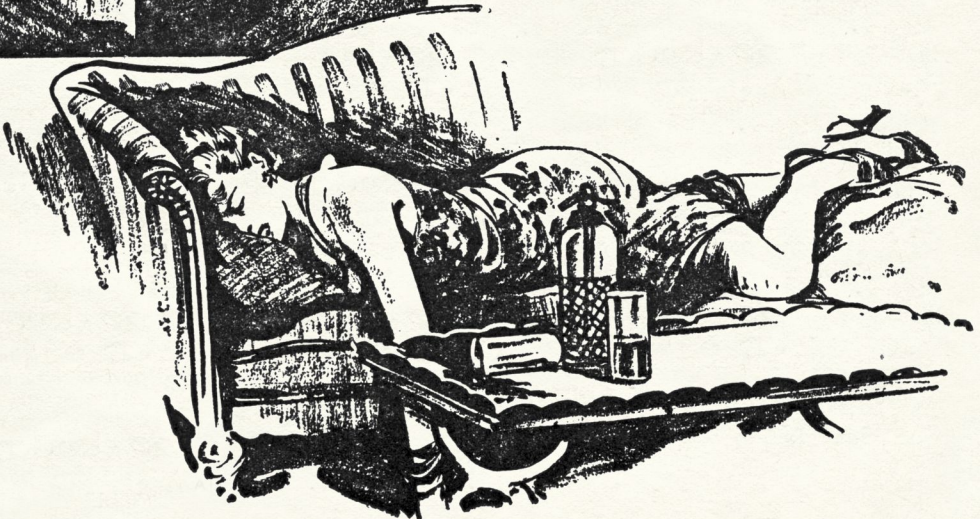
So, I waited.

At ten o'clock they had said, and it must be later than that, now. But they were probably casing the entire area, first. They were playing with dynamite, and taking no chances.

Silence, and the darkness, undisturbed. There was no reason why I shouldn't light a cigarette, I thought. Unless it might bring some watchman into the picture . . . I decided against it.

A sound then, like the scratching of a shoe nail on concrete, and I turned. . . .

The only picture I had was that blob, over-





head, and the arm. The darkness that came now was complete, and mixed with pain, preceded by the brilliance that flooded my brain. . . .

I went down into the pit of nothingness, into one of those endless falls, and that melted into an interior scene, and I was talking to Lana Turner. "You look exactly like Judy Erling," I told her, "though her hair is dark while yours is light. She's an actress, too, and once she was married to that novelist John Clayton Steel." Lana just smiled the smile she reserves for the brash, and that scene dissolved. I saw the fiery glow of the steel furnaces, and felt their heat, and then I heard the drums. Or maybe it was just one drum. It was a slow, steady beat, a dragging beat, like a pulsating headache.

The drum went away, after a while, and left me only the headache. I was lying on my face, on the concrete apron of the warehouse. My arms were outstretched, and my face was bruised. I brought one hand up to feel the bump on my head. There was blood there.

I rose slowly to a sitting position, closing my eyes against the verging nausea, the increase in pain. The money was gone, of course. But my own wallet and my gun were still there.

The tug sent up its eerie call again.

I climbed to my feet and stood there quietly a moment, before starting to walk.

Where now? The police? The Feds? Or the home of Judy Erling? I decided I'd see her, first. I'd been outside the law throughout this whole deal; a few more hours wouldn't hurt.

I walked along the wharf to the steps and up the steps to the spot near the bridge where I had parked my car.

The home of Judy Erling was a showplace out in River Hills, a white one-story place in the modern manner, with glass brick corners, and huge show windows overlooking the water. It had a patio, and a flat, copper roof. But it was without love, I thought. Without love ever since John Clayton Steel, prominent young novelist, had gone to live his separate life. Though that might have been my own imagination. At the time, I had no way of being sure how correct I was.

On the flagstone terrace in front of the house, someone was sitting. Someone who looked exactly like Lana Turner, only her hair was black.

She rose, as I came up onto the terrace. She was wearing a pale blue linen dress, very simple and undoubtedly very expensive. She said, "You didn't pay it, did you?"

"Not voluntarily," I said.

I could hear the quick intake of breath. Then, "You mean—?"

"I was slugged. I was hit over the head

with an instrument probably blunt but anyway painful. The money was taken."

**T**HERE was concern in her voice, now. "You were hurt—?"

With fifty thousand of her dollars gone, she could worry about me. *Heart*, as the critics say.

"I was and am," I admitted, "but I don't know how seriously." A spasm of pain at that moment made me wince.

She took me by the hand and led me inside without another word. Miss Arnold, Junior's nurse was there, and she's a trained nurse. Judy stood by while Miss Arnold washed and bandaged my head and bathed my scratched face.

We went back out onto the terrace, then, just Judy and I. (I am Galveston Jones, if it matters). Judy said, "Johnny's safe. I got a phone call, half an hour ago."

"Then—they did deliver? I thought, after they slugged me—"

"His father had him," she said quietly. "He wasn't kidnapped." Her voice, I thought, was sad.

"But the ransom note? The money? That pencil of his they sent to prove—"

She shrugged. "Somebody saw a chance to make a fast dollar, I suppose." It didn't seem to matter, to her. I wish I could reach a point where fifty grand didn't matter. Or maybe not.

There was no mist here, no hoot of a tug, and the stars were visible. But there was a silence, a sort of lonely silence. I said, "My integrity's involved in this. Do you see that?"

"It didn't occur to me," she said. "I believe you."

"It will occur to the police," I said. "Some of them have nasty, suspicious minds, particularly where private operatives are involved."

"They need never know. I won't tell them."

Her voice was as far away as the stars. She wasn't thinking about the business at hand; that much was sure. She was probably thinking about John Clayton Steel, Sr. now reunited with John Clayton Steel, Jr. No, fifty grand wouldn't matter to her, right then, perhaps.

"You going to get him back?" I asked. "You want him back?"

"I want him more than anything in the world," she said. "But I'm not going to get him. I'm going to Hollywood, in a week. I'm going alone."

That didn't sound like her. Rather, let's say it didn't sound like I wanted her to sound. I said, "The climate would do him good."

"His father would do him more good," she said. She turned to face me in the moonlight. "Don't get the wrong idea, don't think my ambition will ever be bigger than my son, to



me. But can't you see it? Look what happened. Somebody, some sharpie heard that my boy was missing. In two hours I had a ransom note, along with that pencil. In eight hours, they had fifty thousand dollars. If I weren't so well known, if the world wasn't full of that kind of people, I'd want my boy with me. But it isn't fair to him, not while I'm what I am."

"You want to be what you are?" I asked her.

She studied me gravely, and then she smiled. "Galveston Jones," she said, "what am I? What is your considered, objective opinion?"

"You are one of the finest living actresses," I said. "You are a generous, beautiful, talented young lady in love with your former husband. Your ambition is eating you up."

"You'd never make a critic," she said.

"Not while I can make an honest living," I admitted. "But we're talking in circles. There's a matter of fifty thousand dollars and my injured pride. To say nothing of a bruised noggin. I'm taking this to the police."

She came back to here and now. "No," she said, and her voice was sharp and urgent. "Everything's settled. I don't want to stir up any trouble, or any publicity."

"It's more important than that," I told her. "Kidnapping's a filthy business, and the people who indulge in it are too rotten to live. The people who profit by it are no better. This is too big to forget."

"And what about my boy, then? Isn't he important? What about the reporters who will bother him, the photographers, the sob sisters? What about all the rotten publicity regarding the divorce? Do you think my boy shouldn't be spared that? It's my money, Mr. Jones, and my decision."

"It was your decision to pay it," I reminded her, "though I warned you you couldn't do business with that kind of scum. It can be done discreetly, confidentially."

Her laugh was short and bitter. "Impossible."

"Eighty percent of my business is with theatrical people," I told her. "A hundred percent of it was handled quietly."

She sighed. She looked up at the stars, and said, "Do what you want, personally. But keep the police out of it, the police and the papers." She rose. "I'll pay for it; send me the bill."

I rose, too. I said, "There'll be no bill, unless I get that fifty grand back. This is a personal matter."

She put a hand on my arm. "Galveston," she said, "my Don Quixote in the business coupe, don't forget to keep your guard up."

"I won't," I promised. "And I won't tell the police, not right away, at any rate."

She was still standing there, all alone under the stars, when my business coupe idled down the drive to the main road.

Fifty thousand dollars, I thought, and she isn't screaming, she isn't calling copper, she didn't call me names. *Nobody* can lose fifty thousand dollars like that, not even her, not even a girl who would be making Hollywood money in a week. It doesn't add up; it doesn't make sense. It's money as a lead dollar.

**B**UT not her, no, not her. Not that girl of magic and heart and beauty who is cutting herself off from her son for his own good. She couldn't be phoney. But, of course, I'm prejudiced; I'd seen her act. I had seen her in everything she'd ever played, including the turkeys of her early years. I'm a sucker for the footlights.

Golly, I thought, she must be close to thirty. She was twenty-two when she married; her boy was now seven. She would always be sixteen, in my eyes.

I went back to my apartment and had a shower. I had a small drink, and a cigarette and went to bed.

No dreams, this time, or none that I remember.

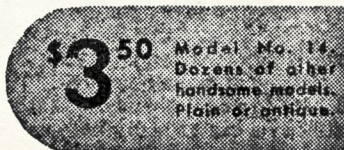
The phone woke me. The sun was well up, and the room was stifling. No breeze moved



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the curtains at the open windows of my bedroom.

I recognized the voice of Alexander Hoover, Judy's agent. He said, "Judy's told me about last night. Would you drop in at the office some time this morning?"

I said I would, around eleven.

I made my own breakfast, which consisted of a cup of coffee and one piece of toast. I took a shower, and wore the cleanest cool suit I had. I killed a little time at the office before going over to Hoover's. He has a nice suite of offices right near the Rialto, on 43rd. On ten percent of Judy's stage and radio pay, he could afford it.

He was a young looking man, though he must have been crowding forty. He had a thin, intense face and expressive, dark blue eyes. He was wearing a blue, tropical worsted suit and a worried look when I entered his office.

I gave him an account of what had happened the evening before.

He shook his head. "Fifty thousand, and she didn't whimper. She's like a baby where money is concerned."

"She wanted to forget the whole deal," I said, "but I wouldn't have it. It might give these boys ideas."

He was staring down at his desk. Then he looked up. "Do you think Junior might be in danger, now?"

I didn't get it, and he must have read the blankness on my face.

"I mean," he explained, "if they could collect fifty thousand on a kid who wasn't snatched, maybe they'd figure it would be worth a try."

"Could be," I admitted. "It wouldn't hurt to warn the lad's father."

He said reflectively, "It's going to hurt her, leaving that boy behind. I wonder if it's worth it. She doesn't need Hollywood; her reputation's sound enough to carry her all her life, right here."

He was just thinking out loud. I didn't prompt him.

"Ten years ago she came to me," he went on. "I don't know who had the biggest plans for her. I guess we shared them."

"You were engaged when she went into that first turkey, if I remember right," I said.

"You remember right," he said. "You've been following this business a long time, haven't you, Galvy?"

"Since I was twelve," I admitted. "Since I peddled handbills for the old Alhambra."

"What do you think of her?"

"She doesn't need Hollywood," I said. "She needs the two John Clayton Steels, though."

His grin wasn't happy. "Maybe. Though I hate to admit she needs that super-ego. He's strictly a career man, that gent."

"He does all right, I understand," I said. "Both critically and financially."

"Sure."

"He wouldn't be the kind of guy who'd stick an ex-wife for fifty grand?"

It was Hoover's turn to look blank now. Then he said, "Oh, no. Not that. Somebody, some angle shooter just saw an opportunity to cash in. No, not John Clayton Steel, though I'd like to believe it." He looked at me doubtfully. "You don't really think—"

"Who else? I mean to find out."

He said, "Galvy, no publicity on this, huh? Even if you do nail them. Since the divorce, she's got a phobia on the subject. And with what happened yesterday—"

"It will be handled," I assured him, "with the usual Jones diplomacy." I rose.

He said, "I've got a couple of house seats for tonight's show, if you want them."

"I've already seen it eight times," I told him. "I'll be busy, for a while." On this genial note, we parted.

I drove slowly down towards the river, to my parking place of the night before. I walked down the same steps and along the same wharf to the identical spot near the warehouse entrance. It was bright here, now, and no tug was audible. I wanted to see how anyone could have come along that concrete quietly.

The warehouse entrance, I saw now, was deeper than I had thought the night before. He had been waiting there all along. He had been there before I arrived. I should have realized that would be the smart way to play it.

I went from there to the Bard's Tap, a bar on Stickney. I ate two bacon and tomato sandwiches and drank a glass of milk. Then I drove out to River Hills again.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Bard in the Barroom

JUDY ERLING, of stage and radio fame, was wearing slacks this morning, black rayon with a white turtle neck sweater. She should have looked warm, but she only looked lovely.

"What now, Galahad?" she asked me.

She was on the terrace, in a mammoth wicker chair. She had a tall and probably cool drink in her hand.

"A drink," I said, "first. A tall, cold drink. And then some information."

"Make yourself comfortable," she said, "but not objectionable."

A maid brought the drink and it tasted as good as it looked. Judy had that faraway look in her eyes, that unhappy look.

I said, "I want the dope on all the servants you have here. I want your husband's address."



"You don't think he—" She stared at me. "I don't think anything yet."

She chewed her lower lip. Then, "There's my secretary, Miss Gilmore. There's the nurse, Miss Arnold. She's leaving today. There's the chauffeur-handyman, Mike Kost, the maid, Linda Kane, and the housekeeper, Mrs. Burke."

"Quite a staff."

She smiled, a purely professional smile. "Johnny and I used to do a lot of entertaining."

"That would be Johnny, Sr.?"

She nodded.

"Most of your help you got through agencies?"

She told me about that, and about their references, and I took it all down in the book, feeling like a detective, which I am but don't want to feel like.

"This Gilmore gal first," I said.

"She's gone to town. She'll be back this evening."

So I had the rest of them out, one at a time, and I put my tactful questions to them in my artful way, and none of them resented it much more than they would have resented a slap in the face.

Judy was no part of it. Judy's eyes were up on the non-existent clouds, affording me a view of her right, her better, profile. I tried to keep my mind on my work.

They all looked clean to me. Mike Kost, the chauffeur-handyman, had a broken nose, but I remembered Mike. I had watched him get the broken nose from the lightweight champ. Mike would be all right.

This Linda I thought I should place, and I searched my memory. But nothing came. She was a blonde, and I've known lots of blondes.

When the last of them had gone back to work, I said, "That leaves this Gilmore."

"She's not really a secretary," Judy explained. "I mean—she does the work of a secretary, and well. But she's really an actress, when she can get a part. She's—quite a girl."

I waited.

"Terrific physical appeal," Judy explained further. "If she ever gets a tailored part, she'll be a sensation." Then she added, "Red-head" as though that explained everything.

"How long has Mike been with you?" I asked.

"Two years. Johnny hired him. He was sort of a protege of Johnny's, and when he missed the title, he started drinking. Johnny straightened him out, gave him his job here."

"And now if I can have that address?"

She looked doubtful. She said, "It's not generally known. It's a retreat, really. You couldn't think that—"

"I try not to think anything that isn't true," I said. "But I'd like to see the boy. I'd like

to see just how safe a place for him that is, up there."

Which did the trick. It required quite a bit of explaining, but I got it all straight in my mind, finally, after a little pencil work on her part.

She said, "When you come back, drop in, and tell me all about it, won't you?"

I promised I would.

I took the north road out of River Hills. I went through Brown Deer, and then cut over toward the Bay. This was a gravel road, flanked with a lot of second growth stuff. About the only sign of human occupation was the mailbox I'd come across occasionally. I was, I discovered, on Rural Route No. 3.

I came, finally, to the fork in the road she had told me about. I took the right one, toward the Bay. When I came to a mailbox that was lettered with just the numerous "603", I turned in at the drive. It was rutted and winding, and the underbrush pressed in close at both sides. A rabbit skittered across the road in front of the car. This is the life, I thought, but not for me.

There was a stand of virgin timber now, tall and clean, and a clearing. There was a log cabin about the size of Union Station. Below was the Bay, the water quiet and shimmering in the lifeless air. I killed the motor, and stepped from the coupe.

A youngster about seven, a kid with sandy hair and stocky legs, was sitting on the steps at the rear of the house, eating an apple.

He looked up as I approached, and stopped eating the apple. "Hello," he said. "Who are you?"

"Hello," I said. "I'm Dick Tracy."

He had Judy's eyes, I could see. The hair would be his Pop's. "You don't look like Dick Tracy," he said. "Besides, he's just a man in the funnies."

"Your dad home?" I asked.

He nodded. "But he's busy. He says he's got a minor epic to compose, and then we're going fishing." He looked thoughtful. "What's a minor epic?"

"Just a gag," I said. "Your dad was kidding you."

He nodded. "He does that a lot. He's lots of fun, though." He took another bite of his apple. "What's a gag?"

"A joke," I explained.

From the porch above us, somebody said, "Good morning?", just like that, like a question.

I LOOKED up. He didn't look like an author, I thought. He looked like a good varsity end, or the stroke on anyone's crew or just a tall, rangy kind of guy you'd want on your side. His hair was sandy. He was wearing a T shirt and khaki dungarees and loafers.



"Good morning," I said. "I'm Galveston Jones. I'd like a little of your time, if possible."

"Galveston Jones—," he said. "Oh, yes. Come in."

"Me, too, Pop?" Junior asked.

"Not right away," his dad said. "In about five minutes, we'll be going fishing. You wait right there."

I went up and we went in together. I'm two inches over six feet, but he was two inches over me. I would be heavier, though, I consoled myself.

There was a long room fronting on the water, finished in paneled pine, with a massive fieldstone fireplace at one end. We took a couple of chairs near the fireplace, and I told him what had happened yesterday.

He was looking at the floor when I finished. He had his hands clasped in front of him, and his elbows on his knees. He shook his head, dazedly. "I had no idea of what happened," he told me. "She never even mentioned the ransom note, until I phoned last night from the village." He looked up. "Why didn't she phone me, as soon as Johnny was missing? She could have phoned the filling station in the village."

"She was pretty excited," I said. "At first, when Johnny didn't come home from the show, she thought he'd stopped at a friend's house. It wasn't until the note came that she began to worry. That's when I was called in."

"I picked him up in front of the movie," he said. "I knew he went there for that matinee. He told me, though, that he had told that Miss—" he looked at me "Judy's secretary."

"Miss Gilmore?" I supplied.

He nodded. "That's it. He told me that before he left for the show, he told her I often picked him up after that, and he spent the night with me. It's happened often enough. I can't understand why they didn't think of it, right away."

"They didn't think of anything but getting the money, after they got the note," I said.

"But surely, Miss Gilmore—"

"An angle," I said, "but she hadn't seen you. And all she knew was that you had picked up Johnny, before. The ransom note changed all that."

"Poor Judy," he said. Then, "Well, he's safe, here. My agent knows about this place and Judy. That's all. I was certainly surprised to see you."

I couldn't tell, by his tone, whether it was a pleasant or unpleasant surprise. I asked, "You got any ideas on it?"

"None. A gang, I suppose. Somebody who makes a living that way."

"It would need to be somebody pretty close," I said. "The timing was all right. They would need inside information."

He looked at the scratches on my face. "Rough, too, weren't they?"

"Rough enough."

He looked down at the floor again. "How's Judy? How's she bearing up?"

"She doesn't seem happy," I said, "but that's only a personal opinion. She seems lonely."

"I guess we're all lonely enough from time to time," he said.

There didn't seem to be any answer to that.

Junior stuck his head through the archway at that moment. "The five minutes are up, Pop," he said.

"Come in, Johnny?" I said.

He came in, and I asked him, "Whatever happened to that pencil you had? You know, the one shaped like a baseball bat, with your initials on it?"

Johnny said, "Isn't that the one you gave me, Pop?"

His dad nodded. "Do you remember what happened to it?"

"Why it's home. In the little drawer in my desk."

"You didn't give it to anyone?" I asked.

"Course not." He looked at his dad. "Is it stolen? Is something wrong?"

"No, nothing's wrong," his dad said, "nothing you can help."

"Well, heck," Johnny said, "let's get fishing, then."

"Well, heck," his dad said, "what are we waiting for?"

John Steel asked me, "Want to go along? I can't guarantee anything but perch, but they taste good."

"I think I'll be getting back to town," I said. "This Gilmore girl is beginning to shape up into a suspect."

He walked with me to the car. Johnny had already started down toward the pier. He said, "I heard something about Judy going to Hollywood. Is it true?"

"As far as I know."

"She—did it seem to you like she wanted to go?" He flushed a little, as he asked about that.

"It didn't seem to matter much to her," I said. "She intends to leave Junior behind, with you."

He shook his head. "That ambition of hers, that drive—"

It was none of my business, of course. But I said, "I guess we all think of ourselves too much, don't we?"

"Maybe," he said.

It didn't make sense to me, but I'm not analytical. I said, "You've got a grand place here, but it's certainly lonesome."

"Right," he said. "Well, I hope everything turns out all right."

I wanted to say something about ivory tow-



ers, but thought it might be in bad taste. Besides, he did have a little reach on me.

**I** STARTED the car, and headed down the rutted drive. A chipmunk watched me gravely from his stump-top vantage point. An ideal spot, I thought, for about two weeks in the summer. But then, everybody isn't like me.

Back to the city I drove. Back to the smell of monoxide and the river, to advertising signs and traffic lights and the heat glaring off the pavements, off the sidewalks, to hurrying people and careless truck drivers and noise and smoke and strain. Back to where I belonged.

From The Bard's Tap, I phoned Judy, and asked her, "Is that secretary of yours home yet?"

"No, she isn't," Judy said. "I thought you were going to stop here on your way back."

"Later," I promised. "I'm on something that might be hot. Don't tell the girl I was asking for her."

"All right, Philo. But how was my boy?"

"Fine and happy. He's out fishing with his dad, right now."

A pause. "And how was his dad?"

"Still thinking about you," I said.

A longer pause, an indrawn breath. "Galveston Jones, what made you say that?"

"I'll tell you later," I said. "I'll be up there, soon as I get some more information." I hung up.

I was just stalling. I had nowhere to go, until I located the Gilmore girl. But it was cool in the Tap, and the picture of the Bard looked down benignly from his place of honor, behind the bar.

"They do not love that do not show their love," I said.

Behind the bar, Knucks, the bartender looked startled.

I pointed to the picture, "His," I said.

"Oh." He looked up at the picture and back at me. "What'll it be?"

"Rye," I said. "With water. The Bard said something else that wasn't true, too."

"That so?" He didn't sound interested.

"Prosperity is the very bond of love," he said. You believe that, Knucks?"

"I wouldn't know," he said. "Speaking for myself, I'd say that if I had the prosperity, the love would be strictly a side issue."

No kindred soul, this Knucks. I drank the rest of my drink in silence, and the other two, also. From there, I went to the office.

There was no mail, and the place was like an oven. I didn't stay long. I drove over to headquarters, to see my old side-kick, Jerry Adams.

I was there, when the call came in. A girl named Gilmore, killed, in an east side apartment. It would be Jerry's baby.

"I'm going along," I said.

"Okay." Then he stopped, to look at me. "You got something on this, Galvy?"

"No," I met his gaze squarely. "Why?"

"Let's go," he said.

Which we did. With the siren screaming, the rear tires squealing, the red light flashing on and off, on and off.

It was a tall and impressive apartment, of white glazed brick. It was on the twelfth floor, in the front. Jerry and I were the first ones there. The manager of the building, a Mr. Stuart, was in the apartment, and a colored maid. There was a girl with red hair there too. I could understand what Judy had meant by "physical appeal".

She was on an apricot colored divan. There were some glasses, on a coffee table nearby. Jerry took one look at her and said, "Poison."

He and the maid and the manager went out to the kitchen. He didn't include me in the invitation.

Doc Anderson confirmed Jerry's hunch, later. Arsenic.

They dusted the place for prints, and the internes came and went. The manager left, after a while, but Jerry was still in the kitchen with the maid.

I caught the manager at the door. "Do you know where Miss Gilmore worked?"

He nodded. "For that actress, Judy Erling."

Jerry would know that, too, now. "Any boy friends?" I asked. "She live here alone?"

"She lived here alone." He stiffened. "I wouldn't know about her friends."

He left and I waited for Jerry.

It seemed the maid knew very little about her. She was employed by the building, and took care of only those apartments which desired maid service. Which meant about twenty minutes a day for each place, it appeared. She hadn't known any of Miss Gilmore's friends. Or enemies.

Jerry was looking at me suspiciously. "You've got something on this, Galvy?"

"Why should I?"

"That theatrical trade. It's all yours. This doll worked for Judy Erling. Back there, at the station, you *jumped* when you heard the name Gilmore."

"You've got a good imagination," I told him.

"I'm going out there now," he said, "out to the Erling place. I hope you're not lying to me, Galvy."

## CHAPTER THREE

Annie Oakley

**I** SAID no more. He left me there, and I didn't go right back to pick up my car. From a drugstore, nearby, I phoned Judy.



I told her what had happened. I said, "If you want to avoid publicity, don't tell him about the fifty thousand. And don't tell him you know me."

Her voice was tight. "How about the servants?"

"We'll have to hope for the best. Tell them how important it is. You'd better meet Adams at the door yourself."

Outside, under the shade of the store's awning, a short man with a broken nose was waiting for me to come out. It was Mike Kost. He looked nervous and shaken. His head jerked backward in the direction of the apartment. "What's the story, back there?"

"Miss Gilmore is dead," I said, watching his reaction.

"I know that. I walked in on that. But was it murder? Or suicide, or what?"

"You walked in on it?" I asked him. "What do you mean?"

He gestured with both hands, palms upward. "I've been there before. I'm making a play for the doll. This afternoon, the door was open, and I walked in. I saw her there, on the couch." He swore.

"You paying the rent there, Mike?"

"On two hundred a month?"

"Do you know who was?"

There was honest surprise in his battered face. "I didn't know anybody was. Look, was she poisoned?"

I nodded.

"How about Miss Erling?"

That one stopped me. "What about her? What do you mean?"

"She in the clear? They hated each other, you know. Anyway, that Gilmore dame hated Miss Erling. She sang me that song, more than once."

"She's in the clear," I told him, though I wasn't sure of it myself, technically. "But how about you, Mike?"

"I think," he said, "I had better blow town. What do you think?"

"I think you'd better go back to the house. Miss Erling might need you, Mike."

"After the way she treated the boss," he said, "I don't figure I owe *her* anything. If it hadn't been the boss's idea, I never would have stayed with her."

"Well," I said, "it's your decision. Only don't leave town. You'd hang yourself for sure, Mike, if you did that."

He hesitated then, and I thought he was thinking it over. But it wasn't that he was considering. He reached into a pocket of his jacket, and brought out a fountain pen, a heavy, gold pen.

"About a week ago," he told me, "I found it up there, in her apartment. It was wedged down between the seat and the back of one of those chairs."

"Did you ever use it?"

He shook his head.

The cap, then, would protect any prints that might be on the place where the fingers would naturally rest. I said, "I'll keep this, Mike. Mum's the word, for now. About all of it, the ransom and this pen and the fact I'm working for Miss Erling."

We parted and I took a cab back to the station to pick up my car. Then I went back to the office, and waited.

About five, the call came through. Judy said, "They've left, thank God. Nobody broke; they're marvelous actors, all of them. Now tell me about this afternoon."

"After the show, tonight," I said. "Tell me, are you so wealthy that you can always raise fifty thousand in cash, just like that?"

"It was a Hollywood advance," she said. "You know I live up to every dime, running a place like this."

There was the picture, then. I said, "I think I'll see your show for the ninth time, tonight. I'll be waiting at the stage door, when it's over."

"Casanova Jones," she murmured, and hung up.

I phoned that peddler of flesh, that ten-percenter, Alex Hoover. I told him, "I think I'll take up your offer on that Annie Oakley. One will be enough."

"I'll leave it at the box office," he said.

"No," I told him. "I'll come over and pick it up, if it's all right."

"It's all right with me," he said, "but make it within a half hour. I'm getting hungry."

I made it in five minutes. He was sitting behind his desk, when I entered, looking like the last rose of summer. His eyes were haunted.

I pretended to see something under his desk. I reached down, pretended to pick it up. I had the gold fountain pen in my hand. I said, "Your's?"

He looked at it absently. "Yeh," he said, "it's been missing for a week. Where—" And then he stopped, and stared at me, and the light began to dawn, in his eyes.

He called me a name. But his voice was tired, defeated.

I said, "It was found in Helen Gilmore's apartment."

"You mean, the police don't know?"

"If the situation there was what I think it was, your prints will be all over the joint. Larceny's one thing, but murder's something else, Hoover. You should have stuck to the ten percent. You should have realized that only *you* and Judy knew that cash was waiting in the bank."

"Ten percent," he said. "I made her. I created her, she's my product. She wouldn't be worth a nickel without me."



"She would to Steel," I said. "You helped to break that up, didn't you?"

He looked at me blankly. "What difference does it make now?" He took his gaze away from me. "Helen and I used to gag about it, how little Judy thought about money. When Steel picked up the kid that day, Helen phoned me. She said we ought to try it, just for a joke. She wrote the note and took the pencil to use as proof. I knew it was no joke, and so did she. I thought it might have one chance in fifty of working."

"Why didn't she phone Steel?"

He said, "She asked Helen to do that. Helen told her that the man at the filling station said Steel was on an overnight fishing trip and wouldn't be home until morning."

"And Helen?" I said.

"She thought it was about time we got married, now. She thought I was tied to her, and to her career for life. She thought she had a career, I guess."

"She was wrong?"

"On all counts." He used a word I won't use.

"Well," I said. "We'd better be running along down to the station."

He looked at me as though I was the last best hope on earth. "Galvy, there's all that money. You could have it, all of it. The cops would never know—"

"You don't know Jerry Adams," I said. "He'll print everybody in the county until he gets a pair that matches. It's only a question of time."

"Okay," he said, and he reached into a drawer.

I am quick and alert. This guy had slugged me before. I reached over and grabbed his wrist, and jerked his hand free of the drawer.

But all it held was a ticket for tonight's show.

It was just a comedy, just a slender thread of nothing, held together by the magic of Judy Erling. It would run forever, a froth of meaningless words given meaning by the star.

When I met her, all the make-up was off her face, and her hair was up.

We went out to sit in her Clipper Club Convertible. Mike, at the wheel, just smoked and stared straight ahead.

I told her about Hoover, first, and she listened politely, with an occasional 'oh' or 'ah' in her professional way. Then she said, "Tell me about this afternoon," and I lied bravely.

"He told me to tell you that he'll always be waiting, that he'll love you until he dies."

"Galveston Jones," she said, "you're lying—"

"It's the gospel truth," I said, and it was. It's just that he hadn't put it into words.

Mike, I could see, was listening, now.

Judy said, "How fast could you get up there, Mike?"

Mike turned around, and he was grinning. "Faster than you think," he said. "I'll make this boiler talk."

Judy kissed me on the forehead, and I got out, and stood on the curb. The Clipper moved out of there fast and went rolling up the street.

I was there, too, at the wedding three days later. Best man, if you must know. It was a lovely wedding.

THE END

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# URGENT BUSINESS



They took him out in the alley and did a very thorough job of roughing him up.

By  
**DON JAMES**

**T**HERE was a note on my desk in the sports department at the *Examiner*.

"Jim Bjorge—call BR-4130. Urgent."

There are several good things about my kid sister, Lissa. One of them is her honesty. If she says urgent, it is urgent. Another is the way she keeps her chin up. She did that when her husband, Chet Smithers, gave her every reason to let things go to seed. Plenty of girls would have walked out on him, but Lissa stayed in there pitching, keeping up appearances, doing a good job with practically no help.

I had a column of sports stuff to write, but I called her first. She didn't mince words.

"Jimmy, can you stop at the apartment on the way home? Chet's in trouble and we need help."

He needs help, I thought, not we. But I skipped that. She'd have hung up if I'd said it.

50

*Okay, Dorr, deal me in on the Tuja-Smith fight, and I'll play up Tuja till they bet their heads off. And I'm giving eight to five yours won't stay on!*



"You don't want to tell me about it now?" I asked.

"I'd rather not."

"I'll stop by," I promised.

A couple of hours later she opened the door for me. In her housedress she looked as neat and pretty as a picture in a woman's magazine. She had to stand on tiptoe to give me a quick kiss.

I went in and tossed my hat on the davenport. Chet was in their single upholstered chair looking as if he had a hangover. Even looking as he did, I could understand why a kid like Lissa would fall for him. He was tall and broad shouldered. He'd have been good-looking if it weren't for a certain weakness about his mouth. But maybe that's what made women like him.

He gave me a curt nod as if he weren't too happy to see me, but couldn't do anything about it. And that was probably the truth. It wasn't the first time Lissa had asked me for help.

"I've some coffee for us," Lissa said and went into the kitchen.

Chet said, "How're things at the paper?" I told him that everything was fine. We didn't say any more until Lissa came in with the coffee.

She sat on the davenport, at the other end from me, with her legs curled under her. With her bobby socks, she looked like a high school kid and she wasn't much older in years, but in experience she was. She'd had more trouble than most women ten years her senior have seen.

She came to the point at once. That's another good thing about the kid. She doesn't avoid issues.

"Chet lost his job today," she said.

I wasn't surprised, but I tried to make it easy for her.

"That's not too serious," I grinned. "Collecting the take from pinball machines for Carl Dorr isn't exactly a career. When I helped Chet line up the job, we both agreed it was just until something better came along."

There it was. Now I was saying "we." I had lined up the job and practically forced Chet to take it. It was the best I could do at the time when I had learned that Lissa had pawned the wrist watch the Old Man gave her the year before he died.

Lissa put her coffee down and studied her fingernails. Once she glanced at Chet as if she expected him to say something. He was too busy lighting a cigarette and keeping his eyes away from me.

I didn't need prompting, so I took the ball.

"What happened?" I asked.

Chet still was too busy with his cigarette to answer and after a moment Lissa told me.

"He made his late collections last night and

started drinking. Someone robbed him of five hundred dollars. Carl Dorr thinks he stole it and is going to file charges."

"Dorr has to have evidence to make it stick," I said.

She still studied her neatly lacquered nails. "He says there are plenty of people who saw Chet spending a lot of money last night."

I looked at Chet.

"How about it?"

He looked at me defiantly. "Maybe I did spend a little of it, but not more than I could have paid back in a couple of weeks. Maybe fifty or sixty. Someone rolled me for the rest. I didn't take it."

"It's your word against Dorr's, and Dorr packs more weight in this town than you've ever seen. You're on the spot."

NEITHER of them spoke, but Lissa was a little pale about the mouth. I felt so sorry for her I could have taken Chet out and beaten him into a pulp.

"What do you want me to do?" I asked, more to snap at Chet than at Lissa. I knew what they wanted me to do.

Chet got busy putting out the cigarette he'd just lighted and Lissa had to answer.

"We thought maybe you could talk with Dorr. You know him, Jimmy. He respects you."

She looked at me then and the humiliation in her eyes made me a bit sick. Lissa and I have a brother who's a doctor in Minneapolis, and a sister you can hear every week over a radio network, but for some reason or other, Lissa and I have been closer than any of them. The oldest and the youngest. I'd been looking after her ever since she could remember.

I reached way down and brought up the best grin I could for her.

"Sure, youngster. I'll see what I can do. Stop worrying about it."

Her eyes filled with moisture.

"Look, Jimmy," she said. "You've done so much for us and—well, if you knew how I hate to ask—"

"What do you suppose big brothers are for?" I smiled. "Forget it. It's all in the family."

I glanced at my strap watch and stood to leave. She got up to go to the door with me, but I shook my head and glanced at Chet.

"How about walking down to the corner with me, Chet. I want a few of the details."

He was reluctant, but he must have caught the edge in my voice. He put on a coat and we left the apartment. I didn't take him as far as the corner. I waited until the automatic elevator had stopped on the main floor and we were behind closed doors.

He reached for the door to open it, but I caught his wrist. He looked at me warily.



"I've something to say to you," I said softly. He avoided my eyes. "Okay. Say it."

"For two years I've been getting you out of jams for Lissa's sake. You're in one now that maybe I can't do much about. I'm going to try. But there's one thing you'd better know."

"What?"

"Either you straighten up and fly right for the kid's sake, or I'm going to beat the living hell out of you!"

For a second he got tense and I thought there was some spark there, but that weak mouth of his began to quiver.

"I'm trying . . ." he started to say.

I said, "You'd better!" and slammed the doors behind me as I walked out.

\* \* \*

Carl Dorr looked like a dark-complexioned Buddha sitting behind his desk. He must have weighed close to three hundred, but that weight could fool you. He was light on his feet when he wanted to be and most of that fat seemed to be muscle on the few occasions that he exerted himself.

He was quite a man in other ways. He had come up the hard way, and the back way. When a city is letting a certain number of rackets operate, someone has to own them, and in our city that guy was Dorr.

Some of the rackets bordered on the legitimate, and in a few enterprises he was supposedly completely so. He owned most of the hockey club, had a piece of the baseball franchise, the dog races, the midget car races and he put on the fights at the stadium.

Because he operated in sports, I knew him. Writing sports was my job and had been from the time I'd joined the *Examiner* on my first job, and still was now that I was sports editor.

"What's new, Jim?" he asked in a voice that was a husky whisper.

I shrugged. "The usual." I glanced at Muggs Teague who settled back in his chair and gazed at me without expression on his ring-scarred face. He had a job, too. It was to be handy for Carl Dorr, to take care of the odds and ends of rough stuff that came up, and to see that Dorr didn't have to exert himself. He had been tough and shrewd in the ring during the old days. He still was.

Dorr lit a cigar and the smoke smelled like opening day at the ball park. I flipped a cigarette from a pack and lit it.

"It seems my brother-in-law is in a jam with you," I said.

Dorr nodded thoughtfully. "Too bad," he said. "Nice little wife, too. Your sister got the looks in your family, not you," he grinned sourly.

**I** DIDN'T feel like grinning and I wondered where he had seen Lissa, but I wasn't there to get sore.

"I was wondering if we can't fix things up," I said.

"So?" Dorr said noncommittally.

"I wouldn't like you to file charges against him. Maybe I could take care of the dough he lost and you could forget the charges."

"Five hundred bucks," Dorr said.

Muggs Teague sighed as if he were bored.

"Say a hundred a month," I told Dorr. "I'm a little short right now."

"It's like this," he said. "Word's gone around about what happened. If I let him get away with it, maybe that sets a precedent and some other guys may get ideas. I've got to be tough about these things, Jimmy. You understand that."

"I see that, all right. You've a business to run, Carl. But I feel responsible. I talked you into giving him the job. I'd like to handle this my way."

Muggs Teague grunted slightly and I glanced at his narrowed, amused eyes. He knew we were sparring, and he was enjoying my discomfort.

It made me sore. I didn't like what I was doing. I'd never sold space on the sports page for something I wanted for myself. And what I was telling Dorr was that if he'd be lenient with Chet, I'd take care of him in the paper. Dorr needed publicity in his business.

"Let me think about it," Dorr said. "I'll let you know."

"I wouldn't be doing this if I didn't think the kid actually was rolled," I said. "I think he deserves a break."

"He wasn't rolled," Dorr said flatly. "I'll let you know."

I nodded and got up to leave. He stopped me with a wave of his pudgy hand.

"Don't hurry, Jim. I've some other stuff to talk over with you. The Tuja-Smith fight. Maybe you'd like some dope on it."

"Tuja will take it," I said. "About the fourth round."

"You think so?"

"I know so, Carl. So do you."

"You're telling the boys that in your paper?"

A small, cold feeling settled in the pit of my stomach. I was telling the boys that and I knew what it meant. Too many times I'd seen betting odds shift with what I said in the paper. Not much, but enough to know that the boys believed in my judgment. Carl Dorr knew that, too.

"That's what I'm writing," I said.

He looked at me with expressionless eyes. "Jimmy, if you're smart you'll say that Smith doesn't have a chance. You'll tell them that Smith is a pushover for Tuja. It's a ten to one bet on Tuja. A one round fight."

I kept my voice as even as I could.

"The betting is five to four on him."



Dorr nodded. "It should be ten to one, Jimmy. You don't want your pals to pass up some easy dough, do you?"

Little warning bells were ringing a four alarm in the back of my mind.

"I wouldn't want a lot of my pals to lose ten to one bets on Tuja if he took a dive for Smith, if the fight were fixed for Smith to win," I said and grinned to make it look good. I still remembered Chet and Lissa.

Dorr chuckled as if deeply amused. "No danger of that. I'm just passing along my judgment based on my experience."

"You've had a lot of experience, Carl."

He chuckled again as I started to leave. At the door he halted me for a second with his whispering voice.

"I'll think it over, Jimmy. About the kid. I'll let you know—after I've read the sports page tomorrow."

I didn't look back and I wondered if he could see the way my spine stiffened. I was glad he couldn't see my face. When I'm angry I show it.

As I went out he was chuckling again and Muggs Teague was softly humming off key.

So a guy builds up a set of ethics in his profession and he lives by them and keeps his record clean. He gets the reputation of being on the up and up, a right guy, a guy you can't reach. It's a good deal and a man can look any other man in the eye without fear.

Then something happens that is deeper than his profession because it's of his blood and kin. The weight against the ethics becomes unbearably great and the scales begin to dip. It is a cruel, grinding movement and the man suffers under it because it is the wrong side of the scales that dips.

I couldn't eat dinner and shortly after seven I was back at the kids' apartment.

They had finished dinner and Lissa was putting away dishes. Chet looked a little better, but his eyes still shifted away from me.

I took my time because it was important.

"Chet, what makes you think you were rolled?"

He looked angry for a second and then shrugged.

"Because I know I was. I didn't pass out."

"Where did it happen?"

"Near Carl's joint at Twentieth and Carney."

"Who knew you had the dough? Who saw you there?"

**H**E EVADED my eyes again. "I don't know. I made a collection in the joint, signed a receipt for the dough and had a few more drinks. When I left I walked down the street to where the car was parked. A guy stepped out of a doorway and socked me. When I woke up the dough was gone."

"Where did he hit you? Any bruise or lump?"

He stood suddenly and glared at me. "You think I'm lying. Well, there isn't any bruise or bump. He clipped me behind the ear and I had a hat on. I didn't go completely out."

He said it in a hurry like a man who is getting peeved. I was surprised at the anger in his eyes.

"Okay, okay," I told him. I was getting sore, too. "I'm only trying to help you."

Lissa interrupted us, her voice worried.

"Didn't you see Carl Dorr? Can't you fix it, Jimmy?"

"I saw him. I can fix it, so don't worry. It's just a tough deal and I'd like another way out."

"Why don't we skip it?" Chet snapped at me. "I can look out for myself."

"Maybe I'm not doing it for you."

He went to a closet and jerked a sports coat out and started to put it on.

"God! I suppose you're going to start the little sister stuff now!" he said. "You'll do anything for the little sister. Well, I didn't ask you to help. What's more I don't think you can! You and your influence, your drag, your pull! All you ever got for me was a crummy job in the rackets. When a real job that calls for pull comes along, you can't do a thing! I'm getting out of here and you can go to hell!"

I went over and grabbed his coat in a bunch at the front and shook him.

"You're not going anywhere!" I said.

"No?"

"No. If I'm going to throw away my reputation as an honest newsman to pull you out of a jam because you're Lissa's husband, you're going to stay here with her or they're going to carry you out!"

My fist was back and I'd have let it go if Lissa hadn't thrown her weight on it. After a moment we all calmed down and Lissa was staring at me with a strange expression in her eyes.

"What did you mean?" she finally asked.

"Forget it."

"Your reputation. What about it?"

"Let me worry about that, kid. I'll be all right."

She shook her head and her lips twisted into a small, tight smile that I didn't like at all.

"No, Jimmy. You've done enough for us. I can't let you."

I put an arm about her and tried to laugh it off, but she pulled away.

"This is one time we're going to get out of our own mess," she said. "I'm going to talk with Carl Dorr."

"No, you're not," I grinned. "Don't get excited and—"



"I met him once when I was with Chet. He's called me several times since then. He wants me to go to work for him at one of his nightclubs."

"Forget it," I snapped. "I know Dorr. He's not interested in giving you a job. He's interested in *you* and I'm not having any of it."

She looked at me with level eyes.

"You haven't anything to say about it now, Jimmy. You can't nursemaid us forever. I'm going to see him. I can take care of myself. I'm not dumb."

"You're not dumb, but you're not going to—"

Chet interrupted us. He shoved me aside and looked down at her and there was something in his eyes that I never expected to see. There was fright and anger and, maybe, a little anguish. Suddenly I knew something that I didn't know before. He was crazy about her. As much about her as she was about him, only he didn't know what to do about it or how to play the game.

"You don't mean that, Lissa?" he said and his voice trembled.

"Yes, Chet, I do. If you can't—can't . . . well, I've got to do it. Can't you see? It's *us*. You and I. It isn't Jimmy or anyone else but us. We have to do the living. I'm going to see him tonight. I've got to. He'll listen to me."

Chet's face paled and his mouth straightened into a grim line. He didn't look at me, but suddenly he turned and left the apartment.

We stared at the closed door in silence and then I turned to Lissa.

"You stay away from Carl Dorr or—or I'll turn you over my knee. And I mean it!"

"Don't you think that day is gone?" she asked, not sarcastically, but calmly and with a certain gentleness. Abruptly she was an older woman than I was a man and I knew I didn't have words enough to change it.

"Will you wait until tomorrow?" I asked. "Maybe things will change by then. Anyhow, you can't find him until after midnight. He's usually busy until then."

"Thanks," she smiled. "I'll wait until then."

I looked at her until the silence became too heavy and the frustration weighed too much upon me.

"I'll be back tonight," I said and left the apartment.

**I**T WAS a merry-go-round. I hung around the joint at Twentieth and Carney for an hour, asking questions, probing and taking advantage of every acquaintance and friend who came in, but none of the answers gave me a thing. No one knew anything about Chet's being rolled the night before. He had

been drinking and spending money and after a while he had left and that was it.

I went back to the newspaper. The city room was empty.

There wasn't much time to decide things and there weren't many things to decide. There was just one thing for me. I might as well call Dorr and tell him that I'd play ball.

I could worry about stopping Lissa from seeing him after that. Or maybe it wouldn't make much difference to him. There wasn't too much reason why he shouldn't hang the ax over both of us, except that—

I dialed his number. He answered the phone himself instead of letting Muggs do it.

"Jim Bjorge, Carl," I said. "I'm interested in your suggestion, but there's a string attached."

"Yes?"

"My kid sister has ideas about seeing you and you've been talking a job to her. You're not kidding me, but I'm in a spot."

"That's a shame, Jimmy. Can I help?"

"Deal me in on the Tuja-Smith frameup. I'll play Tuja until they'll bet their heads off on him. In return, you give me every receipt the kid signed on that pickup, showing he got the dough, and all other evidence you have against him. You let me pay back the dough at a hundred a month."

"What's the string attached?"

"You don't see my kid sister. You have nothing to do with her. I'll do a lot to keep her husband out of the pen to keep her happy. But I'll do more if you try to make a pass at her, or even see her."

"I don't like talk like that. What do you mean?"

"I mean that she's left out of it or I'll throw her husband over the rail to the sharks and banner-line what I know about the Tuja-Smith fight. I'll tell the whole story and hand in my resignation with it."

There was silence at the other end of the line and then his whispering voice.

"It's a deal, Jimmy. Just do a good job. We're going to take the suckers on this one."

The receiver clicked and I felt as if I'd just thrown away my birthright. I dropped the telephone in its cradle.

I had hardly dropped it when the bell rang and I picked it up again.

"Jim Bjorge?"

"Yes."

"This is General Hospital calling. We have a case here—Chet Smithers. He's been badly beaten and wants to talk with you. Will you come at once?"

"Right away."

It took me twenty minutes to get there and to discover that they were telling the truth about Chet's being badly beaten. His face was in bandages, his body was a mass of welts and



the discoloration of bruises was beginning to show. Someone had used shoes on him.

He tried to talk and had to wet his lips first.

"Take it easy," I said. "What happened to you? Drunk again?" I was still sore at him.

He shut his eyes and opened them.

"Muggs Teague," he said. "Muggs took the dough away from me. He said if I told anyone, he'd beat me to death. Then they threatened to railroad me. I was afraid to tell you."

Things were beginning to come to light. I stared at him thoughtfully.

"How'd you get beaten?" I asked again.

"I went after Muggs. Thought maybe I could take him. Might get a break and force him to admit to the cops what happened."

"You mean you went after that ex-pug on your own?"

He wet his swollen lips again and tried to smile. It wasn't a very good smile.

"I guess I'm not that good," he said. "I'm not too smart sometimes. But when Lissa said she'd go to Dorr, I—"

An intern interrupted us and I grinned at him.

"See that this kid gets everything he needs," I said. "Everything."

I took one of the kid's hands and squeezed it. I noticed that his knuckles were skinned. The kid had tried!

**A** SPORTS editor gets around and makes friends. Some of them are pretty independent and not afraid of much. I have four or five like that who hang out at Daly's Gymnasium, a place on Fifth street where fighters work out.

I picked them up on the way and explained how things were. They were very indignant.

They still were indignant when we found Muggs Teague in the backroom of Dorr's Ninth avenue place. They were so indignant that they took him out into an alley and did a very thorough job of roughing him up without marking him.

They let me talk then and I told Muggs what would happen if he didn't explain a few things to my friend Mike O'Brien, assistant chief of police.

He decided that it was an excellent idea. Mike was interested in what he had to say. Mike thought there would never be a reason

to entertain a charge against Chet Smithers concerning a certain five hundred dollars.

Because Mike is a rabid fight fan, he also thought I'd be well within my rights to talk over the matter of fixing fights with my editor and the boxing commission. Even with the mayor.

It seemed that Mike and a good many others were getting tired of Carl Dorr. It was time his activities were drastically curtailed.

So it came to pass that all those things happened and unexplainably I became a minor hero for getting the evidence. The Tuja-Smith fight came off as scheduled and a frightened Tuja won in the third round. I was one round off.

Carl Dorr didn't see the fight. He was busy that night with the district attorney, and it wasn't a social call.

The night before the fight I called on Carl Dorr. I found him alone in his office looking very worried. I didn't bother to knock. I just walked in. He pulled his weight up and stood in front of his desk.

"What do you want, Borge?" he asked.

"I came to pay off a debt," I said. "You thought that by framing Chet you'd get me on a spot and help fix that fight. It almost worked. If it hadn't made a man out of a kid named Chet Smithers, it would have worked. So I owe you something."

He looked at me with bleak eyes. "What?" he said.

"This!"

It was beautiful; right to the point of his double chin. His teeth clicked, his head snapped back, and he went down like a ton of bricks.

I turned around and walked out. I felt fine.

\* \* \*

All of this happened several months ago. This afternoon when I came from the ball park there was a note on my desk.

"Jim Borge—call BR-4130. Urgent."

I called Lissa at once and her voice was excited.

"I can't get Chet," she said. "He's showing a customer a house somewhere. It'll be his tenth sale this month if he sells it!"

"Is that news urgent?" I grinned.

"No, but I just learned that you're going to be an uncle. *That* news is!"

There's one good thing about Lissa. She's honest. If she says urgent, it is urgent!

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# COME HOME TO THE

*Thrilling Detective-Mystery Novelette*



I walked her straight across  
the basement to the shadowed  
alcove that made up the  
cistern.



# CADAVER!

By CYRIL PLUNKETT



My shovel was there, just  
as I'd left it.

*Time ran out for that threatening house. . . And also for Georgia and me, when stark fear needled us into that cellar rendezvous with the four-time killer, who was counting on us to make his score an even half dozen!*

## CHAPTER ONE

16,000 Letters

SHE WAS just a kid, the first time I saw her. That was in Fairview. I lived there, one street over from old Nick Gerard's place.

A queer one, that Gerard. You never saw a picket off his fence. Old Nick—you know, the old devil. We'd swipe apples from his orchard. Old Sour Puss. He'd chase us, swearing he would burn our pants off with a load of buckshot.

When I saw her in his front yard, she was brown and very blonde, all dressed up like a doll in a blue dress without any wrinkles. I wondered what would happen if she just sat down. I wondered if Old Nick would bawl her out for getting her dress wrinkled.

I said, "Say, Old Nick ain't your dad, is he?"

She said, "He's my uncle."

Old Nick came snorting from the house just then, yelling, "Git, Jeff Clenning—!"

I met her again. She came to school at Fairview High, in my senior year. Now she was living with her uncle. Her parents had been killed, and the way they had been killed made all the kids there snub her.

I got to walking home with her from school, as far as the orchard, and the night before I was drafted she slipped away and we went for a drive. We drove across the county, to a place called Windsor. That's where she had lived, in a gloomy brick house that sat on a



hill, alone, just outside of town. The windows were boarded shut tightly.

"I own it, Jeff," she whispered. "But I hate it. I shan't come back to live here, ever."

The moon had just come up. Two owls were perched on two tall posts. I asked: "Are you trying to tell me the house is haunted?"

The owls chuckled, fluttered away. "Jeff, please!" she said. She was trembling. "Our last night together, Jeff—" But someone came walking up the highroad and she called abruptly, "Hello, Mr. Mannix!"

He smoked a short black pipe; the night around us became rich with the odor of it. He lived in the next house down the road. On a leash he had a big black Dane that he called Thor, and Thor put his black paws on the door, his wet nose through the window.

"There you are!" Mannix said, laughing. "Thor hasn't forgotten you, Georgia. Look, you two, why don't you come home with me for a snack and a chat?"

We didn't. We had to get back. Our last night together—and so much to say yet. We drove back to Fairview, and I wrote her after that, every night, from camp. I got just three letters. In each letter she wrote, "Jeff, what's wrong? I don't hear from you. What's wrong, Jeff? Don't you like me?"

Just three letters. You know what was wrong. Old Nick Gerard. You know why she never got my letters.

When I came back—mid summer, '46—I learned she'd gone to Chicago. No one but old Nick knew where she lived there. And Nick Gerard wasn't giving out any information. Scowling, he said, "You're Jeff Clenning. I don't like you, never did. Besides, she's had enough trouble. That's all you'll bring her too—trouble."

He hadn't changed much. His cheeks were sunken, but his brows looked just as black, as fierce. I wasn't good enough for her, and that was that. No use to argue.

I drove over to see Mannix. "Yes," he said, "I heard she'd gone back to Chicago."

"Back?"

He said cautiously, "She was home for a day."

He'd inclined his head toward the brick house down the road, and I turned too, frowning as I said, "Down there?"

Mannix refilled his pipe, lit it. His eyes were gray and very sharp and clear.

"You're aware, Clenning, of what happened a few years back?"

"Yes," I said, "I think so."

"Well, I'm quite fond of that girl. I always wished I could help her. But to talk too much now may be the wrong way. Why don't you go to Chicago and look for her?"

Had he thought I wouldn't? I bought a car, and parked in it a while every day a

block from Nick Gerard's place. Three days passed and the mailman didn't stop. The fourth day he stopped. I could see Old Nick busy, unaware of me, in the rear. I walked up on his porch, raised the lid on the mail box. There was a letter in it from her with a Rush Street return address. Easy, that easy. I made Chicago that same day, by dark. Yes, the landlady told me, she had a Miss Gerard. Miss Gerard had just gone out though. She'd walked down to the drugstore on the corner.

So I found her. She was sitting on a stool and I sat on the next stool and for a moment she just stared into the fountain mirror at me as though this was unreal and couldn't happen.

"Jeff," she whispered.

I took hold of her hands. They were just as soft and nice as they could be, but they got cold. They got just like ice. Her lips began to quiver. I kept hold of her hands.

"Jeff, you never wrote?"

"Only sixteen thousand letters."

"Oh, Jeff!" All the color drained out of her face. She tried to pull her hands from mine, then closed her eyes tightly. Not here, Jeff. It's too light. I—I guess I don't want you to see me when I tell you."

Running away again, eh?"

"Jeff, we—we'll go outside."

We walked straight on, to the Lake, along the Lake. Ships were out there with their slow-moving lights; and the cribs were out there, hulks, black bastions. We just walked and finally I stopped and took her in my arms and kissed her.

"Jeff," she said, her voice low and tight, "I've spoiled it. It's too late. I met a man I liked—"

**HIS** name was Glenn Something and she'd married him. Yes, she'd tried to be strong, and stop running. She'd squared her shoulders, set her chin and married this Glenn Something. She'd gone back with him, on her wedding day, to the big brick house in Windsor. And she'd lived there just that one small day, just a few short hours—

Maybe I should go back too, and tell you more about her. You know girls who laugh a lot, whose only concern seems to be their dates and nylons. They're nice girls. They're normal. *She* never had been normal. Sometimes, walking home with her from school, I would think her blue eyes were too big. I would feel that she was seeing something I couldn't. Sometimes I would wonder what was going through her mind, because she'd had a way of missing part of what you said, saying with a quick turn of her head, "What Jeff?"

Preoccupied? With what? I knew what, everyone knew what, and you will in a minute.



Something that made her look haunted. That's the right word, haunted. She always made you feel a threat, danger, the past, all somehow just over her shoulder.

It was over her shoulder. It was like a field gun trained straight at her head.

"Jeff," she said, there, on the Lake front, "I told everything to Glenn. I wanted him to see, to understand. I didn't try to hide it. Remember, Jeff, when I started to school in Fairview? When I moved there, to live with Uncle Nick? You remember, what had happened?"

Carefully I said, "Your parents had just died. They'd died in a way that wasn't nice. But I didn't care then and I don't care now. I love you."

Her hand had tightened on my arm as she breathed, "Wait, Jeff. That night there was a dance at school, and I was thrilled to—to death with it. My first formal. Oh Jeff, everything was so *good*, until that night. I loved my mother. She was beautiful, thoughtful and kind. I respected and loved my father too, and he wasn't like his brother, Uncle Nick, at all. He wasn't grim, he never shouted. He was gone much of the time, of course. He traveled.

"Jeff, at twelve that night I came home. I didn't ask my boy friend in. I just called good-night to him and ran up to the door—"

She'd run up to the door. The house was dark, and that was strange because other times when she'd been out someone always had been waiting. She'd bubbled with excitement, all the fun she'd had, the things she had to tell. She'd gone straight in, snapped the light on and called, "Mother—?"

"Dad—?" she'd called. Puzzled, apprehensive when no one had answered. Then the hall clock began ticking too loudly. The clock seemed trying to speak words, frantic that it couldn't. The house began to creak as she walked up the stairs. No one here, upstairs? No one in the house? "Mother—?" she'd called. "Dad—?"

"Jeff," she said, here, in the dark, the blackness on the Lakefront, "I—I went back downstairs, to the kitchen. You know how I hurried. You know how you run into your kitchen. I just pushed on the door, snapped the light on without stopping—and stumbled. I fell. There was a body lying there—my Mother's."

She'd just stared, and seconds passed, and she couldn't rise, she couldn't move. She was on her hands and knees—she didn't even see him yet, in that awful moment. She'd just stared with horror at the blood. She'd fallen in a pool of it, and now it was all over her hands and her dress, her beautiful formal.

The first sound that she'd heard was a sob, her own, but a sob that never quite got past

her lips because—because she'd begun to shake her head, and turning it she saw him. He was lying off to one side too, dead too. Her father.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Like Father, Like Daughter

SHE'd scrambled to her feet then, screaming. She'd run down the road to the first house, to someone alive, to Mr. Mannix—screaming. Thor, the black Great Dane, heard her first. Thor, a puppy at the time, had started barking, and all the world, she'd thought, had gone insane this night. She'd run to the door and pounded. Then Mannix held her in his arms, put her in a big chair by the fire. A high fire, a warm fire. Until then she hadn't realized how cold she was, or that she was freezing.

"They're dead!" she was saying to him, over and over.

Thor came crawling to her chair and snuggled close. Thor looked at her, whining, and even in his eyes she read compassion. She stayed there all night in the chair; and at dawn Mannix came back and made coffee. Strong black coffee that they drank slowly, without talking. Then, awkwardly, he told her all about his farm. It was cold this spring; he was worried he would lose his crop of berries. He went on talking like that to distract her.

Finally, he said, "You've got to know the truth, Georgia. Your father killed your mother tonight, and then himself."

Oh no, she'd thought. You read of things like that, sometimes, in the papers. It always happened, though, to people that you didn't know. Oh no, she had thought. Her mind was filled with barbed words, taunting. But this time it happened to you, and it's true, it's true, it's true . . .

"You're going to be brave now, aren't you, Georgia?"

"Yes, thank you, Mr. Mannix."

Brave? What was bravery? Not to sit here sobbing? Oh, if that indeed was courage, then she had it. She had it, of course, because she couldn't sob. She'd walled a place off in her heart, and the sobs were in there, secret, hidden.

"And Georgia, if there's anything I can do—?"

"No. Nothing, thank you, Mr. Mannix."

He found his pipe. He'd looked at it a long time, tamping at the black bowl with his finger. "I've phoned for your Uncle, Georgia. He's still over there, with the police, but he'll be along soon. He'll take you home with him, no doubt."

No doubt. Her mind was bleeding from the barbs. "I'll die with Uncle Nick. Dry right



up and die." Her parents always had been cool to Nick Gerard, and she had never liked him.

She said now, to me, on the Chicago lake-front, "I didn't want to go back to school. I didn't want to face anyone ever again. Jeff, my father was a murderer. So there'd been something wrong with him, and I began to wonder what was wrong with me. It would show up, sometime. For a while that's all I could think of. My father's blood in me.

"I begged Uncle Nick to sell the house. Mr. Mannix would have bought it. But Uncle Nick was stubborn."

She stopped a moment, then looked at me and said, "I told all this to Glenn, and he was like you, Jeff, a little. He said I must stop running. He said we'd go back home and fight. He said maybe that would change things, that maybe he could change things. He was really very wise, Jeff."

Two owls, I thought. I remembered how I'd seen them, sitting on a high post, chuckling. I remembered how they'd watched us, listened, and then flown away.

"And we were married early one morning, Glenn and I, Jeff. By noon that same day we were home. Uncle Nick was there, to help clean up the house. Mr. Mannix saw us and came over. We worked hard, all afternoon, but—but something in the house was wrong. Jeff, I could feel it. I could see it in the way Glenn acted. He would stop at times, frown, just stare. He would say, 'What's that, Georgia?' when I spoke; and smile then for a moment, rather queerly. The house was evil. It was my father's house, and I was evil. Seeing me in the house, he knew it.

"Well, Jeff," she said, "that very night he left me."

"You mean the louse walked out?"

"Jeff, please! He—he left me. Our wedding night. I haven't seen him since."

"Of course he wrote?"

"No, Jeff, he didn't."

"You mean you don't know where he went or where he is?"

"Jeff, please!"

"But look, hon, there's no sense to it. A guy in love just wouldn't do a thing like that."

She didn't answer, and the seconds passed, and finally I drew in a deep breath. "Then you're divorced?"

"Yes, Jeff. Desertion."

Far out in the lake a ship whistled. Behind us, suddenly, the city bawled and roared; its lights were blazing. I took her in my arms. I hurt her with my lips. I wouldn't let her talk. We were going back too. We had to. I couldn't let the small doubt in my mind blossom as did hers, and become fear.

She phoned Old Nick from Chicago. I stood with her in the booth, and I would grin

and interrupt, "Give him all my love too, darling." Old Sour Puss. I could see him in my mind, about to throw a fit, to hear that she was Mrs. Clenning.

"Yes, Uncle Nick," she was repeating. She was proud and firm about it. "We were married this morning."

I heard the sound he made, and I made a sound, and she looked at me and we both laughed.

"Yes, we're coming back," she told him on the phone. "Jeff has a job promised him in Fairview. That's but commuting distance from Windsor." Her voice caught. She looked aside at me. For a moment I saw something strange again in her eyes. I leaned over, kissed her. The look disappeared then, immediately. "Yes, we'll open the house, Uncle Nick. There's no where else to go."

There was nothing wrong with the house. Nuts to the spooks! Minds were haunted but not houses. We had a slate roof. I looked it over. I liked it. I liked the gables. We had fine big rooms and high ceilings. Furnace? Sure we had a furnace, and even several tons of coal. It was a big high basement, with fruit cellars and a padlocked door to a room for the wine. There was even some wine. There was a cistern in one corner, in an alcove, a brick and cement wall that rose some five feet from the floor. The cistern was partly filled with dirt, slime and smelly, stagnant water.

She wouldn't go down to the basement. The shadows? The cobwebs, unpleasant musty odors, rats? Black memories that she felt would breed there? She shivered on the stairs, turned back with a queer look, a queer laugh.

"Okay, hon," I said. "You take the upstairs for your department. New furniture, new rugs, draperies."

"Jeff, can we afford it?"

"Well, we're cleaning house, aren't we?"

**I** PAINTED the kitchen. She returned at noon that day, for lunch; she'd been downtown, shopping. I opened a bottle of wine. She wouldn't touch it. Her father had, upon occasion, used it. I went over to see Mannix, and he drove back in his truck; he brought the wine. That afternoon I decided what I'd do with the basement. One day soon I'd say, "Hon, now take a look, will you?" I would snap the stairway light and then grin when she gasped with surprise. No more odors. No more cobwebs. No more gloom. I would show her a white basement.

Half a day the first week, she would be downtown. Then, Friday afternoon she phoned from town. She'd decided to go on to Nick Gerard's place in Fairview. She had clothes out there to pack and then move over.



Friday was the day I started cleaning up the basement.

Uh-huh. Friday was a fine day, rainy. A day to burrow like a mole. But she'd phoned. She said, "Darling, it rang and rang. Where were you?"

"You've got to have a cistern, haven't you?"

"Oh, Jeff, not down there!"

"Sure that's where I was."

"But—"

"Hey, upstairs, you remember? *Your* department?"

"Yes, Jeff, only—"

"Only you just let me do my job, pack those clothes and get back home. I'm hungry."

"About seven? Will that be all right, Jeff?"

"Fine, hon."

I got a drink, lit a cigaret, stood a minute at the door to look outside. Already I had hauled a lot of trash outside, a lot of dirt and stone. Over to one side, working on a fence, was Mannix. He waved. He had on a raincoat, tight across his beefy shoulders, glistening like black skin. The rain pattered with a sleepy hum on the tin roof of the kitchen.

"How about changing jobs?" he called.

"You can have it!"

"Painting?"

"Cleaning up the basement."

Mannix paused to light his pipe and then flipped away the match. "Rain all night, I guess," he said.

"Yes," I said, "I guess so."

I went back to the basement. The light was one bright bulb that blazed above from a cord I'd strung and then hung onto a nail. Shadows were an arc around it. I crawled into the cistern, and down here it was almost dark, a soggy mess like glue that stuck to the shovel. Time just ran on by. I would fill a pail and then lift it out. The loose brick and the stones I would throw out. I reached down for a rock—

It wasn't a rock. It was slimy leather, a shoe.

It wasn't just a shoe. There was a foot in it—there had been. It was fastened on a bone, a leg, a rag of soggy sock, a piece of soggy trouser. Something happened to my heart; it climbed into my throat, and I leaned against the cistern wall, the only sound my own labored breathing.

"Oh no, Jeff. Georgia's talked too much about her fears. So your mind too is sick. Now you're jumping to conclusions." I fumbled in my pockets for a match, found one but it wouldn't light. The head just skipped off with a flash, hissing when it hit the water. Not much water. Clay turned by seepage into slush. Not much of a hiss. Maybe it was my own breathing.

"Well, Jeff? Want to try it now, again? Don't you have to try it now, again—and be sure?"

No more matches in my pocket. I looked up at the light, just beyond the rim, but it wouldn't reach, it wouldn't pull any farther. I thought of Mannix, maybe still there, working on his fence, and I wanted nothing quite so much as to run out, call him. But something wouldn't let me climb out. I drew in a deep breath, held it, and reached into the musky slush—

There were bones that once had been a hand. And farther up, a head . . . Inside my own head, the blood was pounding. Everything was black, the funnel I was in was revolving. I swayed against the dank brick wall.

She was right. She'd been right from the first. She'd sensed it—or she'd known. The whole house was evil . . .

**I** MUST have heard a sound. I didn't breathe. Yes—distant, coming nearer. A car on the road! My God—she was coming home!

"Hon, come here a minute. I'll show you why I'm standing here, just shaking."

She was turning in the driveway, and the motor had a knock, a ping in it. She didn't drive too well; she never would learn to go into second on the hill. Why the devil didn't she go into second? The motor sighed and stopped and she got out; then the car door slammed. The screen door slammed. She was in the kitchen.

"Jeff—?"

"Jeff—!" she called, and there was something in her voice, the quick, sharp note of fear. "*Mother—!*" she had cried that night. Remember?

I clenched both fists and said at last, "Down here."

"Oh Jeff!" she called, relieved. "You sound as though you're in a well."

"I'm in the cistern."

"Darling, I came as fast as I could." She had crossed the kitchen, to the open door, the stairhead. "I just made it before dark. Guess what I found at the store, Jeff. Steak!"

"Steak," I thought. My eyes were closed. I couldn't muster strength to climb out of the cistern. I didn't have the strength that I would need to face her.

"How do you want it, darling? Broiled? Or shall I smother it in onions?"

I climbed out of the cistern. I stumbled to the faucet, and turned on the hot water. My hands got red from it, but I didn't feel it burn. I kicked off my boots, then stripped off my shirt—

"Did you want me to put the car in?" she asked.



HER heels tapped lightly on the floor above. She was flying up there, in the kitchen. She was rattling pans: and all the while trying to tell me what she'd done all day. Uncle Nick said this; Uncle Nick said that. You know, Jeff, how he's always growling! And she'd found, at last, just what she'd wanted in draperies. Only they were twelve dollars a pair and she thought that was too high. Jeff, dear, was it?

"Jeff," she called, "what's the matter with you? You don't answer?"

I had to go upstairs. Thoughts were buzzing in my head like bees around a hive. I could fill up the cistern. That would end it, pull the curtain. Fill it full of dirt and stones, and then cement the top. But would that end it? A body didn't bury itself in a basement. Someone had wanted to hide it, and that could only mean that it was murder.

"Jeff," she called, "what on earth is wrong?"

She'd come back to the stairhead. She saw me standing down there in bare feet, bare to the waist, my hair wet, dripping. She began to laugh and then suddenly it caught and I saw her stiffen.

"Something happened," she said.

I swallowed. I said, "Yes."

"What, Jeff? You look—" But she paused.

"Jeff," she said, "you aren't ill?"

I started up the stairs. I couldn't reassure her with a smile. I walked past her, sat down in the kitchen. Outside it was dark. It had got dark almost in that instant. The rain began to fall again then, softly, with a whisper. Flies were on the screen, two or three that hung inert, just watching. Something began boiling on the stove, the coffee.

"Shut it off," I said.

"But darling, aren't we going to eat?"

"Shut it off!" I said.

She came slowly toward me, put one hand out, and I took it. Gripped it. Then she whispered, "The cistern?"

"Hon," I began, "look—" I couldn't find the words to say. You've seen a frightened horse, a gun-shy dog? Her eyes were great round pools. She was trembling all over. She was shaking right up to her teeth.

"Something in the c-cistern?"

"Hon, please! Just let me get my—"

"Jeff—is it Glenn?"

I looked at her. The rain was laughing softly, from outside. The coffee had run over. "Georgia, I don't know! It could have been there six months or six years. So how do I know?"

"Then it is a—body?"

I got up. I shoved the coffee pot aside, spilled it, spilled it all over my hand. No pain? I looked at my hand.

"I knew it, Jeff," she was moaning. "I've

known it from that night. I should have called the police that night. I couldn't. I couldn't face it again. He had no one, no family to ask questions, and Jeff, I didn't dare start the ball rolling. Oh, I always knew, Jeff, that he didn't just walk off."

"Damn it, we don't know it's Glenn!" My voice, yelling at her? Harsh and hoarse when now, above all times, it should be gentle? "Hon, listen. Why did your father kill your mother and himself? Why, hon, *why*?"

She answered dully, "I don't know."

"Then maybe that's where the body came from? Maybe that was his reason? How do we know yet? Maybe that's why Glenn walked off. I mean, poking around the place that afternoon, maybe he found something? A clue to what was in the cistern? Maybe he wasn't strong the way you thought, at all, and just ran out instead of facing—"

She just stood there, shaking her head, moaning. Then suddenly she turned and darted for the door.

## CHAPTER THREE

### One Way or the Other

I'd expected it, I guess. She'd always tried to turn her back, close her eyes and run. She reached the screen door, even got it open. But I caught her. I spun her around, and terror, for a moment, stripped her of all reason. She tried to scream. I clamped one hand across her mouth. She bit me, kicked me, clawed me.

Then, quickly, it was over. That quickly she wilted. Then her wild eyes filled with tears and pain. "Jeff," she sobbed, "I've hurt you."

I held her.

"Jeff, I didn't mean it!"

"Better now? Sit down."

"Yes, Jeff, a-anything you say."

"That's the trouble, hon. There's an end to everything, even to running."

She nodded and breathed, "Yes, Jeff."

"It's murder. We know that, at least."

"Yes, Jeff."

"So we've got to know what we're going to do."

"Do?" she echoed queerly.

I lit two cigarettes, one for her, she dropped it. I gave mine to her. She took one inhale, coughed, put it in a tray. Her hand almost knocked the tray off the table.

"It's either Glenn, or someone tied in with your father. That's my guess, and that's where we'll start; your father."

"Oh, Jeff!"

"Hon, it's *murder*. If it's Glenn, you're in it; you didn't tell police that he was missing; you're cooked. Hon, I'm scared too. I admit it."

"What about father?"



"You said he traveled. A salesman?"

She didn't see yet what I meant, what I wanted. "He traveled just around here? Far? Far, hon, all over the country?"

She sat looking at me, nodded.

"So look, he *could* have lived two lives. It's happened. It's a man down there, the shoe tells us that much. He could have got his lives mixed up. It could have been somebody's husband, a showdown. It could have been a fight, and death, and then a frantic try to dispose of the body. Was anything different the night, the day, before it happened?"

"Different, Jeff?"

"I mean he'd come home from a trip. He must have been the same as always this time, or under tension, body in the car, something like that, different."

"He—" I've used the right word before, she had wilted, but now the shivering began again. Her hands began clenching and unclenching. "He was preoccupied."

"Better explain what you mean."

"He—Jeff, I was going to the party. You remember. I was thrilled, excited, full of plans for it. He'd have to pull his mind to attention."

"Did your mother notice it, too?"

Her eyes closed as she probed the past, and she stiffened as she answered, "Mother asked him what was wrong. She asked him if it was something about Uncle Nick. Uncle Nick had loaned him money."

"Did he tell her what it was?"

Her eyes jerked open as though tugged by strings. "Jeff, I can't!"

"Please, hon, try."

"He said he had something on his mind."

"That night? Before you went to the party?"

"Yes, that night at dinner."

"Then what, Georgia?"

"Then I went upstairs to dress—" She stopped. Stared straight through me. Something changed abruptly in her voice; it was curiously oblique, as though she'd cocked her head. She hadn't cocked her head. "And a few minutes later Mother came upstairs and she looked worried. Yes, I remember. She looked worried."

"Had they had an argument, your mother and father? Over maybe the loan, the money?"

"I didn't hear it."

"Did you tell all this to the police?"

She shot up from the chair, pale and rigid as a pole. I could see in her mind the jagged flame of memory of the night she wanted to and couldn't forget, ever. I held her. I hurt her with my hands; she winced.

"Wait, hon. Just a little more. Just something I don't get yet, about Glenn. You said you two came back last fall."

"October," she whispered.

"And you'd worked all afternoon. But then what? Did you drive to town for dinner?"

"We didn't have a car."

"No car?" No loose strings, no estate to settle, no family, no questions.

"Uncle Nick met us that noon at the station. He drove us out here."

"Let's stick to the dinner."

"Uncle Nick drove into town for provisions. And Mr. Mannix brought some things over for us."

"Did Nick Gerard stay for dinner?"

"Oh no, Jeff, he—"

"Did he ever mention the loan he'd made to your father?"

"I don't remember—"

"Did he ever recover on it, when the estate went to probate?"

"Dad only had the house, Jeff."

"Okay. Back to the dinner, then. Did Mannix stay?"

"Oh, no!"

"SO THE two of you, Glenn and you, were alone. Presumably it was dark. I want to get the feel of it, first meal at home, first minute alone—"

"Jeff, no!"

"What do you mean no?"

"Jeff, I've told you. He didn't talk. He was strange."

The word was ready-made, too pat. I walked on tiptoe around it. "Preoccupied?"

"Yes, he would miss words I said."

"Did you ask him what was wrong?"

"He—" The same queer note crept into her voice, as though again she'd cocked her head. I knew now what would come, before it was said. "He had something on his mind, he said."

"Keep going, Georgia." My heart was missing, hopping up and down. "Keep going."

"Well, we ate. He wasn't very hungry. He kept looking out of the window. Then suddenly he got up from the table. He got his coat. He was going out, he said. Of course, I asked him why, and he was evasive. I asked him would he be out long, and he said vaguely, 'Oh, a few minutes. I just want to think.'"

"He helped me clear the table, and then he walked away and I finished washing the dishes."

He didn't come back, when she'd finished the dishes. She'd gone a dozen times to the front door, to look. "Glenn—" she'd called into the darkness. There was nothing out there but the darkness. He'd walked into town for cigarettes? But they had cigarettes. Then he'd walked down the road and met someone? But who? He wouldn't stay this long on his wedding night, talking to a stranger. Preoccupied and strange, evasive.



Ever since they'd got into the house. She'd begun to shiver.

She'd turned on the radio, but the music seemed at once too brassy, jarring and too loud, and she'd snapped the switch again. Then it was too still. The past began to whisper. Little things her father had once said. Little things her Mother had once done and said. She fancied she could hear soft footsteps, and she would call out, "Glenn—?" She turned on every light in the house, paced the floor, and then the clock she knew so well struck ten.

He would be gone only a few minutes?

"Jeff, the house was driving me mad! I stayed as long as I could, until midnight. Then I wrote a note and left it on the kitchen table. I ran all the way to town, and caught the last bus to Fairview. Uncle Nick had just got home, so he was up yet, furious. He went over in the morning, the first thing in the morning. The note was still there, on the kitchen table."

"Didn't he want to call the police, Georgia?"

"He said it was good riddance."

"And that's all?"

"Oh, Jeff, truly! Everything that happened."

**Y**OU know what I had to do, what I was postponing. Up here, in the kitchen, I could make past events jump through a hoop. I could pin a case, motive for a murder, on her father. He had owed Old Nick money. He'd got in a jam. He had killed a man, and then put the body in the cistern. I could say her mother, maybe, had come down and saw him working in the cistern. So up here I could prove it was her father, and the body down there wasn't Glenn.

How about the cops though? No soft gloves on their fists. They were realistic. They'd look at the body *first*. Then would come their questions.

"Mrs. Clenning, you realize, of course, that we're not quite sure who it is, that we'll have to locate your former husband. Can you tell us where he is?"

"Oh no, I can't tell you. He disappeared the night of our wedding."

"Disappeared, Mrs. Clenning?"

"Yes, he just walked out after dinner, and after that I never saw him again."

What would you think? She hadn't reported him missing. Queer, huh? She hadn't instituted a search privately. What, then, would you think? She'd known *why* he was missing?

Oh yes, indeed! Of course she'd known. She'd seen the change in him, almost from the minute he'd come into the house. He'd become preoccupied. . .

So had her Father.

He'd either, *a*— In the space of a few hours, begun to fear the house also, as she did, and then beat it. Or *b*— Seeing her *in* the house, completely dominated by it, the tragedy of what had happened in it, he'd begun to fear her—

Well, what would you think? Her father's daughter, wasn't she? "I knew it, Jeff," she'd moaned. "I've always known, somehow, that he didn't just walk off." Did he try to just walk off—and she react to that by—by killing him?

What would you think?

I put on my shoes, and sat there in the kitchen looking at my feet. You know what it was I had to do, what I'd been postponing. I had to go downstairs. I had to crawl back into the cistern. I had to prove, try to prove at least, whose body it wasn't, or whose body it was.

I got a flashlight from my bag, set my jaw and took her by the hand. I urged her down the stairway. Now she understood, and her eyes were like dry ice. She swayed, almost fell off the stairway. I walked her straight across the basement, to the shadowed alcove that made up the cistern.

"One way or the other, Georgia."

"But Jeff, if it is? What will we do?"

"One way or the other, Georgia."

I shinned up the wall of the cistern, drew a deep breath, pressed the button on the flashlight. The light, shaking, traveled down inside. The light found, hovered on the muck-stained shoe. I turned around then, looked at her. She was standing with her eyes closed, hands behind her, flat against the wall.

"How big was he, Georgia?"

She knew who I meant. She answered faintly, "Tall."

"How tall? Six feet?"

"I don't know, Jeff. I came just above his shoulder."

Okay. Five ten or eleven, maybe. But a man like that could wear size seven or size twelve. There was too much dirt. I couldn't gauge the length of the shoe, just looking at it, from here.

"Hon, I'm going down inside."

Her lids flew open as she cried, "Oh, Jeff, no!"

"Got to. One way or the other now, Georgia."

"But I wouldn't know his shoe, Jeff, even if I saw it!"

"You won't have to look at him. But promise you won't run out on me. Promise you'll stick, Georgia."

She nodded. Her teeth were clicking. She promised. I picked a spot below that I'd already cleaned. My shovel was down there, just exactly as I'd left it. I began to use it as a probe.



"Black shoe, I think, Georgia. Was that what Glenn wore that night?"

Her voice, muffled, came at long last, "Jeff, I don't know!"

"You've got to know, hon."

"But a shoe, Jeff!"

Okay. Skip the shoe. Dig around the body, higher. No color in the soggy rag of pant leg or the sock. I kept digging and turned up a belt, a buckle. She knew something had just happened, by my silence.

"Jeff—?" she said.

I didn't call back, "The initial on the buckle is a G." Hell, a hundred names began with G. I could think of George and Gregory. Ninty-eight to go. Gary, Gerry maybe. Ninty-six to go. Lord, there must be more than Gary, George and Gregory?

"Jeff—?" she said and I said, "Wait, hon, I think I've got a clue. I've just turned up a ring."

"Which hand?"

"It's the right one."

"Oh my God," I heard her whisper.

"Hon, wait a minute. What kind of a ring did he wear? This one's got a setting."

"Jeff—is it red?"

It was red. Redder than neon. Redder than flame. As red as bright new blood. So this did it. It was Glenn. No doubt in my mind now. From here on it was going to be tough. It was going to be awful.

"Jeff!" she breathed, "There's someone outside, at the window—!"

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Lunge of Black Murder

**I** DIED for a moment, right there. Everything inside, my muscles, lungs, and heart. Then life flowed sharply again, began in the pit of my stomach. My stomach quivered and turned over. Nerve impulses ran straight down my spine, like centipedes with nervous little feet they'd dipped in icy water. I jumped for the rim and the light.

Don't ask me why I turned out the light. No one from the window could see me. They could see Georgia possibly, depending on which basement window she'd meant. I've explained that the cistern sat back, in an alcove. But no one, from the window, could see inside the cistern. Anyway, it was our cellar, our cistern. No one could come in, question what we were doing.

Turning out the light was no doubt prompted by fear of what I'd found, by the problems Glenn's body would now raise, by sheer instinct.

Instinct too, I suppose, that froze me up there, on the cement rim of the cistern.

"Jeff, the west window," she whispered.

Along the driveway. The way anyone could come around the house.

"I saw his face, his eyes!"

"Who was it?"

"Jeff, I don't know!"

Mannix, I thought. The obvious thought. He might have heard Georgia's cry a few minutes ago, when she'd tried to run out of the kitchen. But would Mannix stop at the window? It was closed. The glass was dirty. Yes, he might glance in, but wouldn't he go on now to the door, and call to us? No one called to us. No one rapped. The kitchen light was on, and it made a high yellow frame of the open basement stairway. The stair steps were thus also faintly lighted; but there, below the stairs, the gloom closed in; and here, where we were, it was inky.

"Georgia, are you sure?"

"Oh, I'm sure!" she whispered.

"Maybe it was the dog? Maybe it was Thor?"

"But I saw his eyes!"

I listened. I could hear nothing but the rain, with its soft insistent hum, and the drip from an eave, near the west window. "Stay right where you are, hon, back against the wall."

"What are you going to do?"

"Go up, I guess, and see who it is."

"No, Jeff! I'm afraid."

"What the hell, it's probably someone stalled down the road with his car."

"But I didn't hear a car, Jeff!"

"What the hell," I said, "why doesn't he come to the door?"

He did come to the door. Before I could move off the rim I heard the squeak of a hinge. Very soft it was, stealthy. The centipedes began running again, up and down my spine, in and out of my stomach. I couldn't see the outside kitchen door, couldn't see him, but he'd come into the house. Into our kitchen. She'd heard it too. A small moan came from the darkness, from Georgia. The kitchen door had opened and then closed.

My God, I thought, who is it?

Then the kitchen light went out.

That did it. That changed everything. All the while I'd heard breathing from below, from Georgia. Now it stopped. My own breathing stopped. My lungs began to ache. Still I couldn't draw a breath to relieve the tension. The body we'd found was no longer in itself important. The horror of the last half hour, all its problems, had faded. Here was a new and immediate danger. A terrible danger. Here was someone moving softly on tiptoe in the kitchen, toward the basement stairs. He was coming down the stairs. The creak meant the first step or the second. Seconds went by, spinning. Was he down here, with us, in the basement?



I heard a click. I couldn't see the gun but knew that's what it was. Hammer being drawn back on a gun. I still gripped the flashlight, and for one mad moment was tempted to use it. Everything, it seemed, depended now on seeing who it was. I didn't use the flashlight. He could not know yet where I was and even if I didn't know yet *who* he was, I knew suddenly *why* he was here. The darkness around me went on spinning in a white-hot mental glare.

Today I was cleaning out the cistern. Someone had become aware. Someone had realized I would find Glenn's body.

There wasn't time, of course, to sit back and wrestle with the past. No time to search for motives. It simply came through in a flash. Here, in the basement with us, was Glenn's killer. Here was a man with a gun, intent upon our murder.

Beyond that, I didn't know. My mind was leaping stones now in a wide black river. I sensed rather than thought out his plan. I sensed that he had peered at Georgia through the basement window, and coolly chose then to do nothing to her. I sensed that she was peculiarly safe so long as I was alive, that in his clever scheme of things I was destined to go first, had to go first to enable him to stage-set the double killing completely to his liking.

He'd looked through the window and hadn't seen me. I'd been in the cistern. He'd intended to wait out there until I came out of the cistern. He hadn't counted on Georgia seeing him, or on me promptly turning the light out. He hadn't planned on coming in after me, and now that he was in—did he have a flashlight?

I died all over again. Braced myself for the ray, knew that if it came there would be little or no chance to beat his bullet. It didn't come, and seconds passed, and then I could hear him moving cautiously, slowly, a step at a time. Infinite time at his disposal, infinite patience! Thirty feet away yet? Twenty-nine?

I began to wonder about Georgia. I mean, she'd been on the brink, the razor's edge, when I'd forced her down here. She had no nerves left for this game of chess with death, this tension. Her nerves were sure to snap, and with every moment I expected her to cry out.

"Hon, hang on a little longer. We're alive yet. It's like war. I'm entrenched up here, as though on a hill, and he still must climb it. Me? A hell of a guy. Brave her uncle, call him names. Climb a tree and hang there by my legs, just for her. Oh, Jeff Clenning was the strong one! Sure, just close your eyes and marry him, kid—and then go back home. to die."

ONCE I was dead, of course, he'd have little trouble with her. He'd be cute about it, the finish. Powder tatoo on her face, her hand around the gun. Who would doubt she'd murdered her first husband? That, today, when I'd found his body, she'd shot me and then taken her own life? No one would be too surprised. A queer girl? Everyone had known that. Her father's daughter. People were like sheep, always ran pell-mell after a precedent.

Was he still too far away to throw a ray? He was, like the devil. He was halfway to the cistern. I had a crazy urge to laugh. Brother, you've got the gun that I need—and I've got the flashlight! Well, what the hell could I do with a flashlight?

A dog began to bark, muffled, deep, still distant. I almost gasped. I visualized the black Great Dane. I grasped at hope, that Thor and Mannix had seen someone prowling in the yard, and now were coming over. Damn you, Sour Puss! We'll work this thing out yet! Even with your gun, you can't stand against two men and a dog. So we'll beat you yet, damn you, Nick Gerard—

There wasn't any question in my mind as to who it was. Suppose Georgia's father and Old Nick had quarreled about the loan and then Old Nick had killed him? Killed him and his wife. Suppose that was why Old Nick had never wanted the house sold, an estate intact, so he could recover on his loan when Georgia died? Suppose Glenn had seen through this, just as I did; met him on the road that night with an accusation? Where else would Old Nick hide Glenn's body? Who else could feel assured of easy access to this house? Certainly, tonight, Georgia had told him I was cleaning out the cistern.

Suddenly I heard him breathing. Closer than I'd thought. Scarcely ten feet away. Outside, Thor came barking up the driveway, and I waited. I didn't breathe. Mannix must be close behind Thor. Must have realized something was wrong over here. Thor jumped against the kitchen door, then whined and scratched at it.

My nostrils began twitching as I smelled the pipe, the strong odor of tobacco. Simultaneously Georgia's voice came faintly from the darkness, "Mr. Mannix?"

I got it. I knew it too, at last. Mr. Mannix wasn't outside. He was down here.

There was no movement from him, and no answer. He waited for the key as to where I was, as I waited for the key as to where he was; and it went on like that, it seemed, forever, seconds ticking away until—

Georgia called again abruptly, hysterically, "Mr. Mannix!"

Maybe eight or nine feet away? The dog was still upstairs, but sure to break through the screen at any moment. So this was my



moment, the last perhaps that I would ever have. I chose the spot where he would think I might be, away from Georgia, and threw the flashlight. It fell. Instantly he shot at the sound. A fleck of red in the gloom from his gun and now I knew where he was, all that I needed.

I dived from the ledge, straight out and at him.

The gun cracked again, but he didn't turn in time. I had him. Then I heard a cry behind me—Georgia's. I heard the dog break through the screen, upstairs. I had a fleeting, frantic picture of Thor's massive jaws, strong as a vise; teeth that could bite through to my spine, and then break it. Mannix cried out, "Thor!" just as we fell.

Black murder came lunging, snarling, down the stairs. *The dog who had once crawled, laid whining at her feet.* Remember? That quickly it was over. I had the gun. I had Mannix by the throat; I hit him. That quickly it was over, and Georgia knelt now beside Thor, holding to him, trembling with him, her arms tight around him.

I stood there swaying a moment. Mannix moaned; I found rope and bound him. Georgia's sobs continued. She cried as though her heart had been torn open. That, I guess, was what she'd always needed. Just to let the secrets in her heart out in the open, to give her some release.

There is not much more. Later I read the confession. Mannix's own fingerprints had doomed him. Mannix, some ten years back, had lived in the west, and there had committed a murder, for which he was wanted. He'd got away with a small fortune, changed his name, everything about him, even the color of his hair. He'd chosen a small town in which to hide out—Windsor. It proved to be a most unfortunate choice.

"Everything," Mannix admitted in the confession, "went smoothly until the girl's father came back one day from a trip to the far west. Out there he'd stumbled on the old case. There was a son, it seemed, now grown, determined to find the killer of his father, and the papers played this up, ran pictures. Gerard, of course, wasn't sure the man hunted by the police was now his next door neighbor, but my likeness to the picture of the killer troubled him. He made the mistake that night of trying to pump me. I realized the danger. I realized he'd very likely discussed his suspicions with his wife. The two were alone over there. The girl had gone to a dance. I rigged the thing quickly in my mind, how I'd play it, and then killed them. There was no other way that I could figure.

"Everything went smoothly," Mannix admitted in his confession, "until the girl got

married. I'd thought the chances one in a million that someone else would identify me, but I got a tough break. The girl's first husband was the son of the man I had murdered. Apparently he'd traced me as far as Chicago. Of course, I recognized him. Apparently he'd got his next lead through Georgia, the curious tragedy linked to her life, or maybe the way she'd described me. Obviously, after marrying her, he wanted to set up in the house next door, meet me, watch me.

"Now it was the same thing all over. I could see he wasn't sure, but eventually he'd get my prints and tag me. So I had to kill him. I had to do it quick. That same night, I went over to the brick house, the minute it got dark. I heard them, Glenn and Georgia, in the kitchen. It seemed clear he hadn't confided in her, hadn't wanted to worry her. I laid for him outside. It was easy. All I had to do was hit him.

"All I had to do was wait, and then later, when she'd left, plant the body in the cistern. I expected it would be found. She was a queer girl, on paper at least with a skeleton in her closet and murder in her blood. It was a good gamble that she'd take the rap for Glenn's murder. But she didn't report him missing. That, I thought, would be all right with me; and everything went smoothly again, until she married Clenning. Until he started cleaning out the cistern. Again, I knew something had to be done.

"I watched him. Alive, fighting for her when she'd be accused, he would be a hazard. I was in too deep already to court any more hazards. The simple answer seemed to be to kill him. To kill them both. To wind it all up on the same successful note I'd used the first time. It would seem that Clenning found her husband's body, and she'd killed him and herself. As soon as it got dark enough I went over—"

\* \* \*

Exit, therefore, Mannix; enter a new life for Georgia. A new life for all of us, including Uncle Nick.

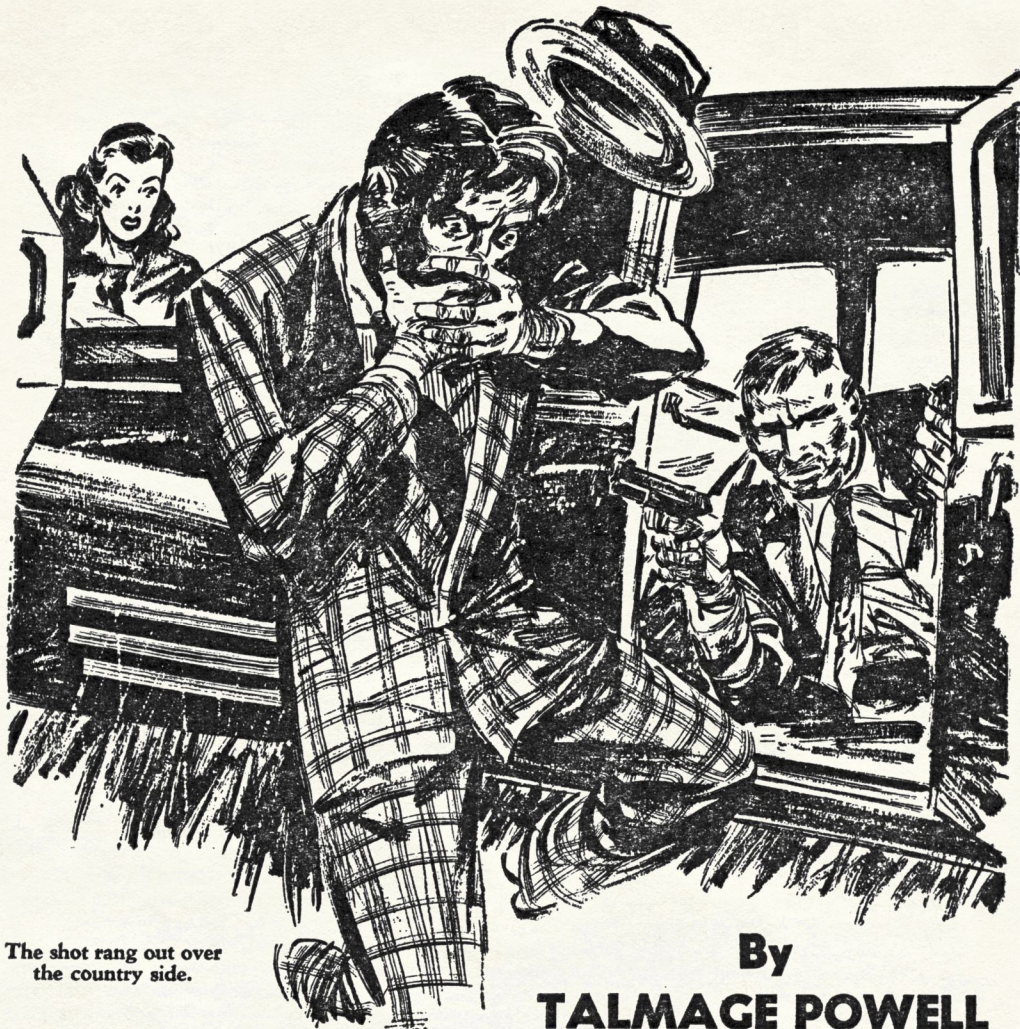
One day I chanced upon him in the barber's chair. I'd stopped in the shop for a haircut.

"Yes, sir," Nick was saying, "he jumped that gun with nothing but his two bare hands. Risked his life to save her. That's the way I am, myself, what I like in a man, fight, gumption. Always knew Jeff had it, gumption. Why, I've known the lad since he was a kid. Yes, sir. I used to call him over to my fence and fill his pockets with apples. He was quite a boy."

He got beet-red when he saw me. He cleared his throat and choked. I just stood there, looking at him in the mirror, laughing silently.

THE END





The shot rang out over  
the country side.

By  
**TALMAGE POWELL**

# A GIFT FOR JEANNIE

*Kemper was a fast, slick guy with the chicks; and faster on the trigger. He was slick enough to get Jeannie, but even his smashing bullets couldn't kill the dream of Big Willie, when that sentimental lug wanted to give Jeannie one last gift. . . .*

WITH the headlights swinging in the night, Willie turned the car off the asphalt road onto the narrow dirt one. He felt the wheels sink a little in the soft, spongy mud. He felt the car slither and jerked the wheel, straightening the car.

The car felt damp, muggy. The night outside was deep black, starless, moonless. A hard, cold rain which beat like a million tiny tom-toms on the roof of the car, was an angered, tortured splattering against the windshield. The wipers did a racing tick-tock. On either side of the car, stretching away from the twisting road, was the lonely desolation of



uninhabited countryside, soggy and cold from the rain.

Willie was alone in the front of the car, but there were three people in the back seat. Willie sat and tried to catch the sounds of their breathing. Kahn made breathing noises like pieces of silk being rubbed together. Joe Meek took great, deadly breaths like the little, gray, deadlly man that he was. Now and then the girl sobbed softly. Willie wished that Kemper hadn't wanted it like this. It added to the risk. Jeannie was Kemper's wife, but Willie didn't like it.

In many ways Willie didn't like Kemper himself. Willie had to make a living and he'd got hooked up with Kemper a long time ago. He didn't know what else to do. Kemper had what it took to make a big time criminal. Kemper was smart, and Kemper was crazy. Willie had it figured out. Kemper was smart in the right ways and crazy in the right ways. Kemper knew what he wanted. He got what he wanted. He never let go of it—not even Jeannie. But this last play Kemper had made—that had been crazy in the wrong way. Willie had it figured.

A half hour of the hard, slipping driving passed. The road burst out in a clearing. In the middle of the clearing, stood a house.

The house was dark. In the car headlights, it was revealed as a two story, log lodge. It had a large, rambling porch. The porch was railed with saplings from which the bark had not been removed.

Willie pressed the brakes. The car stopped thirty yards from the house, along the edge of the yard. Kemper would be there in the house. He would have seen the headlights of the car approaching. A good thing Kemper owned this house, Willie thought. Early in the morning past, Kemper had barely had time to get out of the room where the dead man lay. No time to stop for Jeannie, for clothes, or even for money. Only time to stop once at the edge of town and make a phone call to Willie, giving him instructions, telling him that he'd had a final talk with Brodskinski. Willie had known what Kemper meant. Only the most trusted knew that Kemper owned this house; it had been a place for Kemper to hie himself away to when he wanted nobody to know where he was, to rest. Kemper had liked a place like that.

Kahn said, "What are you waiting for?" "Nothing."

"Kemper won't be taking chances," Joe Meek said. "You better get out and show the light before you approach the house, Willie." "Yeah," Willie said, "I don't want the boss to shoot me in the dark."

He opened the glove compartment. He took out the flashlight. With the light in his hand, he got out of the car. He looked like a grizzly bear dressed in a baggy, tweed suit, a rumpled

white shirt, a tie with a bathing beauty hand-painted on it. The knot of the tie always was scooting under the flying left point of Willie's collar. Kahn said it was the bathing beauty on it trying to strangle Willie. Even a painted woman wanted to get away from him. Willie didn't need a beauty treatment, Kahn said, he needed a miracle. No woman would look at Willie. Joe Meek had never said anything about the tie one way or another.

The rain hit Willie's face. It was cold. He blinked his eyes in their heavy puckers of flesh. His feet sank and squished in the earth turned mud under the rain. The patter of rain against the earth, on the leaves of trees in the night gave Willie a lonely feeling. He held one nostril at a time and blew his nose on the wet earth. He hunched his shoulders and walked toward the house.

After a dozen steps, he stopped, and pointed the light. He clicked the light off and on three times, quickly.

A voice came, not from the house, but from the lower edge of the yard. "Willie?"

Willie whirled toward the voice. "Yeah, boss?"

**K**EMPER came walking up through the wet grass. "I saw the headlights. I didn't wait in the house. The edge of the yard, down toward the timber line, seemed safer."

"That was smart," Willie conceded. "Everything's set. Got the dough, and the car's gassed."

"And Jeannie?"

"She's in the car, boss."

Kemper chuckled.

"Nobody tailed us out, boss," Willie said. "Meek kept a close eye out the back window. I did some fancy driving that would have shook 'em, just in case."

Kemper walked across the yard toward the car. Kahn had got out, and was standing nearby. From inside the car, Joe Meek said hello and let it go at that. Kahn punched Kemper's shoulder playfully, told him everything was going to be a cinch, they'd hit a new town somewhere, take it over. What was one little murder more or less? Everything would turn out swell. Kahn was always telling people what he thought they wanted to hear.

"Save it," Kemper said. "Go on up to the house."

Willie went around behind the car. He opened the trunk. There were suitcases of clothes, a box of grub, and the black satchel of money from Kemper's safe. There were several thousand dollars in the bag. No need to think about that wealth, that expensive club, those other assets they couldn't lay hands on without Kemper himself or his signature. This was murder. A get-away was the thing.

Willie heard Kemper's voice, talking to



Jeannie. Kemper had poked his head in the car. Kemper said, "... And I don't give a damn!" Then he said, "I'll carry you up to the house. The grass is wet. You'll ruin your nylons, baby." He chuckled that dark, bubbling chuckle. His chuckle mocked her.

He pulled her out of the car. He carried her across the wet stretch of grass. She didn't try to struggle.

Kemper often did things like that. He liked to play the gentleman now and then. A cat and mouse game. The mouse wasn't fooled. The cat knew it. That made the game fun. Kemper was a smart, crazy man.

They were all inside by the time Willie had closed the trunk compartment and loaded himself with the bags. He trudged across the yard, up the half-log steps that led to the porch. He knocked on the door with his toe.

From inside Kahn yelled, "Whattaya trying to do, kick it down?"

Willie decided he didn't like Kahn much. The door opened. Joe Meek had opened it. Joe had a comb in his hand; he had tossed his hat on a table. He closed the door behind Willie and went back and looked up at the mirror over the fireplace and continued to comb his sparse, mouse-gray hair.

A fire was crackling. From the looks of the embers, Kemper had had it going for several hours. The living-room rambled across the entire front of the house. It was comfortably furnished with deep couches and chairs. Blinds were drawn over all the windows. Willie put the moist bags down near the bookcase at the far end of the room.

"I thought for a while you weren't going to get here," Kemper said. "I was beginning to think you were going to leave me holed up here all night."

"They'd have had to kill us to make us let you down," Kahn said, nobly.

Kemper looked at Kahn. "Yeah," he said. Then he turned to Jeannie. "How about a little midnight snack, sweetheart?"

Jeannie's face had lost its youth. Jeannie pushed her blonde hair back from her face. She didn't say anything. She went out of the living-room. Presently, they heard her open the kitchen door and close it behind her.

"You better watch that dame," Kahn said. He was at the cabinet pouring himself a drink of bourbon. "She's your wife, Kemper, but me, I'd..."

"He wasn't asking you," Meek said. He blew on his comb, wiped it on his palm, put it in his pocket. "I don't think Jeannie would have talked. She's the kind that's got too many qualms about sending a man to the electric chair. Anyhow, there wasn't anything she could tell them about Broskinski's death. She wasn't there."

"She could have told them about this place,

though," Kahn said. "About where Kemper might hole up. It was still a good idea for Willie to do like Kemper said and have Pencick and Shuler pick her up soon's Kemper phoned. Pencick and Shuler kept her in a rented room all day. That was smart. Pencick and Shuler are a pair of yellow rats, but the cops don't even know they're working for Kemper now."

Willie hunkered before the fireplace. He found a thin piece of firewood and began poking at the embers with it. Willie liked to find pictures in the flames.

"It was a hell of a thing to happen right now," Kemper said. "But I couldn't stop Broskinski. He had those papers. He was going to the police. It was a choice of killing him or prison."

"YOU couldn't have done it a little quieter, could you?" Joe Meek said. "Did you have to shoot the ratty blackmailer? All that gunfire right there in his rooming-house. A damn wonder you even got out of the place."

"He also had the idea I wouldn't want to make noise," Kemper said. He watched Willie play with the fire. Then he jerked his gaze away and jammed his hands into his pockets. "Broskinski was starting out the door. I told him to stop. I walked over to him; he made a dive for the gun. No noise, he thought I was thinking. We tussled for the gun. He might have got it. I had to shoot the hell out of him! What else could I do?"

Willie saw a ship in the flames, a white ship with a flame behind it like a sunset. It lasted only a moment. Then the flames shifted patterns. But Willie thought about the ship. If he ever had a woman, he'd give her a gift. He take her on a trip on a ship like that. They'd sail way over the ocean, pretending they were going to find the place where the sun set. Or he'd give her a gift of rubies, like those embers glowing on the backlog. He would put the rubies on her fingers and caress her hands like sweet, gentle hickory smoke caressing a cloud.

Willie turned his head. "What, boss?"

"I said," Kemper said, "how bad was it?"

"How bad was what?"

"Your session with the cops, you dumb dope!" Kahn said.

"It was pretty bad," Willie said. "It was tough, that landlady in the rooming-house seeing you going up to Broskinski's room. The cops stayed on my neck for nearly three hours. The room was hot, boss, and they kept the light in my eyes 'til I was nearly blind," Willie shuddered. "But I didn't tell them nothing."

Kemper chuckled, feeling the cold darkness in the room. "They're still chasing their tails all over town. A day or two holed in here and we'll be able to leave the state like tourists."



Meek had taken a nail file from his inner pocket. He was cleaning his little gray nails. "And when we're gone, Miles Carter is goin' to have everything his way. The way he's wanted it. He's always wanted to be top dog."

"What the hell," Kahn said. "What can we do about Miles Carter now? Sure, now he'll step in and sew up every racket in town. You wouldn't want to go back and shoot Miles Carter up?"

"No," Meek smiled his small gray smile. "I wouldn't want to take the chance. But it's nice to think about it. Miles Carter has done and said some pretty nasty things to us. I don't like him. I just don't like to think of him with every paying racket under his thumb."

"He's a two-bit punk," Kemper said. "I don't like to be reminded of Miles Carter."

Willie said, "I smell bacon cooking."

They stood up. They were all hungry. They went out to the kitchen where Jeannie was standing over the electric stove. She looked up. Then she looked back at the eggs sizzling in the pan. When Kemper walked over and kissed her on the back of the neck, she flinched and he chuckled.

The midnight supper was over and Willie pushed his empty plate back. He was alone in the dining-room. Jeannie was out in the kitchen, and Kahn, Joe Meek, and Kemper were in the living-room, before the fire, having drinks, making plans.

Jeannie had cooked Willie five eggs. He always ate five. This time he'd eaten the five and he was still hungry, but he didn't say anything about it. He knew that if he said anything, she'd cook more, and the day had been a long one for her. She was tired. Later, he would sneak to the kitchen when the house was asleep and gorge on cheese, salami, and crackers.

He patted his pockets, got up, and went in the living-room. He tapped Kemper's arm. "Boss, I'd like a cigarette to go with my coffee."

"What the hell is wrong with you?" Kahn said. "You never have cigarettes."

"I forget," Willie said, "until I want one."

Meek smiled his little gray smile, looked at Kahn, and the smile turned to a sneer. Kemper handed Willie one. Willie pulled a long splinter from a piece of firewood, lighted it in the fire, and then lighted his cigarette. As he tossed the flaming splinter into the fireplace, the flames shot up, and for an instant he again fancied he saw his white ship, sailing into the sunset.

He went back to the dining-room, hunched over his coffee. It was cold and raining out and he liked to think about being on the ship. Blue, warm water was all around. The sun was bright overhead. His lady was down in her stateroom, among all the gifts he had given

her, the furs and beautiful clothes to wear in far-away, strange lands. Now she came up on deck. Smiling, she sat down in the deck chair beside Willie. He turned in his own chair until he was sitting sideways; then he lay back across his chair, his head in his lady's lap. He was looking up in her face, and he could see that she loved him, even without his gifts, by her smile. She stroked his forehead and crooned a little song to him.

Willie jumped. The cigarette had burned his fingers.

JEANNIE turned from the sink as Willie came into the kitchen. He had his dirty plate, cup, saucer, and silver in his hands. She was just finishing washing the other dishes. She took his with a smile, placed them in the sink. Willie picked up a towel and began drying the dishes in the rack on the drainboard.

She washed Willie's plate. Then she said, "What do you think's going to happen to us, Willie?"

"We'll land in some spot."

"Yes, but which spot?"

"I don't know. Kemper will think of something. We'll hit a town. He'll get a line on something. Or we'll muscle in the old way if we have to."

"You won't mind muscling in, Willie?"

"You mean, the rough stuff? Nah! Leastways not for myself. I always helped Kemper with his killing. Or done his killing for him. That's his mistake, this time. We should have got Broskinski in a dark alley and . . ." He bit the words off. He said, "I didn't mean to talk like that. It ain't right talk for a lady. What I was trying to say was, I don't mind the rough stuff for myself. But I hate to think of you anywhere around."

"Willie," she said, "I like you for that."

Two hours later, the house was silent and dark. Willie lay in his bed, looking up at the opaque shroud of night. The bedrooms were in the left wing of the house. Kemper and Jeannie were in the one just forward of Willie's. Kahn had said he'd take the small bedroom ahead of Kemper's, next to the living-room. Meek was in the one behind Willie.

Willie wondered how many minutes ago it had been when he'd heard Kemper striking her. Bruising Jeannie's flesh. She was his wife, but it wasn't right, Willie thought. Some of these days Kemper might get too angry; he had moods. Once he might have broken Jeannie's arm if Willie hadn't pulled him back until Kemper cooled off. Kemper was a smart, crazy man. Kemper might kill her someday, Willie thought. She was his wife. She belonged to him. But still, Willie thought, it ain't right.

Willie had had a room in Kemper's apartment in town. Kemper had always kept Willie



around him. Willie knew pretty well what went on between them.

He'd seen it from the very first. She hadn't known Kemper for what he was before she married him. One night in the club, Kemper had looked at the new hatcheck girl. It had been Jeannie. 'How long you been here, baby?' Kemper had asked.

Jeannie had told him three days. Kemper had kept looking at her. He'd gone crazy for her. After a dinner, two or three more days of knowing her, he could think of nothing but Jeannie. He'd had a lot of women. But this one was something new. The sweetness of her, the soft innocence of her caused Kemper to react as a hermit miser would have reacted to awaken one day and find his cave a gold-mine.

She had tried to avoid him. She had heard a little of his reputation. But Kemper pulled all his tricks out of his bag. He explained everything away. Of course a few things went on around the club he didn't like. What club didn't have those things? He did his best, he assured her, dinning it in her ears until the very repetition of it made it seem the truth, his very best to discourage those slightly gray things that went on. He was simply a business man making a living.

Kemper was smart. Kemper was crazy for her. His courtship would have blinded any girl. He displayed attention and smartness unusual even for Kemper. He rushed her along that courtship until she was infatuated with the speed of the thing itself; he convinced her that the infatuation was something stronger, was love.

He married her.

He rubbed his hands and smirked. He chuckled.

Then she began to know the real Kemper. To learn that the club was only a front, and that the things that went on in the club were lily-white models of respectability compared to the other things that Kemper handled.

Willie had seen her eyes, the first time Kemper had ever slapped her.

She had suggested divorce once. That was the time Kemper almost broke her arm. "Try it," he had told her. "If I can't have you, no other man ever will! Get that, Baby. No other man—ever!"

Kemper's power was everywhere. Kemper's men were everywhere. To challenge Kemper was to have him reach his clutching fingers to the ends of the earth, if necessary, if it took that for him to win. Kemper would stop at nothing to win. Not even murder . . .

Willie shivered. Willie decided to get his mind off it. The house was asleep now and Willie was hungry. He swung his legs over the side of his bed. When he'd lain down, he had removed only his shoes. He went across

the bedroom without noise; opened the door. He made no sound as he started down the hall.

**T**HEN near the living-room archway, Willie stopped. He frowned. It dawned on him that something was wrong. As they had retired, Kemper had said they'd keep a stakeout, a man awake, just in case. He'd told Kahn to take it until three o'clock. Kahn then was to call Willie and retire to the bedroom he'd chosen next to the living-room. Willie was to watch until six, when he'd call Meek.

They had left Kahn in the living-room. The light had been on. Kahn had settled with a magazine to stay awake until three. But now no light was burning. Kahn had turned it off.

Willie heard the slithering of a window going up. He looked across the long living-room. Kahn was raising the window, leaning his body out. Kahn's whisper was thin in the dark, cold night. "Carter?"

A voice answered from out in the yard. Kahn drew himself back inside. In a moment, a heavy shadow eased over the sill into the room. "You'd never have got in without waking somebody," Kahn whispered. "Not if it hadn't been for me. Kemper's got the place locked drum-tight."

"All right," Miles Carter said, "you're on our team now. You've proven it. Think we can make him sign those papers?"

"Get your boys in," Kahn told him. "We'll rush the bedrooms. Grab the lot of them. You've got the papers. They're pre-dated. Kemper will sign over every penny of that dough he couldn't bring with him. His club, everything. If a little pressure won't work, we can always point out that all we got to do is hand him to the law and he goes to the chair. It's a dead cinch."

"Then we'll shoot 'em," Miles Carter said.

"It's better," Kahn's whisper agreed. "We shoot the lot of them. Safer. Kemper would never forget. Joe Meek is dangerous. So is Willie, a strong brute that'll wade right into anything."

"This will certainly be a surprise party for Kemper," Miles Carter said. He turned to the window. "Come on in, boys."

Willie stood very still. Willie saw what had happened. Kahn had changed teams. With Kemper on the run, sometime today Kahn had managed to get in touch with Carter. Kahn had told him about this hideout. Miles Carter would be the big boy from now on, and Kahn had wanted to be on Carter's side.

Willie counted the shadows that came through the window. He wanted to be sure they were all inside. Three shadows. A total of five, counting Kahn and Miles Carter. "Okay," Carter said to Kahn, and Willie knew that that was all of them. When he'd lain

*(Continued on page 92)*



# The Finger points-- to Murder!



## The COUPLING PIN CASE!

(1)

BEAUTIFUL MARY CLUTE OF SAN FRANCISCO WAS FOUND DEAD IN HER FLAT BY THE LANDLADY. CAPTAIN BOHN OF THE POLICE FORCE FOUND THE BODY AN APPALLING SIGHT. THE RIGHT SIDE OF HER HEAD HAD BEEN BASHED IN WITH A COUPLING PIN WHICH LAY NEAR THE BODY.



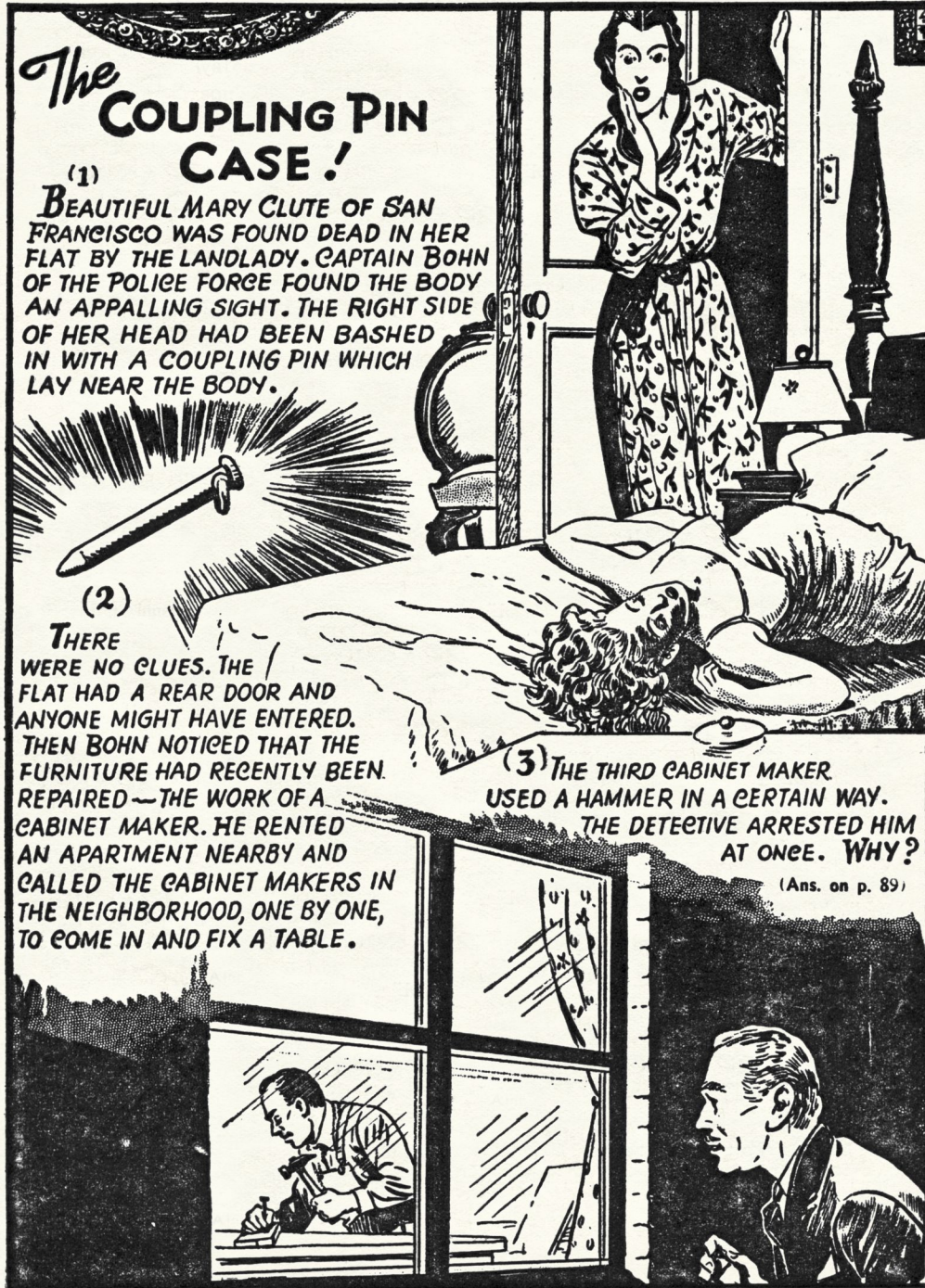
(2)

THERE WERE NO CLUES. THE FLAT HAD A REAR DOOR AND ANYONE MIGHT HAVE ENTERED. THEN BOHN NOTICED THAT THE FURNITURE HAD RECENTLY BEEN REPAIRED—THE WORK OF A CABINET MAKER. HE RENTED AN APARTMENT NEARBY AND CALLED THE CABINET MAKERS IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD, ONE BY ONE, TO COME IN AND FIX A TABLE.

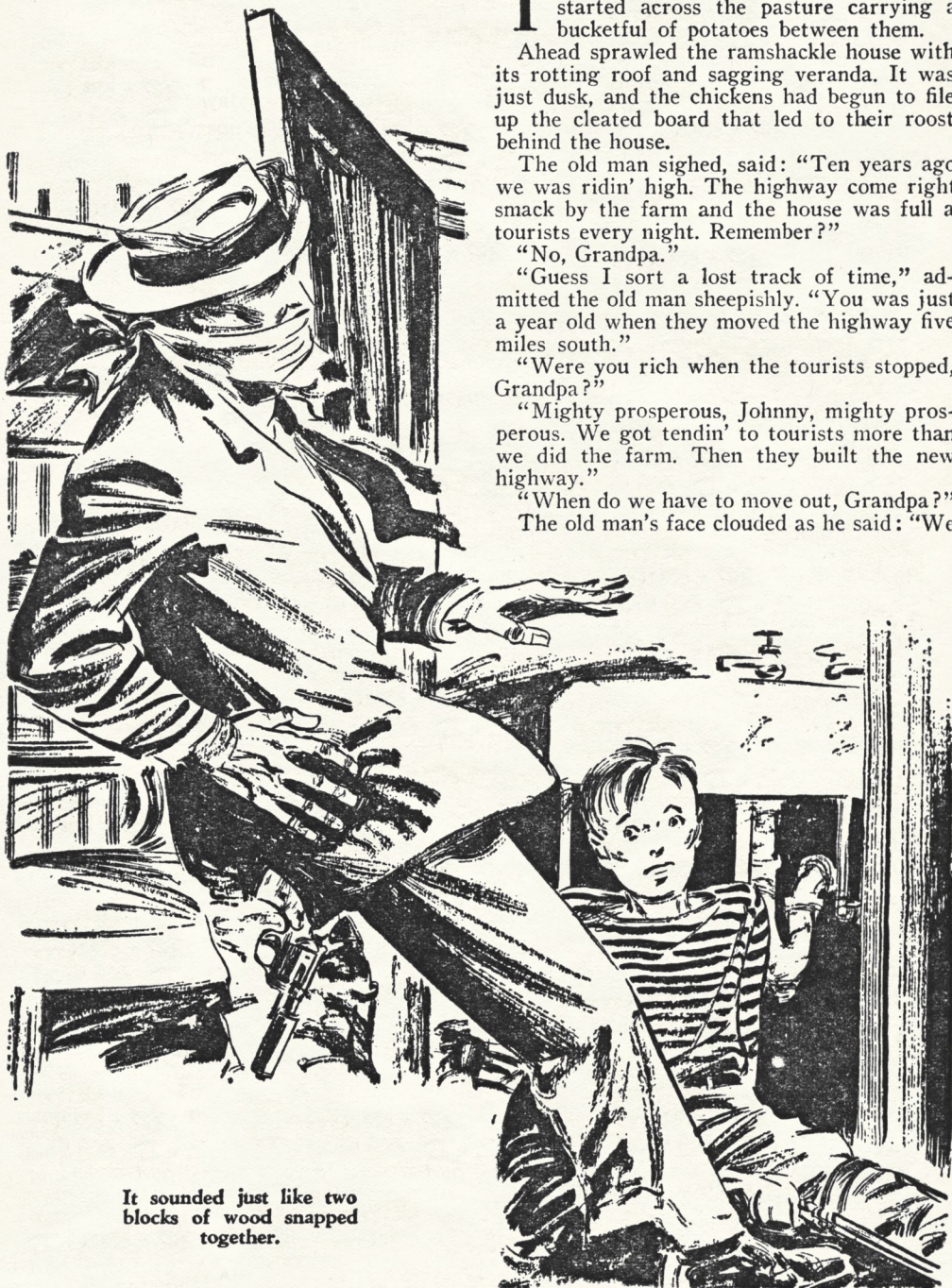


(3) THE THIRD CABINET MAKER USED A HAMMER IN A CERTAIN WAY. THE DETECTIVE ARRESTED HIM AT ONCE. WHY?

(Ans. on p. 89)







It sounded just like two  
blocks of wood snapped  
together.

**T**HE old, old man and the crippled boy started across the pasture carrying a bucketful of potatoes between them.

Ahead sprawled the ramshackle house with its rotting roof and sagging veranda. It was just dusk, and the chickens had begun to file up the cleated board that led to their roost behind the house.

The old man sighed, said: "Ten years ago we was ridin' high. The highway come right smack by the farm and the house was full a tourists every night. Remember?"

"No, Grandpa."

"Guess I sort a lost track of time," admitted the old man sheepishly. "You was just a year old when they moved the highway five miles south."

"Were you rich when the tourists stopped, Grandpa?"

"Mighty prosperous, Johnny, mighty prosperous. We got tendin' to tourists more than we did the farm. Then they built the new highway."

"When do we have to move out, Grandpa?"

The old man's face clouded as he said: "We



# JOHNNY'S ON THE SPOT!

got a month yet, Johnny. We got to stick together, son. You and me's the only Yeagers left. Yeagers has owned this land over a hundred years. Why, a whole corner of the buryin' grounds is full a Yeagers."

"Grandpa, when they sell the house where will we . . ."

"The Lord will provide," interrupted the old man with quiet conviction. "The Lord will always provide."

The boy nodded solemnly. The steel brace on his shriveled left leg was heavy and cumbersome, and he had to drag his next to useless foot across the grassy turf. Carrying his share of the bucket was very tiring.

"Your grandma set a fine breakfast table," said the old man dreamily. "Tourists liked it here. They liked it fine."

"Then why don't they come back, Grandpa?"

"Folks in autos don't often take the same road twice, son. And now the highway runs five miles south."

The boy glanced at the building ahead. In the red rays of the setting sun the house looked white and neat, and in his mind's eye he saw a parade of cars turning off the road and coming up the lane.

Then suddenly he doubted his senses. A sleek, cream-colored convertible swung off the road and purred up the lane. The top of the car was down and a man wearing a snap brimmed hat sat behind the wheel. The boy saw a suitcase upended on the rear seat, heard the crunch of tires on the cinders in the lane.

"Grandpa!" he cried in delight. "Grandpa! There's a shiny car stopping at the house."

The startled old man let go the bucket handle. The bucket arced down at the boy's left leg, struck the steel brace and rebounded a full foot. Surprised but unhurt, Johnny lowered the bucket to the ground.

"That pesky sheriff with them sale posters," said the old man angrily, unable to see the car in the half light.

"Grandpa!" implored the anxious boy. "Grandpa, it's a tourist in a shiny car."

The old man shed his wrath, hastened to say: "Now, don't fret. I'll handle him good. Don't try to tote them potatoes."

Johnny watched his grandfather take off

at a surprisingly fast trot. The boy let the potatoes remain on the ground and limped toward the house. His natural shyness had been aggravated by his affliction, and only burning curiosity drove him on.

The old man came up beside the car and began talking with the stranger. He was probably explaining that the pressure water system no longer worked because they couldn't afford electricity.

The boy advanced watching the men anxiously. The front bedroom was kept ready for just such a miracle. The tourist, however, might sensibly return to the village where the plumbing at the inn was in working order.

Johnny went warm and breathless when the man climbed out and reached in back for his suitcase. The boy hurried toward the car. He was glad that the overall pants he wore extra long and covered the steel brace on his game leg.

" . . . and I'm still shaky after six months in an army hospital," the tourist was saying as the boy arrived.

"Me and the lad tried to do our mite," said the old man. "But I'm past eighty."

The stranger spotted Johnny, asked: "In school yet, boy?"

"Yes, sir," said Johnny in a scarcely audible voice.

"The boy's eleven," said the old man. "He's growed poorly."

Johnny's embarrassment became so acute that it conquered his usual tongue-tied shyness, and he said: "I'll go light the candle in the hall, Grandpa."

THE old man nodded. The boy hurried over the lawn and across the porch, the bottom of the brace making a rasping sound on the dry wood. He entered the hall where the marble top of the table was a white smudge in the gloom.

He found a match and lighted the wax candle in the bright brass holder. As an afterthought he touched the flame to the wick of a candle stub stuck on a cracked saucer. Satisfied, he backed into a corner where the shadows were deepest.

The old man ushered the tourist into the hall. Now unnoticed, Johnny examined the

*More wonderful than Cinderella's coach was that sleek, cream-colored convertible, so no wonder Johnny clambered in behind the wheel . . . to have himself the ride of his young—and extremely short—life.*



man with interest. In the flickering candlelight his face was very pale and seamed. He looked old enough to have been a high ranking officer, a general even, and the boy wished the man had worn his uniform.

Old man Yeager picked up the brass candle holder and led the way up the stairs. The man followed close behind carrying a handsome tan leather suitcase. The two men vanished from sight around the turn in the stair well.

Johnny faced the porch. Through the open door the car outside glittered with a jewel-like splendor and the red rays of the setting sun made sparkling pinpoints of flame dance along its hood. He was entranced.

He heard his grandfather come down the stairs. The old man saw the cause of the boy's rapt attention, said: "A pretty machine, Johnny. A mighty pretty machine."

"It . . . it's beautiful," said Johnny, and felt that even that was a pitifully inadequate description.

The old man bent over, whispered: "The tourist paid right handsome for room and breakfast. I'll sneak down to Hoskins' store and fetch some bacon."

Meat was such a rarity in the household that Johnny gulped. "But Grandpa," he protested, "Hoskins' is a mile down the road."

"Maw always served bacon and eggs and home fried potatoes," said the old man stubbornly. "And I reckon I'm old enough to be out after dark."

He chuckled at that, and color burned excitedly on his leathery cheeks. The boy understood. To his grandfather, the arrival of the tourist was the Lord's answer to all their troubles and the future was rich with the promise of tourists galore.

Johnny followed his grandfather out on the porch, his mouth watering at the prospect of crisply fried bacon for breakfast. The old man stepped off the porch and struck off down the lane whistling cheerily.

The moon had lifted above the horizon and a silvery radiance flooded the countryside. Johnny stepped off the porch and silently circled the convertible. It was even more magnificent at close range. Mysterious dials arrayed the dashboard and the leather upholstery was a handsome shade of green.

A wicked temptation made the boy shiver. For a full minute he stood there tussling with his conscience. The deed, if discovered, would move his grandfather to bitter wrath. Abruptly temptation overwhelmed him.

He reached out and seized a door handle. Scarcely breathing, he twisted it, inched the door open. He moved his bad leg with care and slipped into the seat. The leather was cool and pliant. He sat there imagining that his grandfather was behind the wheel and they were speeding down a broad highway.

Finally he turned around and looked at the lower, narrower rear seat. He was mystified as to how one got there, passengers obviously not being expected to climb over the side of the car. It was a troublesome problem and he got out of the car to think it over.

It suddenly dawned on him that the back of the front seat was hinged. He experimented. The back of the front seat tilted forward as he had surmised. But only half of it. He marveled at the mechanical wizardry which enabled passengers to get in back while the driver remained behind the wheel.

He climbed in back and again carefully left the door ajar. The tilted seat back fell forward of its own accord, startled him. He settled critically and decided that the front seat was nicer.

A sudden and unexpected noise seemed to reach out and grab him by the throat. Footsteps! Footsteps pounded down the stairs inside the house. Johnny sat there powerless to move or think.

There was a moment of silence. Then the tourist's hushed, urgent voice came from the gloom of the hall.

"Hey!" he called. "Hey, boy! Hey, old man!"

Johnny faced the house. A shadowy figure appeared on the porch. It was grim and specterlike in the pale moonlight. The boy went flabby with fear. His brain spun giddily and he slipped from the seat to collapse limply on the narrow floor. Cinders crunched beside the car.

Johnny cowered with fear when a dark object arced above his head and bounced twice on the rear seat before coming to rest. The suitcase! The car trembled as the man slipped behind the wheel. The door on the driver's side slammed closed. The starter whirled, then the motor caught and purred throatily.

The car shot backward, stopped. The driver cursed softly as he reached across the car and slammed the right door closed. The convertible went on back, turned, then shot forward with gathering speed. Soon the blur of varicolored lights flashed down into the car and the boy knew they had passed the neon signs of the village. Johnny felt sort of sick at his stomach. He'd never been beyond the village before.

A RIGHT turn brought them out on the main highway and the hum of speeding tires filled the air. Johnny experienced a horrible, lonely feeling of solitude, as if he were alone in the universe and a cold wind blew about him. He began to cry; softly, hopelessly.

The car slowed, veered right, and tires crunched on loose gravel. A sharp left turn and the starry sky was blotted out as the car jerked to a stop. Johnny blinked the tears from his eyes.



A bright ceiling light flashed on directly above his head. He saw that they were inside a garage. A door opened on squeaky hinges.

"Turn that damn light off!" snapped the driver savagely.

The light winked off. A woman's voice was tense with expectation. "Got it?" she asked. "Did you get it?"

The man chuckled in triumph, said: "You bet. Right under the floor where I left it."

Johnny felt the man get out. A door at the rear of the car rolled closed and the blackness deepened.

"Turn on the light!" the man ordered.

The light came on.

The man said: "So you were afraid to go with me."

"Don't be a fool!" snapped the woman. "No lady would go into a crummy joint like that with the village two miles away."

Johnny tried to push himself through the floorboards as the man's hand reached above him with open fingers ready to grab the suitcase. Abruptly the arm froze in midair, then vanished.

"Okay, kid," said the man. "Get up!"

Johnny had never heard a voice so chilled with threat. He sat up shivering. Instantly fingers closed on the collar of his jacket and he was dragged over the side of the car and hurled backward into the wall of the garage in one smooth display of brute strength.

Johnny's head banged the wall and there was a brief stab of brightness at the base of his skull. He was dimly aware of being dragged up two short steps into a lighted room. The man hurled him to the floor.

"Who is it?" asked the woman in concern.

"The Yeager brat. Sit up, kid!"

Dazed and giddy, the boy managed to sit up with his bad leg thrust straight out in front of him. He was facing the door to the garage. From the corner of his eye he saw two windows and a door that probably overlooked the court of the tourist camp. The door to his left either led to a closet or the bathroom.

"Where's the . . ." the woman began.

"In the suitcase. And I get it."

The man went out into the garage and the woman moved over beside the door frame. She wore red canvas slippers, a blue slack suit, and her hair was brassy yellow. Her blue eyes were dark with worry, her mouth strained.

"What were you doing hiding in the car, kid?" she asked.

Johnny gulped twice, spoke in a shrill voice: "Please, ma'am, I didn't mean harm. I just wanted to sit in the car. I was never in a car before."

The woman's shrug was meaningless. The man came back in carrying the suitcase which he placed on the bench to the vanity. The

woman lit a cigarette. Her hands shook so badly she had difficulty in making the flame meet the cigarette end.

"Better take a look out the window," suggested the blonde in a voice crackling with nervousness.

The man spun around and his eyes narrowed with suspicion.

"What's wrong? Why are you so pale?"

"Nerves," she said. "Play it safe. Take a look out the window."

The man gave her a long stare, said: "You look."

"Oh, hell!" she said. "I may as well tell you. There's a guy in a cabin across the way on the make for me."

The man relaxed and his lips lifted in a brief grin.

"Okay, baby, okay."

He turned his back on them and went to the window. The curtain was drawn level with the sill. Instead of raising it, he pulled the edge of the curtain away from the window frame about halfway up and peeked out with one eye.

The woman fascinated Johnny. She stepped back against the wall and pressed the palms of her hands against it. The blood receded from her face and the paint on her cheeks stood out nakedly. Her feverish eyes flashed to the bathroom door.

Johnny twisted his head that way.

A man stood there. He wore a blue suit and a snap brimmed hat and a hand towel was wrapped around the lower half of his face. The bluish revolver held level in his right hand was hip high and had a pipelike extension on the end of it. The revolver lifted shoulder high.

"I don't see anybody," said the man at the window peevishly. "Which cabin is it?"

The pipelike extension on the revolver spat a short tongue of flame followed by a billow of blue smoke. The man's wrist twisted up as a muffled cough echoed from wall to wall. There was a dismal, heavy thud by the window. The blue smoke spanned out and stung Johnny's nostrils.

**T**HE boy jerked his head around. The man was on the floor beneath the window curled up like a sleeping dog. There was a dismal finality about his inertness. The back of his coat was wet.

The man with the revolver spoke with a curiously flat voice.

"Don't open your yap, kid," he warned.

Johnny couldn't have made a sound if he'd wanted to. He glanced at the blonde. She was still pressed against the wall. She let the cigarette drop from her mouth and stepped on it. Then she lifted both hands and rifled her open fingers through her bright hair.



"Why the towel?" she asked, her voice more assured.

"The kid," said that flat monotone.

The blonde took a deep breath. Suddenly words spilled from her lips in a torrent.

"The kid. Sure, sure, the kid. Well, this is it. Here we come Havana. Here we come Rio. It's caviar and champagne from here on in. We're in the bucks at last."

The man's voice was sharp. "Shut up!"

"Okay, okay. I'll shut up."

The eyes above the towel turned toward the figure curled beneath the window.

"The guy busted rocks twelve years to come out and get knocked off," said the killer.

"So what?" asked the blonde with a sneer.

"It makes a guy think. Yea, it sure makes a guy think."

"I didn't love him," said the blonde anxiously. "It's you I love."

"He thought you loved him. Maybe I just think it too."

"What do you mean?" asked the blonde, her voice shrill.

"With you along I'd feel like I had a rope around my neck all the time. That's how I'd feel, baby," said the man softly.

Johnny was hypnotized. The blonde ran the tip of her tongue around her red mouth and spread her lips in a stiff smile. She squared her shoulders and tugged down the bottom of her blouse as she cocked her head and looked at the man with roughish eyes. The attempt at seductiveness was grotesque. She was rigid with terror.

"I love you," she said. "That's why I did it."

The man snorted in disgust. "The dough don't count, huh?"

The blonde hastened to drop the subject, said: "Look at the fun we can have together."

"Your share'd buy plenty of cuties."

"No!" Her shocked voice was scarcely a whisper. Little beads of sweat formed a moustache on her upper lip and her blue eyes glazed with horror.

The man's flat voice was suddenly edged with alarm. "Hey!" he cried. "Lookit the window!"

Frightened by this new danger, the woman and the boy turned their heads that way. Nothing had changed. Then came that muffled cough. The boy refaced the woman just as she pitched forward. Her face struck the floor with a gritty crunch and yellow hair exploded around her head.

"Dames are poison, kid," said the killer in his colorless voice.

Johnny sat trying to choke down the lump that welled in his throat. The killer's beady eyes regarded the boy thoughtfully and the muzzle of the revolver described little arcs of indecision.

That was when the knock sounded at the door!

The revolver whipped that way. The killer stiffened and seemed to grow taller. The knock was repeated. The man relaxed and his shoulders hunched a trifle.

"One yap and you're a dead duck!" he whispered.

Johnny nodded. It was no idle threat.

The killer reached a decision. He rammed the revolver into his coat pocket and strode to the door. The boy's eyes followed him. The man faced the door and untied the towel. His left hand held the towel to his face as he unlocked the door with his free hand.

He opened the door about two feet. The view of the person outside was restricted to the front corner of the cabin opposite the garage wall. There was no evidence of crime in that part of the room.

The killer said: "I was shaving. What's on your mind, chum?"

A deep bass voice boomed: "I'm with the tent show down the road, friend. You've time to make the evening show and tickets are only a dollar apiece."

"A cozy idea," agreed the killer. "I'll take me friends. Gimme five tickets!"

He paid for the tickets and locked the door. Keeping his back toward Johnny, the killer retied the towel around his face. Then he walked to the center of the room. The only evidence of unruffled composure was a slight tremor to his hands.

The man took out the revolver and regarded it thoughtfully.

"You get a break," he said, half angrily. "You never seen my face. I ought to rub you out too. But chillin' a local kid who's a cripple would make the cops hot. Cops don't worry too much about the killer of a couple of chiselers."

The man's eyes glowed briefly, as if he were ashamed of his apology for not committing another murder.

The killer went over and opened the bathroom door invitingly.

"I'll lock you in the can, see?"

Johnny nodded. He had witnessed two murders with a trancelike numbness. It was fantastic, unreal, and he was certain that the two corpses would soon jump smilingly to their feet and he'd awake in the softness of his feather bed to find it a hideous nightmare.

**I** SAID get in the can!"

"Yes, sir," Johnny replied. "Only I'm a cripple and can't stand up without help."

"Crawl, kid, crawl!"

Johnny gulped. The bathroom was about seven feet away. He spun on his buttocks until his back was toward the open door. Then, using stiffened arms and his good right leg,

*(Continued on page 95)*



# ODDITIES IN CRIME

by LEE and JAKOBSSON



← One hundred and two burglaries in a single year was the record of England's phantom Gardenia Girl—who robbed only bachelors and invariably left behind her a scrupulously dusted and cleaned apartment, impregnated with a delicate scent of gardenias. To the toiling police of Manchester, she was raising a stink—but they finally arrested mousy little middle-aged Edith Annie Riley, who years ago had been jilted at the altar by a gent who absconded with her savings.

The gardenia scent had been a present from him!

If you are thinking of spending the rest of your life trying to get something for nothing, consider the case of Edward Keller of Philadelphia—one of the champ hard-luck criminals of all time. Ed murdered his business partner for profit, back in 1914—and went to the extent of pawing his victim's watch. But the act tripped him up, got him sent to jail for 10-12 years. Out again, Ed tried various enterprises unsuccessfully. Old and experienced in the ways of the erring, he finally got a job as a night watchman at a bank, made his first big haul—\$20,000—and vanished to parts unknown.

He'd gotten clean away. Nobody knew even where to look for him. Then a Philly cabbie decided to see why his fare was so quiet—and found Edward Keller in the back seat of his hack, his ancient claw-like hands buried in greenbacks in an open suitcase. Eddie was staring at his final wealth glassily—dead of heart failure.



← When his brother, Harry Hoffee, died, Emmett Hoffee inherited his dog, a mongrel named Sailor. Six years went by and Sailor had grown old, when Emmett decided to take him for a last sentimental pilgrimage to Harry's old farm near Fairfield, Illinois. Something on his mind, Sailor began to dig.

He dug up a mason jar containing a letter from the dead man's widow to her lover—outlining plans for Harry's murder! Harry Hoffee's widow, remarried, confessed—got ninety years at the women's reformatory at Dwight.

In Milan, Italy, a just married bridegroom complained to the police that there was a roof leak over the bed in his honeymoon suite which the hotel management was unable to cope with. Cops broke into the room upstairs, found a disgruntled suitor standing over a tiny hole in the floor—with a pitcher of water in his hand!

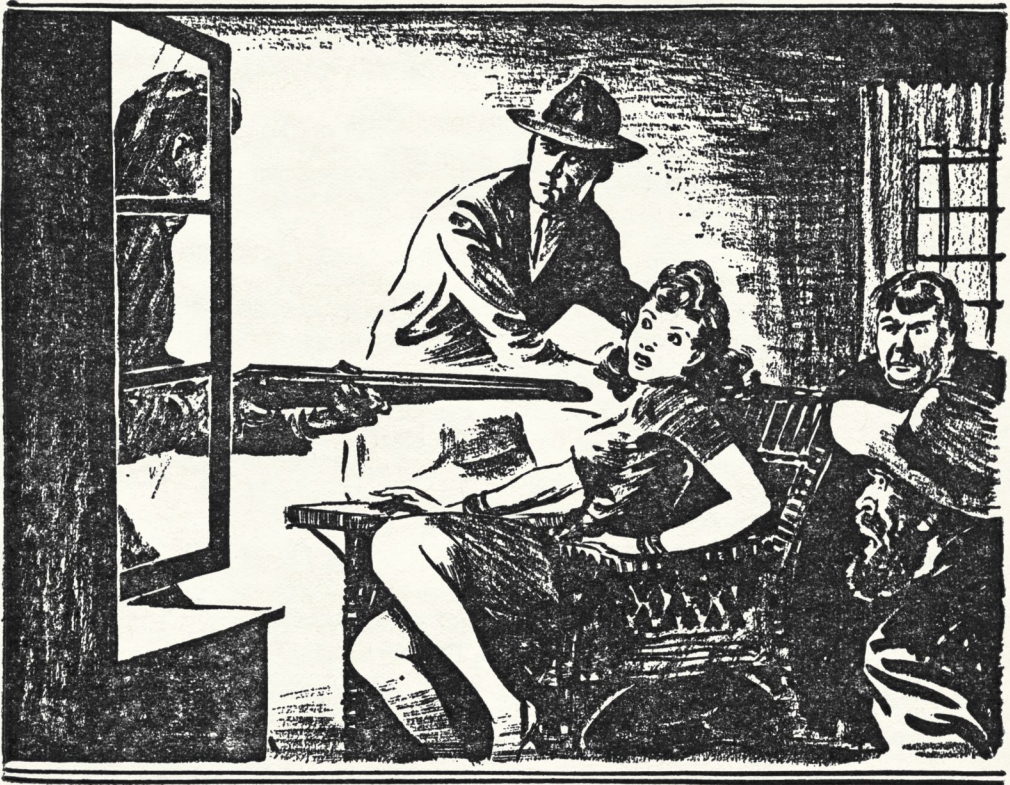
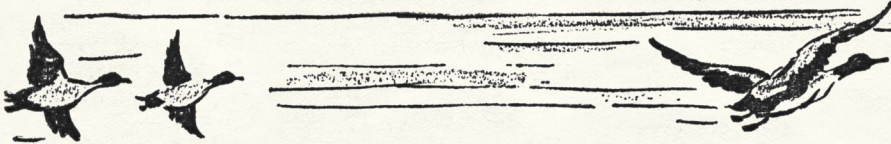




By HENRY NORTON



# Diana and the Monkeyfist



His hand had gone darting into the gun case  
and the muzzle of the duck gun was up and  
loaded.

## CHAPTER ONE

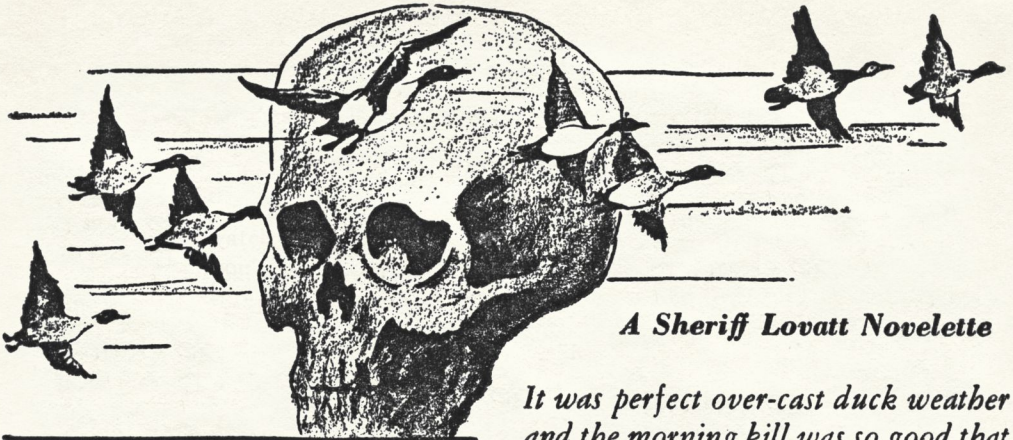
### Private Club

**E**VER go duck hunting?" Clete asked.  
Sheriff Lovatt grunted negation.  
"Never shot anything smaller'n a hu-  
man," he said.

Clete Parker said, "These people we're  
headed for are nutty on the subject of hunt-  
ing. The four guys own this lodge, and it's  
really fixed up to hunt ducks."

Lovatt conned the little car around a jounc-  
ing corner in the road. They were leveling off  
now for the slow descent down to Freck Lake.  
Trees on either side of them had shaded down





## A Sheriff Lovatt Novelette

*It was perfect over-cast duck weather and the morning kill was so good that one guy stopped potting mallards and added a man-sized bird to his bag. Then he reset his decoys and called in Sheriff Lovatt to take a real sportsman's shot at—murder on the wing!*



from fir and cedar and hemlock to the ever-present growth of alder and willow that grew in profusion along the low level waterways of the county.

Lovatt said, "People that shoot ducks to eat, I can figure. People that shoots ducks just to be shootin' something don't make very much sense."

"Oh, it ain't so bad," Clete said.

Lovatt kept his eyes on the devious road ahead, but his mind was filled with the picture

of his deputy. Clete Parker was a black-haired giant of a man, married before he went away to the wars and now divorced for sufficient reasons. He was missing a left hand, a souvenir of the bloody business at Tarawa, but he asked no favors because of that, and needed none. He had been made deputy to Sheriff Lovatt in one of the few political crises of the county, and had kept the job by being efficient, quiet about his work, and utterly trustworthy, up to now.

But there was no capacity for guile in him, and just now the sheriff was busy with the thought that Clete Parker's elaborate unconcern with the murder at hand might indicate an interest in it not entirely professional.

Casually, Lovatt asked, "How well do you know these people, Clete?"

"Nothing special," the deputy said. "Well enough to drop in for a drink once in a while, but that's just about all."

"I guess everybody knew 'em that well."

"Guess Luke Barnes's taken his last drink, anyway," Del Moon rumbled from the back seat. "Always felt kinda sorry for the guy, even if he didn't amount to nothing. He just had it too easy, that was his trouble."

"Can't you just imagine the way the newspapers'll handle this?" Clete said. "'Wealthy Lumberman Dies In Hunting Mishap! Luke Barnes, prominent Mill Center figure, accidentally shot at Freck Lake hunting lodge!'"

"Luke wasn't no wealthy lumberman," Sheriff Lovatt pointed out. "He was a drunken bum, and if Charlie Barnes hadn't supported



him he'd of starved, him and his fancy wife both."

"If a guy's got enough to bury himself, the papers always call him wealthy," said Clete. "And after all, Luke owned a third of the Barnes Lumber Company."

"Maybe Charlie got tired of Luke livin' off the profits of the company," Moon suggested. "These hunting accidents ain't hard to arrange."

"That's possible," said Lovatt.

He was not an impressive figure, this man who had been sheriff of Jefferson County for twenty-seven years. He was small, dressed in rumpled gray, with a broad-brimmed hat set squarely on a narrow, contemplative face. His skin, his eyes, even his voice went along with the predominant grayness of his personality. He was as unobtrusive as mist along a gray stone wall; he made as little impression on those he met as was possible with a living person. And that non-impression was a carefully calculated result.

Lovatt had been sheriff of the county—for which Mill Center was the county seat—for so long that most people had forgotten about him. It was not a populous community, and a more obtrusive personality would have been struck by political lightning long ago. Lovatt owed his official longevity to his doing a good job in a quiet way, claiming neither praise nor blame for the job at hand. He knew the law; he knew his own powers; and he cared less for either of them than for a shadowy lady who was with him constantly—the lady known as Justice. If there was another influence in his life, it had never made itself manifest.

To Lovatt, Del Moon's suggestion that Charlie Barnes might have killed his brother did not seem at all unreasonable, since he had encountered worse crimes in his long service. But Clete Parker objected at once.

"It don't look like Charlie'd call us to come out and investigate if he'd had anything to do with the killing," he said. "At least, not till he'd destroyed all possible evidence."

"How do you know he didn't?" Lovatt asked. "He told you it just happened, but that don't necessarily make it so."

"Well, we'll know before long," Clete said. "I can see the roof of the lodge up ahead."

**FRECK LAKE**, at the end where the hunting lodges are located, is nowhere very deep. Down at the other end it deepens to a ledge enclosed area that provides ample boating and swimming facilities for the Country Club. But at the point where they approached now, it is a wide expanse of swampy land, with patches of reed and sedge growing well out toward the center. It is located on one of the great North-to-South flyways for migrating waterfowl, and at certain times in fall the

dull waters are almost obscured by the thousands of mallard and canvasback and teal that pause there on their annual southward trip.

One reason for its popularity with birds is that Freck Lake is not open for public shooting. It is owned, lock, stock and barrel, by a small group of wealthy sportsmen, and is consequently shot over with moderation. There are no more than a half dozen hunting lodges around its borders, and no more than four blinds or hunting stalls for each lodge.

The Barnes place was reached by a wild road through low undergrowth where the swamp level on either side was sometimes only inches below the roadbed. The sheriff's little car pulled up to the elevation where the lodge was built, some two hundred yards from the lake shore. Off around the irregular margin could be seen two more places, but the ones directly across were hidden from view.

Charlie Barnes came out as they drove up. He was a small man, almost completely bald, with the tanned face and squinted eyes of one who has spent much of his life outdoors. He shook hands gravely with Lovatt, Clete Parker, and Del Moon the coroner.

"This is a hell of a thing," he said.

"Yes," said Lovatt. "Where is he?"

"We carried him in to a couch."

"You hadn't ought to moved him."

Charlie Barnes darted a quick inquiring glance at Lovatt. "I thought that only applied in cases where foul play is suspected."

"Which is always," said Lovatt.

The words might have made little sense from any other lips. From Sheriff Lovatt, they were a fair statement of the creed that had made him, in twenty-seven years a chief magistrate of Jefferson County, a scourge to the evil and an annoyance to the self-righteous. For the sheriff believed implicitly that there was no one who could not be tempted into crime, given enough provocation and enough chance of escaping punishment. Working on this assumption of the complete fallibility of mankind, he considered no one innocent until proved innocent, and in his career he had caught a number of most unlikely criminals. Conversely, he had cleared from suspicion a number who might have spent their lives under a cloud had it not been for Lovatt's own free-wheeling, rule of thumb justice.

"Anyway, there he is," Charlie said.

He waved toward the body on a leather couch in the big front room. Lovatt looked at it casually, paying small heed to the dark stain that matted one side of the face. What he saw, principally, was the inert lifelessness of a man with whom he had exchanged greetings not three days ago. What he saw was, in some way, the unspent years of Luke Barnes—the life abruptly terminated by violence or mal-



adventure. And as always, there boiled up within him a deep and bitter resentment.

Lovatt said, "Look him over, Del."

He took Charlie Barnes by the arm and led him out onto the veranda of the lodge. He filled his pipe carefully with strong, bitter tobacco, and held a match to it with slow and loving care. When he had the pipe going to his satisfaction, and his keen gaze had extracted from the man's face all the information it could, he spoke.

"Who all's here?"

Charlie Barnes considered. "Well, there's me," he said, "and there's John Morris and Fendy Jessup. I called Luke's wife, but she ain't got here yet."

"Where's the others—John and Fendy?"

"Down at the lake," said Barnes. "They figured Luke wouldn't take it disrespectful if they went down and tried for a few ducks."

"Don't sound so awful grieved."

Charlie Barnes gave him another of those squinting, questioning glances. "No great reason they should be," he said calmly. "They didn't care overly for him. If he hadn't been my own flesh and blood I wouldn't be very upset."

Lovatt nodded calmly.

"Natural, I s'pose," he said.

"I feel sorry for his wife, Elena," Charlie Barnes said. "He didn't leave her much to go on."

"I feel sorry for Luke," said Lovatt. "Don't make the least difference if he was any account or not, he had a right to livin' out his years. When all's said and done, that's what matters."

"Lots of people die before their time," Barnes said.

Del Moon came out on the porch and stood for a moment looking at them. He was a great, shambling bear of a man whose brusque manners and unfortunate appearance made it difficult, if not actually impossible to earn a living in private medical practice. In spite of that, he was a brilliant surgeon and diagnostician, and he had developed in his years with Lovatt a skill at autopsy that made his findings almost infallible. And because it was Lovatt who had given him the coroner's post, Del Moon was fiercely and unswervingly loyal to the little sheriff.

He said, "I thought this guy was shot!"

"Wasn't he?" asked Lovatt.

"Hell no," said Moon. "He's got a busted skull."

**I** CAN'T remember telling you he was shot, sheriff," said Charlie Barnes. He fell down the steps and cracked his head on the foot scraper there. He'd been drinking all morning, so he probably took a pretty bad tumble. We found him there when we came up for lunch."

"You said he'd been shot," Lovatt said.

"I was pretty excited when I phoned," said Charlie Barnes. "I may have said that by mistake. Seems to me that's what we thought when we first saw him there."

"Let's take a look," said Del Moon.

They went down and looked at the straight metal blade that was affixed to the bottom step for the purpose of scraping mud from the bottom of the hunters' shoes. It had rusted somewhat in the weather, but there was more than rust on the near corner—a new, brownish stain with two or three human hairs dried in it.

"We found him layin' at the foot of the stairs," Charlie explained. "It wasn't hard to figure out what'd happened when we saw the blood on his head and on the foot scraper. He must've pitched right down onto it."

Del Moon shot a worried look at Sheriff Lovatt, opened his mouth to say something, and closed it again. The sheriff's answering glance was admonitory, cautioning the man to silence.

Lovatt said, "Go get the others, Barnes."

"They won't be able to tell you any more'n I have," Barnes said. "We were all together when we came back an' found him."

"I'd like to talk to 'em," Lovatt said. "Sometimes one fellow'll notice something that the others don't. That way we can get a clear idea of what happened."

And when Charlie Barnes had gone beyond earshot down the footpath to the duck blinds, Lovatt swung round to face Del Moon.

"Now let's have it," he said.

"That wound wasn't made by any foot scraper," Del said. "It was a round depression in the skull, like a baseball hit him, or something like that."

"Couldn't've been the corner of a step?"

Moon shook his head. "Couldn't've been anything like that," he said. "It must've been something like a round rock. There was nothing at the scene of death that could've done it."

"Then it's murder, Del."

"I suppose so," said Del Moon.

Some fifteen minutes now, as they waited for Barnes and the others to come up from the duck blinds by the lake. Lovatt sat on the lodge steps, scowling at the wet earth and the wet sky. It was good duck weather. Gray misty clouds moved slowly aloft on the breath of a keen wind from the north. From time to time the muffled thud of shotgun fire drifted up from the table.

Clete Parker came out on the porch and lighted a cigarette, cupping the match flare in his one hand with an easy assurance born of long practice.

"Sure got some beautiful guns in there," he said. "Hand made Sheffield steel, all named



like boats or something. And balance—man, they aim themselves!”

“That’s Charlie’s hobby,” Lovatt said.

He frowned again, and might have been talking to himself. “Seems silly, don’t it, to kill a man with a rock when there’s all those guns around?”

“Maybe the killer didn’t want to make any noise.”

“What would one more gunshot matter in a place like this, when you c’n hear ‘em poppin’ all around you all the time?” the sheriff reasoned. “Nobody’d pay attention to one more shot.”

Clete said thoughtfully. “Maybe whoever did it wasn’t too sure about guns. Maybe he thought he’d do a better job with a rock or a club.”

“That’s liable to be close,” Lovatt said.

Three men came out of the brush by the lake and started up the path toward the lodge. Charlie Barnes was in the lead, followed by John Morris, with the short, round figure of Fendy Jessup trotting along a few paces behind.

“Look the way that Jessup’s carrying his gun,” Clete said. “If he was to stumble he’d shoot Morris in the back, sure as sin.”

Evidently the same idea occurred to Morris at about the same time, for he turned and took the shotgun out of Jessup’s hands, broke it, and made sure it was unloaded. Then he came on behind Barnes.

“That the same trail he went down?” asked Lovatt.

“There’s a separate trail to each of the blinds,” said Clete Parker. “Like the spokes of a wagon wheel, and then there’s another trail that joins them all along the lake, like it’d be the rim of the wheel.”

“C’n you see one blind from another?”

Promptly, Clete said, “Nope.”

“You seem to know all about it.”

The deputy grinned. “We used to hunt ducks here when we were kids,” he explained. “On days when nobody was at the lodge to catch us.”

“You’re a fine specimen to be a deputy!” said Sheriff Lovatt, but his frosty eyes twinkled. “Anyway, you’re poachin’ lets us know that any of the three of ‘em could have come to the lodge, killed Luke, and got back without bein’ seen.”

“Yeah, but which one?”

“We could ask ‘em,” Lovatt said.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Diana Ain’t No Female

ANY such intention, had it been meant seriously, was delayed by the roaring arrival of another car. Just as the hunters came up

to the lodge, a maroon station wagon came jouncing down the road and pulled up in front of the place with a scream of brakes. A tall young woman in slacks jumped out and ran to the steps. She seized Charlie Barnes by both shoulders.

“Where is he?” she demanded. “What happened?”

“Like the message I left for you,” Charlie told her seriously. “He fell, Elena, and hit his head. I don’t expect he ever knew what happened to him.”

She stood a moment without moving, although the knuckles of her hands were white against the man’s tan hunting coat. Her face was drawn, but her eyes were dry.

At last she said, “I’d better see him.”

Clete Parker took one arm and Charlie the other, and she went up the steps between them. At the door of the lodge it was Barnes who relinquished her elbow, and Clete who escorted her in. The sheriff watched in meditative silence, and only when Barnes had rejoined the group at the foot of the steps did he speak.

“Where’d you call her?” he asked.

“Finally left word for her at the Country Club,” Barnes said. “She was out in the boat, so I left the message for her.”

“Before or after you called me?”

“Before,” said Charlie Barnes. “Hell, sheriff, I only called you so’s to make it a matter of record. She’s his wife, isn’t she?”

“Yes,” Lovatt said. “She’s his wife.”

“She don’t act too badly cut up,” Morris said.

“What I was thinking,” said Fendy Jessup.

It would be hard to find two men more different in appearance than Morris and Jessup. Morris was tall, thin, with a dry precision about every move. His eyes were deep set under crazy, beige-colored eyebrows. His mouth was a thin straight line beneath a prominent nose. Few people liked him, although as general manager of the Barnes lumber interests he was something of a power in Mill Center. Sheriff Lovatt did not bother either to like or dislike him, since their ways seldom crossed.

Fendwick Jessup was as round and bumbling and ingratiating as a bull pup. There was even something doglike in his liquid brown eyes and the way his nose twitched responsively to the movement of his wide mouth. He was wealthy, young and unmarried, Mill Center’s closest candidate for playboy. Yet his words were sometimes most unplayful and cruel, and the more shocking since they fell from those soft, fawning lips.

He went on now, His wife should be relieved not to be tied down to that drunken bum the rest of her life. I for one say good riddance.”

Charlie Barnes turned and for an instant stood still, staring at Jessup. Then with the utmost composure, he walked the few steps



between them, drew back his fist, and smashed the younger man in the mouth.

"You didn't have the guts to talk like that when Luke was alive," he rasped. "Now you'll have the decency to keep your mouth shut when he's dead!"

Fendy's face got red. He put the back of his hand to his mouth like a punished child, but his eyes were venomous and deadly. A little trickle of scarlet escaped from the corner of his bruised mouth and ran down to his chin.

"You'll pay for that," he breathed.

"Nuts to paying for it, and nuts to you," Barnes said. "I've been wanting to do that ever since you ruined Diana, and for two cents I'd do it again."

Fendy took a step backward.

"That's enough," said Sheriff Lovatt crisply.

"He won't get away with it," Fendy Jessup said. His courage seemed to return a little with the knowledge that the sheriff was going to allow no more roughness. "I'll get even with him."

"You better all of you save your strength," said Sheriff Lovatt. "What you've got ahead of you ain't gonna be easy. Luke Barnes was murdered."

He watched their stricken faces.

"You must be mistaken," Charlie Barnes said. "It was an accident, sheriff. He'd been drinking, and he just fell and struck his head."

Morris said, "It's my opinion all law officers try to make their cases as spectacular as possible."

"It'll be spectacular, all right," said Lovatt.

Behind him the calm voice of the widow, Elena Barnes, said, "Just what do you mean, he was murdered, Sheriff Lovatt? Murdered by whom?"

Lovatt turned and eyed her coldly. His eyes took in every detail of slacks and blouse, a costume that displayed her loose, handsomely curved body to perfection.

"Person or persons unknown is the way they say it," he told her. "That's all I can tell you now. But the one who did it will hang, ma'am—depend on it."

**H**E WENT into the lodge. Del Moon was bent over the corpse, but he looked up as Lovatt entered. He might have been studying an anatomy chart for all the emotion he showed at his work. He was exploring the wound with a handful of small instruments.

"Looks like somebody slugged him with a round rock," he said. "There's no trace of the weapon in the wound, but the way the skull's caved in it must've been quite a wallop. No question about it being the cause of death either, although the killer bumped the scalp down on the foot scraper so's to leave blood and hair on it."

"Probably a man?" Lovatt asked.

Moon squinted shrewdly. "So you didn't thank the wife was very grief-stricken either," he said. "Well, I won't rule her out completely till we find what hit him. Just a rock, held in the hand, I doubt if she could've done it. But put the same rock on a handle of some kind, and she could."

"None of them seemed to love Luke Barnes overly," the sheriff said. "But there's some margin between not likin' a man, and wantin' to kill him."

"Not with a good enough chance," Del said.

The sheriff nodded approval of that, and rubbed his pipe bowl against the side of his nose, polishing the dark grain with the oil of his skin. He held the briar up and admired its satiny sheen.

Then he said, "Charlie called Luke's wife before he called our office. She was just fifteen minutes away, at the Country Club. Still we beat her here by a half hour. What was she doin' all that time?"

"Ought to be able to check that," Moon said.

"Del, said Lovatt suddenly, "did it seem to you Clete was pretty well acquainted with this Elena Barnes? When he came in here with her a few minutes ago?"

Uncomfortably, Moon said, "You c'n ask him."

"I don't need to, now," said Lovatt.

"Now gol dang it, Del Moon snarled, "don't you go jumping to conclusions! I just meant it was none of my business, and there's no reason for him to lie—"

"Take it easy," Lovatt said. "It don't mean I suspect Clete of anything. She's a pretty woman, an' if he wants to make a pass at her it's all right with me."

"I didn't say he did," Moon protested.

"You didn't say he didn't," said the sheriff.

"But that don't mean he'd had anything to do with her," said the coroner. "Just because he holds her pretty tight when she's viewing the remains, don't mean he helped her kill the guy!"

"I know what it means and what it don't mean!" the sheriff said testily. "Now there's something else. Who is Diana?"

"Diana?"

"Charlie Barnes said he'd been wantin' to hit that Fendy Jessup ever since Fendy ruined Diana. I thought it might be some relative or other."

Del Moon's heavy face showed suddenly dawning comprehension. He threw back his head and bellowed with laughter. The sheriff waited patiently until the big man's mirth had spent itself.

"First time I ever heard you get caught off second base, sheriff," Moon wheezed. Diana ain't no female that was ruined by Jessup. It's a gun!"



"A gun named Diana?"

Moon stood up, leaving two of his probes sticking from the wound like two thin and incongruous horns on the dead man's head. He crossed the room to a huge gun case with a glass door, swung it open and pointed.

"Look at 'em," he said. "British made fowling pieces—not a one of 'em that didn't cost fifteen hundred dollars, and some a lot more. Look at the silver work on those stocks!"

They were beautiful guns, marvels of the gunmaking art, with their graceful barrels of Sheffield steel, with hand-carved stocks, and a balance so delicate and fine that when Sheriff Lovatt lifted one of them from the rack it seemed almost to snuggle itself up to his shoulder in firing position.

"Well!" said Lovatt. "That dang thing points itself like it was equipped with radar!"

"Only way a man c'n miss with one of 'em is to force it off line," Moon said. "Look at this one, with the crooked stock. It's been made for a lefthanded man that aims with his right eye!"

Lovatt was inspecting the silver name plate on the stock of the gun he held. "This one's Synara," he said. "Now, ain't that a hell of a name to give to a lethal weapon?"

"Here's Diana," said Moon.

He handed out another of the magnificent guns, but this one had a blackened muzzle and streaks of discoloration halfway up the barrel. Lovatt looked at the stained metal and shook his head.

"Sure looks beat up," he said. He tapped the barrel with a coin and grimaced at the dullness of the answering sound. "Temper's all out of the steel."

**L**OOKS like it'd been used to shoot off Roman candles," said Del Moon. "If Jessup did this, I don't think I'd blame Charlie for slugging him."

Lovatt looked at the coroner, his eyes suddenly sharp with thought. He was remembering two things—the guess Clete had made about the killer being unused to guns, and Fendy Jessup's outspoken hatred for Luke Barnes. Add them up and they made less than a case, but they made a healthy basis for suspicion.

Motive—that was the sticking point in all of it! Any of them could have killed Luke Barnes. This was not a case where there was any trouble about the method. Any of the men could have come up to the lodge, found the man there, killed him and returned to his blind undetected. Or for that matter Elena could have driven her boat up to within walking distance of the lodge, come cross country to the kill, and returned. That would explain her slowness in getting back to receive Charlie's message.

Let the killer catch himself, Lovatt was thinking. Keep them all here, miffing around, and somewhere truth will slip into speech and things will fall in place. Murder doesn't like to stay hid. A careless word or gesture, that was all it took. And what better time than now, with the blood still fresh—with emotions rubbed raw?

Letting these thoughts run through his head, not putting them into conscious words but merely savoring the reasoning of them, Lovatt rounded up the ones who still waited outside, brought them into the big front room of the hunting lodge. Even with all of them present—Charlie Barnes, John Morris, Fendy Jessup, Clete Parker, Elena Barnes, Del Moon and the sheriff—the room would have seemed but sparsely occupied had it not been for the still, blanket-covered figure of Luke Barnes on the couch. It was his presence, the presence of death that filled the room with an ominous and pressing fullness.

"There'll have to be a few questions," Lovatt told them. "As you know now, this was murder. That wound was never made by a foot scraper."

"I don't see how you can be so positive about that," John Morris said. "Wouldn't a glancing blow on the side of the scraper look different from one right on the edge of the blade?"

"Don't try to tell me my business," rumbled Del Moon. "The man was struck with something hard and round and smaller than a baseball, and it cracked his skull like an egg."

"Do you have to be brutal?" Charlie snapped.

"You think it wasn't brutal?"

They all looked at Elena in some surprise when she spoke. The cold composure of her voice held nothing of sorrow—it was more a hard determination. She sat up very straight in her chair, like a small girl at a grown-up party, and looked from one to another.

"I don't know which one of you killed him," she went on. "But I know one of you did—you, Charlie, or Fendy or John. You all had motive enough!"

"My God, girl," said Charlie Barnes. "After all, he was my brother!"

"I'm aware of that," she said. "I've watched you and John Morris for a long time now, trying to edge Luke out of the company, refusing him responsibility, doing your best to turn him into a bum!"

"You're crazy!" Morris said.

"Don't try to deny it!" said Elena. "You could keep him from working at the lumber company—that saved paying him a salary! But the stock he inherited was his own, and you had to pay dividends on that. Your only chance was to have him dead, because then



the stock didn't go to me, it reverted to the company. I know all that!"

"I know you're a fool," said Charlie angrily. "Telling a lot of criminal lies like that in the presence of a sheriff!"

She laughed harshly.

"What am I supposed to do, brother dear, keep still and let you get away with it? Let you rob me of my living? And my husband?"

Charlie Barnes laughed back at her, for her addition of her husband to the list of her losses had been late and lame. She whirled on him with fury sparking her eyes.

"All right, so I married him for his money! Can you think of any other reason I'd let myself get mixed up with your family?"

Charlie Barnes said in a level voice, as if the idea was just growing up while he spoke, "You know, Elena, you took a hell of a long time getting that message. It could be your boat was up this way at the time. Or you might have driven over here and killed Luke and been a little late getting back to the Country Club."

"You think I'd kill him, and lose every cent I have to my name?" she demanded. "Play into your hands? You must think I'm crazy!"

"There are other things in the world than money," Charlie said. "Maybe you got sick of your bargain and wanted some other man. Like the handsome deputy here."

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Here's Your Monkeyfist

**S**HE jumped up, her heels making a drum roll on the floor, and laid her hand across Charlie Barnes's cheek in a resounding slap. The man made a half-hearted and ineffectual attempt to strike her in return, and then Clete Parker's big hand was clamped on Charlie's shoulder and he was shaking the man with grim fury.

Sheriff Lovatt's eyes, even when Elena was in the act of slapping her brother-in-law, had never wavered from Clete Parker's face. He saw it go white under the sting of Charlie's words, flush then in sudden dark anger. He saw the compression of lip and jaw muscles that strove for restraint, and when Clete reached out to seize Barnes's shoulder a sort of inner satisfaction came to Lovatt. It was not an act of guilt, he thought. It might be unwise, it might even be illegal, but it was not done in guilt.

Lovatt said mildly, "Cut it out!"

They obeyed him, all of them, instantly. The mere fact that he took such obedience for granted was responsible usually for his getting it. It gave his dry voice a note of quiet command that made it easy for people to obey him, and then forget they had done so.

They faced him and he said, "Now, I'd like to know a little more about that too, ma'am—about why you took so long getting here."

She answered him without heat or resentment.

"It took them a while to get the message to me. I was out in my boat and had trouble getting in. Got twenty feet from the pier and got becalmed behind the bluff, so I couldn't make a landing."

"You could heave a line that far," said Morris.

"Somebody took the monkeyfist from my heaving line," she said composedly. "I had to wait till someone tossed me one from the pier."

Lovatt said, "What's a monkeyfist?"

"It's a lead ball that you reeve onto the end of a light line called a heaving line," she said. "When you want to heave the line to someone at a distance, you toss the monkeyfist, and its weight carries the—"

Harshly, Moon said, "How big a lead ball?"

"Oh, about so," she gestured. "Smaller than a baseball, but heavy enough to—"

She stopped then, realizing that in describing the monkeyfist she had borrowed from Del Moon's own words about the murder weapon.

Lovatt said, "Heavy enough to kill with."

She kept saying, "But I didn't do it! You can check at the Club and see I've been telling the truth. I didn't do it!"

"Checking at the Club won't do any good," John Morris pointed out. "We don't know when he was killed within an hour. You throwing suspicion on the rest of us, and your own hands not so clean!"

"Hey, and what was that crack about me?" asked Fendy Jessup, suddenly coming to life. "What did you mean about me having a reason to kill him. Hell, I won't get any of his money!"

"Not for his money," said Elena. "You've got enough money as it is. You'd kill him because you hated him, because Luke could do all the things you failed at—hunting and sailing and golf and—"

"And marrying you?" Lovatt asked.

She colored, but she met his eyes.

"Yes," she said. "That too."

"Damn' lie!" said Jessup.

"Oh no, it isn't!" Charlie Barnes cut in. "You did your best to marry her, and your best to steal her after she married Luke, and for all I know you're still doing your best!"

"So what?" snarled back Fendy Jessup. "Is that any worse than you and Morris rooking the guy out of his share of the profits with your double-entry bookkeeping system? You've been robbing him blind and everybody in town knew it but him!"

"That's libel," Morris said sternly.



Fendy said, "Then sue me!"

Looking at John Morris's face, Sheriff Lovatt knew that he would never sue. Jessup's words had struck home. Maybe Fendy knew something from his banking connections—maybe he was making a guess. If it was a guess, it was a good one.

But there was no more to be gained from it now. It would only spin out now in angry words and threats that would probably be pushed by hatred past the point where they were believable or useful. Better now, the sheriff thought, to turn these churning currents into a new channel.

He made his voice calm and deliberate and a shade louder than necessary. "I'd like to see one of them monkeyfists," he said. "Del, if you had one, d'you reckon you could tell if it's what did the business?"

"If they're all the same size and shape."

"Most are, for small craft," said Elena.

"Any around the lodge here?" Lovatt asked.

"They're for use on boats," Charlie said.

"Come to think of it!"

Elena was on her feet again, her eyes sharpened by excitement. She turned and pointed an accusing finger at Charlie Barnes.

"That's where the one went off my boat!" she said.

"What are you talking about?"

"Luke borrowed it last week!"

"What are you talking about?"

YOU know," she said. "You were rigging that raft so you could pull it out into the lake and back to shore again without poling. He borrowed the monkeyfist."

"My Lord," said Charlie. "Is that how he did it? I had to go back to town, and when I came out again he had it all rigged!"

"The weight must still be around here," Clete said.

And Lovatt said, "I'd still like to see one."

Charlie Barnes got to his feet with reluctance, and crossed the room to rummage in a big sea chest by the front windows. After a few moments of hauling up handfuls of various gear he shook his head.

"Don't see anything of it."

Clete went over and looked for himself. He too picked at the tangled equipment without success. "Fresh out of monkeyfists," he said finally.

The sheriff spoke mildly.

"I'd still like to see one."

"Damn, the man's persistent," Elena said. "Clete, we could run over to the Club and borrow one and have it back here inside an hour."

"Half an hour," said Jessup.

"Go ahead," said Lovatt.

They went out and got into the station

wagon. The girl slid under the wheel and Clete went round to climb in the other side. The motor roared and they went lurching off up the road. Jessup sighed.

"Don't have much luck on the feminine side, do you, Fendy?" said Sheriff Lovatt. "First Diana, and now this."

"My Lord," said Charlie Barnes disgustingly. "Did he tell you about Diana?"

"No," said Lovatt. "But I saw the remains."

Charlie went over and jerked the ruined gun from the case. He held it out at arm's length and his face was sour and angry.

"Look at that," he said. "Not just a machine to pump lead at ducks, you understand? This is a work of art. It's damn near a living thing—that's why all these guns are christened."

He looked at Jessup and spat toward the fireplace.

"I let that clown take Diana to the blind, and after while I strolled over just to see what he was doing. My Lord, he was building a fire!"

"With the gun?"

"You know how you do—open a shell and pour most of the powder onto dry punky wood, then shoot a piece of powder-rubbed cloth into it. You can start a fire that way without matches if you have to."

"Did he have to?"

"The damn' fool wanted to light a cigar!" roared Charlie Barnes. "And when I got there he was pokin' up his bonfire with the muzzle of the gun!"

"Fendy Jessup started an embarrassed little chuckle that soon died away. Lovatt leaned back in his chair and stared at the ceiling as if he had not even heard the story. Del Moon cleared his throat with a villainous rasping sound.

Lovatt said finally, "S'prised you'd let him hunt with you if he don't know any more about guns'n that, Charlie. Those guns must be expensive."

"They're worth what they cost," Charlie said.

John Morris got up suddenly. "That reminds me," he said. "I've got to clean mine. I stumbled again on that damn trail and shoved the muzzle in the mud."

"If you'd wear bifocals like the doctor told you," said Fendy, "you could see where you're walking."

"They're no good for shooting," John said.

He brought in his firearm from the porch, dismantled it, and cleaned the barrel with scrupulous care. Lovatt watched him through half-closed eyes, dreamily seated in the big leather chair, waiting. Morris, done at last with his cleaning job, reassembled his gun. He loaded it, and placed it back in the gun rack.



"Pretty near time," said Lovatt.

They heard the station wagon then, growling over the slippery approach to the lodge. In a moment Clete and the woman came in and Clete went straight to Sheriff Lovatt.

"Here's your monkeyfist," he said.

Lovatt took it and studied it with mild inattention. It was a solid chunk of lead, molded into the rough shape of a fist, just a little smaller than a baseball. It was eyed on one end, and a small rope ran through the aperture to a length of perhaps fourteen inches. The sheriff held the loose end of the cord and whistled the weight in a circle.

"Nice bludgeon," he said.

Del Moon said, "Lemme see it."

He took the lead weight and tried it in a number of positions on the dead man's skull before he was satisfied. Then he turned, and there was suppressed excitement in his voice.

"This did it," he said.

"Something like it," said Clete. "We swiped that one from the foredeck of the *Annabella*, and the guy that owns that boat couldn't even swing a prayer."

"But it fits," said Moon.

**L**OVATT said, "Well, you might as well all sit down. There's a killer in this room, but he ain't gonna leave it until everybody knows he's guilty."

He got up and ambled across to the gun case, touching one and another of the lovely, gleaming guns. At one time he had two or three of them balanced in his hands. He gave the matter up finally and went back to where the body lay. He picked up the monkeyfist with its short length of rope and swung it gently.

"Well, it was a murder all right," he said. "And a cold, clever one. I might as well tell you folks now. You're gonna find out about it sooner or later. I killed Luke Barnes."

He waited then, until the audible sounds of astonishment had faded and their attention was again focussed on him, sunk deep in his chair.

"Killed Luke Barnes, that is," he said, "by putting myself in the killer's position. It's one of those simple crimes, that often as not go for accidental death. Clete."

He rolled his head to look at his deputy.

"Remember that a good share of the accidental deaths you read about are really murders. They're the unsolved kind, because they're the unsought kind. This one would have been accidental death if we hadn't been here to reconstruct the crime, and figure out how it all happened."

Nobody said anything.

"I said I killed him," Lovatt went on. "I mean I figured out how he was killed, by putting myself in the killer's own shoes. As soon as you saw how it was done, you knew why, and who."

Clete said, "But you said the method—"

"I know," said the sheriff. "But it was the method that caught the killer, try as he would. Remember, we wondered why anybody'd kill a man with a—well, a monkeyfist, when all these guns were handy?"

"Sure," said Clete. "Because the guy wasn't familiar with guns. Because the weight was a cinch!"

"So now let's figure who wouldn't be fond of guns, shall we?" Lovatt asked. "Shall we say that Fendy Jessup wouldn't, and probably Mrs. Luke Barnes wouldn't?"

Tightlipped, Clete said, "That's right."

"But on the other hand," Lovatt said dreamily. "The killer might not have had a gun handy. So he might use something else, where he'd been planning to use a gun all the time."

"The telephone call said the guy'd been shot," Clete said.

"Because he was supposed to be shot," said Lovatt. "A man's mind tricks him sometimes. Like that first man to see the body sayin' 'He's shot,' and the second man remembering it. Like wantin' to shoot a man, and then havin' to grab a monkeyfist to do the job!"

Elena said, But I don't—"

"The murderer fouled his gun comin' up the path," said Lovatt. "He knew these thin steel barrels might blow up if he tried to shoot. So he used the monkeyfist!"

"Fouled his gun?" Charlie said.

"Stumbled," said Lovatt. "Stumbled and filled the barrel with mud. Stumbled because he won't wear bifocals. Didn't you hear him say 'again' a while ago?"

(Continued from page 73)



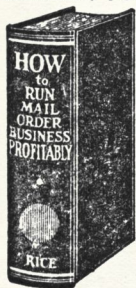
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## DETECTIVE TALES

"Heard him say what?" demanded Clete as he bent forward.

"John Morris was cleaning his gun," Lovatt said. "But it was the second time, as he accidentally let slip. He stumbles on the path and pokes the barrel full of mud. But he's one of the guys who know guns."

Fendy Jessup said violently, "He was always falling on his puss coming up that path!"

Charlie Barnes said, "My Lord, come to think of it, he's the one that yelled Luke was shot!"

"Sure, he did it, and then covered by trying to pretend Luke had been killed by a shot," said Sheriff Lovatt. "If he'd had time enough, he'd of blown the top of the man's head off, so we'd think so too. But he didn't get his gun clean in time."

Elena said tautly. "But why? That stock didn't go back to him! It went back to the company! So why would he gain by it?"

"Fendy's crack about double-entry book-keeping tipped me off on that," said the sheriff. "Morris has been robbin' Luke, yes. But he's also beeing robbin' Charlie, too. He's up to his ears, and Luke must've been about to catch up with him."

John Morris said, "All right!"

His hand had gone darting into the gun case, and the muzzle of the duck gun was up and loaded. He swung it into their faces and said, "Just be quiet now, till I get a start. Elena, I'm taking the station wagon!"

"You burglar!" Charlie said.

"Still think more of money than you do of relatives, hey Charlie?" said John Morris. I'll just take out the phone, so you won't be tempted."

He reached behind him on the desk and yanked the telephone from its connections.

"Give me time," he said, "or I'll wait at a crossing and blow you to pieces," and then, "Sheriff, stop swinging that damn' thing!"

Sheriff Lovatt kept the monkeyfist in an easily rotating circle as he stared at the re-treating man. He said in a suddenly loud voice, "Here it comes, John!"

The heaving lead, released from its violent circle, went spinning out like a rock from a slingshot to strike the man in the face. Morris's shotgun blasted once, and its charge went whistling over Lovatt's shoulder. Then Morris was swarmed under, and Lovatt said to no one in particular:

"I moved his regular gun and put that cross-eyed one in its place. Figured it might give me a minute to bring him down."

Then, "Cleto!" he said. "Take your hands off that woman! How many jams do I have to get you out of in one day?"

**THE END**



## PHOTO FINISH

(Continued from page 39)

canzoric acid test for metals? It's the latest thing in criminology. When a person touches metal such as that iron fire escape he picks up small invisible particles on his hands. A canzoric acid wash shows up those metal particles on the skin. The only thing which can remove them is a crystalline powder known as blue of bromophenol which can be bought at any drugstore. Why don't you take Norbert in and give him the canzoric acid test, Lieutenant. He's your murderer."

The detective's smile was dry and grim. "They always try to pass the buck to some innocent person when they're caught. Let's get going, Miss Matthews." He half turned to Ralph Norbert. "Maybe you'd better be present when we book her, Mr. Norbert. You can drive your own car to headquarters, if you like."

I stood beside the detective in the cold gray room at police headquarters. When Ralph Norbert came in the expression he wore was that of a man almost apologetic at being forced to appear against a woman charged with murder. A bluish stain was on his smooth white hands, and seeing this somehow made my right foot hurt. I bent and removed my slipper. I straightened, still holding the wedge-heeled slipper.

I said, "A man wouldn't try to destroy evidence unless he was guilty, would he, Lieutenant? Remember that I told you how bromophenol would remove particles of metal from the skin? What I neglected to say that when united with normal human perspiration bromophenol will put a bluish stain on the skin." I pointed to Ralph Norbert's hands. "You hadn't noticed that, had you?" I asked him.

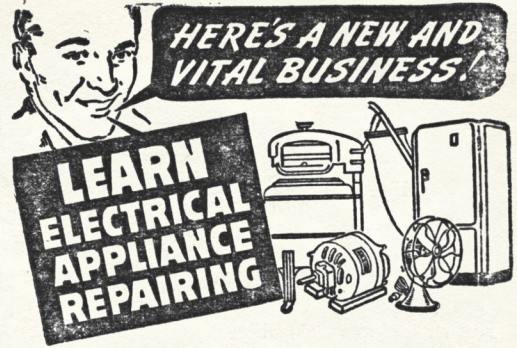
Ralph Norbert didn't reply. He looked at his hands, and he whitened. He looked at the detective, and then fear suddenly broke loose in his eyes. He spun, started to run, and I gave him the heel of my slipper. It was a nice hard heel, harder than the murderer's head. And just to prove I was a lady, I tried to make him comfortable when he fell. But the killer didn't know that.

Before I left, the detective asked, "What did you say that new acid test for metal is, Miss Matthews?"

"Canzoric."

He rubbed his long jaw. "Funny," he murmured. "I keep up on all the latest developments, but I've never heard of canzoric acid before."

"Neither have I," I answered sweetly. "But to a woman with one hip in the electric chair, it sounded like an awful good idea."



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## DETECTIVE TALES

(Continued from page 72)

down, Willie had not removed his coat, nor his tie, nor his shoulder rig, which was as much a part of his ensemble as his undershirt. Only his shoes had come off. He reached beneath his coat and pulled his gun. The five shadows took their first step across the living room. Willie opened his mouth and screamed and began shooting.

The sound of his gun seemed almost to blow the hallway apart. Willie saw one man go down. Carter screamed that it was a frame-up. Willie wasn't sure in the confusion, but he believed that Miles Carter shot Kahn.

Meek and Kemper burst into the hallway behind Willie. The shadows in the living room were shouting curses, shooting blindly, diving behind furniture and against walls. Two slugs caught Willie in the chest. It slammed him against the wall. He felt the hot, salty warmth of blood bubbling in his throat. It turned his belly cold to know his life was pouring out of him.

A little gray shadow, Meek moved up beside him. Meek was calm, but Meek never got to fire a shot. He plunged on his face.

Willie heard Kemper's voice. "Hold them, Willie."

In a huddled crouch, Willie held them. Then he realized he was alone. Kemper had taken Jeannie. Kemper had gone out the back of the house. He would get the car and get away.

Willie wanted to vomit the blood out of his throat. His big, bear-like body was drenched with sweat. He twisted, plunged through the bedroom behind him. He didn't stop. When he hit the window, he took sash, glass and all.

He fell on the wet earth. With his cuts and the bullets in his chest, he looked like a red man. The cold rain cleared his head a little. He pushed to his feet.

Carter's remaining men would burst from the house at any moment. Willie saw Kemper hustling Jeannie in the car. Willie went running down the length of the yard. "Wait for me, boss, wait for me . . ."

He got the rear door of the car open, tumbled in just as Kemper kicked the motor to life. Kemper turned the car in a sickening skid. The night swallowed them. And Willie's own private night swallowed him.

When he came out of it, he was sick. He heaved, sprawled there on the back seat. He heard Jeannie saying, "You've got to get him to a doctor! You said yourself that whatever might be left of Carter's men wouldn't chase us. They've had enough, if any of them are able to chase. They'll lick their wounds. You haven't got them to fear. You've got to get Willie to a doctor!"



## A GIFT FOR JEANNIE

Kemper said nothing. He was hunched over the wheel.

FOR once," Jeannie pleaded, "can't you do something human? Take us to a doctor's address. I know you've got a murder charge hanging over you, but you never need to be seen. I'll get Willie in to the doctor. You can't . . ."

Willie said, "It's all right. No doc. I don't like docs."

"Willie!" Jeannie said. It was a gushing sob.

"Where are we?"

"We're on another highway, Willie," Kemper said. "You been out a good bit."

"Road deserted? Ain't nobody on the road?"

"No," Kemper said. "Why?"

"I want out."

"Willie, you can't," Jeannie moaned.

"Hurry and stop the car, Kemper," Willie begged. "I got to get out."

"But why?" Jeannie pleaded. "Willie, why do you want out?"

"Because I'm dying," Willie wheezed. "I don't want to die here in the car. It's like a tomb. It's cold, and muggy. I want out on the ground to die. Please Kemper."

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Kemper cut the car over to the side of the road. He wrestled with the wheel when the car's wheels sank in the soft shoulder of the road. The car stopped.

"Come around, Kemper," Willie said. "Help me out."

Kemper came around to help Willie out. Kemper opened the rear door of the car. He bent over Willie to grasp his shoulders. Willie shot Kemper twice in the face.

The shots rang out over the countryside. Jeannie screamed. Kemper fell, sliding down, his head and shoulders lying on the floor of the car, the rest of him on the earth. He was like a man kneeling, arms outflung to some strange and terrible god.

"Jeannie," Willie wheezed. "Jeannie, you worked in the club three days before he ever saw you. I saw you when you were hired, Jeannie. I ain't got much sense. All I know to do is what somebody tells me. I got hooked up with Kemper. Maybe if I'd got hooked up with somebody who'd have told me better I'd have done better. I just . . . got no sense. And I'm so ugly even the girl painted on my tie tries to strangle me.

"But I know Kemper, Jeannie. When he was around and you were there I always tried to be around. Like the time he nearly broke your arm. And when I knew, a minute ago, I was dying I couldn't think of but one thing, Jeannie. I was leaving you. I wouldn't be there any more to look after you. I couldn't die and leave you alone with him. No telling what Kemper might do sometime, Jeannie."

Jeannie strangled on her sobs. Willie's breath wheezed out. His eyes grew glassy. Jeannie slipped in the car as Willie sagged over to one side. Jeannie eased the big, ugly bloody head in her lap. Jeannie couldn't talk. She could only cry and caress the lumpy, wrinkled forehead.

"One more thing, Jeannie," Willie whispered. "Go back. You never done anything wrong. No matter what the coppers suspect, they'll have to listen to you. Tell them about Pencick and Shuler, the two yellow rats who snatched you and held you in the rented room all day because Kemper was afraid you'd tell about his hideout. Cops don't overlook any bets. They'll pick up Pencick and Shuler. When they're faced with a snatch charge along with accessory to murder, Pencick and Shuler will crack. They'll talk. They'll clear you.

"I always . . . wanted to give you a gift, Jeannie . . . but I never could think of anything. I'm not much at thinking of things like that. I . . ."

"A gift?" Jeannie sobbed. "Willie, Willie! You've given me everything!"



## JOHNNY'S ON THE SPOT!

(Continued from page 78)

he began to crawl backward with painful slowness. The killer stood holding the door open.

"Get a move on, kid!"

Johnny redoubled his efforts. Then suddenly the bathroom tiles were cold and slippery beneath his bleeding palms. His hands skidded and his progress became snail-like. Finally he was able to double up his good leg and plant his right foot against the door frame. He pushed himself in a foot or more.

He was exhausted. All of him was within the bathroom except his crippled left leg which lay flat across the threshold with the calf even with the door frame. The boy sucked air with a dry sobbing.

Johnny looked up imploringly. There were little dancing pinpoints of black in the wild grayness of the killer's eyes. The boy suddenly knew that the promise of immunity from death had been the decision of the moment.

The man's voice was ominously low. "Hurry up, kid! Want me to slam the door on your bum leg?"

Johnny shivered. Thoughts were black terror. Then came the mad inspiration. In his mind's eye he saw himself and his grandfather crossing the field with the bucket of potatoes between them.

He scarcely recognized the taunting shrillness of his own voice.

"You wouldn't dare!"

The killer cursed. The door was open at right angles to the wall. He jammed the revolver into his pocket and grabbed the knob.

"You asked for it, you crazy brat!"

He gave the knob a vicious yank and let go. The door arced in with gathering speed. The killer leaned forward expectantly.

Johnny tensed. Then the door edge crashed into the steel brace, pinched it against the door frame. The shafts compressed and the metal bit into the boy's numb leg. It didn't hurt at all. The door shuddered from the impact.

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## DETECTIVE TALES

The tightly compressed steel bars sprang apart. The door hurled outward.

It happened with such incredible speed and unexpectedness that the killer was too stunned to move.

The edge of the door caught him on the right temple. It sounded like two blocks of wood slapped together. The snap brimmed hat flew halfway across the room.

The killer's knees collapsed and he fell to the floor. The boy saw that the towel was a smear of red from the blood welling from the man's split scalp.

Johnny began to push his way forward into the room.

There came the crash of breaking glass and a curtain was thrust aside by the muzzle of a rifle. Through the broken pane the boy could see the blue-gray of a state police uniform.

The trooper crawled into the room and unlocked the door. Another policeman entered with a rifle. With him was a fat man with a pointed beard.

"Men don't shave wearing their hat," said the fat man in his booming voice. "And after ten years with a wild west show I sure should know gunpowder when I smell it."

The tightness left Johnny's body and relief flooded him with a warm lassitude. He simply stretched out on the floor and fainted dead away.

The hospital was nice. The bed wasn't as soft as the feather mattress at home, but the sheets were cool and crisp and smelled like a new bar of soap.

Late that night Johnny and the district attorney had a man-to-man talk. The plump, jolly faced official left with Johnny's solemn promise to keep the story a secret until an investigation had been made.

The boy was distressed when the nurse told him that his grandfather had suffered a mild heart attack at Hoskins' store and was recovering right there in the hospital. Assured that a night's rest would restore the old man to rugged health, Johnny meekly downed the funny tasting drink. Sleep came swiftly.

THE district attorney returned at noon the next day. He shoed the nurse out of the room and posted himself at the foot of the bed.

"We had the killer here at the hospital under guard, Johnny. He tried to escape and a trooper shot and killed him. You didn't hear the uproar because you were drugged."

"Gee whiz," was all the boy could say.

The district attorney beamed happily. "Now comes the good news. The suitcase had thirty thousand dollars in it."

Johnny's eyes bugged. It was riches beyond



## JOHNNY'S ON THE SPOT!

his reckoning. "Gosh," he said, "I guess that's more than the squire has."

"Much more, Johnny. And it belongs to you and your grandfather by right of possession over a period of years. The man who hid it at your place is dead and without kin. He was a numbers racketeer. That money was paid to him by thousands of people who gambled and lost."

"Why did the man leave it at the house?"

"He double crossed his gang and they were after him. A few days after he hid the money he was in a gun fight and drew a long sentence for manslaughter. He was just released two days ago. You know the rest."

"Grandpa's sort of funny about money," said Johnny in a troubled voice.

"He has old fashioned ideas," said the district attorney. "But suppose he thought a Yeager hid the money and the tourist found it by accident?"

Before Johnny could reply the door flew open and old man Yeager strode into the room. His head was back and there were stars in his eyes. A new blue suit made him look like a judge.

"We're rich, Johnny boy," he cried. "It must have been Aunt Matilda who hid it. She was a queer one and folks said her husband left her a tidy sum. We'll get a special doctor for your leg. We'll fix the farm up real pretty. Why, we'll even get us a shiny car. What you say to that, son?"

The tragic events of the previous night marched through the boy's brain a chain of minor miracles. His sneaking into the car. Remembering the springiness of the brace at the crucial moment. The tent showman who knew the smell of gunpowder.

"The Lord will provide," he said in a hushed voice. "The Lord will always provide."

The two men beamed down upon him like benevolent angels.

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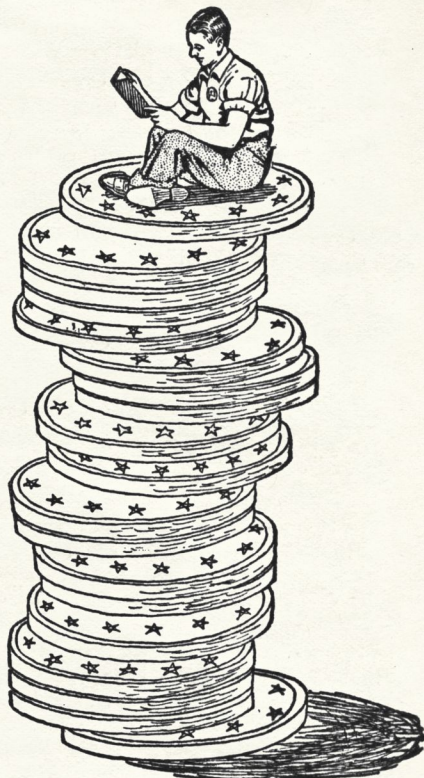
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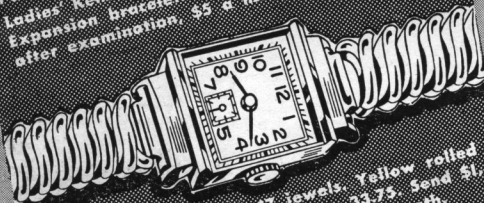




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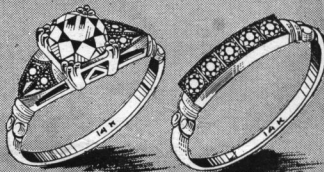
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