

25¢ THE **BIG 15 STORY** MAGAZINE  SEPT.

# DETECTIVE TALES

**15  
STORIES**

**25  
CENTS**

**TOO  
BEAUTIFUL  
TO BURN!**

by

**PETER PAIGE  
KEENE • ALLAN  
MacDONALD**



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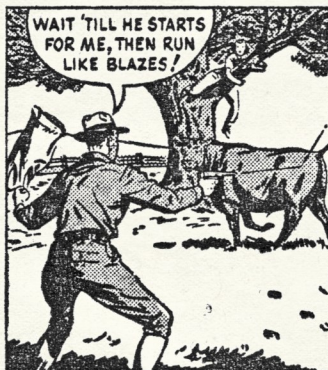
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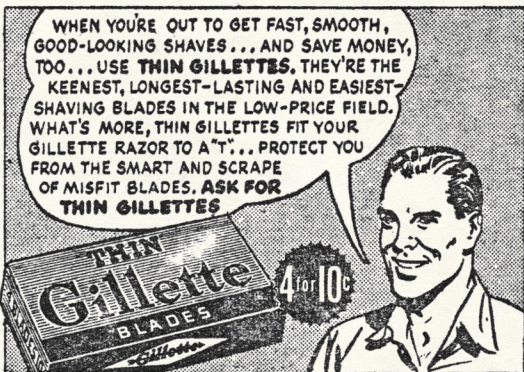
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# DETECTIVE

## TALES

15 STORIES 25 CENTS

VOL. FORTY

SEPTEMBER, 1948

NUMBER TWO

### Two Thrilling Murder Novels

1. **TOO BEAUTIFUL TO BURN!**.....*Peter Paige* 6  
—was movie star Kate Aniz . . . who inspired the torch that turned her into the loveliest grilled corpse ever served up whole to the New York cops!
2. **FEATURED TONIGHT—MURDER!**.....*William R. Cox* 104  
—and starring two corpses, a strip-tease artist and Dumb Dan Trout, the unhappiest private eye ever caught in homicide's spotlight!
3. **RED-HEADED BAIT**.....*John D. MacDonald* 58  
—plus red-handed murder put Detective Cass Gerrit two steps closer to promotion—collected posthumously!

### Nine Suspense-Packed Short Stories

4. **WIN, PLACE—OR DIE!**.....*Day Keene* 33  
—didn't give enough choices to Connors, who lost—every time he won!
  5. **ALL WRAPPED UP!**.....*Philip Weck* 42  
—in one neat bundle were Charlie Carter and murder, with the label on it marked for delivery: *State Executioner!*
  6. **MAYHEM IN THE A.M.**.....*Frank Donovan* 50  
—left plenty of daylight time for Johnny Novak to pull the wool over his wife's eyes.
  7. **HOT PILOT**.....*Nick Spain* 52  
—was ex-war hero Max Stanton . . . who'd look fine wearing his medals on a convict's striped suit. . . .
  8. **EASY KILL**.....*Talmage Powell* 71  
—set Harlow up for the easiest trip ever taken to the gallows!
  9. **THE CORPSE IS FAMILIAR**.....*Bruce Cassiday* 79  
—Al Fast thought—but not when *I* get done with it!
  10. **SCENE OF THE CRIME**.....*Scott O'Hara* 85  
—was visited too infrequently by Harmon Wade to suit the cops!
  11. **TEN PERCENT OF TROUBLE**.....*Dan Gordon* 90  
—gave Herbie Carpis a sweet commission for disposing of a non-existent corpse!
  12. **WHILE THE CAT'S AWAY—**.....*Francis K. Allan* 96  
—Ben Gage did a lot of extra-curricular, extra-homicidal snooping!
- AND—
13. **YOU CAN'T GET AWAY WITH MURDER!**....*Nelson and Geer* 57
  14. **ODDITIES IN CRIME**.....*Mayan and Jakobsson* 89
  15. **GENIUS AT WORK!**.....*Jimmy Nichols* 103

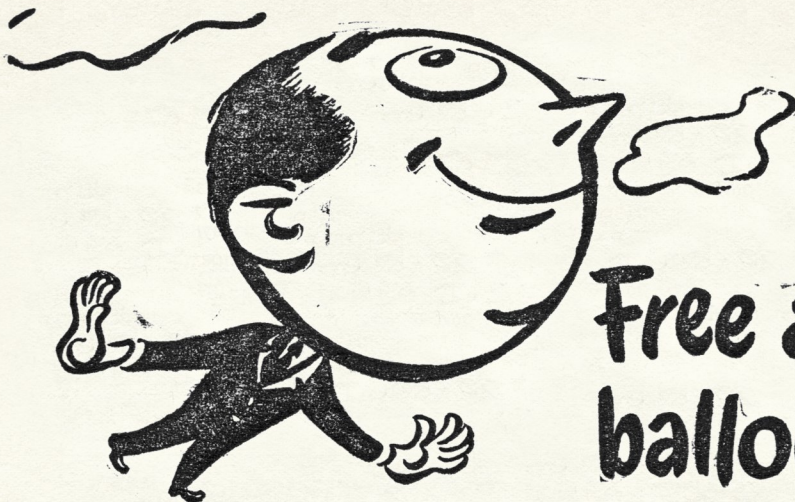
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*"Kidd," Lieutenant Goldstein said, "all I want to know is this: Who, out of the fifty million red-blooded American males who drooled over Kate Aniz nightly at the movies, carried the torch for her to the extent of turning her into one hundred fifteen pounds of broiled hamburger?"*

I slammed his arm aside and started madly toward the figure that stood in the fire-escape window.

**Sensational  
Broadway Murder Novel**

**By  
PETER PAIGE**

**CHAPTER ONE**

**The Picture on the Wall**

THE MAN behind the desk wore silver-rimmed glasses which slightly magnified his blue eyes, giving him an air of childlike innocence the grey at his temples belied. His complexion was ruddy. His voice sounded tired. His name was Sanborn and he was head of the agency's New York office.

"I didn't send for you," he told me. "It



# TOO BEAUTIFUL TO BURN!



was Chicago's idea. I didn't want you."

"I didn't ask to come," I told him.

He said, "While you're in New York you'll take orders from me. Chicago says give you your head, but keep a tight rein on you. That makes as much sense to me as it probably does to you, but since Chicago signs our checks, that's how it has to be. You like girls?"

"How silly can you get?"

"Chicago says you can take them or leave them alone. In this particular headache we've already lost three good men who couldn't leave them alone. I'm not talking for my health, Kidd. Can you control a torch?"

I asked, "What kind of headache is this?"

"We'll get to that. Chicago also says you're about the most irritating man in the entire agency, that you take chances and seem to make it a point to step on toes. On the other hand, Chicago says you're peculiarly—and that's Chicago's word—peculiarly qualified to handle these Californians."

"What Californians?"

"Picture people. Out of Hollywood."

"They're imports. Not Californians."

"Get off my toes, Kidd. I'm giving it to you how it came to me. I told you we dropped three men up to here. Ernie O'Connell had gotten to the point where he was writing poetry. When she returned his letters unopened he spent two hours after one midnight leaning on her doorbell—until the cops dragged him away. Hal Pragotti, who replaced Ernie, took to booze and left his wife. Farley simply resigned last week. She's poison."

"Who?"

"We'll get to her. Then there are the twins. You like kids?"

"I hate kids."

SANBORN closed his eyes and breathed deeply. He opened them and told someone sitting five miles behind my head, "They fly him all the way from Frisco to guard a couple of kids and he hates kids!"

"Guard them from who?"

His eyes returned to my eyes. "Papa."

"Where does this dame come in—this *femme fatale*?"

"That's mama."

"How long does this headache last—

guarding the midgets, I mean? I'm commencing to miss the sunshine and carhops. The buildings here crowd me. The people crowd me. They wear too many pimples. I don't like their smell in the subway. I don't like—"

"You've been in New York City exactly three hours," he cut in. "You've had one ten-minute ride in the subway."

"It took me one sip of castor oil when I was a kid to decide I had no use for the stuff. How long am I expected to nursemaid these midgets?"

"Until a federal court settles the issue. Or until the Anizes settle it between themselves."

"The moon picture Anizes?"

"The crux of the matter is that a California court awarded the kids to him when they separated. She sneaked 'em away and brought them here where a New York court awarded them temporarily to her."

"You talking about Kate and Maynard Aniz? Those Anizes?"

"Aside from making occasional attempts to sneak them back to California, he's having her tailed to get the kind of evidence that would give him a New York divorce and the twins permanently. You'll have to watch out for that, because it's rumored she can't be kept from indulging in the sort of evidence a New York divorce rates."

"And she's footing the bills? Kate Aniz?"

"She has nothing to do with us directly," Sanborn went on patiently. "Midworld Studios is paying us to keep the tangle from making headlines. Midworld, these days, is practically built around Kate and Maynard Aniz, particularly since Congress and the purity leagues pressured so much Midworld talent off the payroll."

"The way things are today, no studio can afford to make a picture that even hints there are such subjects in the world as politics, economics or sex. Which leaves cowboy operas, horror pictures, mysteries and dog pictures, and nobody can direct horror and mystery films faster or cheaper than Maynard Aniz, while Kate Aniz on the screen almost makes sex respectable."

"Which is why Midworld paid the agency enough to have you flown from Frisco so you could have your head while

I hold a tight rein on you. You see?"

I almost felt sorry for Sanborn. He looked on the verge of an ulcer. But then everybody in New York looked on the verge of an ulcer.

"Just give me my head," I told him. "When do I start?"

"Thaw, in Frisco, gave you your head in that blackmail deal and you wound it up by talking a mayor's wife into leading a housewives' riot."

"It came out all right, didn't it?"

Sanborn's eyes glazed behind their glasses.

"Three men were killed, a young girl was driven insane and Thaw suffered a nervous breakdown which I doubt he'll survive. Oh, it came out dandy, Kidd. Dandy!"

I could almost hear his ulcer pop.

"When do I start?" I repeated patiently.

He told me that depended on how long it would take me to reach the address near Washington Square. We batted some more trivia back and forth, about licensing my automatic pistol in New York, about reporting to him, that I should arrange for a twelve hour a night relief man as soon as possible, that I should curb my antipathy for kids, that I should curb even harder my hormones, that I should consider the agency's position at all times and keep myself trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean and reverent.

He finally offered me a limp hand with all the enthusiasm of a wax dummy and I got away from that place.

A STOCKY MAN stood in the foyer of the greystone house off Washington Square that was my destination. He eyed me impersonally. I touched the button over *Aniz* on the button panel. From the screened brass hole—the house telephone—over the panel a voice asked tinnily, "Who is it?"

"Kidd," I said. "Two D's."

A tinny laugh emerged from the opening. "Are you alone, Two D's?"

I said, "There's a man down here. He stands about five-eleven. Weighs about two hundred. He's wearing a blue suit with widely spaced pin stripes. His brown hair is cut and combed in a military brush.

He has small ears. His other features are square. He's wearing horn-rimmed glasses over pale blue eyes and he's carrying a fuzzy-headed doll."

There was silence from the opening while the man and I regarded each other blandly. Then:

"Could you lick him, Two D's?"

The man's mouth widened in a broad smile, revealing teeth that looked too good to be true. He smiled and nodded.

"He's indicating I should tell you I could," I told the opening. "He thinks he's kidding."

The man arched his brows. The tinny voice laughed. "But you're the kiddier, is that it? All right, Two D's. Bring him up."

The door began to tick.

We rode up in a small elevator with a sign in it that said its capacity was five—midgets, it should have added parenthetically. It was a slow ride. The stocky man looked at me. I looked at him. He tilted the fuzzy-headed doll and it said *Maaa-Maaa*. He cleared his throat and said, "You're unnecessary, you know, old man."

"So are neckties," I shrugged.

"She can have Madie and Mark," he said.

I studied the pin stripes over his biceps and wondered if he wore falsies.

"The only reason I got custody of them in L.A. was to try to get her to return to me," he said.

I noticed his fingers around the mama doll and decided his sleeves bulged from muscle instead of padding.

I said, "Listen, Jack—"

"Aniz," he cut in. "Maynard Aniz."

"Okay, Maynard. I'm just—"

"The agency man," he cut in again. "Midworld keeps no secrets from me. You're here to block headlines. There will be no headlines. A man's entitled to see his kids. That's the program."

The elevator came to a halt. The door was flung open from without. A pair of blond midgets threw themselves at Maynard Aniz. He backed them out of the car in an aura of squeals and gurgling *Daddy's* and *Mark, lad's* and *Madie, darlings!*

Beyond the wrestling trio, standing like an icicle in the open doorway of her apart-

ment, stood Kate Aniz, ignoring the domestic bedlam approaching her and smiling past it at me emerging from the car.

Her cool, slim hand pressed mine warmly as the gurglers swept by us into the penthouse apartment.

"Mr. El Greco," she said in a throaty voice she had borrowed from Tallulah Bankhead.

"Kidd," I corrected.

"I mean you could have been painted by El Greco. I always associate people with paintings; it helps keep their identities arranged in my mind. From Mr. Sanborn's description I expected a Pilt-down Man, a sculpture by Epstein. But you're more the El Greco type. Are you offended?"

She wore an aquamarine dress that undulated over her undulations without a wrinkle. Her features were so cleanly chiseled they were almost severe. The aqua chill of her widely spaced eyes had a bright, penetrating quality. Her raven black hair swept up, then down almost to her shoulders in a page-boy bob. She was about thirty, about a hundred fifteen pounds, about five-five, with curves in her slenderness that winked at the beast in you, but with a brittle poise that kept the beast in its place.

It was her mouth that singled her out among the thousands of slender, poised, clean-featured women who model America's fashions and bedeck its stages and screens. Something wistful about the way she held her lips in repose and the way they curled and her cheeks dimpled when she talked dried my throat, made me feel this was a special something no other man in the world but me would notice and appreciate—despite the fact that another part of me was telling this part that the same special something on the silver screen had for years been sending husbands all over the world home to beat their wives.

"I'm not offended. I'd like to see something this El Greco guy painted," I said. "Certainly."

**S**HE CLOSED the door behind me, then floated by me and led me past the family reunion still going on in a divan that flanked the fireplace. An easy chair faced the divan. The ceiling slanted and arched in crazy patterns to conform to the

roof of the house. It gave the apartment a studio effect that a slanted skylight enhanced. There was one other door. It was closed.

She led me to a print on the wall over an open bookcase filled with the bright covers of best sellers. One of those reproductions you can buy for twenty bucks—and throw in another fifty for a good frame. This was the portrait of a seated skinny character in deep reds, purples and blues who looked at me as if I had just spat in his eye and he was considering whether to have me boiled in oil or merely torn to pieces on a rack.

"I'm like him?"

"Something about you," she nodded, cocking her head to eye me as if I hung on a wall inside a frame. "Are you a sadist, Two D's?" She dimpled her cheeks before I could mount a high horse. "Don't be angry with me. We're all vicious to some degree. You happen to look it. But that's not bad," she added hastily. "Women are fatally attracted to the appearance of wickedness. . . ."

"In B pictures," a young voice supplemented.

The midgets had untangled themselves from pop. They stood on either side of him, each latched onto a hand. The girl clutched the fuzzy-headed mama doll. The boy wore a silver star with *Sheriff* on it pinned to his jacket. They both wore buttery blond curls, although the boy's were clipped close. They were both blue eyed, clean featured, slender, about five feet high, about twelve years old. Twins.

Kate Aniz put her fingers on my arm. I felt sparks. "These are my children, Two D's. Madeline and Mark."

Mark, who'd relegated the fascination of evil to B epics, asked, "What do you call yourself—a peep, an eye or a sham-us?"

"Operative," I said.

Madeline said, "You don't look wicked to me, Operative Two D's. Just hungry."

Maynard Aniz said, "Don't let it get you down, old man. I was a Van Gogh man—rugged and simple, with an undercurrent of brutishness, to quote." He turned a toothsome smile on his wife. "Hello, Kate, darling."

Her fingers were still shooting sparks into my arm.

"It's getting stuffy in here, Two D's. Throw him out."

I looked at Maynard Aniz who was grinning his teeth at me almost up to the gums. I looked at Kate Aniz whose eyes were telling me an El Greco man could lick a Van Gogh man any day in the week and a woman with a special sense of appreciation like her would know how to thank me for such a small favor.

I settled myself in the easy chair flanking the fireplace and busied myself with my pipe, pouch and three matches. The third match turned the golden flakes in the bowl to a cherry glow. I tossed the match into the fireplace, wafted a cloud of smoke at the ceiling and told the ceiling, "Anybody tries to snatch the midgets or molest you in such a way as to make headlines, I'll function. For anything else, call a cop."

"There speaks a sensible man!" Maynard Aniz chuckled.

"I think he's scared of you, dad," the he-midget piped.

"Not me!" the she-midget countered, running over to me and settling herself in my lap, doll and all. "I think he's terrific. I think you're terrific, Two D's. Will you marry me when I'm sixteen?"

Kate and Maynard Aniz were staring at each other over Mark's blondness.

"Will you *please* leave my house?" she demanded.

"I'm entitled to reasonable visits," he replied quietly.

"You've had a reasonable visit."

"All right, then, I've had it. Now that we're talking, how about making some sense? Why won't you go to Las Vegas?"

"When I'm ready I'll go. Now will you leave?"

"Can you get any readier? You wouldn't have me back in L.A. You won't let me near you more than five minutes at a time now. You won't take a divorce—or let me get one. Will you tell me what you *do* want?"

"I want you to leave."

"I ask you for sense and you give me Bette Davis dialogue! It can't be a question of money. My attorneys were instructed to meet any of your demands short of pauperizing me. It can't be Madie and Mark—you have them. It can't be your reputation, not how you—"

The glasses almost flew from his face from her palm on his cheek. She looked as if to bend her an inch in any direction would snap her in two.

He deliberately adjusted the glasses back to his eyes. He stared at the wall over the fireplace. He said, "The key to Katherine Aniz is always over the fireplace. For years it was one Van Gogh after another. Then I came home one night and found a Picasso over the mantel and learned I'd become a man without a family."

He was talking to me. I looked over the fireplace at the picture of a dark man whose face was looming sternly out of brown fog.

"It's a Rembrandt these days, old man. When you see an El Greco on that part of the wall you'll know you're in!" His glare stopped another slap halfway to its mark. "Can you give me just one good reason for your attitude?"

"In two words," she said huskily.

"Go ahead!"

"Lani Saxon!"

It was almost as if she had slapped him again.

He recovered slowly. He seemed to grow aware of the midgets again, staring back at him with white faces. He forced a crooked smile to his lips and asked, "You kids think this scene'll be good in my next? With Grable and maybe Dan Dailey?"

"Too shmaltzy," his son said, white-faced.

"Without songs and dances Grable and Dailey wouldn't touch it," his daughter said from my lap, equally white-faced.

"Anyhow, since when do they let you make pics without cowboys or monsters?" his son asked. He asked it as he approached Maynard Aniz with the sheriff badge in his hand. "Could you swap this for a T-man badge, dad? Sheriffs are corny."

Maynard Aniz put the badge carefully in his lapel pocket. "Sure, Mark. Sure thing." His glance slid unhappily away from the boy's face. It rose to the Rembrandt, then dropped to my face. "The thing to remember about a scene like this," he said thickly, "is that it's too shmaltzy."

He strode to the door and slammed his way out.

## CHAPTER TWO

## Food for the Flame

MADeline ANIZ slid off my lap and cried, "I hate Lani Saxon!"

Kate regarded her with troubled eyes. "Madie. Mark. Go down to Uncle Joe's. Mr. Kidd will meet you there and take you out. I want to talk to him now."

Mark was studying her with equally troubled eyes. "Just one question, mother. Do you and pop still love each other?"

Kate Aniz favored me with a strained smile. "That's modern progressive education for you. Last week Madie tried to psychoanalyze me."

"Do you, mother?" Mark urged.

"I think," Kate Aniz told him slowly, "that in our own cockeyed way we will always love each other."

"Then why . . . ?"

"Because mommy won't give in until daddy comes back *crawling*!" Madeline told her brother fiercely.

Mark's eyes shrugged at me helplessly.

I shrugged mine back at him.

"Children . . ." Kate Aniz said.

They left.

I sat very still while Kate Aniz floated around that room. She did nothing so sordid as move her feet to cover ground; it was merely a matter of thought control. She glided. She came to a final halt a few feet from me, staring up at the Rembrandt.

"He's a magician with only one trick in his bag."

"Your husband?"

"Rembrandt."

"How about Van Gogh?"

"Childishly fashioned guts," she smiled down at me. "Do we Anizes confuse you, Two D's?"

"I'm a native Californian," I said.

She nodded as if that explained everything. "Lani Saxon was my understudy, Two D's. Long before I hung a Picasso on the wall she extended that function to my private life. The Picasso—and its successors—have represented nothing more than clean friendships. In these days of Kinsey it's probably shocking to admit that I'm a virtuous woman, but that's the case. Do you believe me, Two D's?"

"I'm paid to believe anything you want to tell me."

"Don't fall in love with me."

"I'm also paid to not fall in love with you."

She laughed. Her laughter turned cartwheels up and down my spine. "We'll get along, Two D's."

"Sure," I croaked from the sudden dryness in my throat. "To get along we have to cooperate. If I'm taking your midgets out, who's standing between you and characters hubby may send around to frame divorce evidence?"

"That's been anticipated," she smiled. She stooped over me and brushed firm, cool lips against my cheek. She drew back and let her smile deepen, making us old, old friends all of a sudden. "Joe Farley has the apartment directly under this," she breathed. "Bring the darlings back by five, Two D's."

"Okay," I breathed back.

JOE FARLEY turned out to be a tall, tanned, dark-headed man with small, restless eyes that explored every crag and cranny in my face as he stood in his doorway.

"Agency man?" he asked.

"Kidd," I said.

He smiled dourly. "You must be the Two D's they're gabbin' about."

"You a maternal or paternal uncle?" I asked politely.

"Fraternal, you might say," he said, keeping his eyes briefly on mine to see how I took this. I took it like a soldier, standing up.

"You gonna send 'em out or do I go in and get them?" I asked.

He called over his shoulder and my charges trooped out. They gave him solemn good-byes and he watched us until the elevator door blotted the view.

"He's a fake," Mark told me.

"Yeah?"

"Doesn't even pack his rod," Madeline told me.

They both eyed me expectantly. I peeled back my lapel and let their eyes shine on the butt of my .38 automatic.

Seven years later the elevator thumped tiredly on the street landing and hands dragged my hands into the afternoon sunshine.

"I wanna go to Bergdoff Goodman's and see dresses," Madeline announced.

"I wanna go to the docks and talk with stevedores," Mark proclaimed.

I asked, "Don't you kids want to ride a merry-go-round—or something?"

They regarded me as if I were a backward moron who had to be taught the fundamentals of life.

"We'll sort of show you around, Two D's," Mark said kindly.

They showed me around.

We looked at dresses in Bergdoff Goodman's. We ate hot dogs in Central Park. We talked to a French stevedore on South Street who said he'd not given the Algerian situation much thought, but now that Mark had wised him up to the implications he'd look into it. We ate some stuff that shall forever be nameless in a dingy Chinatown restaurant that shall be ditto. We looked at women's hats in Sak's Fifth Avenue. We ate hot fudge sundaes in Schrafft's. We spent fifteen minutes breathing the evaporated sweat that passes for air in a professional boxers' gym where a muscled Negro gently told Mark that he didn't—nor did any Negro of his acquaintance—have any deep-rooted yearning to return to ancestral Africa. We ate blintzes in a delicatessen. We somehow got in the stage door of a musical that was showing a matinee, where a well-upholstered, red-headed chorine stopped enroute to her dressing room to tell Madeline she wasn't supporting a starving family, that she'd get compromised gladly for such trivia as a mink coat and a diamond necklace, but that the best offer she'd had to date was from a pimply faced guy with two tickets to her own show, that she'd played sick that night and it was a wonder to her, after seeing it from the balcony, how the show lasted this long. We rode subways, cabs, busses and were turned down by two cops in a prowler car who gave me and my papers a hard time for ten minutes after Mark urged me to *make* them give us a ride at the point of my .38-caliber automatic.

I want to go on record here and state that I'm a tough guy, a rough guy—the kind of guy who broke the bones of my left hand in order to slide that hand out of a cuff, then slammed the dangling cuff into the throat of Major Hatimo, borrowed the pistol from his belt to extinguish Major Hatimo and two nameless

sentries on the way to the edge of the jungle through which I crawled for thirty-seven hours to reach our lines. I was the kind of guy who poured live flames into a cave and later, when I looked at the ten hunks of human meat that resulted, remembered I was hungry. But at four-thirty of that Saturday afternoon I slid into a phone booth, dialed the agency office and told Sanborn:

"Find another boy. I quit!"

"She got to you." He wasn't asking. His tired voice was issuing a flat statement.

"She isn't my type," I lied. "I'm an operative. You want a nursemaid—a nursemaid with a cast-iron stomach and a bicycle. I tell you, Chief, they're driving me nuts!"

"Where are you now?"

"In a cigar store. They're asking the clerk if he doesn't think our civilization is falling to pieces because we spend more money each year for whiskey and tobacco than we do for education."

"What does he say to that?"

"How the blazes do I know what he's saying to that? He's probably promising to swap his tobacco for volumes of philosophy. Will you take me off this kiddie car?"

My ear filled with a goodly chunk of silence followed by a sigh.

"Listen, Kidd. I'll say it again—I didn't ask for you. But now that I'm stuck with you you're stuck with this job—unless you want to risk being blackballed by every agency in the country. If you want any encouragement," he cut in as I started spluttering like a dry fuse, "Midworld's gotten Maynard Aniz to agree to have his California custody of the kids revoked. It should take less than a week for the papers to clear. In the meantime, Midworld warns me that Hollywood characters are unpredictable and until the ink is on the dotted lines we should keep the situation under firm control. Which means you. It'll only be for a few more days, Kidd."

"If I live that long!" I snarled.

AT FIVE O'CLOCK Mark said, "I smell smoke."

"From Two D's pipe, stupid!" Madeline told him.

"My pipe is empty," I said. "It's in my pocket and empty."

"I still smell smoke," Mark insisted.

We were in the tiny elevator and moving up. They looked, so help me, as fresh and neat as when we'd been going down. If I looked how I felt, any decent-hearted citizen would have given me a dime for coffee on sight.

The elevator stopped. We emerged. Mark said, "It's stronger here." Madeline giggled, "Mommy's burning toast!" I brushed between them and keyed open the door and gaped at—*smoke!*

It was floating through that studio room in flat streamers and rising toward the fog that almost completely obscured the upper third of the room. It was surging from a door to my right.

I went through that door low. The theory about smoke is to go in low because it rises and the freshest air circulates on the bottom. I went through that doorway like a beagle, with my nose toward the floor. I passed an open bathroom door. I cut left before an open kitchen door and gaped into a doorway choked by the billowing fog and through which something orange colored flickered.

I dived into the fog. Heat slapped my face and clung to it. Tears stabbed my eyes and blurred still more the smoke-blurred outlines of a bed, of a figure on the bed, of orange flames dancing over the motionless figure on the bed.

It wasn't that much of a blaze, I was thinking, that she didn't have time to feel it and get off the bed. I was thinking also about the seven slugs in the butt of my .38 that might go off if it got any hotter. I was thinking, too, about the kids. I'd have to get them out of here before the roof came down, before they learned why she was so motionless in the fire.

While I was thinking all this I was moving. The thoughts were timeless flashes between the doorway and the bed. By then my jacket was off my back and over my head and slamming down at the dancing orange devils, slamming down and whipping up and slamming down again and again and again—until thick fingers of smoke were thrusting up my nostrils, down my throat, into my eyes.

I don't remember how I reached the window. It must have been like the blind

wriggling of a grub toward light, crossing that smoke-clogged room, forcing open the French windows and diving out head first through them.

I should have dropped five floors through space and landed in an alley on my thick head.

I landed on a terrace on my aching back.

I lay a few inches under the cloud of smoke surging from the open window. I forced myself to my feet and jammed the windows shut and pressed my eyes to the glass and saw nothing but swirling smoke.

I tried my shaky knees around the terrace. Walls loomed on three sides, studded with windows. I brooded about the hundreds of people living behind those windows and speculated how they'd react if they knew Kate Aniz lay motionless in this penthouse bedroom while flames cavorted over the profile that had made so many of them drool.

Then I thought if I could think such thoughts I had recovered enough to go back inside and try some more.

But when I got back into the smoke there didn't seem to be any more flames, just sparks glinting on the bed and on her. I left the window open to release the smoke, then brought a pot of water from the kitchen and emptied it over her. I made a second trip. On my third return from the kitchen I bumped into a short, slim figure that was retching and staggering out of the bedroom.

With my left hand I brought the blond head to my lips.

"Keep your sister out of here!" I whispered hoarsely.

The head nodded.

"If you have to get sick, do it in a hurry in the bathroom, then go make up games with your sister. Say your mom left a cigarette on the bed. Got that?"

The head nodded again.

I started to release him, noticed something and grabbed his arm as he wobbled past.

"What's in your other hand?" I demanded, hauling him back toward me.

He kicked my shin. I spilled the pot of water. I used two hands on him. He kicked my shin several more times. He bit my wrist. He punched my eye. He forgot about being sick. All he wanted

now was to keep me from reaching his left hand.

I reached his left hand and wrested something hard out of it. I sent him sprawling toward the living room while I glanced at my prize.

Then I had him all over me again. I took some more kicks, some more punches, his teeth on the calf of my leg; but I finally had him all bundled in my arms and my lips close to his ear.

"Listen, you little dope!" I hissed at him. "I'm not the cops! I'm on your side! Catch?"

His teary blue eyes clung to my teary brown eyes.

"I dropped it there!" he choked.

"Sure you did. Where?"

"Near the wall. You won't . . .?"

"Who's paying me—the cops? Why should I?"

"Promise?"

"It's a promise. Now, will you go take care of Madeline?"

I released him warily. He plunged into the bathroom. I looked again at the prize I had wrested from him, the one he'd said he'd found near the bedroom wall. It was the sheriff badge I had last seen Maynard Aniz stuff into his lapel pocket!

I STUFFED the badge into my hip pocket and carried the empty pot into the bedroom. The water I had spilled would have been unnecessary. The last sparks had been flooded. The open French windows had sucked out enough smoke to clear the air for at least a foot over where Kate Aniz lay sprawled on her back on the burned bed.

It wasn't pretty. She wasn't pretty. The fire had eaten a lot. The odor in that bedroom was the odor of meat cooking. But the fire hadn't eaten enough to conceal the five gaping holes in her abdomen.

I found my jacket on the floor and carried it back to the living room where Madeline Aniz turned an excited, flushed face toward me from the doorway and squealed, "Isn't this fun, Two D's? Will there be fire engines? Won't mommy be surprised when she comes home?"

"No fire engines," I said. I glanced at Mark whose swollen eyes were flooding his cheeks.

"Smoke's making me cry," he sobbed.

"Sure," I said, patting his back and urging him toward Madeline. "You kids go down to Uncle Joe's and wait for your mom. She won't like to find you up here now."

As soon as the door closed on them I rifled through the phone book on the floor under the phone stand and found no Joseph Farley listed at that address. I dialed information and got the number. I dialed the number and got Farley.

"This is Kidd. The twins there yet?"

"The bell's ringing now."

"Yell for them to wait. Then listen."

I could hear his: "Just a minute!"

Then: "Go ahead, Kidd."

"The point is, give Mark a chance to be alone and get himself under control. And keep Madeline occupied. It may take a little time before Midworld sends someone over to take charge of 'em, but—"

"What the devil are you talking about, Kidd?"

Someone stabbed Kate Aniz five times and set fire to her. I got the fire out. As soon as I hang up I'm calling the cops. Mark knows about it. Madeline doesn't. That's it."

My receiver filled with nothing. I said, "Hey, Farley! You hear me?"

More nothing entered my ear.

I got down to Farley's door in no seconds flat. The twins were standing there. I tried the knob and the door opened.

Nothing was still entering the phone at Farley's end. The receiver hung at the end of its cord a foot over Farley's open mouth. His dark face was coated with wet. He lay on his back with his arms flung wide. I thumbed back an eyelid and stared at the small green marble that was his eye. I let the lid drop back and put my ear to his chest. He was breathing steadily.

I glanced up at the twins in the doorway, gaping down at me—Madeline flushed with excitement, Mark paler than chalk.

"Water," I said.

Madeline left. I loosened Farley's belt and began slapping and massaging his wrists. Madeline returned with a tumbler of water. I poured the water into Farley's face.

His eyes fluttered open. He tried to sit up into my palm shoving his thin chest back down. He croaked, "You said—"

"The twins will stay with you a while," I said loudly and distinctly. "Remember?"

His small eyes fluttered to the twins, back to me. They filled with comprehension. "I must have—"

"Shock," I cut in swiftly. "Faced with the prospect of handling these perpetual quiz kids, you did what any red-blooded man would do: you passed out."

"But she—"

"She's worse than he," I cut in again. "She makes faces at mannequins at fashion shows and braces chorines about their sex lives. He just keeps pushing for the revolution. Think you're up to handling 'em?"

Comprehension was adding to comprehension in his nervous eyes. This time I allowed him to sit up. I helped him to his feet.

"I'll be all right," he murmured.

"Just uncle 'em fraternally until the gyrenes arrive," I told him. I told Madeline, "You better nurse him, honey. He needs a woman's touch." She flew at Farley's arm and guided him to a chair as if this was the chance for which she had been practicing all her life. I glimpsed Mark's back duck into another room.

I returned to the penthouse and dialed the agency. They told me Sanborn had quit for the day. I got his home number and called him there and heard his voice demand wearily, "Now what, Kidd?"

I told him what.

"I'll be damned!" he croaked.

"That's neither here nor there," I told him. "As soon as we're through chatting, I'll call copper. You better get Midworld to arrange something for the kids. And you better think up some fast answers for Maynard Aniz—if we're still hired to block headlines."

I could practically hear the ulcers pop like golf balls into Sanborn's innards.

"What makes you pick on him?" came in strangled tones.

"He left a calling card. Should I sit on it?"

This was my day for silent telephones.

Then, in an even more strangled voice: "Kidd, I didn't hear a thing you said. You understand me? Midworld will probably retain us to watch their interests. You understand that? It is the agency's policy to give every possible assistance to

the police at all times; do you understand what I mean?"

"You mean I should keep a tight rein on it while I give it its head?"

"I mean every word I said," he said in a choked, careful voice, "exactly as I said it."

He broke the connection.

I called the police.

I started back to have a more careful look at Kate Aniz, but my signals reversed and I wound up in the bathroom.

After a while I was back in the living room. I hadn't taken a more careful look at Kate Aniz. Forget what I said about being a tough guy, a rough guy and the rest of it. It was a violet, a petunia, a sick and pale and shaken man who wanted to sit in that living room easy chair and watch the cloud of smoke hover under the ceiling and listen to my arteries harden.

I felt like a drink. I felt I couldn't hold a drink, not old petunia Kidd at this time of my life. Then I happened to glance at the fireplace and decided a drink was in order after all.

The Rembrandt was in the fireplace. Someone had ripped the print from its frame and crumpled it into the fireplace.

My eyes climbed the wall over the fireplace and I decided the last thing in the world I wanted then was a drink. The only thing in the world I wanted was to gape at the wall over the mantel where the Rembrandt had hung.

The El Greco was hanging there now!

I was still gaping at it when the buzzer sounded.

## CHAPTER THREE

### End of the Music

**I**NSPECTOR ANTHONY J. QUINN, Homicide, didn't seem to like me on sight. This was not unusual. Few people like me on sight—or subsequently. But in Quinn's case, he didn't seem to be the sort of man who'd like anybody on sight—or subsequently.

He was a painfully clean-shaven man whose face consisted mostly of jaw. He wore a black suit that looked twenty years old and was creased to knife points. A gold watch chain hung across the lower part of his vest. He was probably in his fifties and probably had an ulcer, or

at least was pretty sure he had an ulcer.

He handed back my credentials after reading the fine print on their faces and backs as if in search for codes.

"What was she afraid of?" he asked me in a gritty voice.

"I was here to keep the kids clear of snatchers, blackmailers, autograph hounds, publicity nuts—the usual assorted pests who make it a point to bother the families of moom pic stars."

He turned an ear full of grey hairs toward me and asked a short, fat, bald man who emerged from the bedroom, "What makes, Doc?"

The doctor shrugged.

"Two of the five stabs went clean through her, Tony. Any one of the five would have killed her instantly. I'll find out which did it in the post mortem.

"How about the time?"

"That'll have to wait for the p.m. also. The fire was no help. If she ate anything within the last few hours and you could tell me what and when, I'll be able to give you the time within minutes."

Quinn scowled at me. I shrugged. "I never saw her eat anything, ever." He shifted the scowl back to the doctor, who was saying:

"One curious item, Tony—they seem like overhand stabs, as if the stabber was on his knees and reached up to do it, or as if she was standing on the bed when it happened, or lying on her back where we found her and he had to reach over to do it." The doctor yelled back into the bedroom, "Let's go!"

Two uniformed men emerged with a canvas-covered litter between them. They followed the doctor out past the uniformed patrolman at the front door.

"Anything in particular?" Quinn asked me.

"Does it have to be?"

"I'm asking you."

"I don't know of anything in particular. A lot of movie people use bodyguards. The added expense drops them another bracket in their income tax."

"Ever see her before?"

"Just on the screen."

"Any special talk about her? I mean in California."

"Everybody talks about everybody in California."

"We're concentrating on Kate Aniz now."

"At different times I've heard she played around, that she never played around, that she left hubby, that he left her, that she was a finger for a con mob before breaking into pics, that she was discovered in a religious pageant in a convent, that she sexed her way to the top, that she's the secret daughter of a newspaper publisher and an opera singer, that she was the highest paid Russian spy in America, that she was sober only before the cameras, that she—" I stopped at the spectacle of Quinn's jaw, which was threatening to leave his face and poke my eye. I shrugged. "You asked me."

The man behind me asked, "Inspector, you want all that in?"

"All of it." Quinn breathed. "Some day I'll want to set it to music."

The man behind me, who wore a uniform, nodded and poised his pencil over his shorthand pad for the next round.

"Go ahead, Kidd," Quinn prompted. "Start with the minute you walked in that door and take it from there—hold it!" He turned to a detective who had emerged from the bedroom. "Anything, Goldstein?"

"A weird wrinkle, Chief." Goldstein, a red-headed, stub-featured, dark-eyed man in a grey suit, nodded. "You wanna look?"

We trooped into the bedroom where the homicide specialists were functioning. A photographer was packing his equipment. Print men were dusting the French windows in search of fingerprints. Lab men had cleared a small table and set up the portable lab with which they were analyzing parts of the charred mattress for bloodstains.

One of these showed Inspector Quinn a long, slender carving knife.

"This did it, Inspector. The prints have been washed off it, but we found blood traces where the hilt goes into the wood and they match. The blade matches the stabs. We found it packed in the kitchen along with a meat fork that has the deceased's prints. The blade made the hole in the wood also, although the fire's been at the wood there and ruined most of the traces. Not the blood, though. We got a specimen from the plaster that

matches hers, there's no doubt about that."

"What hole?" Quinn growled.

"That's what I was telling you about," Goldstein said. He led us to the paneled wall alongside the foot of the bed. A detective who had been working with hammer and chisel to remove that section of the paneling stepped aside to let us look.

**I**T WAS a ragged, cone-shaped hole that had been cut through the wood to the plaster. The wood and plaster were smoke-blackened, except in the deepest part of the hole where glints of whiteness showed where the lab men had found a blood specimen.

"Two of the cuts went all the way through her, Chief," Goldstein suggested.

"And made a hole like that?" Quinn snorted. "Man, that was *whittled*!"

"The stabber could have done that later."

"Why?"

Goldstein shrugged. "A guy who's crazy enough to give it to her five times like that could be crazy enough to taper off whittling a hole."

"You think she might have been standing there with her back to the wall when she got it?" Quinn asked.

"Could be," Goldstein said. "Doc measured her to be five-three. Standing in her shoes where the blade came through could have started the hole."

"Doc says it was put to her overhand," Quinn mused.

"That's on account the stabs slanted down. It could be done side-handed," Goldstein demonstrated. "Side hand and from the right; they angled a little toward the left."

The police stenographer spoke from the doorway. "Chief, they located the husband in a Third Avenue bar. Says he's been drifting from bar to bar most of the afternoon, but can't remember exactly where. He's not tight, but he's not exactly spinning on dimes either, Sergeant Murphy says. Sergeant Murphy wants to know what you want."

Quinn scowled at me. "What was he wearing, Kidd?"

I told him, "A blue serge with wide pin stripes that matched at the intersections, making it a custom job. White broadcloth shirt with an ascot collar.

Paisley silk tie, mostly blue and orange. White handkerchief in his lapel pocket. Tan brogans with a high polish. I didn't get to see his underwear."

"Not bad," Quinn said. He told the patrolman, "Check with Murphy and tell him to hang on." He told one of the print men, "Try Kidd for size."

The print man pressed my fingers on an ink pad, then onto a sheet of blank paper. He gave me a wiping rag and had me sign my name under the prints. He labeled each hand, then carried the paper to the pile of papers stacked on the window sill and checked through the pile.

He told Quinn, "He's on both sides of the windows, on the door, on the cold water tap and the handle and sides of an aluminum pot. His left hand is on the wall near the hole."

"Where I braced myself when I started passing out from the smoke," I said.

The police stenographer was back in the doorway. "Murphy says Maynard Aniz is wearing a brown tweed suit with a tan shirt and plain green tie. He still wants to know what to do."

Quinn and Goldstein exchanged bright, hard glances. Goldstein's lips were pursed in a soundless whistle. Quinn said, "He's your baby, Lieutenant." To the stenographer Quinn said, "Tell Murphy to take him down to the morgue, but not to let him see his wife yet. Just keep him isolated until Lieutenant Goldstein gets there."

Back in the living room, Quinn settled himself on the divan, facing me in the easy chair. "Tell it in detail this time, Kidd."

I told it without mention of the sheriff badge in my hip pocket or that my actual job had been to keep Maynard Aniz from his kids and his divorce operatives from his wife. I was, in other words, giving the situation its head and at the same time keeping a tight rein on it.

When I concluded, Quinn had a print man go over the crumpled Rembrandt in the fireplace and the El Greco on the wall over it. The print man found both reproductions covered with old and new prints from the hands of Kate Aniz, period.

"She did it herself," Quinn brooded thoughtfully. His mouth widened in a tight grin. "For you, Kidd. You're the

El Greco man, aren't you? You're in!"

"I didn't hit him. I didn't exactly beam on him either." His eyes widened.

"She get to you that close?"

"You saw her."

"Not alive."

"What else do you want to know? I want to get away from here."

"This Farley guy. Why'd he pass out?"

"He was her fraternal brother, he said. Why don't you ask him?"

"I'm asking you, Kidd. What do you think?"

"I think when I told him she was stabbed to death he became one shocked cookie."

"Or making like a shocked cookie?"

"I'd like to see you let me finger back your eyelid without reacting."

"Okay, okay," Quinn nodded agreeably.

"He was actually a shocked cookie. As soon as that movie outfit sends someone over for the kids, I'll have him up and hand him some more shocks. But you can go. Drag your broken heart out of here, Kidd. Get out—but keep in touch."

I got out.

**I**T WAS nine in the evening. The night was full of cool breeze and stardust set in black velvet and millions of people who moved slowly for a change. I rode a cab to my hotel and spent fifteen minutes in a hot, then cold shower, five more minutes with my electric shaver, then minutes more getting into my other suit, the grey one with the gravy stains. Around then my phone rang.

Sandborn's voice in my ear demanded, "What happened, Kidd?"

I counter-demanded, "If hubby's elected, how much of a rein do I keep on the situation."

"They arrest him yet, Kidd?"

"I don't think so."

"How does it look to you?"

"Considering what I saw of the guy, I'd say no. He's not a stabber. But he picked a hell of a time to change his clothes. You want me to give it a whirl?"

"Midworld's a big account," Sandborn said carefully. "They never used the agency before. Chicago must want their business pretty badly to fly you all the way from Frisco for a job of this nature. I think you might give it a whirl, Kidd."

"What's behind me?"

"It's the policy of the agency to give the police every possible assistance—and no hindrance."

"You mean you'd toss me to the wolves if I got caught off base?"

"I mean exactly what I said."

"Say something more."

He caught that on the first bounce.

"I'm not authorized to offer bonuses; you know that, Kidd."

"Chicago is," I told him. "Right now I'm going down to the hotel restaurant. From there I'll go to the bar. I'll stay at the bar. The desk will be posted where to reach me when the long distance call comes through from Chicago. I think it's worth at least an extra grand to risk getting caught off base in a homicide—an extra grand if I produce, if you want it wrapped in a pink ribbon. What do you think?"

He said it was up to Chicago to do the thinking.

My second whiskey sour was on its way to join the first when a bellhop tapped my shoulder. I followed him to a booth in the hotel lobby where a couple of girls in my receiver batted the information that they were respectively in Chicago and New York around for a while. Then a voice that could snap a regiment to attention alongside a boiler factory barked in my ear:

"Is that you, Kidd?"

I all but snapped to attention myself in that booth. This was the agency's top brass—the man behind the man who signed the checks.

"Yessir!"

"Go ahead!"

The connection broke.

**I** WENT ahead.

It involved a fast phone call to Sanborn, still in the office, then a fast cab ride to the address in Greenwich Village my call to Sanborn had netted.

It was a dirty brownstone house crouched between two huge apartment houses whose façades were mainly windows backed by venetian blinds.

On the brass panel in the foyer I found the name of Maynard Aniz—Apt. 4. No. buzz answered my finger on the button alongside the name. I climbed three

flights of creaky stairs and used my knuckles on a door with a brass 4 on it. Nothing happened. The door had a Yale lock that was locked.

Lacking a key, it would have taken a jimmy. Lacking a jimmy, I climbed the wall ladder at the far end of the landing and raised myself through a trapdoor into the star-dusted night.

It was a ten-foot drop from the edge of the roof to the fire-escape. I sat on the fire-escape a while, collecting my breath and wits, until it became evident nobody behind the windows a dozen feet across the alley seemed to be minding my business.

The window opening on the fire-escape was not open. Wrapping my jacket around my fist, I punched out the pane over the latch, turned the latch and opened the window. I stepped over the sill, down to a rug that absorbed my weight like a pile of feathers.

A phone was ringing somewhere in the darkness.

I closed the window, closed its venetian blinds, closed the blinds of another window, then crossed about three yards of springy feathers behind a match cupped in my palms to the switch of a reading lamp which I switched.

Buttery glare splashed down on a low divan with blond wood arms and fuzzy, dark green upholstery. The carpeting was also dark green. In the dimmer glow that filtered through the parchment lampshade I noted that all the furnishings of the living room were low, blond in the wood and upholstered in dark green.

The phone continued to trill at regular intervals.

Match flare touched my fingers. I whipped it out, then made my way into a foyer off the living room where the phone stood on a table with wrought-iron legs. I eared the receiver and listened to a woman's voice, one notch this side of hysteria, squeal: "Maynie? Is that you, Maynie? My God, I've been calling all evening! Where've you been? Maynie . . . ?"

I grunted carefully into the mouthpiece, pulled a small chair from under the table and sat on it.

"I have to see you, darling," she answered my grunt. "When you called

at five and told me not to worry, that you had everything under control, I was too shocked, too numbed, to utterly *dazed* to grasp the significance of what you were saying. And then when I did realize the implications behind what you said, I phoned back. But nobody answered. And I've been phoning back ever since, sitting here and working on that fifth of scotch we were going to go through tonight, and dialing and dialing until I thought my fingers would fall off. Maynie . . . ? Do I make any sense?"

I said, "Ah-huh."

"Well, how did you *know*?"

I could think of no grunt to answer that. I whispered, "*Not over the phone!*"

"You mean the police found her *al-ready*?" She had pulled in the notch and was now fully in the grip of hysteria. "What'll I *do*?" It was a rhetorical question. "They'll never believe me. I didn't shoot her; I swear I didn't shoot her, darling! But I left the gun on the floor right near the bed and they'll—Maynie, in whose name did you register it in Beverly Hills?"

"*Yours*," I whispered.

Her voice leaped along peaks of scream. "You've got to do something, you hear me, Maynie? They'll take the bullet and match it to the revolver and find out it's registered in my name and arrest me for shooting Kate! What'll I do?"

"*Come over here*," I whispered.

"There? Have you gone mad?"

"*Told you I had it under control*," my whisper cut in.

"But how . . . ?"

"*Not over the phone. Come here!*"

Her hysteria bubbled into sobs that oozed into my ear. Then: "All right, darling. All right, Maynie. I'll have to get dressed. Should I wear my flowered print? Should I, Maynie?"

I grunted that she should. She asked me if I loved her. I grunted that I did. That ended the beautiful music.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Torch Carrier

**B**EHIND the phone table a door opened on a kitchen with an electric refrigerator from which I stole an apple. The

third door in the foyer led to a library whose walls were stacked from rug to ceiling with more books than I'd ever care to read. There was a Capehart I could never afford to own and a desk half the size of the library piled with manuscripts, a portable Remington, a wire recorder, a half-filled fifth of Scotch on a tray with one glass. There was a thin-stemmed blue vase full of pussy willows and a double-frame picture stand holding portraits of the twins.

A small bathroom opened on the library. A slightly larger bedroom opened on the library and bathroom.

The bed was unmade. Bureau drawers were full of used and laundered trivia in bachelorish disarray. The closet held a double-breasted light grey suit, a single-breasted dark grey suit, two brown double-breasted suits, a midnight blue dress suit, a black tuxedo, two white flannel jackets, a corduroy jacket, six pairs of assorted slacks and an officer's uniform with chickens pinned on the shoulders.

But there was no blue serge suit with matching pin stripes, which was my object in the first place.

The phone was ringing again.

This was a male voice, low and almost furtive.

"Mr. Aniz?"

I grunted.

"I was wrong this afternoon. I knew

someone was there when I called you, but later I saw her come out. I didn't know it was a woman. I tried calling you again, but nobody answered. And, Mr. Aniz . . ."

I grunted again.

"I didn't know how you wanted it handled when they questioned me. So I kept our little deal under cover. I'm entitled to that privilege, but the police take a dim view of holding anything back in a homicide. I told them about hearing her in your wife's apartment and what time it was. They needed that to help establish what time she was killed. And I had to tell them about the woman I saw in the elevator—a brown-haired woman wearing a flowered print dress and carrying a red handbag. Was that all right?"

I tried another grunt.

"What's that, Mr. Aniz?"

Grunts seemed to be *passé* at this stage of our conversation. I said, "That was okay."

He said nothing.

He spent fifteen seconds saying nothing.

He broke the connection.

I thought all this over a while and then I reached for the phone again.

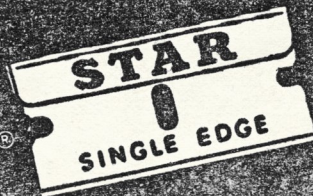
I dialed Sanborn's home and a woman's voice that sounded as tired as his voice told me he was back in the office. I got him at the office and his voice was no longer tired. His voice, in fact, was bellowing into my voice and it continued

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to bellow into my voice until I slammed my receiver back in its cradle. I sat there for ten seconds getting my spleen back under control. Then I dialed the agency again and, when his bellow returned to my ear, yelled, "This time listen to *me!*"

He seemed to be listening.

"I want this fast! I want the names of the guys who nursemaided those Aniz twins before me."

He roared, "*You* listen . . . !"

He roared it into a phone that was once again dead.

ONCE MORE I dialed the agency. This time Sandborn's voice no longer roared. It came in a grim monotone.

"Ernie O'Connell. Hal Pragotti. Joseph Farley."

I said, "Joe Farley is about six feet tall, dark haired, dark complexioned, jumpy grey eyes and a soft, sad way of talking."

"Yes," Sandborn said.

"Joe didn't disappear," I said. "He switched sides. He rented the apartment under Kate Aniz and undertook to gather divorce evidence for hubby. I should have smelled him sooner, but the only indication until a minute ago was that he hadn't lived there long enough to get in the phone book. A minute ago he phoned a report to hubby, who I impersonated. Farley probably rated with Kate Aniz on account he came to her from the agency in the first place and he played it smart by just getting fraternal. She didn't want lovers, just brothers."

"Anything else, Kidd?"

"That's just an angle. From his apartment he could hear feet on the ceiling. He made it a point to peek whenever he heard them, probably by stopping the elevator on its way down. He did it this afternoon and spotted a dame who I expect over here shortly, which is another angle. A third angle is that when he heard the dame's feet on the ceiling this afternoon, not knowing they were female feet he phoned hubby that Kate was sowing oats. When he learned they were this dame's feet he tried to phone hubby again, but hubby was no longer here."

"Anything more?"

"I have some other ideas which I can't fit into language yet, but some checking from your end might help. If you could

get someone to the twins, for instance, you could find out how long that Rembrandt's been hanging over the fireplace. You could also check L.A. and pick up gossip about Maynard Aniz and a dame named Lani Saxon. It might also do to check if Lani Saxon has a gun registered in L.A. And if so, what caliber and what serial number."

"Is that all, Kidd?"

"There are some facts I want established. Have you a pipeline into the cops?"

"Yes."

"They should have the time Kate died by now, and the time the fire started. And I'd like to know exactly what killed her."

"The medical examiner estimates the time of death at four-thirty to five. The fire marshal says the fire was started by spreading lighter fluid over the bed and body around the same time. The best I could learn, they haven't completed the post mortem yet. Is that all you want?"

"For the time being."

"Then go back to your hotel and be ready to leave for the Coast in the morning. I have a body guard job that'll take you back to L.A. We're too deeply involved in this homicide now. We're washing our hands of it."

I could think of nothing to say. I said nothing.

"Listen, Kidd," Sandborn's voice went on in a kindlier tone. "You're a first-rate operative, and all that data probably has a bearing here and there on the case, but only in a minor way, and certainly in too minor a way for the agency to jeopardize its relations with the New York police."

"You mean you're satisfied Maynard Aniz killed his wife?" squeaked out of me.

"There isn't the slightest doubt about it. They found the remains of the suit you described in the furnace of the house from which you're calling now and in the remains they found slight blood traces that matched his wife's blood. As I understand it, they're taking him down to the Tombs at this moment to book him for homicide. I'm sorry about your thousand-dollar bonus, Kidd, but that's how it has to be."

"Don't be so damned mournful about that bonus!" I yelled at him. "I know Maynard Aniz stabbed his wife! What

you don't know, and what you should know—"

"What?"

"Nothing."

"I don't understand you, Kidd."

"I said nothing. Absolutely nothing. Good-bye."

I put the receiver gently in its cradle. I brought my right hand alongside my left hand still on the receiver. I did this slowly and deliberately, so there would be no mistake that both my hands were in full view and empty.

"You and your innerspring rugs!" I said.

The cold, hard *something* that had been touching the nape of my neck withdrew.

"Can I turn around?" I asked.

"Slowly," Maynard Aniz said. "Keep your hands in sight."

I TURNED on the stool slowly, keeping my hands on my knees. The distance from my right hand to the butt of my .38-caliber automatic was roughly one million miles. My mind concentrated on this fact and kept it uppermost in my thoughts. By dint of such concentration in such situations in the past I have managed to reach the ripe old age of never you mind.

A silver revolver was almost lost in his right fist.

The fist emerged from a brown tweed sleeve. His tan shirt and green tie were very becoming. The right lens of his horn rims was cracked. He wore a purple bruise on his cheekbone under the cracked lens which wasn't becoming at all. His expression was the expression of a slab of granite.

"You're on your way to the Tombs to be booked for homicide," I said.

"You just told whoever was on the phone I stabbed Kate," he said.

"That's what I think," I said.

"You're right," he said.

"You also set fire to her bedclothes," I said.

His shoulders shrugged this away.

—"What difference does it make, Kidd? I stabbed her. I set fire to her. There's no mystery."

"Not to us," I said, winking at him. Nothing in his expression answered my wink. I said, "The fire wasn't too far gone by the time I got there at five. You must have been close."

"I was on the stairway behind the elevator when you brought Madie and Mark home." The granite of his features changed to loose dough and sagged. His voice thickened. "Kidd, did they . . . ?"

"Mark," I told him. "He took it standing up. Found the sheriff badge on the bedroom floor while I was putting out the blaze. It's in my hip pocket now." I winked at him. "But you don't want it."

He started to shake his head, then caught himself and stared into my eyes. I stared into his eyes. We spent several interesting seconds staring into each other's eyes.

"As a matter of fact," I went on, "aside from not knowing how you broke away, I can't understand *why* you broke away."

He'd been holding his breath. He let it out slowly.

"That makes two of us," he breathed. "A cab hit the police sedan broadside and turned us over in Times Square and I was thrown clear. By the time I reached my feet the crowd was pressed all around me. When I backed out of it to the sidewalk the crowd had me moving toward Forty-second Street. I was shaken and confused. I let the crowd move me."

"With that revolver the cops obligingly left in your pocket?"

"I couldn't think of any place else to go."

"With that gadget in your fist?"

"I don't know what to do next."

"You'll think of something. A guy whose brain has been as busy as yours this afternoon ought to have a few ideas left over. How about giving my side of the conversation a break? I'm talking about that revolver. If it's loaded, I'm nervous."

"It's loaded."

"I'm nervous."

"Stand up, Kidd."

"No."

He studied me. He studied the revolver in his fist. This was something that probably violated the movie code. When someone in a movie waves a gun, everybody is supposed to jump. He continued to study his revolver. He sighed and dropped it into his jacket pocket.

"It makes me nervous also, Kidd. Now will you stand up?"

I stood up—into his left fist, which

evidently didn't make him nervous at all. It made a handball of my skull against the wall.

My right fist hooked into his middle. If all my knuckles weren't broken I was due for a shock. His middle was made of concrete.

His right fist dropped the rug from under my shoes.

The rug came off the floor and slammed into my face.

I pulled my face away from the rug to see his feet turn toward the library.

The doorbell was ringing.

His feet turned toward the front door. He took a step—into space, from my hands yanking on his descending ankle. He used his hands to cushion his fall. That took care of his hands. My hands took care of the unprotected "button" an inch behind the center of his left ear.

The doorbell was ringing steadily.

I managed to raise half his two hundred pounds. I dragged that half through the library and into the cubicle of a bedroom. The other half tagged along. I fished the silver revolver out of his pocket and noticed it was a .25-caliber, double-action revolver containing five bullets and one shell-case of a bullet. The inside of the barrel looked powder stained. The curved butt was decorated in white bone. I touched the "button" behind his other ear with the butt, then slid him under his bed and arranged the disordered bedclothes so they completely concealed him.

The doorbell was still ringing steadily.

I opened the door and the man who had been fingering the button leaped to one side, leaving me covered by the muzzles of two Thompson guns in the hands of two uniformed patrolmen who knelt behind them.

"I GIVE up," I said.

The leaper reappeared: Lieutenant Rubin Goldstein, of Homicide. His red hair was mussed. Three brand-new strips of plaster decorated his stubby-featured face.

"You!" he said.

"Hello," I said.

"You took your time answering the bell," he said.

"I was asleep. You been ringing long?"

"You alone?"

"Sure."

"What are you doing in his apartment?"

"I work for him. Remember?"

"I thought you worked for Midworld Studios."

"Same difference. They work for each other. I work for them."

He gestured and the two patrolmen entered the doorway carefully behind their Thompson guns. One turned right into the living room, the other glanced into the kitchen door, then turned left into the library. Lieutenant Goldstein studied my face for clues. I kept my expression sincere.

"We tagged him as far as Penn Station where he got lost in the shuffle. He might have been screwy enough to come here," he said, watching me carefully to see how I took this. I took it neat.

"Who? Maynard Aniz? You mean he busted loose?"

"He was busted loose," the lieutenant said sourly, fingering the patch of plaster alongside his jaw. He glanced past me and asked, "Anything, Finelli?"

Finelli, the lad who'd entered the library, a hawk-nosed brunette with pale jowls, shook his head.

The other Thompson-toter emerged from the living room, a freckled, pointed-featured man.

"Somethin' funny in there, Lieutenant. Pieces of glass on the rug. Somebody pushed a pane outta the fire-escape window."

I gave Goldstein one of my sincere smiles.

"He's talking about my prowler. The falling glass woke me up. When I reached the living room there was a hand through the opening, fiddling with the latch. It pulled out before I could reach it. By the time I had the window open he was two flights down and still going."

"Then what?" Lieutenant Goldstein breathed.

"It seemed silly to phone in an alarm over a busted window pane. And he'd have been lost before I could have spoken my piece over the phone. I went back to sleep."

Lieutenant Goldstein showed me the front of his teeth without smiling. "My finger on the bell for three minutes can't

wake you—but some glass falling on a rug does?”

He didn't linger for my reply. He was yanking the Positive from his belt holster and calling over his shoulder, "Bring him along!"

They brought me along.

He treated the living room, kitchen and bathroom to brief glances from their doorways. He spent a little time in a closet in the library. He spent a little more time inside the wardrobe closet in the small bedroom.

Then he dropped to his knees and peered under the bed. After a moment he regained his feet and dusted off his knees.

"Okay, Kidd," he said quietly, "you're an eccentric sleeper. Finelli . . ."

"Yeah?"

"Down the fire-escape. Rap on windows. You come to a window with no answer, wait there and keep your eyes open. Dugan . . ." The sharp-featured patrolman looked at him attentively. "You start with the roof, then work down ringing doorbells. Same as Finelli. You get no answer—wait. I'll collect the super and we'll come back up with keys for the No Answers. Get started."

They left.

Lieutenant Goldstein breathed into my face. He tapped a stiff finger into my chest. "Let me tell you something about private detectives in this town. Your agency knows about it, but I hear you're an out-of-town boy just lately arrived. In this town, if a man has a permit and a bond and a clean record we allow him to sometimes tail people and guard people and keep an eye on wedding presents and look for bill skippers. But we never, *never* allow him to stick even the little joint of his little finger into a homicide. Is that clear?"

I gave him a *who-me?* look, which didn't quite impress him. Then I followed him to the door and bolted it after him. I returned to the bedroom and peered under the bed and spent a long, long time peering under that bed—at *nothing!*

I stood in the middle of that small bedroom and resisted an urge to look under the bed some more. I resisted an urge to examine the closet, to look in the bureau drawers, to bite my fingernails, to punch myself.

Then I glanced around and gaped at Maynard Aniz!

A WINDOW PANE stood between our faces and he was gesturing for me to open the window. I opened the window and helped him off a ledge that jutted one inch from the brown bricks of the wall. He'd been standing on that ledge and holding onto tiny cracks in the mortar between the bricks.

"I broke into pictures as a stunt man." He grinned crookedly, coming in over the sill. He eyed me almost kindly. "You didn't turn me in, Kidd. I came to when that policeman was walking out of the room, saw his legs from under the bed, peered out and saw his gun. Then I heard them coming back. I'm obliged, old man."

"Why?"

His face became a granite slab again. He sat on the edge of the unmade bed and frowned at nothing. "Why? That's a good question. You're a shrewd article, Kidd. You asked me why I'd broken away in the first place. I told you it was shock and the moving crowds in Times Square. Now you ask me why I didn't turn myself in." He looked at me blankly. "Did you ever reach a point where you didn't understand yourself, where you were doing things and not knowing exactly why you were doing them?"

"Not when I was sober."

"I'm sober, Kidd, sober enough not to want to die in the chair. It didn't seem to matter, dying in the chair, until the accident threw me clear. Now—" he gestured awkwardly—"I feel if I could get away and think things out I may arrive at a more satisfactory solution than the chair. Not *your* solution," he scowled, focusing his eyes on mine. "I know *your* solution. Got that from how you kept your mind on the gun . . ."

"Not any more," I told him. "You had it stashed in a dime locker in Penn Station . . . where you took it from your wife's bedroom . . . where Lani Saxon left it."

His eyes died.

"Is that your story for the police, Kidd?"

"I have no story for the police. They don't want even the little joint of my little finger in this tangle."

A flicker entered his eyes. "Then what are you after?"

"I'd like to know how long that Rembrandt hung over the fireplace."

"A week. Two weeks. Not long," he said, eyeing me curiously. "You know what my main trouble was, Kidd?"

"Sure. You confused yourself with that Spanish shmo, Don Quote, or something."

"No." He shook his head. "No, Kidd. I was in love with two women. Can you believe that?"

"Carrying a torch for two dames simultaneously makes you a four-star shmo. If I didn't believe that from the beginning I wouldn't have reached first base in this kill game. I'm on first base now, but I still can't figure what you intend to do."

"All right, I'm a shmo," he said thickly, rising. "What I'm going to do now is go some place where I can think this through."

"You better start thinking. You'll never get out of this house."

"I'll get out."

"In a canvas-covered litter. The house is crawling with cops."

"Don't worry about me, Kidd," he ground through his teeth, starting toward the library.

I didn't worry about him. His feet became entangled with my outstretched foot. I rode his back to the floor. I slammed the heel of my palm against the button behind his ear until he lay quietly on the floor.

I didn't worry about him one little bit.

Two minutes later he lay under the bed again, but this time with his ankles bound to his wrists behind him and the sleeve of one of his white shirts gripping two of his handkerchiefs against his teeth (which turned out to be his own after all).

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Rembrandt—and Death!

I SAT on the telephone chair in the foyer and wondered what the rap was in New York for concealing a murder suspect from the police. I weighted that against the prospect of holding one thousand dollars in my sweaty little fist.

I had never in my entire life held one

thousand dollars at one time in my sweaty little fist.

I thought of Maynard Aniz stabbing his wife five times. I thought of the hole whittled in the woodwork of the wall alongside the bed by the kill knife. I thought of the Rembrandt that lay crumpled in the fireplace after spending only two weeks on the wall. I thought of the woman Joe Farley had seen coming down in the elevator after hearing her footsteps on his ceiling. I thought of the woman on the phone who swore she hadn't shot Kate Aniz.

I thought I could sit on that chair and keep my eyes open . . . .

A doorbell was ringing in space. It rang three long, insistent times. Then came the sound of a very cheap clock ticking loudly. It ended in the falling of tumblers and I realized the ticking had really been the tapping of a key against the outer face of a lock in search of its slot.

My eyes opened as the door opened.

A slim white hand was clinging to its edge. The woman's face over the hand was vaguely familiar, a pert face under the powder blue skyscraper she wore for a hat. A red and blue flowered print dress appeared under the hand and face.

She closed the door gently behind her as if it were made of eggshells, keeping large, shiny eyes fixed on me.

"You're not Maynie!" she said. She said it scoffingly. "You couldn't be Maynie if you tried for a week! Who are you?"

She approached me carefully on a tight-rope, extending a red leather pocketbook and a hand gloved in red net to retain her balance. She lost her balance a yard short of me and floated down into my arms.

Her face as close enough to my face for me to see my eyes in her eyes.

"I faw down!" she giggled. "I'm stinkin'!"

That was a fact.

I helped her to her feet and guided her along her tightrope to the green upholstered divan in the living room where she kicked off her red pumps and brought her slender ankles under her amplitude, shielding the juxtaposition with her flower print skirt.

"You're *not* Maynie," she insisted,

focusing her eyes too steadily on mine as I stood over her.

I knew now why she'd seemed familiar. The honey brownness of her page-boy bob was one difference. Another was that her eyes were deep purple instead of aqua. The primary difference was in the way she held her lips. Instead of the dimpled curl that invited all things of all men, this was an innocent, pouting mouth—nice enough as mouths go, but no standing invitation I would have to wrestle with myself to resist.

Despite these differences the note of familiarity persisted in the same cleanly chiseled features I had last seen on the face of Kate Aniz.

"You're Lani Saxon," I said.

"But you're *not* Maynie!" she said in a voice that marked another difference. Instead of a throbbing downbeat, this was a lilting voice that seemed constantly on the verge of a giggle.

"I'm a friend of Maynie's," I told her. "Maynie had to leave. He asked me to handle this matter. Something to do with this, isn't it?"

I drew the bone-handled revolver from my pocket and showed it to her.

Her eyes brimmed with shock. She extended a faltering hand toward the weapon, then drew the hand back and clasped it to the other.

"He gave it to you? Maynie?"

I nodded.

"Where'd he get it?"

"Where you left it."

"Where I—I—I? Oh, but I didn't! It was on the floor when I awoke, when I—" Her eyes snapped wide. "I'm going to be sick."

She was sick.

We met again in the foyer. She was paler but steadier. I helped her back to her perch on the green divan in the living room.

"Where is he?" she asked hoarsely. "Where's Maynie?"

"He'll keep," I told her truthfully. "What you know won't. You say you awoke and found this revolver on the floor. Of Kate's bedroom?"

She nodded, keeping her eyes glued to mine.

"Where were you? In the bed?"

Her head shook as if she wanted to

topple the powder blue skyscraper from it. It didn't topple.

"She was in the bed."

"Where were you?"

"On the floor. I—I'd been—I—" She leaned forward and gripped my wrist. "You see, I don't *know*! The last thing I recalled, she'd been standing facing me and telling me she wouldn't—*ever*."

"Wouldn't ever what?"

"Divorce Maynie."

"Is that why you were there? To ask her to divorce Maynie?"

"Yes, but—"

"With this gun?"

Her eyes clutched at mine. "For *myself*! Don't you understand? I told her I didn't care to *live* without Maynie, that if she wouldn't give him a divorce she'd have my death on her hands . . . in her apartment . . . right there . . . *then*!"

"And what did she say?"

"That's just it! I don't know what she said! I felt something like a *click*. Next thing, I was opening my eyes. I was on the floor. The gun was right there in front of my eyes. There was a smell—"

"Powder. Never mind the smell. Where was she?"

"I told you. On the bed—half on and half off. Sort of bending over the foot of the bed. I could see that little circle of blood on the back of her dress and I knew that that gun, *my* gun—*what are you doing?*"

What I was doing was gripping her shoulders and shaking them.

"Listen to me. Did she know you were coming?"

"You don't have to *shout* at me!"

I released her shoulders. I sifted my words through my teeth. "I'm not shouting at you. I'm asking you a simple question. *Did she know you were coming?*"

"I'd phoned her . . ."

"Okay. Now what happened after you saw she'd been shot?"

"Nothing happened. I got out of there. I ran down those stairs and all I could think was—*will you stop shaking me!*"

I released her shoulders again. I wrapped my hands around each other to keep them off her shoulders. I told her, "You're going to do something for Maynie now. You're going to make a phone call. You're going to say exactly what I tell

you to say, exactly how I tell you to say it."

"But—"

"But nothing! You're an actress, aren't you? You want to keep Maynie out of the hot chair, don't you? Aren't you? Don't you?"

**T**EN MINUTES later she was sitting on the foyer chair with me kneeling at her side and our ears touching near the receiver, listening to the periodic rings of a distant bell. There was a faint click. Then:

"Hello?"

She was an actress. She gave it the right amount of giggle. She giggled, "Hello, Rembrandt!"

She looked at me with wide, frightened eyes. I winked at her reassuringly. The voice re-entered our receiver:

"Who are you?"

"Lani Saxon. Who'd you expect?"

"What do you want?"

"I want to show you you're not so damn smart!" she giggled shrilly. "All afternoon I've been thinking where I've seen you before, and then I remembered and came here to wait for Maynie, and when he comes I'm going to tell him what you did this afternoon, and then you won't feel so damn smart, will you, Rembrandt?"

The voice in our receiver became urgent.

"Listen, Miss Saxon, let's talk this over first. You think you're in trouble, but how things worked out you're not in trouble at all and there's no point dragging me into it. When we get together I can show you how it's to your advantage to keep me out of it. Where are you now?"

I palmed the mouthpiece and whispered in her ear, "Switch it here, baby."

She nodded and turned the giggle into a shrill scream: "You think I'd tell you that? You think I'm *dumb*? You better start running, Mr. Rembrandt! You hear me? You better get on a train and never get off! Next time you'll think twice before you fool around with someone like me!"

I took the receiver from between our ears and slammed it into its cradle and grinned into her shiny eyes.

"I do all right?" she breathed.

"Perfect. You're an actress, baby."

"What happens now?"

The phone answered her.

"Act two," I grinned at her. "Take it, baby."

She lifted the receiver and screamed into the mouthpiece, "Maynie? Is that you, Maynie? May—" She turned enormous eyes on me. "He hung up. Didn't say a word. Just hung up!"

"A silence more eloquent than words, baby. All he wanted was to check if the bait was on the right hook. He regards you as the fish, but don't worry your pretty head about it. It's a case of mistaken identity. He's worth a thousand dollars on the hoof to me and he should be hoofing it this way now." My watch said it was one in the ayem. "I give him five minutes."

"I think you're crazy," she said. She softened it with a smile that included her eyes. "But you're cute in a repulsive sort of way, like Boris Karloff. Do you really know what you're doing?"

"Probably not. I spent last night on a plane. All day I've been on a kiddie car. I've breathed smoke. I've battled two hundred pounds of human concrete. I've broken several laws and gambled for a thousand bucks on the strength of my belief that a stabber doesn't tapper off by whittling a hole in the woodwork. Now I've spun a web and there's nothing we can do but wait. . . ."

"Wait for what?" Lieutenant Rubin Goldstein asked from the door.

**B**EHIND him stood Dugan and another uniformed patrolman. Between them stood a wizened old man bearing a large brass circlet full of keys. It was purely a rhetorical question. The homicide lieutenant was plowing into the foyer at the head of the parade.

"Downstairs, the lady is awakened by thumps on her ceiling, right over her bed. But don't pull another 'prowler' on me, Kidd. I want to dig up my own answers. Dugan!"

Dugan followed his Thompson gun past the lieutenant, into the library on his way to the bedroom.

Lieutenant Goldstein breathed in my face. "You know what the San Francisco police said about you in answer to our

wire, Kidd? They said you have been known to take chances." His palms were slapping my sides. His right palm settled under my left arm. His left palm extracted my .38 automatic from its leather nest under that arm. He jammed it into his belt, then brought his palms lower down my sides. He produced the .25-caliber revolver from my jacket pocket. He dropped it into his jacket pocket. "In New York we let the cops take the chances, Kidd. We pay the cops to take chances. Who's the lady?"

I breathed into his face. "Lani Saxon. She was Kate Aniz' understudy. That's her revolver. It was used to kill Kate Aniz this afternoon while Miss Saxon was unconscious on the floor. Any more questions?"

"No, Kidd. I have a B. S. degree. I was a captain an Army Intelligence and I've been with Homicide a long time, but I'm not qualified to ask such questions as how you figure Kate Aniz was stabbed five times with a revolver. In Bellevue we've got people who are qualified to ask such questions. Let's move into here where we can sit down. I have the feeling I should sit down."

He was arming us back into the living room. Lani Saxon didn't want to go. She wanted to—and did—rise on her toes and scream, "Maynie!"

The homicide detective gaped over his shoulder at the spectacle of Maynard Aniz preceding Dugan's Thompson gun out of the library. Maynard Aniz was rubbing his wrists where the binding had slowed his circulation. He avoided Lani Saxon's eyes. He avoided my eyes. He gazed through the horn rims at nothing, a stocky

man in brown tweeds, with a bruise on his left cheek, rubbing his wrists and moving into the foyer under the prod of Dugan's Thompson gun.

"Found him all wrapped up in a package under the bed, Lieutenant," Dugan spoke from behind him.

Lieutenant Goldstein's stubby features swiveled to aim at me.

"Boy, do you take chances!" he breathed.

"He found his wife with the bullet hole through her and Miss Saxon's gun on the floor," I breathed back at him. "He took the gun—the silver revolver in your pocket—and then stabbed his dead wife five times to obscure passage of the bullet. He whittled the bullet out of the woodwork, then set fire to the bed to obscure any of the bullet's passage the stabbing hadn't obscured. He was in love with both of them. He's a shmo."

"Explain that word to me some time," Lieutenant Goldstein exhaled at me, "but not now. Now tell me how you figure a shooting out of this."

"She told me."

"You told him that you shot Kate Aniz?" he breathed at Lani Saxon.

"I didn't shoot her!" Lani Saxon said.

"I didn't say she said she did it," I said.

"Can I say something?" Maynard Aniz asked.

Lieutenant Goldstein turned an agonized face toward the stocky director. "Say something."

"I shot her, old man," Maynard Aniz said quietly.

The homicide detective groped for the phone stand chair, pulled it out, sat on it. He began dialing, then stopped and roared

# HEADACHE

UPSET  
STOMACH

JUMPY  
NERVES



# RELIEF!

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at Dugan: "Take 'em in there! Keep 'em in there! Keep 'em quiet!"

From a green upholstered easy chair I could watch Lieutenant Goldstein huddle over the phone. Maynard Aniz borrowed a cigarette from Dugan, who backed to the far corner with the Thompson gun under his arm. Lani Saxon watched Maynard Aniz light the butt with the same intent fascination as a bird watching a swaying snake. They sat at opposite ends of the green divan.

Lieutenant Goldstein pronged the receiver and entered the living room behind an expression of confusion.

"They completed the autopsy," he told us all from the middle of the room. "The way they told me, it'll take further lab analysis to cinch it one way or the other, but up to here it looks as if the stabs didn't manage to ruin a passage left by a small-caliber bullet."

"It should make no difference, old man," Maynard Aniz said conversationally, gesturing with the cigarette. "I shot her, then stabbed her later to confuse the issue, then set fire to confuse it still further."

"I told you he's a shmo," I cut in wearily. "He's directed too many heroes; it's gotten into his blood. He thinks Miss Saxon killed his wife. He loved his wife, but he loves Miss Saxon also. He's all mixed up."

"He's mixed up! He's mixed up!" Lieutenant Goldstein roared at me, rising to his feet.

"You think I shot Kate? Me?" Lani Saxon was screaming at Maynard Aniz. "Is that what you think I am—a murderer?"

"Honey . . ." Maynard Aniz tried to soothe her.

"She didn't shoot Kate. Take it easy," I tried to soothe the lieutenant.

"Don't honey me!" Lani Saxon screamed at Maynard Aniz. "I never want to see you again as long as I live!"

"I'll tell you what's gonna happen to you!" Lieutenant Goldstein roared at me behind a waggling finger. "You're gonna—hey!"

But he couldn't have told me I was going to slam his finger-waggling arm aside in my sudden dash toward the fire-escape window—*toward the eyes that had*

*peered briefly in through the window!*

"Dugan . . . !" Lieutenant Goldstein roared, clawing at the Positive in his belt holster.

**T**HE SHARP-FEATURED patrolman was not quite ready. This had taken place too swiftly, too complicatedly, for Dugan to be ready. He had to pull his Thompson gun up from under his arm.

He brought it up into my hands. He lost it to my hands. My hands chucked it through the big pane of the fire-escape window.

Dugan launched himself at me—but I was launching myself through the brand-new hole in the window.

A bee screamed over my back and chipped brick from the wall across the alley.

The alley roared from gunblast. Windows on all sides of the alley were snapping open, filling with yellow glare. Voices mingled with the dwindling echoes of gunblast.

It all raised the face of the man who was dropping down the stairwell of the fire-escape below me. He spotted me diving through the stairwell of the third-floor landing after him.

Steel slats leaped up to club my shoulders, my back, my hips—until the second floor landing held me back as I gaped up at the shadow blotting the glare from the window overhead and heard Lieutenant Goldstein's voice above the echoes in the alley:

"Finelli . . . !"

The face of the man below lifted a second time. The was over the railing of the first-floor fire-escape and descending the straight ladder to the alley floor.

I was swiveling over the rod that formed the banister of the stairway between the first and second-floor fire-escapes.

He scampered down the ladder. A shadow had detached itself from alley shadows and was racing across the cement toward him, yelling: "Hey, you—halt!"

Hey You decided he didn't want to descend to the alley after all. He started back up the ladder. He saw my feet vault the rail of the first-floor fire-escape. His right hand scrabbled under his lapel as he clung to the ladder with his left.

He dragged a glint of black metal from

under his lapel as my right foot struck his left hand where it gripped the ladder.

It ceased to grip the ladder.

He ceased to grip the glint of black metal in order to grip at me plummeting down on him from the fire-escape.

We hit the cement floor of that alley in a writhing embrace. He groped for the glint of black metal, found it, swung it around—into my face. My face forced it back, back and down, the coolness of it against my cheek—until the jar of my skull bones signaled the moment my face pressed the metal-holding hand down against the grimy concrete.

I tasted the soapy flavor of his trigger finger from my teeth gripping into it.

He forgot about the black pistol.

My left hand sent it skidding away across the alley floor as his left hand began slamming at my ear. My right hand balled twice into the softness around his belt buckle. His right hand sliced at my Adam's apple—found my Adam's apple.

The edge of the ladder slammed the back of my head.

The alley floor rose up and slammed grit into my face.

I went to sleep. I woke up. I got to my hands and knees and gasped for drops of air while my lungs screamed for gallons. After a while I began breathing gallons and I looked up.

That alley seemed jammed with blue uniforms. A million windows overhead seemed to frame a million heads peering down at me. Lieutenant Goldstein seemed to have hold of my arm and he seemed to be trying to shake it out of its socket. He brought his teeth down to my eyes and yelled, "I want to hear this, Kidd! I want to hear every last word of it while it's still fresh in your mind. What did you want of him? Say something, Kidd!"

He was referring to the man who sagged in the grip of Finelli and another patrolman.

"Joe Farley," I said. "He's not as important right now as that gun, if it hasn't been fired. Has it been fired?"

A plainclothesman had retrieved the weapon. He put the muzzle to his nose. "I don't think it's been fired lately, Lieutenant."

"He thinks it hasn't been fired, Kidd!" Lieutenant Goldstein shouted into my face.

"You hear that? It make you happy?"

"That's all I was trying to do," I explained, "keep him from firing it. If he didn't fire it now, the chances are he couldn't prove he fired any gun in the past ten hours, which means it's all in his hand, in a negative way, of course."

LIEUTENANT GOLDSTEIN dropped my arm. He reached for Joe Farley's right hand and shook it.

"This hand, Kidd? I want to be sure about this. I don't want it said the New York cops don't give a smart operator like you every chance to explain everything. You mean this hand?"

"Don't get so excited. That or the other. You'll find nitrate traces on his shooting hand—from firing Miss Saxon's revolver into Kate Aniz after conking Miss Saxon from behind."

"This is Joe Farley, Kidd, the guy who passed out when you told him over the phone Kate Aniz was dead; he passed out so hard you could finger his eyelid without getting a reaction. You'd think he was real surprised she was dead, wouldn't you? Didn't you?"

"What made him pass out was hearing she was stabbed and set afire," I cut in wearily. "He was all braced to hear she'd been shot. That kind of knocked the props from under him. Kate Aniz told me she had hubby's divorce operatives anticipated. I didn't get it then. She meant Rembrandt, here. He was playing both ends against the middle. He quit the agency to work for hubby, double-crossed hubby to play with Kate, only she wouldn't play the way he wanted to play."

"When Lani Saxon phoned, she probably called him up to listen in from a closet or some place. That was her last mistake; she'd underestimated her effect on his hormones. When he heard her tell Lani Saxon she wouldn't divorce Maynard Aniz, *ever*—that tied it. See?"

"Boy, are you an explainer!" Lieutenant Goldstein breathed hoarsely. "Two and two make fifteen every time you open your mouth! What made you think it was him in the first place?"

"The Rembrandt in the fireplace, I think. Something smoky about his face, as if he's pushing out of brown fog. And then he said he saw Lani Saxon leave by

the elevator—but she told me she'd run down the stairs; and why should she lie about that? Which meant *he'd* lied about it, that he probably saw her in the penthouse apartment—and everything else fell into place. Why don't you ask him? He shocks easy. It shouldn't be hard to shock it out of him."

"Never mind him, Kidd!" Lieutenant Goldstein breathed through his teeth. "He'll keep. He's not going any place. We're getting answers out of you while they're still hot. Supposing, just for the sake of supposing, all you say is true—why should he then stick out his neck by crawling up the fire-escape to Maynard Aniz' apartment? You got an answer for that?"

"He expected to find Lani Saxon there alone. She'd told him enough over the phone to make him think she'd spotted him in the penthouse, and he came over to talk her out of it. Or blast her out of it."

"You're telling me she phones him where she is and needles him to come after her and he doesn't even smell a mouse?"

"Not how she did it. She didn't tell him where she was. In fact, she told him she wouldn't tell him where she was."

"So he came to where she didn't tell him she was? Because he killed Kate Aniz on account she chucked a painting in the fireplace? Which you figured because Lani Saxon took the stairs instead of the elevator? And the payoff's in his hand?" Lieutenant Goldstein still gripped Joe Farley's hand. "This hand, Kidd? Do you want it wrapped up, or will you eat it here?"

"Take it easy!" I yelled at him. "You'll get an ulcer."

"I have an ulcer!" he yelled at me.

I should have known.

**D**AWN was a rosy glow on the tops of the skyscrapers when Sanborn finally helped me limp out of police headquarters and into a cab.

They had found traces of nitrate powder under Joe Farley's nails and, after three hours under a white-hot arc light, they had his signature on a detailed confession that was muddled only in his tortured explanations of the impulse that

gripped him when he saw the Rembrandt print in the fireplace and heard Kate Aniz vow to remain Kate Aniz, making of his carefully planned gamble to make her Kate Farley a bitter mockery that, to quote him: "Drove me out of my head . . ."

When the cab stopped I told Sanborn, "This isn't my hotel."

"It's Penn Station," he told me.

"What's the idea? I need sleep, about forty hours of sleep. . . ."

"On the train, Kidd," Sanborn muttered, urging me out of the cab.

"What train?"

"You can sleep on the train and be collecting full pay while you're doing it. Add that to your thousand-dollar bonus and you'll have a tidy sum to squander on the Hollywood fleshpots."

"I've seen the Hollywood fleshpots. I want to see the Stork, the Bowery, Grant's Tomb, the Statue of Lib—"

"I'll mail you picture postcards, Kidd," Sanborn mumbled, urging me down the ramp. "You miss the carhops and sunshine, remember? New York's buildings crowd you. The people crowd you. Too many pimples. You don't like their smell in the subway. I have a simple bodyguard job for you on the train. You'll love it. You'll be sleeping in a private compartment. Let's go, Kidd."

"Can't you take a gag, Chief? This place is growing on me. Things happen. In fact, I wouldn't mind working out of your office a couple of months, Chief. I produced, didn't I? What do you say?"

"I say over my dead body! As soon as you get on that train, I'm going to the nearest hospital and have a nervous breakdown. *Get on that train!*"

I boarded the train. A porter led me to the compartment and opened the door.

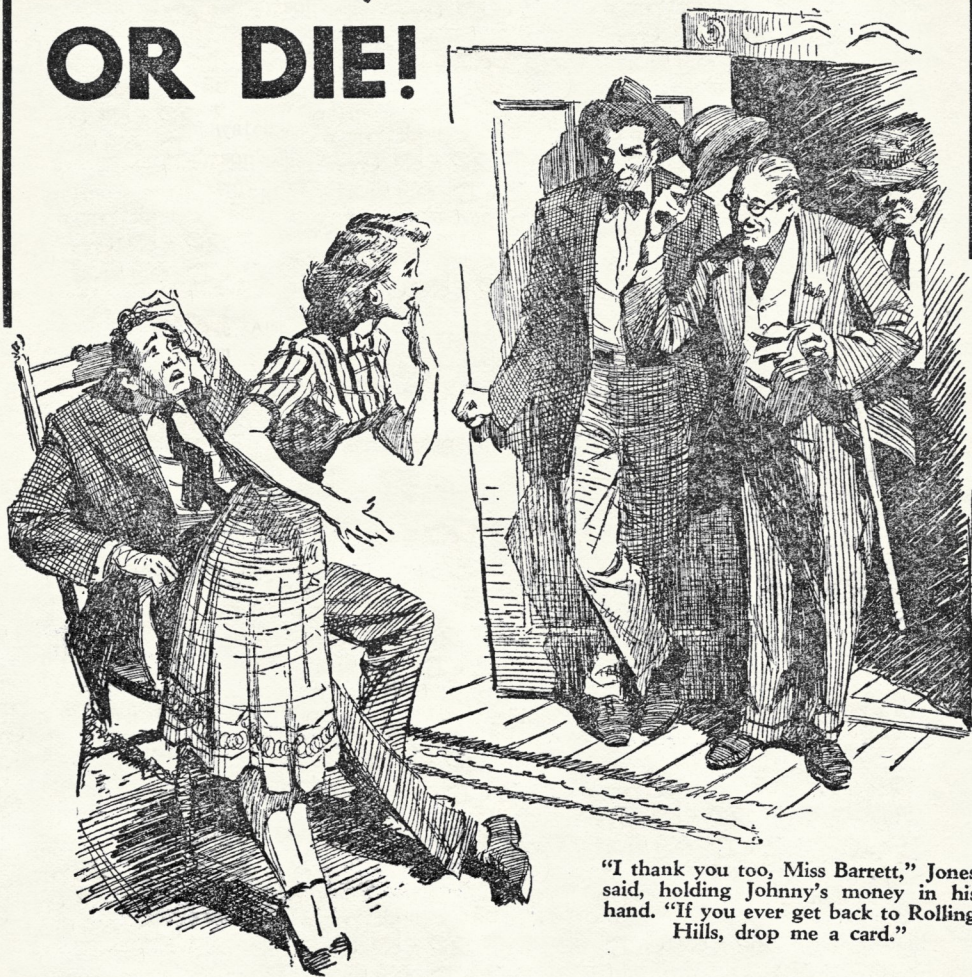
"Madeline Aniz squealed, 'Isn't it wonderful, Two D's? You're going to be with us all the way to California!'"

Mark Aniz said, "We're going to write a novel of this trip. You'll take notes while Madie interviews the men passengers and while I interrogate the women passengers. Won't that be keen, Two D's?"

"Yeah," I said. "Great. What do you know about ulcers, Mark?"

I could feel mine starting to sprout.

# WIN, PLACE— OR DIE!



"I thank you too, Miss Barrett," Jones said, holding Johnny's money in his hand. "If you ever get back to Rolling Hills, drop me a card."

*Johnny Connors and Hazel had the sweetest racket in the world: They booked bets on Uncle Remus, a swaybacked plater that never had won, couldn't win and—to the tune of Johnny's last ill-gotten buck—did win!*

**By DAY KEENE**

**D**URING late afternoon, spring tipped into the Loop. The last long windrow of grimy snow became a wet memory on the pavement. There was a new soft lushness to the air. Starry-eyed, sweet young things paused on their way home from work to admire the manikins suddenly blossomed in the windows.

Fashions in some things didn't change. White slipper satin and tulle still had the same old look.

With night, a full moon rose over the city. Movie-bound lovers sought out the parks instead. Mixed drink sales fell off. Barmen wished they had ordered more lager. All of which doesn't matter except

as the alchemy of the seasons affected Johnny Connors.

He thought at first it was indigestion.

Six feet of former G. I. topped by a twice-broken nose and a mop of flaming red hair about which certain New Guinea head hunters still had ecstatic, if disappointed, dreams, Johnny scowled across the table at Hazel.

"And where did you get this?"

Her blue eyes wide, she said that someone must have slipped it under the door of her hotel room.

Addressed to John Connors in a bold masculine hand the unsigned letter warned:

You can't get away with it much longer, Johnny. Why not get out while the getting is good? There is a law of average, also one of retribution and ten years can be a long time—especially in pokey. Smart up. Get a job. Get married. Amount to something.

His face almost as red as his hair, Connors banged a huge fist on the table. Amount to something. What did the wisenheimer, whoever he was, want—black pearls in his oysters? True, half of it belonged to Hazel but he had fifty grand in the hotel safe right now, and if the mousy, bespectacled, little chump currently smitten on Hazel jumped through the hoop as per schedule by this time tomorrow night they would have another five or ten grand.

Show him any other G. I. who had done better. But who had sent him the letter? Ah. That was the pertinent question. What snake in the Chicago grass had sought him out? He didn't know any snakes in Chicago—or did he?

Hazel began to weep softly, taking care not to smear her eye shadow. "Why don't you do like the letter tells you, Johnny? I'm getting scared."

"Why don't you eat your soup?" he countered.

She brightened. "Besides, I read once somewhere in a book—" her brow furrowed in concentration—"or maybe it was a magazine, that the best authorities have concluded that crime doesn't pay."

Johnny lifted a hand to biff her, then remembered just in time that according to Emily Post a gentleman never strikes

a lady in the dining room of a good hotel except in self-defense. He passed the appetizers instead. "Have an olive."

She sniffed, "No, thank you. You know I don't like olives or ersters."

"Oysters," Johnny corrected her. "Oy. Like in boy."

He wished Hazel wasn't so dumb. He liked her. He wished she liked him. Hazel was his masterpiece. Besides being his bread and butter, and an occasional short beer, she was living proof of the musical allegation you could find a million-dollar baby in a five-and-ten-cent store, if you looked long and hard enough. Hazel had everything but brains, most of it where it showed.

"Now you've hurt my feelings," she wept. "You think I'm dumb, don't you, Johnny?"

He didn't think it was polite to say so. "Of course I don't," he lied. "Now stop bawling, honey. And forget all about that fool letter. No one is going to jail. One of the boys in the know is just having some fun with me."

He wished he felt as certain as he sounded.

**H**AZEL continued to drip into her alligator pear. It was the first time outside of their act that Johnny had ever seen her cry. He wished that she would stop. If Hazel continued to drip, the odds were ten to one that some male with an ingrown Sir Galahad complex would think he was pushing her around and try to punch him in the nose. She attracted that sort of gallantry as a presidential year did self-nominees.

"Sweetheart, darling, lambykin," Johnny pleaded with her. "Please. Be patriotic. With so many people starving to death in Europe, leave me at least enjoy my calories when I am paying six bucks a copy. You have nothing to worry about. Outside of being perfect, our racket is reasonably inside the law. So some chump wants to bet on your horse. Why shouldn't I take the bet? If Uncle Remus should win I would have to pay off, would I not?"

"That crow-bait," Hazel hooted.

Johnny was shocked. "Darling! Not so loud. Besides, you know as well as I do that Uncle Remus is blood cousin to

that king of the turf, War Admiral."

"On the plasma side," Hazel agreed.

Johnny applied himself to his steak. That was the trouble with women. You couldn't depend on them. You took a girl out of the dime store. You bought her clothes. You taught her to eat with a fork. You taught her how to tell the story. And what happened? She either ran off with another guy or she wanted to think for herself.

Hazel harped back to the letter. "If you ever were to marry someone, Johnny, who would you marry?"

"You are stating a hypothetical illusion," he assured her. "I wouldn't marry the best woman alive. Marriage is the grave of a man's ambition. Marriage is a snare and a mixing of the best that there is in man with the worst that there is in woman. Look at what happened to Adam, to Samson, and to that Ding Dong Daddy guy out in L.A."

"What?" Hazel wanted to know.

"Adam was short-changed a rib. Samson went bald. And Ding Dong Daddy went to jail for bigamy."

Hazel's eyes grew wide again. "How awful, Johnny. That's where the letter said you'd go. Only it called it pokey."

Johnny half rose from his chair, remembered the price of the steak and sat back down again. "Look. For the last time." He shook his knife at her. "I am *not* going to jail. I am *not* going to marry anyone. I am *not* going to get a job. And when I find out who wrote that fool letter I am going to punch him in the nose."

Hazel hewed brightly to the line. "Unless, of course, you are in jail."

Johnny ignored her.

"And another thing, Johnny," she pointed out. "On the other hand, that is, I mean, your *own* parents were probably married."

"Probably," he agreed, then realized what she had said. "You're darn tooting they were. But please. For my sake, Hazel. Be a good girl and fill your mouth with food. I don't even want to talk about marriage. All marriage gets a guy is an alarm clock, installment payments and babies. Besides, if I had a wife what would she think, me running all over the country with you?"

For a moment he thought the ceiling

had fallen on his head. It hadn't. It was only the steak platter. It was the mayonnaise on the salad, not blood, that had temporarily blinded both eyes. He wiped them clear in time to see Hazel's back disappearing into the lobby. The head waiter rushing to the scene of the wreckage braked to a toe-tip stop, gaping open-mouthed at the alligator pear nestling on Connors' lapel.

"I always wear a pear on my lapel," Johnny told him with dignity.

The headwaiter was a small man. He had to crane his neck to look Johnny in the face. He chose the discreet form of valor. "Yes, sir. On you it looks good, sir," he said meekly.

Johnny resumed his chair, his steak dry in his mouth, wondering what he had said to make Hazel explode. If he had insulted her as he had once, early in their acquaintance, he could understand the display of temper. He fingered his cheek in memory. The slap had sounded like a Jap mortar shell and had been almost as effective. Whatever else she might be, Hazel was an Ivory baby, ninety-nine and forty-four one hundredths percent pure.

HE TRIED to put her, along with the letter, out of his mind, and couldn't. It all went back to the vow. That had been somewhere in the Eastern Malayan Archipelago with a hot and thirsty Pfc. John Connors repairing the shot-up transmission of a command car under fire while a nattily uniformed colonel had lounged in nearby safety drinking the last bottle of beer on the island.

"If I ever get out of this mess," Pfc. Connors had promised Connors, "if I ever do another lick of work, I hope my hair turns green. Starting as of the day Uncle Sam gives me that paper, I'm going to be the brass of whatever racket I'm in."

To date he had kept his word, tremendously assisted by the fact that shortly following his discharge his Uncle Charlie had died, willing him his small stable of platers, including the gawky four-year-old entered on the stud book as Uncle Remus but better known to men who knew horses as Charlie Connors' folly. Uncle Remus was a faithful starter. He often finished fourth. He had even placed

on several occasions, but if he had ever won a race it wasn't recorded in the records.

The mechanics of the swindle were simple. That was where Hazel came in. Johnny had legally transferred his horses to her. Then he had taught her to 'tell the story.'

It varied from town to town and chump to chump, but it was basically the same. She was Hazel Barrett of the Rolling Hills Barretts of Kentucky. The four-year-old and a thousand dollars were all that was left of the money her parents had left her.

*"... my no-account, no-good brother, God rest his soul in heaven, gambled an' drank all of our money away. But it doesn't matter now. I just got a wire from my trainer that Uncle Remus is sure to win in the fourth at Santa Anita tomorrow, an' most likely will pay the nicest odds, maybe even fifteen or twenty to one. So I am going to bet my thousan'." Then came the tears. "But oh, if I were only rich like you an' I could bet five or ten thousan' I could clear off all the mortgage on Rolling Hills an' maybe fall in love with some nice man like every well-brought-up young girl should."*

It was corn but it never missed. From there on there was little to do but gather in the sheaves. No wealthy, self-respecting sucker with a wife who didn't understand him could afford to pass up such an opportunity. If Uncle Remus should win it was easy money and Miss Barrett would be grateful. If he should lose, which was far more likely, the little blonde orphan without a dime to her name or a friend to take care of her, stranded in a strange big city, would have to lean on someone. A measly few thousand dollars was a small price to get in on such a ground floor.

What made it practically foolproof was that Miss Barrett didn't trust the local books and, being too far from the scene to process her money through the mutuals, she insisted on betting her thousand dollars with an old bookmaking friend of the family, one John Connors, who would pay track odds, and who just happened to be in the city.

The chump was forced to follow suit. Juggling his big roll of bills, openly bored

by such a small transaction, Johnny remained with them until the results had been announced, then regretfully pocketed the money. He had hoped Miss Barrett would collect. Uncle Remus *had* to win some time.

Hazel was always *so* sorry. But she was brave. More, she wasn't quite broke after all. She still had train fare to Kentucky.

The chump might realize he had been swindled. Most of them did. But he had no legal redress. Hazel actually owned the horse. The horse had actually run in the race. And Johnny doubted if even a lawyer could prove there were no Barretts of Rolling Hills. Most of the family had moved to some place called Wimpole Street. A traveling U.S.O. show in New Guinea had given a play about them.

To date, Hazel had told the story fourteen times. Tomorrow would be the fifteenth. And Uncle Remus had never failed them. He had limped in fourth or worse from the merry-go-round at Pascoag to Tijuana.

THE WAITER, hovering for a tip, wanted to know if the meal had been to his satisfaction.

"I never wore a better one," Johnny assured him. He paid his check and holed up in a chair in the lobby, the recurring high points of the scene with Hazel and the mysterious letter refusing to aid and abet his digestion. There was, in fact, a growing hard lump in his stomach. Not even sight of the curly lamb whom he was to shear on the morrow was able to dissolve it.

The man was forty if he was a day. His hair was mousy brown. He wore huge horn-rimmed glasses that made him look like a college professor but somehow reminded Johnny of a house man he had known in Las Vegas. Hazel had allowed him to speak to her in the cocktail lounge some days before. His name, he had told her, was Jones. He was a retired banker. His wife didn't understand him. He had already mentioned a ten-room apartment, a mink coat and a Cadillac, all of which he would be pleased to have Hazel try on for size.

Dismissing him from his mind, Johnny re-read the letter. It had been written, he decided, by some lug. The words

retribution and especially were misspelled. That ruled out a former victim. Wolves able to grow five-thousand-dollar pelts were also able to spell. On the other hand, none but the burned knew of the fire he was tending. Then he thought of Sergeant Gill. While not exactly a reformer, the former technical sergeant was hyped on the subject of marriage. He was always showing pictures of miniature Gills around. And every time Johnny met him there was a new one in the group. More, Gill knew he was in Chicago. He was head night mechanic of a big Loop garage less than a block away.

A cold light in his eyes, Johnny stood up and promptly became entangled in the fronds of the potted palm under which he was sitting. By the time he had fought his way free, Hazel was emerging from the elevator, a floating dream in white silk and Persian lamb and a big smile on her face for Jones.

The lump in his stomach growing, Johnny glowered at her. That was a woman for you. She would conk her bread and butter with a steak platter, then goo all over a man who was practically a stranger to her and certainly bore her the worst of intentions. It would serve her right if he took the advice in the letter and quit while the quitting was good. Then, when her twenty-five thousand was gone, she would have to go back to the dime store. Or would she?

Johnny suddenly wasn't so certain. Dumb or not, Hazel had what it took. The house detective pried his hat from his scalp as she passed him, allowing a covey of moths to escape. The desk clerk beamed idiotically. A salesman swallowed his cigar

and continued to smoke air. There was no doubt about it. The kid was beautiful.

A sour taste in his mouth, he followed them out on the walk to see what kind of a car Jones drove. Jones, it would seem, rode cabs.

Johnny sniffed at the air suspiciously. Someone had been tampering with it. Since he had been out that afternoon there had been a definite change. The night was soft and warm and somehow slightly fragrant. The last of the snow had disappeared. A silver moon was spiked on the Tribune Tower. It was a hell of a night, he thought, for a nice kid like Hazel, crazy about nature as she was and always cooing over flowers in florists' windows and pointing out bird nests in trees, to have to sit through some corny show and a night club with a lecherous old goat like Jones.

Jones helped Hazel into a cab and got in beside her. The overhead light winked out. The cab merged with the passing traffic. The sourness in Johnny's mouth increased. Maybe he needed some baking soda, or even some sulphur and molasses like his mother used to dose him with.

"... on the other hand, that is, I mean, your own parents were probably married, Johnny."

Or maybe he needed a shot, a big one. But business before health. He had a little matter he wanted to discuss with former Technical Sergeant Gill. He found Gill squatting on his haunches, peering with professional interest into the abdominal cavity of a disembowled Lincoln Continental. Tapping him on the shoulder, Johnny demanded, "And just how



**Kent**

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do you spell retribution, Sergeant Gill?"

"R-e-t . . ." Gill began earnestly, then got to his feet grinning. "Hi-ya, Johnny. I was hoping you'd look me up. I was talking about you to the boss just the other day. The best damn grease monkey in the whole damn Army of the United States of America, I called you." He shook hands enthusiastically. "How is the world going, soldier? Swell, I hope. But what is this retribution gag? Don't tell me you're beating the drum?"

Johnny was not to be diverted. "Spell retribution," he insisted. "Also especially."

"R-e-t-r-i-b-u-t-i-o-n. E-s-p-e-c-i-a-l-l-y," Gill spelled the two words promptly. His grin widened. "You see the reason I know so good is I was helping my oldest boy with his spelling just this afternoon and both of them words was in the list. But what is the idea, Johnny?"

That would seem to absolve Gill. Sighing, Johnny told him to forget it. "It was just an idea I had." He tried to make amends. "How is for stepping across the street and lifting a short one, Harry?"

With fifteen mechanics under him, Gil couldn't leave the garage. But he did have a bottle in his office. The whiskey warm in his stomach, the familiar smell of oil in his nose, Johnny forgot his indigestion, at least temporarily.

The first bottle dead and buried, Gill insisted on sending out for a second. Nine o'clock became ten. Ten o'clock merged with eleven. Midnight snipped the day from time. It was after one o'clock when Johnny left the garage, weaving slightly, with Gill's parting words still in his ears:

"The best damn red-headed grease monkey in the whole damn Army of the United States, including the Gyrenes and the Seebees. And any time you want a job, Johnny, you come around when I go on shift at eight and I will make room for you if I have to fire six other guys. Peace, it's wonderful, Johnny. I never seen so many broken-down heaps. A smart mechanic like you couldn't help but make himself one-five-oh a week."

"Peanutsh," Johnny hiccuped. Besides he would have to work for it. He had a better racket. Hazel told the story. He made book. Uncle Remus ran out

of the money. It was an unbeatable combination. But he still wished he knew who had written the letter.

SOMEONE had built an invisible barricade in the revolving door of the hotel. He tripped over it and would have fallen if a disapproving doorman hadn't steadied him. He asked at the desk if there had been any wires or phone calls and the clerk gave him a dirty look.

"No. There have not, Mr. Connors." He hesitated, added, "But Miss Barrett left word for you to call her, if you think you should in your condition."

Johnny wanted to know what was wrong with his condition.

"Nothing," the clerk assured him. "But as one Alcoholic Anonymous *might* say to another, your slip is showing, brother."

"I'll tell him when he comes in," Johnny wise-cracked. But his brief elation was gone. The lump was back in the pit of his stomach. Perhaps he had better see a doctor in the morning. It might be something serious.

A youth about his own age and size was lounging near the elevator bank on the seventh floor as the operator let Johnny out of the cage. Johnny wove past him down the hall. In front of the door of Hazel's suite he hesitated, then walked on to his own room. She'd said to call her. He would. Besides, he knew what she wanted to tell him. She had told Jones the story and Jones had promised to show up before the race with two, four, five or more thousand dollars to augment the thousand she had told him she intended to bet.

His key was lightly swollen but he managed to get it into the lock of his door. Closing the door was a different proposition. The lounging youth had followed at his heels and was edging in behind him.

"Easy makes it, Joe," Johnny reproved him. "One of us must have the wrong room."

"I don't think so," the other man said. "Inside, pal. And don't give me no argument. So you were in New Guinea. I bulged all over Bastogne."

Johnny felt for the light switch, the better to see to smack him, but when the room light came on he changed his mind. An older man was sitting on his bed, a

lighted cigarette dangling from his lips and a nasty-looking gun in one hand. More, the gun was pointed at his indignation.

The door snicked shut behind him. Something hard and round prodded the small of Johnny's back. He asked the man on the bed, "What is this, a stick-up?"

The man pondered the question briefly. "No. Not exactly. I guess you could call it a meeting of the redistribute-the-wealth club. But the first thing I want you to do is call Hazel so she won't come busting in here." He slipped the safety on and off his gun. "And if I were you, Connors, I wouldn't mention us."

Johnny did as he was told. Hazel sounded contrite. "Oh, I am so glad you called, Johnny. I didn't want us to go to sleep on a quarrel. It was all my fault and I'm sorry I hit you with the steak and threw the lettuce and tomatoes at you."

"It was an alligator pear," Johnny corrected coldly.

Some of the warmth went out of her voice. "About the other. It—it's all right, I guess. Mr. Jones mentioned the figure five and he'll be here some time around noon because of the difference in time."

A long silence followed. Hazel broke it. "Well, I guess that's all. Good-night, Johnny."

Johnny said, "Good-night," then turned back to face his visitors. "Okay, boys. Let's have it. What's the caper?"

The younger man had put away his gun and was flexing a lead and leather sap.

"Now," his partner told him.

The younger man swung the sap, Johnny tried to block the blow and managed to deflect it to his shoulder. The older man got off the bed and took two quick steps.

"For God's sake," he exploded to the younger man, "I thought you knew your business." He lifted his arm and brought it down in a chopping motion. The barrel of his gun made contact with the small hollow behind Johnny's right ear and Johnny promptly lost all interest in the matter. He was dancing in a daisy chain on a Vassarish looking campus while Hazel, in mortar board and gown, was declaiming a scrambled prelude to the

Constitution. Or was it the Bill of Rights?

"We, the women of the United States of America, hold these truths to be self evident."

Then all was dark and silent. . . .

MORNING was full and Johnny knew that he had been. He tried some hair of the dog from the bottle in his suitcase, and the dog backed up and growled at him. Later, sitting on the edge of his bed holding his head in both hands to keep it from swelling up and crowding him out of the room, he tried to reconstruct the events of the night past.

They didn't make sense. The contents of his wallet were intact. Nothing had been taken from his bags. Outside of the one blow no further violence had been inflicted on him. Some time during the night or early morning he remembered hearing the phone ring. Shortly following the call the two hoodlums had departed. The attack on him didn't make sense. As the first meeting of the redistribute-the-wealth club, it had been a phenomenal failure. Johnny patted the dog again and this time it stayed in its kennel long enough for him to shave and dress.

It was almost noon when he descended to the lobby and collected the fat roll from the hotel safe. He would need it to impress Jones and imply prompt payment of the wager. He shuddered slightly as he put it in his pocket. If he had been carrying it last night it would be gone.

Three cups of black coffee steamed the last cobweb from his head. He felt like a new man and bought the new man a big breakfast as he waited for Hazel to have him paged.

Last night's solution was simple. The hoods thought he would be carrying his roll and they had slugged him for it. Still, that didn't explain the phone call or why they had stayed in his room all night. Nor did it explain the letter.

Life had been so simple. Now it was complicated.

"And to hell with Chicago," he decided.

As soon as he had trimmed Jones he would have Hazel pack her bags and they would take the first train out. They might even go back east and watch Uncle Remus lose a race.

A bellboy paged him shortly before one. Seen close up, Mr. Jones looked neither so old nor so mousy. Back of the horned-rimmed glasses his eyes had the same predatory look as those of the house man in Las Vegas.

"Mr. Jones, meet Mr. Connors," Hazel performed the honors. She was in good voice and form. There was a musical lilt to the end of her sentences. A simple, tight-fitting white dress brought out her best points. As long as the four words, *erster, poil, erl and boid* didn't creep into her conversation, Johnny doubted any male who was looking at her while she talked could possibly detect the flaws in her Scarlet O'Hara accent.

Jones had been well hooked. There was no need for a further telling of the story on Hazel's part. When she handed Johnny the one thousand dollars she said she wanted to wager, "right on dear ol' Uncle Remus' nose," Jones dutifully forked over five grand more only assuring himself of Johnny's ability to pay and the fact that he paid track odds.

Hazel tuned the radio to a station broadcasting directly from the track and suggested a drink while they waited. It was too early for Jones. Johnny said that he'd had one last night and retired to a chair in the corner from which he watched Hazel concoct a villainous-looking, sticky green drink from her small stock of liqueurs.

"To Uncle Remus," she toasted.

Johnny shuddered as she raised it to her lips. A sweet kid like Hazel, he decided, shouldn't drink. The sight of her sipping the thing brought back his indignation. And then the fourth race was on.

Hazel found a fresh handkerchief in which to be broken hearted. Jones leaned on the radio, a far-away look in his eyes. Johnny snapped the rubber band on his roll preparatory to returning it to his pocket. With the starting and jockey and trainer's fees, plus all expenses, deducted, the next few minutes would earn himself and Hazel a good four thousand dollars. And the wisenheimer in the letter had suggested he get a job. It was to laugh. The radio droned on:

". . . now they're coming into the stretch. It's Blue Bonnet in the lead with

Margerine coming up fast and Uncle Remus on the outside. Now Uncle Remus is passing Margerine. He and Blue Bonnet are racing neck and neck." There was slight incredulity in the announcer's voice. "It's Uncle Remus. It's Uncle by a length!"

For a moment Johnny sat stunned. Then he attempted to shut off the radio.

"I wouldn't, son," Jones suggested. "Why not let's get the odds or you won't know how much to pay me." There was a strange new quality to his voice, something resembling emery paper.

Johnny asked him, "You haven't by any chance a brother in Las Vegas, have you?"

Jones ignored him pointedly. Her handkerchief clutched in her hand, ready to turn on the tears, Hazel wanted to know what had happened.

"You wouldn't know, I suppose," Johnny said hotly. "I knew you didn't like me. But I didn't think you disliked me so much,"

A LOT of things were suddenly clear to Johnny. He knew why the hoods had slugged him. He knew why they had spent the night in his room. He knew whom the phone call had come from. Murphy, the trainer, had called from the track, suspicious something was in the wind when the hood's outside man who had given the hypo or speedball or whatever Uncle Remus had been given had begun to hang around the stable.

"Twenty-two forty . . . sixteen twenty . . . ten sixty," the announcer read the odds as they were posted and Jones switched off the radio. He knew what he wanted to know.

"As I figure it," he told Johnny, "that makes you owe me fifty-six thousand dollars, even."

"I'll see you in hell first," Johnny exploded. "I've been robbed. I—"

He stopped short as the room door opened and the two hoods with whom he had tangled the night before stood framed in the doorway.

The older of the pair said, "Hi-ya, pal. Have a little tough luck on the horses?" Hooking his thumbs in his belt he allowed the butt of his gun to show slightly.

Jones took the roll from Johnny's fin-

gers and counted it. "I make this just right," he announcerd. "Exactly fifty-six thousand dollars. Thank you a lot, Mr. Connors." He put on his hat, then turned in the doorway to lift it gallantly to Hazel. "And thank you, too, Miss Barrett. If you ever get back to Rolling Hills drop me a card. With the eleven thousand, two hundred dollars you win from Mr. Connors you should be able to make a substantial payment on the mortgage."

The door closed solidly behind him.

Worrying her unused handkerchief into a knotted rag, her forehead furrowed in deep thought, Hazel came to the conclusion, "Something went wrong, didn't it, Johnny." Her face brightened. "But it isn't as bad as it might be, considering that I've won eleven thousand two hundred dollars."

All Connors could do was groan. He hadn't the heart to tell her they were broke, that he would be lucky if he could scrape enough together to settle their hotel bills. Nor was there anything he could do about the swindle. It had been perfectly legal. Jones had merely turned his own guns on him. The only bright spot in an otherwise very dark picture was the fact that Hazel hadn't turned on him, that she hadn't been in on the clip. He didn't think he could have stood that.

But right now he needed a drink.

Hazel stopped him halfway to the door. "I had a premonition something like this was going to happen. Our luck was just too good. Like Uncle Stanislaus, on mother's side of the family, used to say, you can ride a good horse to water but a rolling stone gathers no moss."

In sudden suspicion, Johnny crossed the room to her and tilted her chin with his finger. "How do you spell retribution and especially?"

"R-e-t-i-b-u-t-i-o-n. E-s-p-e-s-i-a-l-l-y," she spelled.

"You wrote that letter yourself."

"I did not," she denied the accusation. Her voice grew small. "At least not the final copy. I got one of the bellboys to do that for me."

"Why?" Johnny wanted to know. "I mean, why did you write it?"

Her chin quivering, she tried to explain. "Well, like I said, I had an intuition. I'm not getting any younger, Johnny. I'll be twenty-one next year. No decently brought-up girl wants the father of her children away somewhere in a nasty old jail. And I think when a girl loves a man the way that I love you she ought at least to know where she stands."

Johnny couldn't believe his ears. "Would you mind repeating that?"

Hazel repeated, "I think when a girl loves a man the way that I love you she ought at least to know where she stands."

Even this high up a curious breeze fluttered the curtains, carrying with it an aroma of distant violets and much more nearby hot buttered popcorn, bock beer and spent gasoline.

Johnny looked at his watch. He should be able to hock it for enough to buy a license and pay a preacher. The hell of it was in Illinois there was a three-day wait. He said as much to Hazel.

Her eyes shining she said, "Oh, that. I think nothing of it, Johnny." She rummaged in a drawer. "I have a week-old license for Illinois. And one for California, Rhode Island, New York and New Jersey. It was the first thing I bought in every town, just in case you should decide to marry someone."

Johnny kissed her, hard. She responded with equal fervor, then backed from him warily. "Now—just a minute. Is that a proposal or a proposition, Johnny?"

The lump in his stomach gone, Johnny grinned all over his face. "Both," he admitted candidly.

"Oh, well, in *that* case . . ." she told him, and came back into his arms.

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# ALL WRAPPED UP!



"You know," Nick said, "I think I need a kiss before I kill you."

By **PHILIP WECK**

*"Maybe I ought to shoot you," Nick said. "I could call it resisting arrest. The cops would like that—everything all wrapped up for them."*

**I** GOT the wire at two o'clock, Pacific time. There's three hours difference; Nick must have sent it from New York about four P.M.

I called the airport right away and made a reservation. Then I went in to see the boss.

"I want a leave of absence," I told him.

He looked at me out of watery blue eyes and said, "You know we're busy now, Charlie. Busy as hell."

"I've got to have it."

"Charlie, I don't see—"

"Look," I said, "I have something to do that's of transcendental importance. Know what that means?"

He said, "See here, young man, I—"

"It means that I'm going to do it right now and nothing's going to stand in my way. If you still have my job for me when I'm through you can call it a leave of absence."

"Maybe if you'd take a different attitude," he said, "we could work things out. Just what is the trouble?"

"Strictly personal. Something your

coarse little soul wouldn't understand."

He got red in the face.

"How about it?" I asked him.

"Absolutely not."

I stood up. "I'll write you a letter one of these days," I said.

Hell, I thought, I could always open my own office again. I'd rather be a starving private eye once more, anyway, than an insurance investigator with a five-figure income.

I went home and fished my gladstone from the back of the closet and threw some clothes into it. Peg came in while I was packing. She looked at the bag and the clothes the way a dog sniffs at things. "Where are you going?"

I tossed the wire on the bed, and she grabbed it.

"Charlie!" she said. "You can't do this to me! You can't!"

I dug up the .38 I'd bought from a drunken Navy officer and put it in the bag.

"If you go," she said, "you don't need to come back."

I threw a box of cartridges in beside the gun.

She said, "This means we're through."

I snapped the bag shut and pulled my hat on my head, hard.

"I won't be here when it's over."

I walked out the door and yelled, "I'll drop you a postcard some day."

Beulah, the maid, was in the hall, where she'd heard the whole thing.

"You're going to be sorry," she said.

"I'll send you a message in a bottle," I told her.

I had just enough time to stop at the bank, where I drew out all my cash, \$15,000. The plane was waiting when I hit the airport, its engines roaring, and we took off by four o'clock.

Once we were in the air I got the telegram out again and read it.

*She's gone*, it said. That's all. *She's gone*.

She's gone, she's gone. I could hear the engines hum it and the shoes of the hostess clickety-clack it as she walked up and down the aisle. She's gone, she's gone, she's gone. . . .

**I** REMEMBERED the first time I'd met her, with her soft brown eyes and her big floppy hat, and the bruise on her

cheek. Walking through Central Park in the rain.

And the second time, when Gus was picked up, and the times after that, during the trial, when we'd sneaked out to the bar across the street and looked at the pictures of her in the papers: "Gangster's Wife at His Trial." And the evenings we'd spent together.

She's gone, the telegram said. Gone. She'd always been gone—just a little out of reach, just beyond me.

The plane let down at Salt Lake and after that I slept a little. At Kansas City I wired Nick when to meet me. I tried to doze but the engines kept roaring, "She's gone, she's gone," and the soft voices around me kept whispering the same words.

The way she'd whispered to me on that last night, after Gus had been convicted and we were walking through Central Park in the rain.

"It won't work, Charlie," she'd said. "It won't work. I'll never go back to Gus. He's a—brute. But I'm no good for you, Charlie. It just won't work. Let me go away for a while, by myself."

I had let her go. She didn't even answer my letters. And then I had heard she was back in New York and she wouldn't see me. So I'd pulled up stakes and headed west.

And now Gus was out of jail.

And she was gone.

In Pittsburgh I sneaked the gun out of my bag and loaded it and put it in my pocket. Then I tried to sleep some more while the plane rocked and bumped over the mountains and a soft rain fell in Central Park.

We landed at LaGuardia Field in a grey morning—I couldn't tell you which morning. Nick was waiting for me. He shook my hand and said, "Come on," and led me to his car and we drove back toward Manhattan.

"What happened?" I asked him.

He said, "I dunno. She's gone, that's all. And Gus is out of stir."

"Yeah, I know that. But where did she go? How did she get away?"

Nick said, "I been spot-checking, like you told me. Night before last I went around and she'd moved out. Just like that."

"What about the landlady, doesn't she know?"

"She ain't sayin'. What about a hotel room for you first?"

"I'm going to see that landlady," I said. "Now."

Nick squirmed uneasily. "I never worked out on an old lady."

"I haven't either. Up to now."

We went to the rooming house, on the East Side. It stuck right out to the edge of the sidewalk, a dingy, run-down place in a dingy, run-down neighborhood. The street was deserted except for a little old fellow leaning against the front of a poolroom across the way.

I pushed the bell of the rooming house and pretty soon the landlady answered, opening the door just a crack.

Landlady? She barely qualified for the second half of that word. She must have weighed 200 pounds, and not a bit of it fat. She went in for a mustache and she could have worn a ribbon in the long hairs on her chin.

I said, "I'm looking for Grace."

She glared at me, from my foot to my hat. Her face was blank and ugly.

Finally she said, "It's too bad, sonny. It's too bad."

"Where is she?" I asked.

"You got blue eyes, all right, and fancy duds. Your name Charlie?"

"Yes. Where is she?"

"It's too bad, sonny. She was waitin' for you, but she went off with some greasy slob. Last week."

Then, before we could move, she slammed the door and we heard her lock it.

I pushed on the bell and kept my finger there and Nick tried to kick in the bottom panel of the door. After about a minute of this a window opened right over our heads and the old hag stuck her head out.

"The cops are comin'," she boomed in a deep, nasty voice. "I just called 'em. That door'll hold till they get here."

Then she whammed the window down again.

It was too high for us to reach. There weren't any other windows we could get at and there was no way around to the back. Nick and I crossed the street to the poolroom and stood there.

Nick cursed under his breath. But I

didn't feel much like cursing. I was sick.

A greasy slob. That was Gus. It had to be Gus. Her husband.

And where did that leave me? What could I do about it? Where did the whole play leave me, anyway, with Peg back in California?

Those things that should have been—well, they were gone again, gone for good this time. I was really sick.

THE LITTLE OLD MAN from the poolroom ambled over.

"She's a one," he said. "She's sure a one."

He meant the landlady with the John L. Lewis eyebrow on her upper lip.

He said, "She's sure a one. I could tell you plenty about her."

"Look, pop," I said, "you hang around here much?"

"Every day."

"You know any of the people who room over there?"

"Sure, sure. I know 'em all. Ain't none of 'em like Emma, though."

"How about a young girl with brown hair, smooth brown hair, and a squinty little nose and deep blue eyes and—"

Nick said, "Aw, for cripes sake!"

"Sure, sure," the old man said. "I knew her. She's gone."

"Where did she go?"

He shrugged his skinny old shoulders. "I dunno. I dunno where, but she's gone, all right."

"Did you see her leave?"

"Nope. Didn't see a thing. But she's gone, all right. She ain't been around since the day after she come in with the black eye."

I grabbed him by the shirt-collar and lifted him off the walk. "You're lying!"

"I ain't lyin'," he whined. "Honest, I ain't lyin', mister. She's gone."

I put him down. He didn't weigh as much as a loaf of bread. "Come on, Nick," I said. "Let's get out of here."

We got in the car and Nick started the engine. Then I climbed out again and went back to the old man and gave him a ten-spot.

He grabbed it and whipped it into his pocket. "I ain't lyin', mister," he said. "Honest, I ain't lyin'. She's gone, she is."

I got back in the car. Big-time Charlie.

If things weren't right, if you kicked one around, fix it up with a ten-spot.

Only there were a lot of things you couldn't fix up with all the ten-spots in the world. Such as an old man getting pushed around. Or a brown-haired, pug-nosed girl with a black eye.

"Let's go," I said. "Let's get the hell out of here."

We drove around for a while, over to Riverside Drive and up. Way up.

Finally Nick said, "Now what?"

There was only one thing we could do, so I told him, "Find Gus."

He said, "Count me out."

"You getting yellow, Nick?"

"I kinda like the skin I'm wearin'," he said.

"Okay, okay," I told him. "Pull up."

He pulled up to the curb and I got out of the car. "I'll pick up my bags at your office," I said.

He didn't move.

I took three tens out of my wallet and gave them to him. "That enough?"

He stuck them in his pocket and said, "It's okay for a starter. I'll send you a bill."

Then he drove off.

And there I was—alone again. Alone on the town, with a brown-haired, soft young girl to find. Quick.

I remembered a tavern on the East Side where Gus had hung out before he went up the river. I grabbed a cab and found it and went in and sat at the bar.

After my second whiskey I asked the bartender, "Where's Gus these days? I'd like to talk to him."

The bartender was a new one on me, a young kid. He said, "Gus? Gus who?"

"Gus," I told him. "There's only one." "What kind of a game is this?" he asked.

I went across the street and tried another tavern. Then another. By late afternoon I got a nibble. Gus was living in an apartment house across town. He was playing it straight now. No more trouble with the law for him.

The apartment house was a big, plush affair. No doorman, but carpets in the foyer, a settee, a big urn. Quiet, swank. Not the place where you could bring a girl forcibly.

But what made me think she'd been brought there forcibly? What made me think she hadn't walked in of her own accord, with her eye black and her shoulders bent and her spirit broken over a guy she'd waited for who hadn't shown up?

I didn't know, but I sure meant to find out.


**T**HERE were six apartment bells with six different names over them in that foyer. Hanefstaegel, Pilger, Jones, Beer-bohm, Goodnight and Leamon. I buzzed Jones and walked up one flight. Gus was standing in the door of his flat, waiting.

He knew me. There wasn't much secret about what Grace and I had been doing while he was on trial and there wasn't much secret about the way I felt.

He said, "C'mon in," and his bulging face didn't show any expression at all.

Just the idea of Grace ever married to him made me sick.

We went in and he sat down in an over-stuffed chair. He took a handkerchief out of his hip pocket and smeared it over his bulging face.



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**MUTUAL BROADCASTING SYSTEM, INC.**

"It's hot," he said. "It's too damn hot."

Except for us, the apartment was deserted. I didn't feel like wasting time. I said, "Where's Grace?"

He mopped his face some more and he kept his mouth shut, waiting.

"You might as well tell me," I said. "Because I'll find her anyway."

"What's it to you?" he asked suddenly. "She's my wife, not yours."

I said, "I'm going to take her away."

Woodenly, still without changing his stupid expression, he said, "Maybe. Maybe. When I'm through you can have what's left, Carter."

The dirty slob! My fingers tightened around the gun in my pocket.

He rubbed the handkerchief on his face again. "Hit a babe in the body, it hurts, yeah, but it don't show. Hit 'em in the face, it shows. To a woman it's worse. Right?"

I cursed him with every word I could think of. I had the gun halfway out.

He said, "This time I smash her face in." He put the handkerchief in his hip pocket and when he brought his hand out he had a blackjack in it. He moved faster than I've ever seen a big man move.

I fired. But he'd tricked me. The blackjack took me across the knuckles and the gun went flying into the air, the bullet splattering into the woodwork. He picked the pistol up before I could move toward it.

"Now git!" he said. "Out! Or I'll smash in your puss too."

I cursed him again and he cuffed me on the jaw, slamming me against the wall.

He had two hundred pounds, a gun and a blackjack. I opened the hall door.

"I'll be back," I told him. "I'll find her. And then I'll kill you."

He said, "Git!"

I closed the door and walked out, past a thin, bony old woman with long feet, standing there in the hall and watching me, her eyes big. I went outside, to the nearest tavern, and I had a couple of quick ones. My hands were shaking and my mouth was dry.

I should have killed him when I had the chance.

But if I had, how would I ever find Grace? She wasn't in that apartment. Where was she?

I had another drink. Then I spent a half-hour trying to find a cab, and when I did get one I went to Nick's office.

It was after seven but the office was open. Some blonde who wanted divorce evidence was waiting. After a few minutes Nick came in and took me into the back room.

I said, "Nick, I need a gun."

He didn't ask any questions; he opened a drawer of his desk and brought one out. It was another .38 revolver, an old one. I broke it; it was loaded.

"It's not registered," he told me. "They can't trace it."

"I don't give a damn if they do," I said.

I took another cab back to Gus' place. The best job was to tail him, I thought. Stick with him and in that way find Grace.

But I didn't get a chance to. A couple of squad cars and an ambulance were parked at the curb, and the street was full of cops.

"Keep on going," I told the cabbie. "Don't stop."

Around the corner, I had him park and I slipped him a ten. "Stroll back there and see if you can find out what's up," I said.

He found out. A man had been killed there, he said. A fat man who was an ex-con and lived on the first floor. Shot in the back of the head.

I cursed some more. "He even died too soon," I muttered.

"What's that?" the cabbie asked.

"Nothing. Get in."

He got in.

"Times Square," I said.

Halfway there I had him stop, paid him and left the cab. Then I took a subway for a couple of stations, got out and walked six blocks and hailed another hack. I didn't want the cops to find me too easy.

Finally I stopped off to have a drink and to think it over.

Gus was dead now. He couldn't lead me to Gracie. Nobody could. I didn't know where to find her or how to find her.

But this was only half of it. Because from that minute on I'd have to keep ahead of the police. Well ahead of them.

The old lady in the hall outside Gus' apartment had seen me; she'd probably heard me threaten Gus. She'd talk.

The cabbie I'd sent back to investigate

would go running to the cops as fast as he could.

They didn't know me, but they could give a description. And before long all this business about Grace and me would be scrawled in some cop's notebook, with my name heading it.

I HAD another drink. This bar was wired for television; I wouldn't get any news broadcast in there.

I went out and tried another bar. Another television set.

I tried a third one, then a fourth. Nothing but television and fights. I walked the street for hours.

Finally I found a newsboy and bought a paper. It was dark out, close to midnight by that time. The papers had the story.

They had more than the story. In the second paragraph they had the business: "... Police are looking for Charles Carter of Hollywood, who allegedly was involved with the slain gangster's wife, Grace. Carter, they said, is in New York now and ..."

I threw the paper in the gutter and walked on in the darkness. Darkness is nice. Sometimes in the darkness Charlie Carter of Hollywood doesn't look like Charlie Carter. Sometimes a blue suit looks like a black suit. Sometimes you can hide in the darkness, and people can't see you but you can see them.

I walked a few more blocks until the whiskey fumes cleared a bit. Then, by subway and bus, I made my way back to the East Side. There was only one chance now. Only one answer. I had to find Gracie.

I went to the dingy street where she'd lived and I made my way among the shadows until I came to the poolroom. I planted there, across from the Hairy One's rooming-house. Maybe, I thought, I could shake her down. Maybe I could stay there and something would happen. Maybe.

The old man was still there, still supporting the wall of the poolroom. A radio inside was blaring out the news.

"... the gun found beside the body," the announcer said, "was a Navy issue. However, Los Angeles police have reported issuing a permit for a gun with that serial number to Charles Carter. An all-car alarm ..."

The old man shuffled over to me.

"I remember you," he said. "You gave me ten bucks."

I said, "Yeah, sure, pop, that's right."

"That girl," he said. "She's no good. Forget her. Purty as a picture but she ain't no good."

I said, "That's right, pop. That's right."

"Anythin' else you want to know, mister? I could use another ten."

I said, "No."

"Okay," he said. "Okay. I figgered mebbe you'd like to know where she went."

I grabbed him by the collar again. "How could you know?"

"I followed her," he whined. "I followed her. I always follow the purty ones."

"You're lying!"

"I ain't lying. I followed her. I'll show you."

I put him down and he moved off, beckoning to me. At the corner he stopped and said, "It's worth twenty."

"Okay," I said.

It was around a couple of corners, down another street. He stopped in a doorway and put his whiskered face close to mine and whispered.

"Over there. In that fourth house. She'll be comin' along purty soon."

I took two tens out of my billfold and gave them to him. "Thanks, pop," I whispered back. I could play games, too.

The doorway wasn't very dark; any passing car could have spotted me. I waited until Pop was around the corner before I took out after him again.

He was too confident. He didn't look back once; instead he went straight to the poolroom. This time he didn't stop outside; he went in.

I peeked through the window just enough to see him at the telephone. Then I went across the street and found a big shadow and hugged it.

He came out soon and took up his old post. In about five minutes a big, black, unmarked car went by the corner. Detectives. He watched it; when it was past he moved off again.

I kept on his tail. Over to the subway, down and onto the first train, with me in the shadows, lurking on the subway stairs and dashing for the train when he got on, staying a car behind him. I made it, too;

he still was overconfident. Across town, then off the train.

A block from his destination I let him disappear. I knew where he was headed. I waited across the street fifteen minutes, and he shuffled by again on his way to his home, wherever it was.

Pretty far from that poolroom, I guessed.

I went into the building he'd just left and rang the bell of Nick's apartment. A voice floated down through the speaking-tube. A woman's voice. A voice I knew even through the distortion of that tube—a voice I would never forget.

"Who's there?" she said.

"I fergit to tell you somethin," I whined.

The buzzer rang, unlocking the downstairs door. I went in and up and Nick was waiting in the doorway of the apartment.

I had the gun in my hand, the old gun he'd given me.

"Hello, Charlie," he said. "Come on in."

NICK always had nice taste. Too nice for an honest private eye. The carpet was expensive; the furniture had cost a lot; the drapes had set him back plenty. And the woman sitting there was going to cost him a lot more. Grace.

She jumped up when she saw me.

"Charlie!" she said. "Charlie! I—"

She was just as cute as ever. Just as attractive, with the tight, low-cut dress and the wrinkled little nose and the brown eyes. Brown. Not a trace of black or blue anywhere.

"Charlie!" she said again.

Nick said, "Yeah, it's Charlie. Looks like we'll have to change our plans."

"This gun," I told him, "means you'll have to change them a lot."

Nick walked over to the drum table, opened the drawer and took out another gun. I aimed for his legs and pulled the trigger.

All I heard was a click.

"The hammer's broken, Charlie," he said. "It won't fire."

It was an old gun, the kind you can cock yourself. I pulled the hammer back and, sure enough, it was broken off. Not much, but enough.

"Charlie," she said. "Don't look at me

like that, Charlie. I had to do something, didn't I? I couldn't go back to Gus."

I said, "No, I guess you couldn't. How much insurance did he have?"

Nick answered me. "Enough. Enough to get Gracie and me out of town after you go to the chair."

"It was a smart play, Nick," I said. "You even had me paying off your operative, the old man."

"How much did you give him?"

"Thirty, all told."

"He told me ten," Nick said. "You can't trust these punks."

"Old Hairy Face, too?"

"Yeah," Nick said. "She tried to shake me down for fifty. I gave her half."

"What are you going to do now?" I asked him.

"Why not just call the cops? They'd never believe you."

Gracie said, "And after all, you did kill him, didn't you, Charlie?"

"No," I said. "I didn't. You thought I would, but I didn't. Nick must have been following me and when the trap didn't work he must have done it himself. That right Nick?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "What difference does it make?"

I said, "You going to run off with a killer, Grace?"

Nick raised the gun just a bit. "Maybe I ought to shoot you. Now. I could call it resisting arrest. The cops would like that—everything all wrapped up for them."

I said, "Maybe you ought to."

"Anyway," Nick went on, "this is the real thing, Charlie. Gracie and I—we're naturals for each other. Ever since that rainy night in Central Park a month ago when we first got to know each other."

"It was a good play, Nick," I told him again. "She never did go back to Gus, did she?"

"Nope. You can't beat it, Charlie." He got up and walked over to the telephone. "I'm going to call the cops. I'll take care of you while they're on the way over. I kind of like that idea, resisting arrest."

I still held the useless gun in my right hand. With my left I took out a cigarette and my lighter.

By the time he was connected with the Homicide Squad I had my cigarette lit.

By the time he had finished calling I had the flint out of the lighter.

He sat down on the couch again and I slipped the cigarette lighter and the spring that had held it into place into the palm of my left hand.

He raised his gun and leveled it at my head.

"This is it, Charlie," he said.

I said, "I can't believe it, Grace—"

Nick grinned. "You always were jealous, weren't you, Charlie?" he considered for a moment. "I think I need a kiss before I kill you."

He reached out with his left arm and grabbed Grace and pulled her to him. The muzzle of his gun lowered, until it pointed almost to his feet.

"Nick," I said. I had the other gun, the useless one, aimed at him.

He finished the kiss before he looked at me. Then he said, "what are you trying to do?"

"I've got the flint from my lighter in here," I told him. "In the firing-pin hole. Drop your gun, Nick."

"You crazy fool! That won't work!" He raised his right arm a couple of inches.

"Bring your gun any higher and we'll see," I said.

He hesitated.

"Drop it, Nick!"

He sat there and stared at me, thinking it over. I could almost see the sweat on his forehead.

"Drop it, Nick!" He dropped it on the floor.

"Kick it over here!"

He kicked it.

**T**HE COPS were there in five minutes. They listened to my story and they looked at the gun Nick had given me and they chuckled.

"Think it would have fired?" one of them asked me. He pointed the gun at the window and pulled the trigger. Noth-

ing happened. He tried it again. It was still no go.

"Wait a minute," I said. I got down on my hands and knees. "I dropped the flint when I tried to put it into the gun. Try it again with the flint really in there."

The cop gave me a funny look. "Never mind," he said.

They tossed me in a cell that night and kept me there for two days while they went over my story again and again. The old lady in Gus' building finally turned the trick when she remembered that Gus had been alive after I left him. In the end Nick talked.

They let me go with a warning to hang around for the trial. I walked all the way from the Tombs to my hotel, took a shower and put on fresh clothes. Outside, it was dark and raining. From my hotel window I could look down on Central Park. And remember. That was what did it.

I cracked to the room clerk as I passed by, "Case anybody asks for me, I'll be in the park." Pretending it was a joke.

He barely looked up. "Sure thing, Mr. Carter."

It was still raining in Central Park. Like the night I first met her.

She was in jail now. But not for long. With her face and her figure she could beat any accessory charge they might bring, and they realized it.

Then I heard the footsteps behind me. High heels clicking on the pavement.

I turned and a woman rushed into my arms.

"Ed!" she cried. "Ed! I got here as soon as I could. I took a plane. As soon as I heard you were in trouble. Oh, Ed, don't ever leave me again!"

It was Peg. I kissed her. Then I pushed her away a bit.

"I won't, Peg," I said. "I won't leave you. But there's one thing. I'm Charlie, not Ed. Remember?"

## LADY BOUNTIFUL

Justice of the Peace Dorothy Elliott, of West Riding, England, was a remarkable woman. Young, beautiful and brainy, she did far more than dispense justice—she built schools, libraries, dealt charity to the needy, all out of her own pocket. For seven years she rode the crest of popular esteem, blessed and beloved of her constituents . . . until she was unearthed in her real identity of a little 40-dollar-a-week secretary to a coal firm, who had merrily juggled her company's books to the tune of nearly half a million—all spent on charity!—*Lauri Wirta.*



*Meet Johnny Novak, the guy who was so allergic to work that he could barely tear himself from the arms of his loving little wife to spend the night avoiding it!*

Johnny had a lot of time to kill before seven. Judy thought he worked the graveyard shift in a plant in Burbank.



## MAYHEM in the A.M.

By FRANK DONOVAN

**J**OHNNY NOVAK pushed open the door to the all-night coffee shop and climbed a stool near the end. The counterman was leaning on the barrier watching the rain strike the windows softly, then slide down like giant tears. He glanced up at Johnny's entrance but didn't move.

"Coffee," Johnny ordered curtly.

"Sure. Sure thing, pal."

Johnny unbuttoned his trenchcoat while he waited and gazed about the room. Except for himself and the waiter there was only one other person in the place. This individual was perched on a stool in the center of the counter. His cap and suit made it obvious that he was a motorman on one of the local transportation sys-

tems. He looked as if he'd just gotten off the shift.

"Here's your coffee. Wanna doughnut or something?"

"No."

The motorman finished his coffee and stood up, dropping a coin on the counter.

"I'll be seeing you, Tom," he called to the waiter. "I've got to be getting to work."

Johnny watched his retreating figure until the door closed behind him. *Sucker!* Johnny's mind whispered. *You've got to go to work.*

The word *work* brought a sneer to his lips. He had just finished work too, but his job was a little different from the average line of employment. He only worked from four A.M. to six A.M. He wondered what the motorman would say if he knew how Johnny spent those two fleeting hours, how he made more money in one night than the motorman could in a month.

He had started it a year ago. He wondered how he hadn't thought of it before. It was so simple it frightened him sometimes. All he had to do was walk along the hall of one of the big hotels (he never bothered with any of the second-rate places) and try the doors. Some were locked. These he never bothered with. But some weren't bolted. It always surprised him at the percentage of people who were careless enough to leave their doors unfastened at night.

When a person retires he usually places his things on the dresser. One out of every ten would vary from this habit, Johnny had discovered. How simple it was to scoop the things off the dresser and walk out with them.

It was always good for two or three hundred dollars a night and with a minimum of risk. Several times he had run into the embarrassing position of having the occupant of the room awaken and demand to know what the hell he was doing there. And he always answered with the same routine:

"I'm the house detective. I'm just checking the doors to see if anyone left them open. The management cannot be responsible for your valuables if you do not lock your doors."

The other would always apologize,

especially if he weren't alone, and promise to secure his door in the future.

He finished his coffee and ordered a refill. Unconsciously his hand dropped to his coat pocket where the haul for the night rested. It had been as simple tonight as ever. He smiled a little when he thought of the couple in the bedroom of the suite he had burgled that night. Their murmured promises of undying love still rang in his ears. They had been completely unaware that he was in the next room calmly taking everything he could lay his hands on.

THE CLOCK behind the counter said six o'clock. Johnny shifted on the stool impatiently. He was anxious to leave this dirty, smelling little place and go home; home to Judy. Sweet, adorable little Judy who was as unsuspecting as the rest of the world. He gave himself a mental pat on the back.

But he couldn't get home before seven. Judy thought he worked the graveyard shift in some plant in Burbank. That was a laugh. Him working in some plant like a sucker!

Then he thought about Judy again. They had only been married about six months. He thought about her pug nose that wrinkled when she smiled and the large liquid eyes that constantly lavished silent love upon him. He got a kick out of the way those eyes lit up when he brought her a present. He remembered the time he had bought her the fur coat. It was something she had always wanted. It had set him back a couple of thousand but he didn't mind. She was worth it, all right.

Then there had been the honeymoon in Palm Springs. They had stayed at the swankiest hotel and lived like kings for two weeks. She had scolded him for being so extravagant but he knew she was pleased.

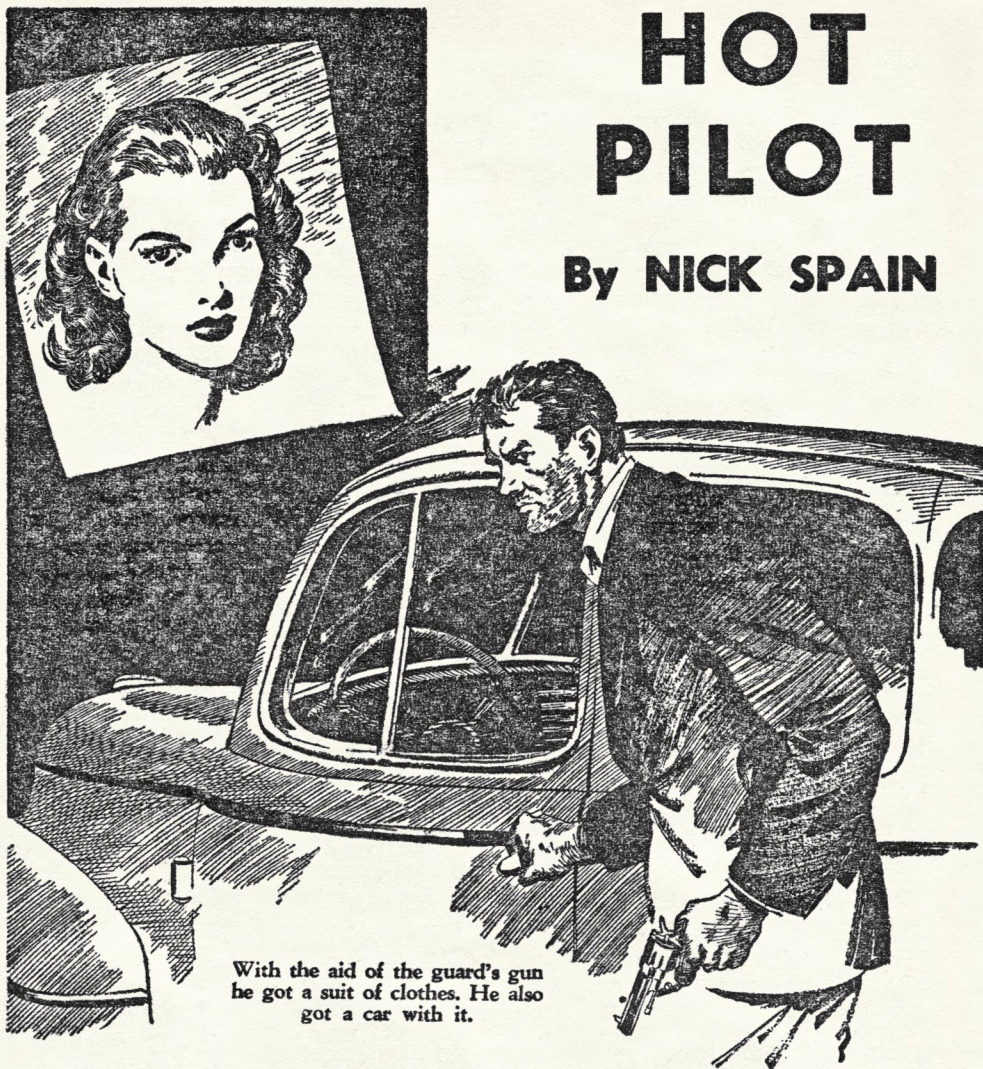
"I wish you wouldn't spend your money like that, honey," she had said. "But I do love you!"

He remembered the time he had taken her to the Mocambo. She had never been there before and was disappointed when they discovered that the famous place was filled.

(Continued on page 125)

# HOT PILOT

By NICK SPAIN



*"You want to be a hero, Billy?" Max Stanton asked. "I'm wanted five grand's worth. Turn me in and it's all yours!"*

THE KID in the next bed was dying. He had started dying very nicely but his performance was getting steadily worse. The prison doctor had told him that morning he probably wouldn't last the night and the kid had said, "So what?"

"Max," the kid said huskily, "tell the guys I took it good."

"Sure," Max Stanton said, thinking:

*But I'll bet he goes out like Little Eva in a third-rate stock company.* Max had seen a lot of them go before he'd begun to fly dope into the country—and quite a few since then.

Now it was late and the kid was dying with the prison doctor beside his bed and one guard had gone for a priest. Max Stanton lay in his bed, his face tight with contempt. The kid was delirious, mutter-

ing of his father and mother and occasionally of how he had lost his nerve when the plane caught fire over the desert and how brave, good Max had tried to save him.

Max Stanton told the doctor, slowly and precisely, so the doctor would be sure and understand, that he hadn't been trying to save the kid but the kid had been between him and the cargo of narcotics. That he had known the kid was no good when the trouble started, but in order to unload the dope from the burning plane, Max had first to move the kid. It was the kid's first try and he was yellow and . . .

The kid was as good as dead already and when he heard Max say these words it snapped the tenuous thread that held him to this world and he half sat up in bed and when he fell back, he was dead.

The priest, young, drawn with fatigue, hurried in too late. Max was amused. "Tough luck, father," he said. "I guess he couldn't wait." The young priest looked at the boy on the bed, then at Max, with bitter pity.

Max Stanton closed his eyes and started working on the problem of his escape. He wanted to get back in time to start with the new syndicate which was forming to fly the stuff in by the carload. They had promised him the job, and the setup was right, down to maintenance crews on either end of the run and two emergency landing fields, one on either side of the border. He dropped off to sleep hoping that his reputation for close-mouthed sobriety and his skill in handling an aircraft would be enough to prevent them from taking a chance on an unknown pilot before he got back.

**T**HE MAN they put in the kid's bed next day was almost fifty. He was a three-time loser who had been somewhat slow in departing from a bank with a sub-machine gun and a canvas bag full of money. A furious burst from a squad car had killed his young companion, but the old boy had prudently dropped his gun, lowered the sack and raised his hands. Now he was in the prison hospital with only a bullet hole, a small one, in his leg.

Max said he wished he were out of there, that today's prices were such that

a man could fly in ten loads and retire.

The bank robber scratched himself and said that a man who would transport, sell or use dope was either a hop-head or fool.

Max sat up in bed. "We can't all be smart," he said coldly.

"I never was," said the other.

Max quit talking to him and lay back, trying to remember all the escapes he had read of. Several came to mind: riding out in a dead man's coffin, digging a tunnel over the years with a teaspoon and disposing of the dirt by scattering it in the yard. He gave these up. The one great advantage he had was that he spoke like an educated man and didn't look like a convict. Also, he was feeling very well. He had been put in the hospital for observation, in case he had been injured internally when the plane's gas tank exploded.

The doctor changed the bank robber's bandage, looked at Max's chart and told him he'd be out of the place by tomorrow.

It was a prophetic statement. Max got out of his bed that night, slugged a careless guard with a bedpan wrapped in a sheet and, with the guard bound, gagged and naked in a linen closet, walked away in his uniform. He took his time about leaving the prison grounds and lay over through the day. That night he got a suit of clothes. The guard's gun assisted him mightily.

He held up a filling station and stole a car. His goal was Mexico, but some place in California the fever came upon him and he was sick.

He was sitting beside a little road, dirty, unshaven, and the memory of his long flight was vague in his mind. He remembered the nights when it was cold and the days when it was hot, and the fat police in the little towns, and the frequent planes in the sky. And all night long the whistle of the trains on the mountain grades, and the fever was coming back upon him and he was sick.

He sat there, and the trees danced before him as they should not dance. He had been afraid to try the border at Juarez. He had planned to go through at Caliente with the race-track crowd some Sunday. But no, he was sick. San Diego was only forty miles, but that was far, far away.

He stood up with an effort. The trees

still danced, but he held his head down, looking at the rolling ground, and the sweat came coldly down his face. He turned away from the road and started up a little lane into the mountains. Finally he saw a house. It was white and he made toward it though it wavered and was far away. The sunlight was heavy on his back. And he carried it, hot and heavy, on his back toward the house.

The house moved, grew and shrank and moved away, but finally it waited for him and he got on the porch and to the door and rapped upon it as hard as he could. He heard some movement inside the house and a dog barked. He wrapped his mind tightly around the thought that he must not think in case he fainted and was delirious, and he remembered the kid in the bed next to him back in the pen, calling for a priest.

The girl opened the door and drew back, instinctively. Max Stanton looked at her and remembered a mirror in a place called Electric Park, in Kansas City, where his father had taken him once. And the girl looked as his reflection had looked in a mirror there. Now constricted, short and wide. Now ridiculously, grotesquely, tall and thin. Behind her was the smaller figure of a boy. He said to the boy, "Have you ever been to Electric Park in Kansas City?" And that was all he said.

**H**E WAS LYING on a couch and it was cool. The girl said, "How do you feel?"

The perspiration on his face was dry and he felt nothing but weakness. "Better, now," he said.

The boy, looking wide-eyed around the girl's skirts, said, "You ain't very heavy. Me'n Sis lifted you."

"Thank you very much," Max Stanton said. "I'm sorry I caused you so much trouble."

"You have a fever," the girl said. "I'll send Billy for the doctor." The girl was young and tanned and very earnest. She wasn't frightened, just concerned.

There was the sound of planes overhead and the boy disappeared out of the door. He came back in a moment. "Trainers," he said disdainfully.

"Do you like airplanes?" Max asked. "I was going to San Diego," he added

slowly, "to try and get a job in one of the factories."

"Billy," the girl said, "you ride down to the store and call Dr. Dave."

"I'm sure that won't be necessary," Max said quickly. "I had the—the flu a little while back and I guess I got up too soon. I'll be all right in a little while."

"I like to watch the hot pursuit jobs and the bombers go over," Billy said. "I betcha I could fly a trainer."

Max smiled. "I expect you could," he said. To the girl he added, "I feel better now. I believe I'll go along."

The girl said, making a womanly gesture, "You'll do nothing of the sort. You are much too sick. If you won't let me call the doctor, you must at least stay here and rest."

"Won't your husband—"

"I haven't any husband," the girl said. "This is my little brother. I had another brother, but he went down and joined the Navy after Pearl Harbor. He didn't come back. If you'll go in there," the girl went on, "and go to bed, I'll fix you some milk toast."

Max was suddenly very hungry. He went docilely, leaning on Billy's shoulder.

Billy helped him off with his clothes and he got into the bed. "I'll getcha my brother's old straight edge tomorrow," Billy said, "and you can get you a shave."

Max Stanton put a hand to his face and it was trembling. "Thank you," he said. He lay there a moment, very tired. Then he asked, "Do you and your sister live up here all by yourselves?"

"That's right," Billy said. "Pa, he died; then there was Sis and me and John. John went off to the Navy, so there's just Sis and me. We're runnin' a few head of cattle up here and you purely can't go off and leave no cow to solo."

"What's your name, Billy?" Max asked. They haven't a telephone, he thought, and it must be a long way to a neighbor. I could stay here, perhaps, until I'm fit again.

"Brock," the boy said with profound disgust. "Ain't that a hell of a name? Billy Brock. Sayin' William don't help it none, either."

The girl came in then with the bowl of milk toast. There was the sound of a plane overhead and Billy Brock disap-

peared out of the door to take a look.

Max looked up at the girl. She was clean and sturdy looking, and her legs were brown and straight below her faded cotton dress. "Here," she said, smiling. "This will make you feel better." She put a cool hand on Max's brow. "You still have a fever," she said. "But I think you're better."

The next day his fever was gone. He found his clothes all clean, on the foot of his bed, and the sun high in the sky. Billy came in with a bowl of water and the razor. "Do you know anything about airplanes?" he asked.

"Why, no," Max said. "No, I don't."

"You seen landing fields, ain't you?"

"Yes, I've seen landing fields."

"Well, when you get up, I want you to walk up to the big pasture and see if it ain't big enough for a landing field. It's near level, a mesa like, a hundred and fifty acres."

"I'm sure that's big enough," Max said, lathering his face and sitting up in bed.

"That's what I been tellin' the Army and the Navy. . . ."

"Have you really been in touch with the authorities?" Max asked quickly.

"Naw, not really."

Max Stanton kept the relief out of his voice. "Who have you seen?" he asked.

"Well," Billy said, "it's like this. Most of this country around is Indian reservation. Our neighbors is mostly Indians." Billy paused, looking out of the window. "Did you ever tell an Indian anything?" he asked finally.

"Why, no, I never did," Max said.

"Well," Billy said, "don't."

"Why not?"

"Tellin' an Indian somethin' is just one step better'n tellin' it to a tree. I like Indians fine but they're sure poor to tell stuff to."

"Why do you tell them?" Max asked, puzzled.

"I ain't got anybody else to tell," Billy said. "I told Sam Torres about the landing field and you know what he said?"

"What did he say?"

"Nothin'. So I told him again and that time he said, 'Damn fine pasture,' and rode off."

"What's your sister's name?" Max asked, working under his chin.

Billy looked at him disgustedly. "Barbara," he said. There was the sound of a plane overhead and he disappeared through the door.

**B**ARBARA BROCK came in the room. She looked at Max a long time, then came over and sat down on the edge of the bed. "Max," she said slowly, "are you in trouble?"

Max Stanton looked up, startled. He rubbed his clean chin. "No," he said, mustering a smile. "I'm not in trouble."

"Not about the Army, or the draft or anything?"

"No," he said. "No, I wasn't eligible for the Army." He tapped his chest.

"Is it your heart?"

"Yes," Max said quickly, "my heart."

Barbara Brock came over and put her hand on Max Stanton's brow. "Your fever is gone," she said.

"I feel quite fit," he said. "I really should be getting along."

"No," the girl said. "You mustn't. Not for a few days; if your heart is bad the after-effects of the flu can be very serious."

"You are very kind," Max murmured.

A week passed quickly. Max was up and about and he helped with the work and walked with Billy and his sister up to the big pasture. It was a lovely spot, an enormous flat indentation on the slope of the mountain, green with grass and spotted with black Aberdeen cattle.

Billy rode the fence on a pony. Barbara and Max sat in the sun and watched him. They said very little, but Max Stanton felt her presence as he had felt the presence of the federal officers behind him the day the plane had burned. But this was a sweet weight upon his heart. He cursed himself.

Billy rode up and climbed down from his pony and watched a plane go overhead. "That's the hottest pursuit job in the world," he said.

Max watched the plane disappear. "Why are you so interested in planes?" he asked. "I thought you'd like this—being a cowboy!"

"Cowboy!" Billy snorted. "I'm some cowboy. Ridin' around with steeples and a hammer. I wanna be an Ace."

"Let's go back," Barbara said. She

stood up suddenly, and her face was grave.

Max stood up and stretched his arms and looked away across the pasture at the cattle and up into the warm blue sky and took a deep breath. He smiled when he noticed Barbara was watching him.

\* \* \*

The week slid into another week, and Max was well now. Tanned and gaining weight.

In the cool night he sat with Barbara before a tiny fire in the fireplace and that was the world.

"Barbara," he said finally, "I must go on. I'm well now. I can't stay on."

"Must you?" Barbara Brock said, and her face was very lovely, turned to him in the firelight.

"Yes," he said, and he twisted his mind back to its old channels. Only suckers work. . . . "Yes," he said again, more harshly, "I must." He moved quickly from his chair to the sofa beside her, and he took her in his arms and she was warm and sweet.

"No, Max," she said, and he saw the tears in her eyes.

"Darling," he said.

Barbara Brock pushed him away. "Poor Max," she said and stood up and moved toward her room. "Good-night," she said, and he heard the lock click and he heard the beating of his heart.

He sat there long, gazing into the fire, and as he sat his face changed and on it rode a look of tight contempt once more. He got up and went to bed.

Billy woke him the next morning. Billy, bursting with noise, the words tumbling. "There's a plane down! A plane in the big pasture. A trainer. Get up, Max. Get up! Barbara, Barbara!"

Barbara came out of the kitchen. She didn't look at Max. "Billy," she said, "calm down. Tell me—"

"I'm tellin' you. Come on, Max. Let's go up there and see. There ain't anybody in it. I guess the pilot walked down to phone. Oh boy, I been tellin' 'em all along . . ."

Max Stanton kept his voice even. "Is the plane damaged?" he asked.

"No. Come on. Come on, Max. Let's get up there."

Barbara Brock said slowly. "You two go ahead, I'll be along in a minute."

Max followed Billy from the room. Billy raced ahead, came back, like a crazy puppy. Max followed him. The phone is a long way away, even if the pilot knows the nearest one. He won't be back for an hour. Maybe I could fix it. Maybe I could. Max was cool now, feeling a strange tightness. If it had gasoline in it enough for a couple of hours . . .

Billy shouted, "See—over there!" Max broke into a run.

There was nothing wrong with the plane. Nothing. Max climbed up, looked at the motor. The ignition, he thought. It must be the ignition.

He could see nothing wrong. Now he examined the motor more carefully. Maybe the pilot was afraid to try to take it back up from here. Maybe he'd fixed it already. Max climbed into the cockpit and pressed the starter. The motor caught.

Billy looked up at him, started climbing up. He saw Max's face and hesitated. "Beat it!" Max said harshly.

He taxied the plane around. To hell with them. He'd fly it out of here and set it down in Mexico. . . . He'd . . . He stopped thinking. The old exhilaration was upon him and he forgot Billy, forgot everything but getting the plane off of the ground. "So long, chumps. Happy landings!"

The plane came off of the ground. Max knew the old godlike feeling. A kid could fly this plane. He looked out and down.

Down below, small now, pathetically small, he saw Barbara Brock. And as he watched her running up the hill he saw her stumble, straighten up, and look up at the plane; and she grew smaller.

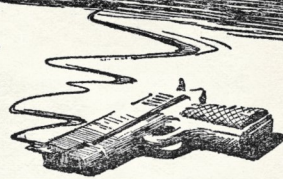
He thought of the truck drivers and the sweet peace of afternoons in the big pasture and the fire in the fireplace and the oil fields and the planes and Billy and his pony and the Aberdeen cattle that couldn't be left alone. And he thought of Barbara. It was something that he knew existed but that he didn't admit. He thought of Barbara.

Small there among the frightened moving cattle. Still there, defenseless. Alone. There by herself, alone.

Max Stanton felt his heart constrict, and something flooded through him and something went away and the sweat was

*(Continued on page 126)*

# YOU CAN'T GET AWAY WITH MURDER!



By NELSON and GEER

Through forged references Gabriel Mourey, vicious French criminal, secured a place as butler to wealthy New York banker Albert Shattuck and shortly walked out with several thousand dollars worth of Mrs. Shattuck's jewels—which gave him an idea, complicated, yet diabolically simple. With Paul Camillieri, Eugene Diaset and Maurice Bagnoli, underworld characters like himself, he broke into the basement of the Shattuck home on Washington Square early Sunday morning, April 2, 1922, and hid there. At noon they crept out, guns drawn, to surprise the Shattucks and their four servants.

All were subjected to a rigorous search which extended even to emptying the banker's pockets of small change and keys. His wallet was stripped of bills and tossed negligently back. Mourey snatched the watch from his waistcoat pocket



and without bothering to detach it snapped the fine gold chain. Then they were herded into the wine cellar. "But this place is air-tight. We'll suffocate," Shattuck protested futilely, then warned: "If harm comes to anyone here I'll follow you—follow you forever if need be." Mourey laughed. "There'll be no one to follow us anywhere," he snarled, locking the door, and proceeded to loot the house of \$100,000 in gems.

In the wine cellar the reason for the robbers' search became evident when a canvass revealed no escape tool, nothing save for the fragile pen-knife on the other end of the banker's watch chain, which had somehow been overlooked, and a "lucky" dime he carried tucked in a fold of his wallet. With these he set to work desperately on the rusty old lock. The air grew heavier. The maids wept. Mrs. Shattuck prayed. The banker kept at the lock, aided by the flare of an oc-

casional match. The knife was in fragments, the dime twisted out of shape, his fingers torn and bleeding when, 45 minutes later, he pried it off.

The robbers, just finishing their looting, took one look at the grimy phantoms who suddenly confronted them and fled through the front door. A police dragnet captured Diaset a few blocks away. He named the rest. Two days later Shattuck aided in rounding up Bagnoli, celebrating in a Plainfield, N. J., house. Both were sentenced to 40 to 60 years. True to his vow, the banker offered a \$20,000 reward, and wanted circulars went out in 14 languages as his manhunt for the others spread over the globe. Camillieri, always a jump ahead of pursuit, was run to ground in Marseilles 8 months later and drew 45 to 65 years. Mourey, eventually cornered near Paris, went to Devil's Island for life.



*Cass Gerrit was already on probation from the Homicide Squad, so when the red finger of murder pointed his way, what was more natural than for him to set out as killer's bait—the loveliest redhead ever to get a man bounced off the police force!*

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# RED- HEADED BAIT

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*Thrilling  
Crime-Mystery Novelette*

**By JOHN D.  
MacDONALD**

•

## CHAPTER ONE


### *Girl in the Night*

**O**N MOST MORNINGS at four it was a dead street in a dead city, the dark canyon walls of the buildings throwing back the metallic echoes of his long strides.

But on this night the west wind howled across the river and came shouting hoarsely down the narrow street, the thin rain stinging his face.

Occasional taxis sped by, the wet sound of tires lost in the tumult of the storm.

He didn't notice her ahead of him on the deserted block until he was not more than thirty feet behind her, and the erratic



Anna screamed and staggered back, falling, as Cass dropped silently from the tree.



clicking of her heels came to his ears.

His smile was an inverted wryness because there was some secret part of him that could yet be touched by what he saw.

And, to Cass Gerrit, a drunken woman, old or young, was the distillation of pathos, the ultimate form of familiar horror—though he would never have mentioned it aloud.

She was slim and young and she should have been wearing a raincape. There was a damp heaviness about the way the hem of her cloth coat flapped against soaked nylons. The sidewalk was wide, and rain was a halo around the infrequent streetlights. He slowed his pace, watched the erratic rhythm of her steps, saw her stumble and nearly fall as a high heel scuffed against a raised edge of concrete.

It seemed probable that she had wandered away from the barren gaiety of the neon section of Quayles Street, three blocks away. Taken a little sick, perhaps. Fresh, cold air and rain in her face to clear her head.

But even as he watched, her steps grew more uncertain, and she half fell, half leaned against the wet bricks of a dark warehouse at a place where the glow of a single streetlight was brightest. She was hatless and her hair matched the pallor of the lights, though it hung in a soaked tangle.

He came up to her and heard the small sound in her throat, half moan and yet oddly like a laugh. In sudden contempt for her and what she was doing to herself, he put a heavy hand on the frail shoulder and spun her around.

The vast purple bruise stretched from her left cheekbone down to the corner of her mouth where the lips were puffed. As she started to fall he grabbed her, held her upright. She breathed through parted lips and her neck was suddenly too weak to support the weight of her head.

"Who're you?" she demanded with drunken emphasis, but when he leaned close to her, he could smell no odor of liquor. Though she was drenched by the rain, her clothes had the look of money. Her alligator purse was slung over a slim shoulder.

She fainted then and, after a moment's hesitation, he picked her up, shifting her weight so that her head fitted into the

curve of his shoulder and throat, held in place by the pressure of his jaw against her wet hair.

The first two cabs ignored his shouts and when a third pair of headlights appeared in the distance, he walked out into the road, tensed to leap aside if the car should come close to running him down.

The brakes squealed and the taxi swerved as the wheels skidded on the wet road. The front right tire bounced up over the curb and it stopped. Cass Gerrit walked over.

"What the hell are you trying to do?" the driver demanded.

A fat and irate passenger rolled down the rear window and glared out.

"Police business," Cass said. "Open that rear door there. Sorry to delay you, mister."

He awkwardly edged the girl in, placed her on the back seat in a sitting position. She slumped over against the fat passenger, and he fended her off. Cass caught her as she started to topple the other way.

A decision had to be made. He found her pulse in the thin, wet wrist. It was strong and regular. He gave the address of his small apartment eight blocks away. The cabby drove angrily, wrenching the car around the turns. Cass gave him a dollar. As he started to lift the girl out, she moaned and tried to pull away.

AS THE TWIN TAILLIGHTS of the taxi disappeared down the street, the girl began to struggle again. Cass set her on her feet.

"Let go of me!" she said thickly.

"I do and you fall down. Use your head. I want to take you up to my place and get you a doctor. Who hit you?"

She turned and looked up into his face for long seconds. "Nothing funny?"

He laughed. "Maybe you don't know it, but you're not exactly attractive at this point. Come on. You've got two flights to climb. No elevators."

She leaned against the door frame while he found his key and unlocked the door. Once they were inside, the quiet was startling after the constant buffeting of the wind. A feeble bulb hanging from a frayed cord made heavy shadows in the hallway. With his arm around her, he took the stairs slowly. She was panting

in an exhausted manner as he unlocked his apartment door.

It was a small place. A couch. Two overstuffed chairs. Books. Pipes. She tottered as she walked over to the couch. The light from the floor lamp struck diagonally across her face and he looked at her with interest. The wetness could not hide the fact that her hands, eyebrows, had been carefully tended, nor could it hide the quality of her dress and coat. The bruise stood out from the clean lines of her face, and he judged that it was enormously painful.

"Have a good look," she said flatly. She shivered.

He came back from the bedroom with a big towel and a robe. "I turned on the bathroom light and the electric heater. Right through that door. Strip down and hang those clothes over the shower railing so the heat'll dry them."

She looked at him and he saw that her knuckles were white where she clutched the edge of the couch.

"Go on," he said. "If I want a big deal I'll pick up somebody with a face that doesn't look like yours."

Without a backward look she went through the bedroom door. He heard the bathroom door shut. After hanging up his trenchcoat and hat, he dropped into a chair and made himself a cigarette. He was in his early thirties, a tall, dark man with a taut, muscular look about him. His face was pale, his beard blue under the skin of the jaw. His black hair, clipped short, was like a close-fitting skullcap. There was a fullness about his upper lids which gave his eyes a narrow, sleepy look, but the eyes themselves were sharp and

wary, as though a more alert creature looked out from behind a face that was, in repose, a placid mask.

She came back out in ten minutes, the maroon robe belted tightly around her, the sleeves turned up, the bottom of it reaching almost to the floor. Her pale hair, not completely dried, was a mass of tight ringlets. She carried the big purse and sat on the couch and looked into it.

"Have you a cigarette?" she asked.

He made one, rolled it tightly, went over to her and said, "Moisten it along here to keep it closed."

She inhaled gratefully. "That's quite an affectation. I thought that was restricted to the Western movies."

He shrugged. "My tastes in liquor, food and clothes are expensive. I save my pennies."

"What do you do? I mean, outside of bringing in stray women and drying them out."

He watched her eyes. "I'm a cop."

He couldn't read the faint change of expression. It could have been fear. "Who hit you?" he asked.

"I walked in front of a car."

"Oh, sure. The car knocked you onto a feather bed. That's why you didn't get any brush burns from the pavement. Who hit you?"

"Are you asking as a cop?"

"I could be."

"It's none of your business."

He shrugged. "Anything you say. How do you feel?"

"Better, but shaky. I was chilled, but not now."

"There's a doctor three doors down. He'll run in and take a look at you."



**SCALP  
FEEL TIGHT  
AS A DRUM?**



**LET FITCH'S IDEAL  
AND THE JIFFY RUB  
LOOSEN IT UP**



**THEN LOOK AND  
FEEL EXTRA  
GOOD!**



Put that feeling of new life into your tight, itchy scalp with Fitch's Ideal Hair Tonic. Its healthful action stimulates circulation — relieves itching scalp — helps prevent dandruff — and helps check falling hair. For a pepped-up, tingling scalp and handsome hair, use Fitch's Ideal daily. Ask for Ideal at barber shops and drug counters.

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"No!" Her voice was suddenly strident. "I'm all right."

He walked over to her again. "This is going to hurt. Hold tight and don't move your head."

She shut her eyes. He put one hand at the back of her head, gently prodded the bruise with the fingers of his other hand. She gasped and grew visibly paler. Under his fingers he felt the firmness of the cheek bone.

"Okay. It didn't smash the bone. What's your name?"

"Mary Smith," she said defiantly.

"I'll play fair. My right name is Cass Gerrit."

She frowned. "Didn't I hear that some place? Didn't I read about you?"

"Maybe." His smile was sardonic. "I was a promising hotshot in Homicide and stepped on the wrong toes and got busted back to a district. The papers gave it a play."

He saw that her eyes widened momentarily. His interest began to grow. Even though she had been wandering around the streets with what could have been a mild concussion, her interest in his job shouldn't have been more than a mild and casual interest. But it seemed a bit more.

He gave her his best smile and said, "So you won't talk, huh?"

"No, Mr. Gerrit, I won't talk."

"I could, of course, grab that purse and take a look. You must carry some identification."

She looked at him coolly. "If you were going to do that, you wouldn't talk about it, would you?"

"What are your plans?"

"When my clothes are a little dryer, you will call a taxi for me, please. I will thank you for your trouble and I will leave."

"Just like that?"

"Exactly like that. Would—could you get me a drink?"

He went into the kitchen.

**T**HE WET STREET was grey with dawn when he took her down the stairs to the waiting cab. She got in, held out her hand to him. Her clasp was firm and warm.

"I do thank you, Mr. Gerrit. I know I'm being rude. I'm—I'm sorry that

you're going to find out—" She stopped. "Find out what?"

But she wouldn't add to the statement. He stood, puzzled, then turned and went slowly back up the stairs. Inside his apartment he frowned and scratched his head. What was he to find out? Still wondering, he phoned in, gave her description and asked if there was a call out for her. It would have been a good idea to have done it before she left. He sighed with relief when he found that she wasn't wanted. He went to bed.

\* \* \*

The insistent pounding on his door woke him up at noon. He pulled on the robe as he walked to answer it.

It was George Fayley. Cass had worked with George for a time before Cass had had his trouble. George was a short, wide man with a florid face, a few remaining traces of what had once been a full head of curly blond hair, and sharp little blue eyes. Cass knew that if George had backed him up properly, his punishment for what had been, at worst, a piece of bad judgment, would not have been so severe.

George had avoided him ever since it had happened.

"What's the pitch?" Cass said. "Belated apologies?"

"Hell, Cass," George said in an abused tone, "you know I couldn't do anything or I'd have been tossed out right along with you. Isn't it better to have a friend in the right spot who can work for you?"

"I'd say yes, if you weren't so busy taking care of George. What's on your mind? Make it fast."

The man's face reddened with anger. "Okay, hard guy. I'm on a case."

"Congratulations!"

"At six-twenty this morning you phoned in to ask some questions about a blonde girl, five foot six, hundred and ten pounds, grey eyes, bruised face, tan tweed coat, no hat. Give me the story on her."

"Why?"

"Because I asked you. That's why."

Cass sat down in one of the chairs, smiled amiably and said, "That reason's not good enough, Georgie."

Fayley glared for a time, sighed and said, "Okay, Cass. At nine o'clock this

morning when a secretary to a Mr. Alvin Fontine unlocked his office, she found that somebody had put three small slugs in his face. We got on it right away and we found out that last night he took a woman to a restaurant not far from his office. This Fontine was the New York agent for an outfit that handles the exports of a bunch of South American companies. He lived quietly and he was unmarried and the only people working for him were the secretary and a young guy named Bruce Ryan who came in a few minutes after the body was found. We dug up the guy who waited on Fontine last night and he gave us a description of the woman. We put it out and one of the boys checked it against the one you phoned in. It comes pretty close. This office where Fontine got it is only about ten blocks from here."

Cass slowly made a cigarette, lit it and sucked the smoke deep into his lungs. "This is just a checkup on speculation, then?"

"Sure. The odds against it being the same gal are a million to one."

Cass tried not to show his nervousness. His hunch said that 'Mary Smith' was the girl who had had dinner with Fontine. A second hunch told him that she hadn't killed him. But it was exactly that same sort of hunch that had gotten him into trouble.

He knew that the department would sneer politely when they learned that Cass Gerrit had had the suspect in his apartment and let her go. They wouldn't stop to think that at the time she left, there was no call out for her. He could feed George the wrong data and George would go away happy.

Then he glanced over and saw the glass she had used. Training and instinct came to the fore. The glass would have prints on it.

He told George the story, leaving nothing out.

"Damn it, man, why didn't you look in that purse? Why did you let her go?"

Cass stood up. "How would I know? Remember, George, she was just a woman who had been beaten up as far as I was concerned."

George walked over, leaned close and looked at the glass. "Hey," he said. "Take a look! I never see such a good set. Al-

most like they'd been rolled on. Perfect!"

It was true. The glass held five almost perfect prints. In police work an identifiable print is a rarity, not the rule.

George was humming under his breath as he looked over the couch. He picked up one of the cushions and the humming stopped abruptly.

"That yours?" he asked, excitement in his voice.

It was a small automatic, foreign in appearance. It had obviously been shoved under the cushions.

"Not mine," Cass said.

"Look at it!" George said. "Look at those prints on it. Along the side of the barrel. Just as good as the ones on the glass."

## CHAPTER TWO

### Clay Pigeon

WHEN Cass walked into the precinct station, he sensed the air of amusement, of quiet laughter. Without expression, he walked back to Lieutenant Fowler's office.

Fowler was a young, thin, alert man with a mobile face and a wide mouth. "You look upset, Cass," he said.

"I suppose you know all about the Fontine case, Bill."

"I talked to Fayley."

"Do I get assigned to it?"

"No, Cass. It's outside our district."

"Could it be arranged?"

"It could if there was a good enough reason. But this isn't a good enough reason. She made a fool of you, Cass. You'll feel better if you admit it. Lots of criminals go out of their way to make the cops look silly. I don't think she had any intention of planting that gun in your place until she found out you were on the force. Then she had to do it. Just forget it and go ahead with the things you're working on now."

"It's easy to say that, Bill. Besides I have a few theories on the Fontine case."

"So has every joker that reads the papers, Cass."

"And if I use my free time to look around?"

"You do it at your own risk. Interfere with the men assigned to the case and

you'll get the same treatment an outsider would get. You seem to forget that you are as close to being on probation as any man can be. In your spot, Cass, I'd keep my head down and my mouth shut."

Cass turned on his heel and left the office.

\* \* \*

The evening papers had new information. The prints on the glass matched the prints on the weapon. A test slug from the weapon matched the slugs taken out of Fontine's brain. The woman's prints were on file. She had been a Wave during the war, and had been printed at that time. Her name was Carol Hallison. The motive was not known. She had had several dates with Fontine. The theory was that Fontine had struck her and that she had killed him. The papers said that after committing the crime, she had visited the apartment of one Cass Gerrit. Gerrit had enlarged on the original description. He was not assigned to the case. The papers carried her picture. In the picture, she was smiling. It seemed that there was little for her to smile about.

She would be apprehended within a matter of hours.

Cass sat for a long time in a bean wagon, listlessly stirring his coffee, thinking about the way she had looked and the way she had acted. He had seen examples of that particular type of megalomania which causes criminals to write bragging letters to the police. She did not seem of that breed. Her grey eyes had been too direct, her mouth too sensitive.

And yet all the great wheels of the department were slowly and mercilessly grinding. Each moment she remained free was an additional proof of her guilt. Do the innocent run? He ached to be able to step into the case. Yet the woodwork would be loaded with legmen, digging into her habits, her acquaintances, trying to find out which way she had jumped when she had left Gerrit's place. The cab driver had been found. He had taken her immediately to the railroad station. There, the earth had swallowed her.

He worked his shift, walked slowly home. Gerrit the fall guy. Gerrit the chump. You remember Gerrit! He was

that guy who had the dish in his apartment right after she'd knocked off that importer fella? Just a dumb copy. Boy, did she pull it over his eyes!

If the topside had been considering his reinstatement, he knew that they would soon drop the whole idea.

He wondered if he hadn't ought to hunt up some nice clean business—such as driving a truck.

What was the name of that secretary? Anna something. Anna Bloss. He walked two blocks off his route, found an all-night drugstore, looked her up. Good luck. She was listed. Way uptown. On a hunch he phoned her.

The phone rang and rang.

A sleepy voice finally said, "Who is it?"

"Ana Bloss? You alone? Good. You don't know me, Anna. I'm calling for a friend. Carol asked me to call."

He heard the gasp and the long silence. "Is—is this some sort of a trick?"

"How could I prove it wasn't?"

Her voice was suddenly crisp. "You must have the wrong number." The connection was broken. Maybe Anna thought she had given nothing away. Had there been no possibility of Carol Hallison getting in touch with Anna Bloss, then Anna would not have found it necessary to ask if the call were a trick. His reasoning satisfied him that the hunch had paid off.

He checked the amount of money in his pocket, hailed a cab and gave an address two blocks from Anna's place.

**S**HE ANSWERED the buzzer in a matter of seconds, her voice hollow in the tube.

"This is the guy who has to prove that he's leveling," Cass said quietly.

The door buzzed. He pushed it open, took the stairway to the second floor. She stood in her doorway, the light behind her.

They looked at each other curiously. She was a tall girl with oversized freckles, a mop of red-gold hair and a spectacular body. She shut the door behind him, said, "Sit down. What's this about?"

"I don't know. I'm just a messenger. I'm supposed to say that our mutual friend needs a little cash. She said to tell you that hiding costs money."

Anna Bloss sat down abruptly. There

was quick concern in her eyes. "Is—is she all right?"

Cass shrugged. "Nervous, but okay."

Anna looked suddenly grim. "You tell her that I didn't tell them a damn thing. But I wanted to. There were a lot of things I wanted to tell them. How she could think so much of a punk like him I'll never know. Look what she's doing to herself, just for his worthless hide!"

He raised his eyebrows. "You don't think she really did it, do you?"

"Carol?" Anna made a contemptuous sound. "Not for one minute."

Cass pulled the cloth sack out of his pocket and began to make a cigarette. He glanced up and saw that Anna was watching him with an odd expression. She jumped up and pointed at him dramatically. "Okay, Mr. Cop, you nearly made it. Now get out!"

"What do you mean?"

"Get out! She called me yesterday morning. She told me that she'd planted the little item in the apartment of a tall, dark, handsome and stupid copper who rolls his own. You fit that picture, mister. Get out!"

He stood up slowly. She yanked the door open. "Too bad," he said. He smiled at her. "You see, Anna, I don't think she did it either."

Her look of anger faded. She looked startled. "You big boys are trying to grab her, aren't you?"

"Not me. I'm just the sucker she planted the gun on. They won't let me on the case. And I'm the only one on the force who doesn't think she's guilty."

Anna bit her lower lip. She didn't slam the door though he was out in the hall. Her eyes were troubled.

"Come back in," she said.

He resumed his seat in the chair. The room was small, furnished cheaply but in good taste.

"Why did you phone me?" she asked.

"A hunch. It was a small office. You'd be likely to know a little about Fontine's private life. I thought you might know Carol Hallison. If you acted dumb over the phone, I was going to try Bruce Ryan next."

She sat opposite him, her long clean legs crossed. "It was a good hunch. I want to talk to somebody. I think this

whole thing is going wrong. I think Carol is committing a complicated form of suicide. But she's stubborn. You can't tell her anything."

"I guessed that she could be stubborn."

"What's your name?"

"Cass. Cass Gerrit."

"Here's your story, Cass. I was going to save it until the trial. But I'm worried about Carol. She met Bruce Ryan over a year ago. I met her through Bruce. Bruce is clever and more than a little sly. They are sort of engaged. I don't think Bruce ever intended to go through with it. But you can't keep a girl like Carol on the string with any smaller sales talk than marriage. Carol makes — made — good money designing clothes. Bruce has always been money hungry. From time to time he borrowed from her."

"About two months ago Bruce began walking around the office with a wise look on his face. I don't know exactly what happened, but my hunch is that Bruce got wise to some cheating that Fontine was doing. Rigging the books or something like that. Fontine lived very well. Anyway, Fontine stopped talking to Bruce as though he were a dumb puppy and began to look at him from time to time with a sort of worried expression."

"Also, Bruce Ryan began to have a little more money to toss around. I just type the letters and do the filing. I don't handle the books. A month ago Carol had a date with Fontine. I was surprised. Fontine was one of those eager little men with a habit of trying to put his hand on your knee while talking earnestly to you. I like Carol and so I took her to lunch one day and asked her what the hell."

"She wouldn't talk at first, and then she told me that I mustn't tell, but that Bruce had found out Fontine was cheating on the firm and Bruce had asked her to go out with Fontine to help him get evidence on Fontine's standard of living. She seemed excited and said that this was Bruce's big chance. I didn't mention to her that Bruce seemed to be getting a little of the gravy too. I couldn't figure out why Bruce would be anxious to have her go out with oily little Mr. Fontine."

"She had a date with Fontine the night of the murder. The police found Fontine's gun in his desk drawer. Carol isn't

the type to carry a gun. She was afraid of them. My hunch is that our boy, Bruce, was among those present. Carol called me at seven. She knew the body wouldn't be found until nine. She knew I would find the body. She wanted to prepare me for it. And she wanted me to get a message to Bruce."

**"DID YOU** give him the message?" Cass asked.

"Yes. I phoned him and gave him Carol's message. It was a very simple message. She had me tell him that she loved him, no matter what. And for him to take care of himself, and he would know just how she meant that."

"And what do you think happened, Anna?"

She smiled tiredly. "I think Bruce killed Fontine, assured that he would get Fontine's job and a fat opportunity for profit. I think he was tired of Carol and I think he framed her for the job."

"He must be a charming fellow," Cass said. "And if you're right, he's getting a break he doesn't deserve. Was he over-seas?"

"In Europe."

"It could be a gun he picked up over there. It's a foreign automatic. And the bruise would fit. I imagine he had a key to the office. He could have learned somehow that Fontine would go back there for a few minutes with Carol. Dark office. They come in. Bruce waits for his chance, steps out and slugs Carol, kills Fontine, drops the gun on the floor, or presses it into Carol's hand and leaves. But why wouldn't she phone the police and tell what happened?"

"For that, my friend, you have to be able to understand women like Carol. Me, I would have done as you say. But women like Carol are able to fall in love so deeply that it makes them forget personal safety. The loved one can do no wrong. No sacrifice is too great. She probably thinks that Bruce killed in self-defense and then got scared and ran out. She's saving him from the law by pretending to be the running rabbit."

"And what will happen?"

"They'll catch her. And she won't say a word in her own defense. She may even confess it. But then little Anna will step

in and shed some light on the matter."

"And this Bruce will sit on the sidelines and watch her get sent up?"

"The little Bruces of this world do exactly that, Cass. And there are always silly women around to let them do it."

"I very much want to meet the lad," he said softly.

She laughed. "I could like you, Cass. A lot."

"Want to try an experiment?"

"Sure."

"We'll phone Bruce. A handkerchief over the mouthpiece and a half whisper and you can pretend to be Carol. Make a date and ask for money. Ask him to bring the cash. Then we'll watch from afar and see who shows. Bruce or the prowls cars."

Anna frowned. "I know the answer to that one already."

They sat in silence. Cass made another cigarette. Her lips were pursed as she thought. She sighed. "If we only had some way of trapping him."

Cass began to pace back and forth. He stopped and said, "What's the layout of the office?"

"Four rooms all stretched out in a row. Very inconvenient. First is the anteroom where I work, then Bruce's office, then Fontine's and then a sort of storeroom. My guess would be that Bruce waited in the storeroom."

"Can you think of any place where Bruce wouldn't have waited, and where he wouldn't have looked?"

She frowned. "Behind my desk is the closet where I keep office supplies. I have the only key to that."

"Perfect!" he said. "Fontine made a late date with you. You were jealous of Carol. You hid in the closet. You saw Bruce come in. Later you saw Fontine and Carol arrive. You heard shots. You were petrified. You saw Bruce run out. Then you went into Fontine's office. Carol was on the floor. You could have called the cops, but you are greedy for a little cash. You decided to let it blow over and then blackmail the new boss. Would that work?"

She nodded slowly. "Bruce will believe the worst of anybody, being such an impure little soul himself. But suppose it didn't happen exactly that way?"

"You don't have to give him a play by

play description. Just enough to give him a good scare."

"Suppose he gives me money? What then?"

"He won't. I think he killed Fontine. One killing makes the second one not twice as easy, but nearer six times as easy. You make a date with him at such a quiet spot that he thinks he can get away with knocking you off."

Anna Bloss swallowed hard and licked her lips. "Now wait a minute! I don't like the casting. I'm not the clay pigeon type."

He went over to her, took her hand and squeezed it hard. "Anna, I'll try to keep you out of danger. But I can't guarantee anything. First let's see if he falls for it. Have you got the necessary intestinal fortitude for that?"

"If I don't fall down getting to the phone."

"Now play it smart. I won't tell you what to say. I'll be right there, so close to you I can hear his answers."

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Fall Girl

"THIS is a hell of a time of day to phone me, Anna," Bruce said. He had a warm, slurred baritone voice.

"I didn't think you'd mind, Bruce. We've always been pals, Bruce. I need a little loan."

"Loan?"

"Not a big one, Bruce. Oh—say five thousand."

He laughed heartily. "What brand have you been drinking, darling?"

"Gosh, I don't know. It's been making me see things, too. I saw you in a big hurry the other night."

He didn't answer for so long that Cass was afraid he'd hung up. "Hurry? When?"

"Oh, about the time Fontine got it. Poor little old me, standing there in the closet with all the letterhead paper and paper clips, jumping every time that little gun of yours cracked."

"If you were close enough to Fontine to hear the shots, darling, you were miles away from me. I wasn't there." There was a strained note in his voice,

"Gee, Bruce, it certainly looked like you. Have you got a double?"

"Do you spend your evenings in closets?"

"Only when my boy friend is dating another girl. Then I do."

"Anna, if I'd heard shots, I'd have phoned the police."

"When you need money as bad as I do? Don't be silly, Bruce honey."

Once again he waited on the other end of the line. Then his voice came over, clean and young and confident.

"Well, who am I to say people can't have pipe dreams? I like you, Anna, and maybe I can let you have a small loan. We ought to talk it over. I'm not sore because you happen to have such a strange sense of humor. Maybe I can let you have a couple of hundred."

"Should I come up and see you?"

"There—there may be friends around. Make it tomorrow night. . . . I mean tonight, actually. In the office."

"Oh, that's another thing, Bruce. I'm sick of working. I guess I won't have to work any longer . . . now. So I won't be in tomorrow. Get yourself another girl."

His voice was angry. "I don't think you're handling this very well."

"I like the way I'm handling it. And make it five thousand, darling Bruce."

"I'll phone you." He hung up.

Anna stood up, said, "Phew!" and fanned her face with her hand. "He bit, didn't he?"

"Like a bass in the springtime." At that moment he realized how much confidence he had lost since his reprimand and demotion. The feeling of rightness, of having made a good guess, was like the taste of fine wine to him. But then his hopes dropped. Had he been assigned to the case, he could have used full departmental resources to bait and snap shut the trap. But he was in this as an individual. He guessed that a second murder was in the making. And if Bruce Ryan made the second murder successful—Carol Hallison's chances were that much less. Her motivation was hard to understand. Maybe there could never be any practical and cold explanation for it.

"Now I'm getting scared," Anna said. Her lips were pale under the hasty line of lipstick. "Before, I just had a hunch.

Now I know he did it. And I'm scared."

He scribbled on a piece of paper, tore it out of his pocket notebook. "Here. Those are the two numbers where you can reach me. Have you got enough stuff in stock so you won't have to go out to buy groceries? Good. Stay inside. Keep your door locked. He will probably think of a place to meet you and phone you back sometime during the day. Call me immediately. Don't agree to meet him on a ferry at night. I can't protect you that way. Agree if he makes it the park, but pin him down to the exact place, and not near the reservoir. Near trees. Big trees, if possible. He may wait until the last minute and want you to leave right away to meet him. Don't fall for that. Don't fall for any place where you can be run down by a car. Got all that?"

"Yessir," she said and gave him a mock salute.

"Good-night, clay pigeon," he said.

"Good-night, Mr. Law."

HE WATCHED the area from the screen of a newspaper until the light faded. Fowler would have his scalp. It couldn't be helped. Either take a big chance of coming back fast, or get busted off the force completely. It had to be that way. As soon as it was dark enough, he strolled across the grass over to the tree. The limb seemed higher than it had looked by daylight. He cursed silently as he saw the couple sitting on the bench fifteen feet away.

He growled, low in his throat, saw their pale, startled faces turn toward him, heard the gravel scrunch under their shoes as they hurried away. His foot slipped off a knob on the trunk and he scraped his cheek against the rough bark. At last he got his hands around the thick limb and his shoulder muscles cracked audibly as he pulled himself up, straddling it at last. He glanced at the luminous dial of his watch. Eight-forty. Two hours and twenty minutes of perching on a limb like a wingless bird. He missed the familiar weight of the .38 Special. Anna had it in her purse.

When he had to shift position because of cramped muscles, he did so with a minimum of noise. Wind rattled the autumn leaves. He wished he could

smoke. That was no good. He hoped that Anna would pay close attention to the instructions he had given her. To move fast, stick to the shadows and come up to the tree from across the grass instead of on the path.

He wondered what Fowler was doing. There was no longer any question of what Carol Hallison was doing. She was in a cell—taken out of a salesman's car at a parkway toll gate, a preparation called Covermark imperfectly hiding the bruise.

Each time he looked at his watch, he was positive that it had stopped. Time passed all too slowly.

At last the minute hand began to creep up toward eleven. Ten of. Five of. Two of. Eleven. One after. Two after.

A soft sound beneath him. A woman. She leaned against the bole of the tree. Softly she began to hum. That was the signal. He tore off a bit of bark and dropped it, heard it thud against the felt brim of her hat. She did not look up. As he had instructed her, she stayed on the darkest side of the tree.

He flexed stiffening muscles and waited.

Heels scuffed against the gravel. Steps coming closer. The night had grown very dark. The familiar voice said, "Oh, there you are! All alone, Anna?"

"Of course. What did you expect?"

He made a wide circuit of the tree, came close to her. Anna moved a bit until she was under the limb that Cass had pointed out to her by day. He sat on his heels on the limb, his hand against the trunk of the tree. Their heads were a good six feet below the limb.

"Did you bring my loan?" Anna asked. Cass marveled at the casual tone of her voice. The fear was deeply hidden.

"First we ought to talk a little, Anna. We ought to understand each other." Cass could easily read the strain in Bruce Ryan's voice. "Carol has been arrested and she has confessed. It seems that the case is closed, doesn't it?"

Cass had carefully rehearsed Anna. "Almost closed, Bruce. Her fingerprints were on the desk top, so they know that she didn't wear gloves. And they do some sort of wax thing to people's hands. I've got a friend in the police department. He told me that they're wondering why Carol's hands didn't show any trace of

her having fired a gun. Odd, isn't it?" "Friend in the department? How interesting! Have you talked this over with him?"

Anna laughed softly. "Of course not, you big silly! Why he'd come charging over and arrest you and then how would I get my money?"

"Then you haven't talked it over with anyone?"

"Not a soul, Bruce honey."

"And I suppose if I gave you five thousand, you'd go away for keeps?"

"Until the five was gone, anyway."

"I thought it would be this way," Bruce said. At the sound of his voice, Cass prepared to drop. He waited a second for Bruce to make the overt move, to reach for a weapon, to reach for her throat.

Instead, Bruce swung toward her in an oddly jerky gesture. Anna screamed and staggered back, falling. Cass dropped silently out of the tree, his feet slamming against Ryan's shoulders. Ryan fell onto his face and Cass landed on the small of his back. When he came up, Ryan was already up. Cass realized for the first time that Ryan was both large and durable.

Anna moved feebly a few feet away. She coughed and there was a bubbling sound that filled Cass with fury. He looked for the weapon which Ryan had held in his hand, with which he had stabbed Anna. There was no sign of a weapon, no glint of faint light on steel.

A hard fist clubbed him high over the left ear, knocking him down to his knees. He moved to one side and the kick narrowly missed his face. He shook his head to clear it. Ryan came in fast and in a workmanlike fashion. His face was in shadow, but there was a faint touch of light on bared teeth.

Cass suddenly realized that this Ryan could knock him down and out. As the next punch whistled through the darkness, Cass managed to catch Ryan's wrist. He locked both hands on it and spun hard in the way he had been taught. Ryan gasped with sudden pain but the bone didn't snap. They rolled together on the ground and a fist smashed into Cass' mouth.

They were both breathing hard. Cass

quickly slipped the bracelets out of his side pocket, wondering why he hadn't thought of them before. Holding one end in his right hand, he swung hard as Ryan rolled free and they both bounded up. The steel crunched against bone and Ryan dropped without a sound.

Cass shouted for help with all the power of his lungs. He snapped Ryan's wrist to his own, then dragged the unconscious man several feet so that he could kneel by Anna.

She had opened her jacket and she held the palms of both hands against the white substance of her blouse, just under her left breast. A dark stain discolored the white fabric.

"I'm sorry, Anna," he said hoarsely. "I'm sorry."

"This is what is supposed to happen to clay pigeons," she whispered.

CASS GERRIT, his lips still puffed, stood in front of the green steel desk in the large office. The grey-haired man behind the desk shuffled through papers. George Fayley, Lieutenant Fowler, Richards, Aigen and Jenetti stood by. Blain, from the district attorney's office, sat in a chair against the wall.

The man behind the desk glanced at Blain. "You have enough to go on?"

"We can get a conviction."

"You want the woman held? We should be able to stick her for a couple of years."

Blain shrugged. "We're not eager. She was doing what she thought was right. She just played along with the frame."

"Then we'll release her." The man behind the desk looked heavily at Gerrit. "Gerrit, we had hoped to teach you a lesson. Your previous hunch hurt the department. I'm very sorry to see that you have stepped into the same trap again. It doesn't matter that your hunch worked out this time. I'm merely complaining about the method. Do you have anything to say for yourself? You endangered the life of a woman and very nearly lost your own life."

Cass shifted uneasily. "It wasn't exactly a hunch. I had something to go on."

The sarcasm was evident. "And what could that have been?"

"Fayley found the gun. He found that

the prints on the glass were very distinct. He said that they seemed to be rolled onto the glass. Payley's assumption was that the gun had been shoved under the cushions. The prints were along the side of the gun. It looked to me that if the gun was shoved under there, the prints would be smeared. I tested that with a small automatic. The only way you can leave the prints intact is to lift the cushion, put the gun under it and carefully lower the cushion. I figured that she wanted the prints on there and that she wanted them to match up with the prints on the glass. She wasn't just getting rid of a gun. She was framing herself. People who frame themselves do it usually to protect somebody else. And it looked like that somebody else had to be closely connected with Fontine. So from the beginning I didn't think she was the one. That was why I got in touch with Miss Bloss."

"And why didn't you inform Homicide of your deductions?"

"I asked to be assigned to the case, sir. I was turned down."

The man behind the desk smiled. "Okay, Gerrit. Go back with Fowler and do your job. Maybe one of these days you'll be coming back to your old job. But don't plan on it happening in the next ten minutes. Dismissed."

\* \* \*

On the hospital steps she paused again, and as she tried to turn away Cass Gerrit took her arm, shook her angrily. "Stop thinking of yourself! I tell you that it will do Anna good to see you."

Carol's face was pale and set. In a flat voice she said, "Suppose I don't want to do her any good. Suppose I hate her for the way she helped trap Bruce."

"Don't be childish."

The nurse smiled professionally at the doorway to Anna's room and said, "You can stay exactly ten minutes. She's still weak."

"How is she doing?" Cass asked.

"The lung was punctured and the edge of the heart was scraped, but she's doing amazingly well. Please don't tire her. Was it really an ice pick?"

"That's right. He had it with the

handle up his sleeve and the point in the palm of his hand. He just let it slip down a little and then he drove it into her. He lost it in the grass when I jumped on him."

The nurse shuddered. Cass glanced at Carol's face. There was no flicker of expression there. It was as though she had not heard.

Anna's face was pale against the pillow. She opened her eyes and looked at them and her smile was slow and warm. Her freckles were accentuated by her pallor.

"Hi, Mr. Law. Hello, Carol," she said. "Pull up a suture and relax."

Carol stared hard at her. "You did this to Bruce," she said in a tight voice. "They'll kill him."

"It can't happen too quick."

Carol's fists were clenched. "Fontine was an evil man. Bruce had a right to kill him. Bruce was frightened and he ran. He hit me and left me there. But I still love him."

Anna yawned. "Save it for the soap operas, honey. That priceless Bruce of yours was a bore. A week before he killed Fontine he was giving me a large play, saying that he would make a killing—the money kind—and we would run away together. I yawned in his face."

"He what?" Carol said, her eyes wide.

"Carol, he said that you were oppressive. That is the word he used. Believe me."

When Cass saw Carol's knees beginning to buckle, he pushed the chair under her. She dropped heavily into it. Then she put her forehead on the edge of Anna's bed and began to cry.

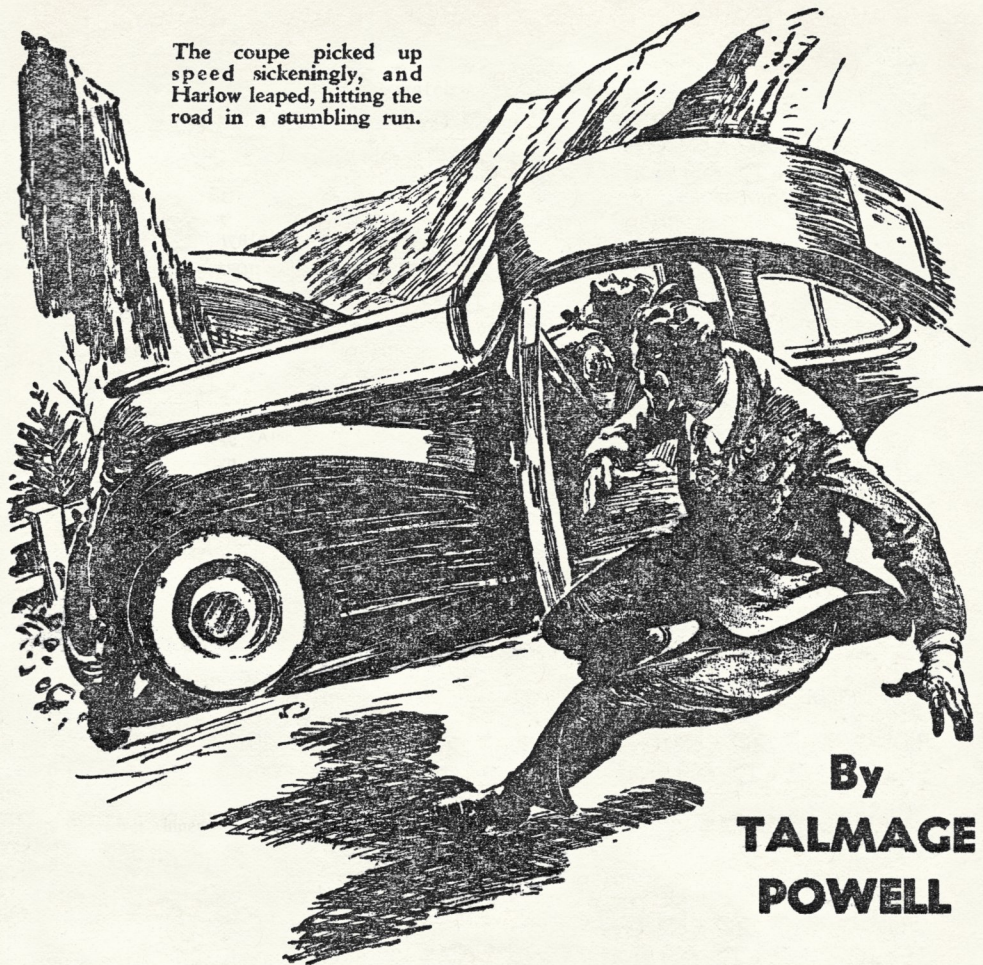
Between sobs they heard her say, "I've been such a fool!"

Anna grinned at Cass. "How about that? She can forgive murder, but when she finds out that he wanted to cheat, she folds up." She put her hand on the back of Carol's head, gently caressed the pale hair. "You'll get over it, honey. Next time pick yourself out a sterling specimen like this Gerrit character instead of a phony like Ryan."

Suddenly Anna pursed her lips, looked speculatively at Cass. "On second thought, Miss Hallison, please ignore my suggestion. I think I'll save him for myself."

THE END

The coupe picked up speed sickeningly, and Harlow leaped, hitting the road in a stumbling run.



By  
**TALMAGE  
POWELL**

## **EASY KILL**

*Harlow built a sixty-mile-an-hour murder trap—and waited for it to come crashing through his own front door!*

**H**ARLOW had a motto: Do the other guy before he can do you. Unlike most men, Harlow did not regard his motto as a mere bunch of words. He took it seriously. It was the way he played the game.

At ten that morning, Harlow strode down the corridor to his office. He paused at the door to read his name: Harry K.

Harlow, Attorney at Law. The office was in a modern building, and the office itself was passable. Harlow was getting along; it was the third office he'd had and each one had been better. He'd come a long way from the days when he'd slaved as a mechanic, hating the job, and stolen pennies to pay his way through law school.

Miss Slocum was already at her desk.

She was thin, pinch-faced. She looked like a prim, business-like spinster, and that's exactly what Slocum was. Harlow thought often that she disapproved of him, but she lent a certain air to the office. In her grim, dry, legal presence, clients lowered their voices and knew they were in a hallowed hall of Law.

Harlow nodded this morning to Slocum's greeting. He caught the faint tightening of her lips as she looked at him, the gleam of disapproval almost hidden in the depths of her eyes. She obviously deduced that he had been drinking more than was good for him last evening. He probably looked as if he had a light hang-over.

The fact of the matter was that Harlow had killed a man last night and the past few hours had brought every mental state except the sleep he had craved.

He entered his private office and sat down at the desk. Slocum had already placed the newspaper there. He unfolded it, hands trembling a little. There it was, on the lower right side of the page, in black and white letters. In cold print:

#### FINANCIER KILLED IN CRASH

At dawn this morning, the body of Sebastian Vanderling was discovered by a pair of hunters on the floor of Rockaway Canyon. Vanderling was pinned in the demolished wreckage of his car. To all appearances, Vanderling failed to make a sharp turn on the canyon road, plunging through the guard rail and crashing almost five hundred feet down to the cliffside to the rocky canyon floor. . . .

Harlow snapped the paper closed, leaned back. He let his breath out and wiped his face. He didn't need to look further. He only needed a phrase from the first sentence of the news story: "... the body of Sebastian Vanderling . . ." That meant the pig was dead. A body—a cold, dead body.

**H**ARLOW replaced his handkerchief in the breast pocket. Now he was sure. All night he hadn't been quite sure that Vanderling had taken the plunge down the side of Rockaway Canyon. He had gimmicked the brakes on Vanderling's personal car, the small, maroon coupe, and he had phoned Vanderling: "I must see you. Yes, tonight. It's very

important—I've something to say to you about Marika."

Marika—Vanderling's wife. That would bring Vanderling. But all night Harlow had wondered if it really had, if Vanderling had really started.

Over and over in his mind, Harlow had pictured it. Vanderling starting from Cliffside, the mansion he'd built high in the canyon like a monument to his ego. Vanderling turning out of the landscaped grounds, onto the canyon road. Vanderling roaring down the narrow road, nearing the sharp curve, pressing the brakes . . . first idly . . . then in rising terror as the brakes refused to work. The guard rail looming. Vanderling screaming, throwing up his arm before his face. The crash. The hurtling of the small, maroon coupe out into space . . .

Yes, Harlow now thought in his office, it had been a bad night, a night that would have broken a man of lesser nerve. Harlow had always taken pride in his nerve, in his ability to run risks, make precarious split-second decisions. When you bent your every effort to doing the other guy before he could do you, you often had to make those decisions, run the risks.

Harlow opened the desk drawer, took out the small automatic that was there. He held the gun in his hand, looking at it. It was part of his first plan to murder Sebastian Vanderling. He'd considered making it appear the work of a cheap, common robber. He'd even worked out a timetable, checked the exact movements of Vanderling's servants. But he'd discarded that plan. Afterwards, as the weeks passed, he'd considered poison, a slugging, finally settling on the accident. It had been a simple matter to gimmick the coupe's brakes. No one knew he'd been around the Vanderling garage last night. It looked as if this might be one piece of business without any risks. . . .

Harlow dropped the small automatic in his pocket. The phone screamed at him. He picked it up.

Slocum's voice sounded tart. "Mrs. Vanderling is on the wire."

"All right," he said. Then: "Hello, Mrs. Vanderling." He caught the click of Slocum cutting out her extension.

"Harry?"

"Yes, Marika?" He hardly recognized her voice. It didn't sound like the voice of the lovely Marika Vanderling.

"I had to call you, Harry! They've been here!"

"They?"

"The police."

His lips thinned ever so faintly. "Yes, Marika?"

"They came first in an official car, told me Sebastian was dead, took me down to the morgue to identify him. When they brought me back, another came. His name is Crenshaw. He asked me all kinds of questions. Harry, I—I'm scared!"

"Listen," he said almost harshly, "hold on to yourself! I'll see you before the day is over."

He rang off, put the phone back in its cradle. He pushed back from the desk, walked to the high windows and gazed at the street below. Damn it, what had happened? What had they found at the scene of the wreck?

Harlow's eyes were shimmering.

He walked to the desk, sat down again, drumming on the edge of the desk with his fingertips. Forewarned, he reflected. It might be a good idea to drop around headquarters, do a little sly fishing. "Just saw it in the papers," he'd say. "Awful accident. . . . Yes, I knew Vanderling. Terrible. . . ."

Harlow swung his gaze up as the door opened, framing Slocum. She said, "A Mr. Crenshaw to see you."

He lost a little color about his lips, but held his voice steady, "Show him in, Slocum."

Crenshaw evidently had been standing near the door. Crenshaw came in. He was lean, tall, handsome and young. He didn't look like a detective. A lot of them didn't.

Harlow watched Slocum close the door behind her. Then he turned his attention to Crenshaw.

The cop was wearing a suit of natty powder blue. He came across the office with an odd, wary light in his eyes. "You're Harry Harlow?"

"Yes." Cool. Aloof. Never show what you're really feeling, Harlow thought.

Crenshaw's eyes were darting pinpoints of light. "This morning, Harlow, as soon

as he heard the news, Sebastian Vanderling's lawyer called us. It seems that some time ago Vanderling left a sealed envelope in his lawyer's keeping. The envelope was marked, 'To Be Opened Only In The Event Of My Death'."

Harlow felt his jaw muscles bunch and beads of cold sweat breaking on his forehead. He remembered the automatic he had dropped in his side pocket. He slipped his hands casually in his coat pocket, let his fingers curl about the gun.

"Would you like to see the contents of that envelope, Harlow, which Vanderling's lawyer opened this morning?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"You will soon enough. I'm taking you to headquarters. You'd better realize the mess you're in. Here—this is what was in the envelope, Harlow." Crenshaw dropped a folded, letter-size paper on the desk, watching Harlow closely. "Just so you'll know the jam you're in, Harlow."

THE COLD SWEAT was breaking harder now. Harlow reached out his left hand, flicked the paper open. What he read stunned and angered him. To think that the fat pig had left a missive like this! The words of the letter burned in Harlow's gaze. Words that stated that Vanderling had put a private detective named Obie Leggett to shadowing Mrs. Marika Vanderling days ago. Her actions in Vanderling's presence had made him suspicious that she was carrying on an affair. The detective, Leggett, confirmed the suspicions. Leggett had done much more, giving Vanderling, the letter stated, a complete dossier on Harry Harlow, the man involved. Leggett also had discovered through channels that were peculiarly his own that Harlow had bought an unregistered gun through a man that dealt in such things.

"I—" Sebastian Vanderling's letter continued—"am no fool. At this point I gave Leggett unlimited resources and a free hand. He made a further discovery to the effect that the above named Harry Harlow shadowed my house by night and also entertained a rattle-headed maid secretly one evening with a dinner and abundance of drinks at a certain night club.

Leggett, who is unknown to Harlow, followed Harlow and the maid into the club, taking a table near them. Before the evening was over, Harlow had carefully plied the maid with sly questions and ascertained the movements, working hours and duties of every servant in my household. Knowing the true character of Harry Harlow from Leggett's reports, I am convinced that he is capable of committing murder—my murder. He stands to gain my wife and through her my fortune. In the event of my death suddenly and by violence, I am positive that the hand behind it will be Harry K. Harlow's."

Harlow's heart felt squeezed dry of blood. He hoped that death hadn't come swiftly to the pig. He hoped that death had been long, painful and lingering as Vanderling lay crushed beneath his car at the bottom of the canyon.

Harlow raised his gaze to Crenshaw's. He managed a laugh. "I knew the man was an egomaniac. Now I know he was completely insane."

"You can talk about it at headquarters, Harlow."

Harlow shrugged. He walked over to the hook where his hat hung. He tossed a bland smile over his shoulder at the cop. Crenshaw seemed to relax a little, come down off his toes.

Harlow slipped his hat on his head. "I suppose you'll want to search me." The cop was right behind him. He sensed Crenshaw reaching forward to pat his coat and trousers. As Crenshaw's fingers touched him, Harlow's hand came out of his side coat pocket. He moved very fast. The cop had time only to let his jaw drop when Harlow hit him.

The flat of the automatic smacked Crenshaw in the temple. It made a sickening sound. The cop's eyes rolled up in his head and he crumpled to the floor.

Harlow stood a moment, catching his breath. He walked over to the office door. He stuck his head out. Slocum was poised at her desk as if she'd heard something, like a bird trying to decide whether to take wing.

"Will you step in a moment, Miss Slocum?"

He let her squeeze past him into the office. She saw Crenshaw's crumpled

form. He heard the intake of her breath. She started to whirl and met the full force of the descending automatic in his hand.

Harlow let her fall without bothering to catch her. He moved quickly now. There was a full roll of wide adhesive in the office medicine chest. How long it had been there Harlow didn't know. There'd never been need for it—until this moment.

He bound Crenshaw and Slocum tightly about the wrists and ankles with the adhesive and gagged them. Then he dragged them into the office closet, locked the door and threw the key in the wastebasket.

Time was the important thing now. How long until there'd be a general alarm out for him? There was only one thing to do—get money and run. To get money he had to see Marika. He also had to make arrangements for her to meet him somewhere—perhaps in Rio or Mexico City, which was a nice thought—when she had settled the pig's estate and got all that cleared up.

He pushed across the teeming sidewalk as he left the building and flagged a taxi. His thoughts raced on. He damned the unknown quantity of this private detective, this Obie Leggett. Leggett even now might be telling them at headquarters that he, Harlow, had prowled in the Vanderling garage last night, gimmicking those brakes, if Leggett had been shadowing him the way Vanderling's letter had stated. Yes, Harlow conceded the frantic corner of his mind, Leggett was a serious blow. But he'd known there might be unknown quantities. He'd covered every conceivable angle when he'd decided to murder Vanderling. And he'd never been one to cry over spilt milk. You didn't get, Harlow thought, to the position he had attained by being weak-kneed, looking backward.

Now he was facing a new risk. They might be covering Marika's house. But if he didn't see Marika, he would have to run like a tramp, penniless, and they'd get him then sure—and that was out of the question.

Harlow gave the cab driver a Rock-away Canyon address and relaxed in the seat.

THE FIRST TIME Harlow had ever seen Marika, she had been wearing a flesh-colored bathing suit, and he hadn't been able to take his eyes off her. That had been one afternoon at the Bath Club pool. He had been reaching long and high and had worked at it to get a membership in the swank club. Then that afternoon he had seen her, watched her mount the high board, stand poised like something suspended between earth and blue sky, like something from a mystic land across the seas. He had watched the beauty of her dive. He had watched her swim—had seen the sudden spasm cross her face. He had hit the water in a flat, racing dive.

He liked to think that he had saved her life, that she was really his property, though it had actually been the lifeguard who'd pulled her out with that stomach cramp.

They'd seen each other often after that. Little things revealed her one interest in her husband—the Vanderling wealth. That didn't bother Harlow.

He learned a lot about her, that she was beautiful, as a cold flame is beautiful, that Vanderling had bought the beauty and that Vanderling couldn't suffer defeat in any arena and therefore wouldn't divorce her.

To Harlow's way of thinking, the quite natural thing was for Vanderling to die. He thought of murder with no moral qualms. Vanderling had wealth and Marika. There was a probability that Harlow could do Vanderling out of both of them. . . .

Once, long ago, Harlow had hinted at the possibility of killing Sebastian. But never after that. She didn't know that he had been around the garages last night, tampering with the brakes of Sebastian's coupe. He hadn't wanted her to know. He wouldn't let her know now—unless Leggett had been on his tail and spilled his brains. No, Harlow decided, he would never let Marika know for sure that he'd killed Sebastian. Two heads might be better than one, but two tongues can be twice as unsafe.

As the taxi crawled up the canyon road, Harlow let his gaze drag over the curve where Sebastian Vanderling had gone over last night. You could tell the spot—

the highway department had repaired the guard rail in a temporary fashion and had marked the curve with red flags. The flag looked like pieces of cloth dipped in blood. Vanderling's blood. Harlow smiled thinly.

The taxi let him out at a mailbox a quarter of a mile below Cliffside, the Vanderling estate. Harlow watched the cab nose into the rutted side road, turn around, and vanish back down the canyon road. Then Harlow cut up through the timber.

The Vanderling house was set on a small plateau. A huge Colonial structure, it was surrounded by landscaping that had cost the pig many pennies. The house seemed quiet, and after his scouting, Harlow came down the hillside, crossed the yard and hammered on the front door.

Marika answered it herself. She was stunning in a black and white suit, her hair like midnight about her tanned face.

"Harry!"

"You're alone?"

She nodded. "I even gave the servants a day off. Wanted to be alone with my grief, you know."

"Yes, I know." He pushed into the vaulted hallway.

"Harry, whatever is it?"

"They think I killed Sebastian."

She stared at him a moment; then she made a sound that might have been a laugh. "Oh, no—no!"

"I need some money. I've got to get away."

"But you didn't kill him, darling . . . did you?"

"Certainly not! But they have a circumstantial case that might burn me."

"I almost believe you did kill him!" Her voice sounded throaty. Her teeth flashed at him, and she touched his cheek with her fingertips.

"Think anything you like, darling," he told her. "I'm thinking of palm trees and white beaches and foaming surf. I'm thinking of balmy sunshine, hotels, night clubs where the atmosphere is right, the food good and the music wonderful."

"South America?"

He didn't speak. He didn't have to. He simply continued looking at her.

"Harry, it sounds delicious!"

"I'll be waiting for you to join me."

In Buenos Aires. You will, of course?"

"As soon as his estate is settled." She became brisk. "How much will you need?"

"Several thousand."

"You haven't got it?"

"I stay stripped to my financial bones. You know that, Marika."

They were moving into the living room. She poured him a brandy, handed it to him. "I have very little in my personal account, Harry. He never let me have much cash. It was one of his exquisite forms of torture for my not loving him. He knew the way I felt about him. It drove him sometimes to desperation. He could never bear to have anything near him and not possess it completely."

HARLOW made no comment. He watched her place her fingertip to her mouth. "I have it," she said. "My jewels!"

Her eyes were dancing. "You leave immediately. You won't even have to think of packing a bag. . . ."

"I haven't time to be thinking of packing a bag anyway, Marika!"

"Oh, my darling!" She pouted for him. "Well, when you reach the end of the line, write to me under the name of Norwalk Falconer. I'll join you as soon as possible. How does it sound?"

"It sounds. Get the jewels."

He watched her leave the living room, heard a door slam in the depths of the house. He set the brandy down and poured himself a stiff drink of Scotch. He was lifting it to his lips when the front door chimes sounded.

He set the shot of Scotch down, sprang to the window. A black, dusty car sat in the drive, heat waves shimmering on its hood.

The chimes sounded again. Harlow heard her steps outside in the hall as Marika went to the door.

"Yes?" That was Marika, her voice like ice.

Then a heavier voice, a man's grating voice, said, "Mrs. Vanderling? My name is Obie Leggett. I'm a private detective. I want to talk to you."

Harlow's hands moved open and closed, like hands hungry for a throat. He moved behind the drape, listening to Marika talk

in a high voice, throwing out her warning. Harlow had a thin thread of visibility where the drape flowed against the wall. He inched the automatic out of his pocket, watched Marika precede Obie Leggett into the room.

Leggett was short, squat, sloppily dressed. He had a coarse face with tiny, glittering eyes. He smirked at Marika and said, "Things about your husband's death the police might like to know, Mrs. Vanderling. Now, you got a boy friend named Harry Harlow. . . ."

"Yes," Harlow said, "she has."

Leggett twisted around to look as Harlow stepped from behind the drape. Leggett's face turned the color of a slug under a log. His heavy cheeks and jowls shook.

Leggett looked at the gun in Harlow's hand. "I—I—"

"You know, Leggett, I hate blackmailers. I hate anyone who tries to do me . . . before I have an even chance to do them, that is." Harlow's smile was cold. "And that's why you came here, isn't it, to start the blackmail ball rolling? I think I should kill you, Leggett."

"No . . . please . . . I—"

"Shut up. Turn around—and move!"

Leggett whimpered and moved in a shuffling stumble all the way down the hall. Harlow herded him down the narrow stairs into the basement. He remembered a storage room down here in the damp gloom, a room cut back into the hillside. At the door of the musty room, Leggett tried to turn. "Please, Mr. Harlow, let me explain. . . ."

"I don't want explanations from a rat like you, Leggett." Harlow hit him with the gun. Leggett screamed, tried to squirm aside, to run. Harlow hit him again. Leggett fell to the concrete floor, groaning. Harlow kicked him until he had pushed and mauled Leggett's mass into the storage room. He threw the bolt, wiped his hands and went back upstairs.

Marika was waiting in the upper hall. She was worrying her hands together. "If he implicates me when he gets out of the storage room, Harry, I'd be. . . ."

"Yes," he said, "an accessory. The money. All the Vanderling money. You'll tell him—and the police—that I had you covered with the gun from the living room, that you had no choice. We've got to

have no accessory charge, not one hitch in getting the money."

She relaxed, smiled. "I knew you'd come through, Harry."

"The jewels?"

"I've got them."

"Then get me to the station, sweetheart. Let's get a move on!"

He followed her out of the house, over to the garage, grasped the handle of the door and pushed it up on its counterbalance. Then Harlow went numb as he stared at the car in the garage.

It was a maroon coupe.

Sebastian's car.

He said, "Marika, you killed him. You slugged or drugged him, put him in your car, sent him down the grade toward the curve."

He looked at her, and the sight of her eyes jolted him. She was trying to hide it, but it was there. She smiled. "But no, darling. You're the one they're looking for. I didn't kill him. You did."

A great weariness flooded him. He knew what had happened as precisely as if he had witnessed the whole thing himself. He had tampered with the brakes of the maroon coupe, of this car squatting before him at this moment, because no one but Sebastian ever used the coupe. But when she had slugged—or drugged—her husband, she had put him in the sedan to start him on that steep plunge down the canyon road. The papers hadn't given a description of the car, merely calling it Sebastian Vanderling's, the death car. And the maroon coupe had sat here unused. They'd taken her to the morgue to identify Sebastian in an official car.

He couldn't take his eyes off her face. Dark eyes, raven hair, scarlet mouth. A blood-thirsty, greedy face. Why hadn't he seen before?

A hot surge of hatred for her suddenly overpowered him. If she were caught, she would make him her companion in crime. She would swear him right into the chair

with her. He had seen that lurking in her face.

He felt the diamond bracelet she had given him in his pocket. The price of murder—he'd never get anything else out of it. Perhaps not even the bracelet. She would sic the law onto him as soon as she was safely away from him, at a comfortable distance from his automatic. With that letter that Vanderling had left, with her to swear against him, with his actions against Crenshaw, with her able to buy Leggett to swear no telling what kind of lies—with all of it together, Harlow knew a sinking sensation in his stomach.

But she wasn't going to be able to do him, because he was going to do her first. Even as the thought flashed in his mind, he put a smile on his lips for her, patted her hand and led her around the coupe.

He was remembering that other road that led toward town. The Crest road it was called, paralleling the canyon road far over to the west. The Crest road was more heavily traveled than the canyon road, a main highway coming from the north. If Marika should take the plunge he had planned for Sebastian, she'd never be able to do her dirty work. He could hole up in the wooded area west of Rockaway until nightfall, then make his way to the Crest road. Once there, a ride into town . . . lose himself in crowds until he could manage some money off the bracelet through his connections . . . then escape.

Marika was bending to get in the coupe while he held the door. With her head in that position, she offered a prime target. Harlow struck her with the automatic. Once, hard.

The gun crunched the base of her skull. She tried to scream, and he hit her again. She slumped half on the seat, half out of the coupe. Harlow's teeth felt on edge.

He pushed her into the coupe, got under the wheel. With the car growling in low gear, he swept it down the canyon road. The drop was long and steep. Harlow

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looked for other cars. There were none.

He let the couple crawl, braking it by keeping it in low gear and applying no gas, until he was just a hundred yards from the curve where the little blood-colored flags fluttered in the breeze. She was still slumped beside him, unmoving.

Harlow set the wheel, opened the door of the coupe and prepared to jump. He threw in the clutch, geared to neutral. Released from the braking action of the low gear, the coupe picked up speed sickeningly.

Harlow leaped. He twisted, almost thrown off his feet, hitting the road in a stumbling run. He slowed himself down, then tripped and rolled over and over until he was lying on the shoulder of the road. He heard the crash then, the rending of metal, the tearing of the guard rail. The awful sounds of the coupe's falling in space came to him, holding him paralyzed for a moment.

She was gone.

He felt a little hollow inside. He was sorry it had turned out like this, but he'd had no choice. He was playing the game for his life now, for escape.

Harlow rose and made his way up the hillside, into the trees. It would be a long wait for darkness. Harlow had never liked the quiet of a wooded hillside.

**E**ARLY NIGHT had dropped a mantle of black velvet over the earth. Cars on the Crest highway shot long shafts of light into the night. The light would pass over Harlow, then darkness would swoop over him again as the cars roared by.

Harlow cursed in the darkness. He was tired. He was hungry. His clothes were sweat-stained, his shoes dusty and hurting his feet from the long hike.

New headlights came toward him. He stood at the shoulder of the road, raised his thumb. The car slowed. Harlow threw off his feeling of fatigue. He was in luck. He had been on the Crest highway only a few moments. Here was a lift toward safety already.

The car rolled to a stop, motor idling. It was a black sedan. A rear door opened. A man's voice said, "Hop in, chum."

Harlow started to get in the car. There were two men in the front seat, one in

back. He was almost in the back seat when he recognized the man sitting there. His heart lurched. He was practically breathing in the face of Obie Leggett.

Harlow jerked his head around. One of the men in the front seat said, "Easy, chum. We're cops."

Blind rage mingled with a blinder panic flooded over Harlow. He wasn't thinking. Only feeling, tasting the bitter taste of his rage. He lunged backward, twisted and started running up the rocky hillside.

He heard voices shout behind him, pounding feet coming after him. He clawed his way up the gently sloping hill. "Make the top," he panted. "Lose them in the timber. . . ."

A gun cracked behind him. Harlow felt the sharp, hot bite of the bullet in his back. It knocked him off his feet. He moaned, and his senses swam dizzily toward becoming a part of the black night. He realized they were looming over him, three blocky shadows. He heard the sound of their voices and tried to force his fevered brain to make sense of the cops' words.

Slocum and Crenshaw had finally got out of the office closet. It seemed a client had come in and Crenshaw had beat his forehead against the closet door until he attracted attention. He'd called headquarters. Men had been sent to the Vanderling place. They'd found Leggett—and Marika. Blocks and patrols had been thrown over every road, lane and pathway in the whole area. A giant trap, with Harlow at the middle of it. . . .

"What's he doing?" one of the cops said.

The cop kneeling over Harlow seized Harlow's hand, tore away the diamond bracelet. "I guess he was trying to slip this under him, push it in the dirt, hide it. Look at those diamonds sparkle! A hunk of nice, bright sparkling evidence to add to everything else we got. He's quite a lad—but he's certainly done himself in this time!"

Harlow felt himself sinking, sinking. His wound was burning as if something white hot had been bored into his flesh. And Harlow knew with an icy, numb terror that his motto wasn't big enough to get him out of this. . . .

He ground through the fibers and finally the heavy balance gave a downward jolt.



## THE CORPSE IS FAMILIAR

By  
**BRUCE CASSIDAY**

*Magician Al Fast looked enough like Bill English to be Bill English . . . which, Al Fast figured—considering English's wife and bank account—was not a bad idea at all!*

**T**HE GIRL in the doorway was the last one in the world he wanted to see. Al Fast stared at her a long time, and then he stood back to let her in. She moved past him and the perfume of her hair came to him gently. Crossing the room, she sat down in a chair facing him. He stood there at the door, his back to

it, looking at her. She hadn't changed much. A little more brittle. A little harder in the eyes. A little softer in the body. That was all.

She turned her wide grey eyes full on him then, and he knew that everything about her he had so deliberately forgotten wasn't forgotten at all. She knew how it was with him, and the knowledge brought a smile to her mobile face. The smile broke the brittleness and shattered the hardness in her eyes. It was just like old times—she was really here again, and not just part of a haunting memory.

"So how's things with you, Doris?" he asked, the words coming out easy and soft, not at all as he had intended they should.

Doris English arched a brow in her familiar way and shifted in her chair so the perfume from her hair came to him. "How do you think, Al? And you. You're the Great Faustino still, aren't you?"

Al Fast fumbled with a cigarette package. He fed her a cigarette and lit it. "Doing not bad at all, kid," he said. "A lot better than the last time we . . . mentioned it."

She smiled through the smoke. He looked at her throat, soft and smooth and velvety. She had her taffy-blond hair combed so the bottom of her ears showed pink and clean under the swirls. He hated her through the smoke. She was better than he remembered her, and her presence brought back the hellish ache in him.

"I see you got good publicity notices, Al. 'The Great Faustino. Best Magic Act in Town.' Lots of stuff like that plastered all over the columns. You're hot."

"Sure, Doris." He flicked an ash in a nearby tray. He sat down in a hard-backed chair and slumped into it. He could see her looking at his shoulders sagging down into his sport jacket, and at his shined shoes. Sizing him up.

"It's still on, Al. You know that, don't you?" She spoke cautiously, her face fresh and brash and her eyes straight on him. But underneath there was a groping, an unsteadiness, as if she were reaching out tentatively to feel how he would take it.

Before he realized it, his mouth was twisting up in one corner. His eyes got

hot watching her. He stared down at the cigarette, squinting against the smoke that curled up into his eyes.

"No, kid. It wasn't on two years ago. Why should it be on now?" His eyes went to her face.

"Things happened. There's no use going into it, Al. It just wasn't right then."

He got up and walked to the window, looking down into the traffic on Fifty-ninth Street. "You couldn't tell me then, could you? You couldn't drop a nickel in a phone and let me know. No. You had to skip out with him again and—"

She was already talking. "All right. It looks rotten. You have to believe me—it wasn't. And now it's on. It's for keeps this time. This is it, Al."

"This is it, Al." Four years ago the same girl with the same eyes and the same lift to her body and the same soft throat had said, "This is it, Al."

Two years ago the same girl had said, "This is it, Al."

HE REMEMBERED the cigarettes he'd burned through. He remembered the piled butts in the tray the next morning. He remembered the stinking, dirty brown taste of whiskey in his mouth for days afterward. He remembered the bleached-out, dirty, yellow room where he'd come to, and the thin, ripped blankets, and the wallpaper peeling off at the door jams. He remembered the ache of her double-cross as if it were yesterday.

"How is Bill English these days?" he said, trying to get the sourness out of his guts.

"I hate him," she said. Her face got hard and brittle thinking about it. She did it just right. She was a woman, and as women will, she made Al Fast feel like a heel for ever doubting her.

"I wish he'd hurry up and die," she said. "He gets those damned fainting spells now and then, and—husband or no husband—I keep hoping he's dead. But he never is. I guess you'll have to take care of him like we planned, Al."

"Does he still look enough like me," he asked, a smile crawling across his mouth.

"Every time I see him I think of you. Honest, Al."

"I believed you two years ago. Four years ago, too, and those big shows didn't

come off. You had to go disappear on me. It was rough, baby, because I didn't have anybody to look at—to remind me of you."

She turned her head away from him. "You're lucky you didn't have, Al."

He walked over to her and stood not three feet from her, looking down at her cool mouth and her hot eyes and her warm face.

He took hold of her chin in his palm and the soft feel of her flesh went through him like wildfire. Then he had her in his arms in an instant and she was pressing herself against him, holding tight to him.

Sure, the words beat through his head. Kill Bill English. Switch places with him. Smuggle the body onto the stage in your prop trunk. Squash the hell out of his corpse so there won't be any questions. Preso chango! Keep their eyes off the hand that's doing the dirty work. Pull the great switcheroo. What are you a magician for? Make it pay, buddy. Turn yourself into a man worth five hundred thousand dollars.

He could get away with it. No one would ever think a self-effacing, forty-buck-a-week accountant named Bill English living in some small Midwest town was a masquerader, an ex-magician—and a murderer.

And he'd have Doris English. That was what he'd always really wanted—ever since he'd picked her up in that bar off Sheridan Square and let her talk him into this little scheme. . . .

"No, damn it!" he said suddenly, and the sharpness of his own voice made him start.

She looked at him with wide grey eyes. "What did you say?"

"It won't work, baby. I'm not going to do it." He moved away from her. "I'm going to be the Great Faustino for the rest of my life. The hell with playing the part of Bill English."

Her soft eyes had become steel traps. Loaded. "Look, Al. Let's get our cards on the table and look at them a while. Sick or not, Bill English is no kid with a cap pistol. He's got a gun that shoots. And he's jealous as hell of me."

"So?"

"I can let him find out about us, Al, and if he does, it's you he'll come after,

not me. Remember that. Think about it a long time, Al. If you welch on this game now, that's what'll happen."

He stared at her. She was like a shiny automobile just rolled off the assembly line, complete with everything but warm blood and a heart to pump it. He stared at her, and no words would come. Something inside him told him that there was no way out.

She came into his arms then, timing it just right, and she was close to him before he realized he was responding warmly, and that the years were gone and all the bitterness between them was finished.

You're in it now, kid, he told himself. Good-bye, Faustino.

She moved in his arms then, and the last of his thoughts swirled away from him in a dark black whirlpool. He was conscious only of her and her throat and the perfume she wore, so thin and subtle, and so damned effective. . . .

**M**OCKINGLY, the pile of dead butts reared up in the ashtray, and Al Fast pushed them away with his hand. He dragged his head up from his shirt front and looked at the clock through red-rimmed eyes. Ten-thirty.

He stood up and rubbed his hand across his chin and jaw. The black stubble scraped his finger tips. Ten-thirty, and Doris thought he would be there at English's apartment at midnight. Thinking about her and putting her name into his thoughts brought another stab at his stomach.

This time there would be no messing around. This time there would be no pile of cigarette butts in a dirty hotel room, no broken bottles in the waste basket stinking of dried bourbon. This time there would be no regrets, no ache in the guts, no dry, flat feeling all through him while he thought of her.

Because this time he was pulling out on her—out of town, out of the state, out of reach of Doris English.

He grinned at himself in the mirror. You stinking shmo, he thought. You think you're any better than she is, pulling the same welching trick she pulled on you?

He pulled his suitcase out of the closet, emptied the dresser drawers one by one,

dumped everything in the suitcase and then pushed all the drawers back in again. He shook the .38 Colt out of his rolled-up pajamas and looked at it, running his fingers over the cold blue barrel. There was no caress in the movement.

Then he put it in the suitcase and slammed it shut.

Before he could pick it up and leave, the door buzzer rang. He crossed to open the door, wondering who it could be. Doris? The bellboy?

The man outside was on him and past him and in the room before he could see who it was. Twisting to face the intruder, he greeted instead the muzzle of a small, compact Italian Beretta. Slowly his eyes traveled up from the muzzle of the gun, along the slender arm, up into the mildly cynical, amused eyes of Bill English.

Bill English, with a sardonic hatred in his eyes, a flat grin on his lips—and a very deadly little Beretta in his right hand.

"Well, well," said English, glancing at the suitcase on the bed. "Thinking of moving, Fast?"

"I'm moving to the theater. I open tonight."

"Yeah. So I heard."

Abruptly English stared at the heaped ashtray. He upended it with a flick of the hand, and all the butts spilled onto the carpet. Five of them at the bottom rolled out on top—crimson with the lipstick of Doris English. English stooped over, picking one of them up. He read the brand name, still there near the cork tip, and then he ground it flat in his fingers.

Slowly he turned to Al Fast. The veins in his neck swelled, and a green sick anger was spreading through his body.

"So she *was* here last night!" His left arm was relaxed and loose at his side, and the Beretta was held in close and tight next to his right side.

Sweat crept over Al Fast's skin, and his blood beat through him heavy and sluggish. He stared at English's furious face, his own mouth twisting mirthlessly.

"I found the trunk she'd hidden in the back end of the car. As if she was going to sneak out and run away with you—in my own car! Your name was on the trunk, Fast. So I came right over."

Cautiously Al Fast's eyes traveled to

the suitcase on the bed. The .38 was in it.

"Or was it murder you planned, Fast? Were you going to kill me, and dump me in that trunk—and then change places with me?"

Al Fast's eyes widened. English *had* figured it out.

"I got eyes, Fast. I know we look pretty much alike. But we won't—in a minute!"

Al Fast saw the gun come up, saw the hand tense around it, and suddenly he was on the floor, making a grab for English's ankle. The gun crashed to the floor as English spun down on top of him.

He found English's face and smashed a fist into it. English was groping for the gun, but Al Fast slammed his wrist and English groaned. With a backward twist, English threw him off, and while Al Fast's head slammed into the floorboard, English grabbed the gun. He drew it up just as Al Fast spun away from the wall and came at him.

Al Fast twisted the gun around into English's chest. With a sudden jerk, English closed in on him. At that instant the gun went off, muffled between them, burning their clothes with gunflame. Then all the struggle in English's body ceased, and he dropped limply back on the floor.

Al Fast scooped up the gun. He stood over English and stared down at him. "Had enough, English?" he whispered, dropping the gun on the bed.

He knotted a handkerchief around English's mouth. Twisting one of his shirts into a tight wad, he bound Bill English's hands behind him, turning him over on his stomach to do so. There was blood all over English's clothes and body. Al Fast wiped it off with another handkerchief, but it kept seeping out again.

He washed his own hands three times. Despite the blood, he hauled the body over to the closet and got it inside. With a towel he bound English's feet. Then he kicked him in the side to bring him to.

There was no movement from English at all. His eyes did not flicker.

"English," Al Fast cried. "English!"

Bending over, he put his finger to the man's wrist. No pulse. He felt for the man's heart, put his ear down close to it. Nothing.

Bill English was dead. It had done no

good at all to tie him up and gag him. Bill English would never move or talk again.

Al Fast sat on the edge of the bed, staring down at the carpet. His tongue felt like sandpaper and his throat was raw and tight. His heart was beating all over his body and the veins on his wrists were blue and sickly.

Slowly he got to his feet and reached for the suitcase. He snapped it shut, then put Bill English's gun in his pocket. He reached out for the doorknob and froze dead.

That was no good. The trunk in English's car was labeled Al Fast. If he took the car, they'd track him down. If he left the car here, they'd have proof he'd killed English.

Besides, if he ducked out now, Doris would squeal on him. She'd be glad to get him crossed off her list now that he'd done her dirty work for her. She'd have English's money—and her freedom.

No. He had to play it wise—play it the way the cards were stacked to begin with. He had to, now. Dump Bill English in the laundry bag, get him in the trunk, drive to the theater just as he'd planned. Get the body on the stage, switch wallets, drop that overhead weight on the body, turn into Bill English and fade. Fade with Doris English, and be Mrs. Doris English for the rest of his life. If he could stand it.

Sure. The plan had been for Doris to duck out of the house early, leaving Al Fast plenty of time to come in and kill English. Doris was waiting now to pick up the car in back the theater.

He looked back of him at the half-open closet door, at the feet of Bill English. With a shudder he dumped the suitcase on the bed and walked over to the closet. . . .

**T**HE BLACKNESS of the empty theater rose about him like the shadow of death. He could feel the stillness and mustiness crushing down on him.

Good-bye Broadway, hello hell, he thought to himself, his face tight and grey in the black air. He glanced back at the stage door. The doorman who had helped him drag the trunk onstage was gone, and there was no sound from outside.

He pulled out the laundry sack, and then peeled it from around English's body. So far everything had gone without a hitch. Without a hitch, except that he had unwittingly become involved in the murder he never really meant to commit. That was one for the judges in limbo to figure out.

He laid the body out just where it should be for the weight to smash it. He'd played the same spot a year before, and he'd worked one of his tricks off an invisible wire strung from that same line. Hell, it was almost too damned perfect—the whole setup.

He turned English's face up square into the loft above—so the weight would have no trouble blotting out all the differences in facial features. Not that there would be any questions asked. Accidents happened around stages, especially while things were getting set up.

He managed a bleak grin out at the empty theater. A hell of a neat trick this was. Too bad he had no audience. But then, there'd be an audience tomorrow. Plenty of people would read in their papers: "Magician Killed in Accident."

A lot of the best acts in the world never got on the stage, he thought. That was what bad actors said about their lousy routines. That was what a smart actor was saying now about a routine he hated, but which was going over big.

Al Fast moved quickly up the ladder to the high catwalk above the stage. Balancing himself on the narrow platform, he moved out over the stage. He tested the line, then got out the pocket knife. He'd have to saw it jagged, so it would look as if it had frayed from the pulley.

He ground through the fibers and finally the heavy balance gave a downward jolt. He leaned back. That was enough. Now the rope would go on breaking of its own accord. He'd move down the ladder, get ready to go out the side door the instant he was sure it had smashed into the dead body of Bill English.

He could hear the hempen strands ripping now, faster and faster. Like a cat he climbed down, lowering himself expertly on the slippery round rungs.

Onstage he crouched in the shadow of the tormentor to wait, to watch, to make sure, before he ducked out and let the

doorman take over. Above him he could hear the snapping of the rope unsnarling. He held his breath and began to count.

At seven his breath went out of him with a hideous gasp. The door was opening across the stage. The damned doorman was coming in, snooping. Trying to get a look at Al Fast's magic props.

Damn!

The doorman's lanky frame appeared silhouetted in the opening and Al Fast could see him peering in. "Mr. Fast," the doorman called.

Al Fast cursed again.

"Mr. Fast. Hey—can you hear me?"

Then Al Fast's body froze to ice. The body on the floor was moving! Bill English was alive—not dead. He'd passed out, as he'd done often before, and now he'd come to!

He was moving his hand, spidering his fingers along the stage floor, aroused by the sound of the doorman's voice.

Like a fiery crackle of lightning, the rope snapped above them. Al Fast leaped out towards the body of Bill English, trying desperately to cry out at the same time. He thought he reached English and shoved hard, but he didn't know.

Then all the fury of hell crashed into his shoulder with a glancing, slanting impact, and he felt himself slammed into the stage wall.

The cry from the doorman's throat at the same instant ripped into his ears and before he could stop himself he moved forward at a half crouch, peering out onto the darkened stage. The dark shape of the doorman was bent over the limp form on the floor, and Al Fast could hear choked sounds coming from the old man's throat.

"Mr. Fast! Mr. Fast! . . . My God—maybe he's dead!"

Maybe, hell! He was dead all right. With sweat pouring off his face and sliding down into his dampened collar, Al Fast pulled himself around the corner to the corridor, then out into the night. . . .

WITH trembling hands he let himself into Bill English's apartment where he was to meet Doris. She was to have picked up the car in back of the theater the minute the doorman went inside. She should be there to meet him at the apartment. Where the hell was she?

He closed the door and crossed the room. Better get his stuff packed and be ready to pull out when she came. He was in it now up to his neck and he could never get out.

Sure, he'd tried to push English's body out of the way of the weight. But why the hell had English been there in the first place?

No, he could never kid himself that he hadn't killed Bill English. He'd never sleep a night in his life again. He'd never stop hearing that twanging parting of the hempen strands, never stop seeing those feebly moving fingers of Bill English's hands before the weight crashed down.

Live a long time, Al Fast, he told himself, so you can think about that for the rest of your days. You killed Bill English just as sure as if you aimed the gun and pulled the trigger deliberately. You did it to get Doris English—and now that you've got her, enjoy her. You're two or a kind, you and Doris. You'll go good together.

He opened the bedroom door and stepped back. Doris English lay there on the floor between the two beds, dead. Her hair was twisted under her head, mixed up with her ears, plastered around her soft cheek.

She had been shot twice at close range, and the powder burns had eaten into her fine satiny skin. The dress she wore was twisted and torn about her milk-white body. She was a hell of a hunk of woman, he thought, even dead. Well, this was one thing he owed to English.

He laughed then, thinking of it. Al Fast, the Great Faustino, the prestochango impresario, had pulled the neatest trick of the week—he'd changed himself from a man-murderer into a woman-murderer. Good going, Fast. Only next time, you keep their eyes off the hand that's doing the dirty work; try to keep a little control over it yourself.

He was sitting on the bed, laughing silently to himself, when the big cop walked in. "You're Al Fast, aren't you?" the cop asked.

"Yeah." That was something. He could still talk.

"Rough day, ain't it, Fast?"

"You got here quick."

*(Continued on page 127)*

# SCENE OF . . . . . . THE CRIME



"You know," she said, "I think I ought to ask you for twenty-five hundred." That, of course, left just one way out for Wade.

By  
**SCOTT O'HARA**

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*Harmon Wade made a deal with the cops . . . and found that he had been roped—hangnoose fashion—into the death house!*

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**H**ARMON WADE was thirty-one. He looked older. There was a faint sag of sallow flesh over a jawline that had never been pronounced. Protruding blue eyes had that particular color which looks as if it had been washed with too strong a soap. His hair was re-

ceding, and it was of a coarse texture, an indeterminate color.

His legs were short and rather thick, his trunk long, his wrists and hands thin and rather white. As a consequence, his jacket sleeves never seemed quite long enough, and the jacket itself appeared

short and outmoded, despite a creased newness.

He walked with an odd gait, leaning back as though he were going down a slope. He sat erect in all chairs. He had a nervous habit of sucking his lips in before speaking so that the pink membrane disappeared entirely. As a small loan adjuster for the Farmer's National Bank of Naronna, New York, he had a respectable job which earned him forty-seven dollars a week after all deductions. It was adequate for his needs, as he neither smoked nor drank.

All in all, he was as eminently respectable a murderer as one could find in a month's search.

He realized that in all his dealings he was cool, detached and thoughtful. He knew that he inspired no liking among his associates. Merely respect. It was the stern look he could assume which was responsible for his bill-collecting success.

As a practising determinist, he was annoyed that a combination of coincidences had turned him into a murderer. He regretted it, and, having come from a religious home, he spent many long sleepless hours in his bed in his furnished room on Gowan Street wondering about the hereafter and hellfire.

But of course, it was all too late to wonder.

If Mrs. Anna Delaporta had not had such a sharp and bitter tongue that she had driven her husband back into the Army from which he had gratefully been discharged . . . and if Mrs. Anna Delaporta had been a better manager of her funds so that she had not contracted for more time payments than she could manage . . . and if the Delaporta house had not been small, white and quite isolated on the edge of town . . . and if Anna had not been darkly beautiful, and quite lonely . . . and if Harmon Wade had not been a shy and sublimated man . . .

But such conjectures were useless. Harmon Wade sat in the golden oak anteroom of the law office of Amos McCane thinking empty thoughts.

He remembered the still afternoon, the drawn shades, the sounds of the insects in the vacant lots on either side of the Delaporta house. Her voice had been a husky and demanding whisper.

He had left much later, walking out to his car, looking nervously about, wondering if anyone had noticed the length of time he had stayed there. He drove five blocks, his hands sweating on the wheel, and had parked. It was then that he remembered the payment that he didn't collect. Trembling, he took out his account book, made out a receipt for eleven dollars and twenty-one cents. A washing machine on the time-payment plan. Let the Farmer's National Bank handle your credit. Loans with a wide smile.

It was after he had destroyed the customer's copy of the receipt that he realized dully that it was what she had wanted him to do. He had heard of such experiences, listening to the gay, bawdy talk of other adjusters. . . .

HE GLANCED at his watch as he sat in the anteroom. He frowned. It was taking McCane a long time to see him.

Back to the empty, useless thoughts. The memory of Anna had been a dark secret to which he had clung. And at last he had gone back to the small white house. At night. He had made the last three payments on her contract. It was then that he had gradually learned that that dark shine in her eyes was greed. But it was too late to stop.

Gradual change to nightmare. Her voice on the rooming house phone. Demands. Tears. Bills folded once and handed to her. Harmacy, as she called him. "How would they like to know about this at the bank, Harmacy?"

"You wouldn't, Anna!"

Shrill laughter. "Sure I would. Who are you? A lousy bill collector. Good old Harmacy. Come here, Harmacy."

On and on and on. The savings dwindled. Slowly at first, and then more rapidly. Nothing left but the stock. Eight shares. Worth two hundred and something a share. Legacy.

"I'm going to have a kid, Harmacy. Joe has been gone a year. If you want out, Harmacy, I've got to have two thousand bucks. Quick."

She didn't like his answer. She put her slippers on and shuffled over to the phone. "I know the address of the president of that crummy bank of yours, Harmacy. I think I'll ask him for the loan.

Hell, Harmy, you can borrow the other four hundred. Pay it back in easy installments. If you can't borrow it, you can sell that car of yours. That car'll bring nine hundred, anyway. You know, I think I ought to ask you for twenty-five hundred."

And, of course, there was just one way out.

As soon as he had decided, the problem had been easy. . . .

\* \* \*

The girl said, "Mr. McCane will see you now, Mr. Wade."

He sat very straight on the chair beside Mr. McCane's desk, sucked his lips in and said, "Mr. McCane, I am being persecuted by the police. I want to know what my rights are."

McCane, tall, seamed, grey, rolled a pencil against his desk with the palm of his hand. He smiled. "I'll have to know more than that, sir."

"Eight months ago a woman named Anna Delaporta was killed."

"I remember the case. They found her in the river, didn't they?"

"Yes. She had been struck on the head. I knew her. Her husband was away. I . . . gave her the benefit of my financial advice. She was having a hard time. I am an adjuster." He smiled thinly. "A fancy name for bill collector."

"And they connected you with her?"

"The inquest was death at the hands of person or persons unknown. Someone saw my car parked outside her house a few times. The police, a Lieutenant Patterson, questioned me for a long time, asking the same questions over and over again and making the most . . . horrible insinuations. Mrs. Delaporte was a rather coarse woman, and I certainly wouldn't have done what the—"

"Of course, of course," McCane said soothingly. "But what is bothering you now?"

"Maybe they haven't got enough cases for the police. I don't know. But ever since I was questioned eight months ago, I have been followed by the police. Oh, they make no secret of it. Fat, horrible men who just stand and watch me. Every call I make. I look out my office window

and see them. I handle many of my accounts by mail. The choice is up to me."

"Do they hinder your actions in any way?"

"Yes. They are driving me mad. I forget my accounts. I can't keep my mind on the figures. They—"

"You don't understand my question. Do they ever prevent you from going any place you wish to go?"

Slowly. "No. No, they don't."

McCane shrugged, spread his hands in a gesture of helplessness. "They are in the right. They can follow you, so long as they don't hamper your movements."

"Suppose I have a breakdown?" Harmon Wade demanded angrily.

Amos McCane seemed to get a cool light in his wise old eyes. "I rather imagine, Mr. Wade, that it would lead them to presume guilt on your part."

Harmon Wade sucked his lips in and sat very still. He said, "Thank you. Your fee . . . ?"

"No fee for this call, Wade. Good-bye."

He walked down the flight of wooden stairs to the street door. His car was parked three blocks away. The June day was cool. It had been raining, and the sun had a watered, faded quality, the asphalt shining with dampness.

**L**IEUTENANT PATTERSON, a youngish man with a square, heavy face and a speculative look, pushed away from the side of the building and fell in step with Harmon Wade.

Wade noticed him and stopped. He looked angrily and inquiringly at Patterson. Patterson seemed wildly amused. "Nice day, Wade, isn't it?"

"Why do you keep bothering me?"

"Bothering you? Hell, man, don't be so sensitive. Why should I bother you?"

"Your people follow me all the time. They don't make any secret of it."

Patterson took a pack of cigarettes out of the side pocket of his jacket, tucked one cigarette in the corner of his mouth. He lit it with the last wooden match in a small box. Then, grinning peacefully at Wade, he suddenly crunched the box in his heavy hand.

Wade jumped, oddly startled, not knowing why.

Patterson laughed. "Bones in a head

make a crunching noise like that, Wade. Don't they?"

Wade sucked in his lips, then said, "You're being childish. I wouldn't know."

He turned away and started to walk again. Patterson once more fell in step with him. Wade tried to pretend that it wasn't Patterson, that it was an acquaintance, someone who meant him no harm.

"It didn't have to be much of a blow, Wade," Patterson said. "Hit her right over the ear. Depressed fracture the size of a quarter. A claw hammer would do the trick."

"I have no interest in what was used."

Patterson chuckled. He stood, smiling, his thumbs tucked into the waistband of his trousers as Wade unlocked his car and climbed behind the wheel. As Wade started up he glanced in the rear-view mirror, saw the black and white sedan, a half-block behind him, pull out.

Harmon Wade shut his jaw hard. Okay, let them tag along. They'd never find out a thing. Never. They wouldn't catch him in any lapse. They wouldn't find him revisiting the scene of the crime. They wouldn't detect in any action of his any indication of guilt. Sooner or later they'd give up.

He smacked the wheel with the heel of his hand, said in a low tone, "If I just don't crack up. If only I don't crack up."

He turned out the light in his bedroom that night, padded to the window and looked down. There was a misty rain that made soft halos around the street lights. A black and white sedan was parked across the street. He could see the red glow of a cigarette end, saw the arc as it was lifted to lips, a brighter glow, and then the descending arc.

He went to bed, and lay rigid, staring wide-eyed at the ceiling, his nails digging into his palms. "If only I don't crack. If I can just stay calm."

Each morning he went down to the office and the girl gave him the cards on the delinquent payments. Each morning he sorted them into three groups. One group to be handled by phone. A second group to be handed by letter. A third group which merited personal calls. Each morning he dictated the necessary letters, made the necessary phone calls and then left the office for the day. Each night he

read the paper, hoping that there would be news of a crime wave, of new murders, of something which would make so many demands on the police department that they would take the men off him.

Weight began to melt off him, and he lost his appetite. He was sharp and bitter with the delinquents, and his collection rate began to improve.

In a dark corner of his mind were certain facts and certain emotions that he never investigated. A bridge, a purchase, a blow, a gasp, a great fear, a great relief.

On the eleventh day of September he received a phone call from Lieutenant Patterson. "Wade? Patterson speaking. Want to run over here to headquarters?"

"No, thank you."

Patterson laughed. "Better come along, fella. Or we'll pick you up."

Harmon Wade sucked at his lips for a moment. It would be silly to refuse. Maybe this was what he had been waiting for? False arrest. A chance for a suit. A chance to get the interminable police off his neck.

"I'll be over in fifteen minutes," he said briskly. "And I am going to demand certain explanations."

Patterson laughed again. "So are we."

The line went dead. Wade sat at his desk, his sweating palms tight on the arms of his chair. Patterson wanted explanations also. But of what? What could they have discovered? Slowly he relaxed as he realized that nothing new could have come up. For the first two weeks after the murder he had been in horrible fear, realizing after the crime that maybe Anna had protected herself by leaving a letter or a note with someone.

No, a note wouldn't turn up at this late date.

He nodded coolly to the office girl, took his hat and left. The day was hot and as he drove toward headquarters the asphalt shimmered in the distance, showing a mirage of dark water.

He parked near headquarters, put a nickle in the meter and walked up the wide stone steps. To the man behind the high desk he said that Lieutenant Patterson was expecting him.

"Down that hallway. Last door on the right."

*(Continued on page 128)*

# ODDITIES IN CRIME

By MAYAN and JAKOBSSON



①

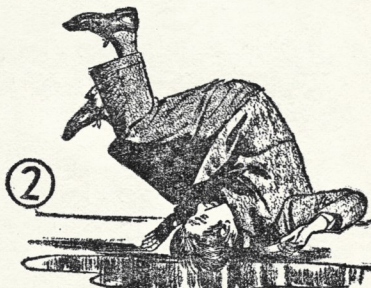
3. Add weird jury trials. After an obviously sour verdict, the twelve good men and true in a case which made our headlines not too long ago were taken to task and questioned separately as to their method of reaching an opinion. Finding themselves deadlocked and anxious to go home, the jurors decided to pick a number between one and one hundred by lot. The juror whose age came closest to the number passed on the fate of the defendant!



③

4. Leroy Brady, neighbors agreed, might have his faults. But he had one saving virtue, and in the end, it saved his neck. When Leroy's younger brother married a girl whom Leroy's mother detested, Leroy sent the bride a bomb disguised as a gift. It killed the girl and her brother and sister; it tore off a little boy's arm and put out an old lady's eye. A jury of local farmers gave Leroy three years and four months for every person he'd killed. They didn't want to be hard, they explained, on a boy who'd oblige his mother.

1. According to the most valid statistics in the world, everybody dies sooner or later. Mrs. Amy Archer-Gilligan, who ran a private home for the aged in Connecticut, based what she felt would be a career in perfect crimes on these indisputable figures. She felt she could knock off her boarders freely for profit and still not top nature's batting average of .1000. Figures, though, will lie, as many another killer has found. When all twenty-eight of Mrs. A.-G.'s patrons died in two years, authorities investigated. The death rate in Connecticut is now back where it should be.



②

2. "I could fall for you, kid," said Donald Carlyle to the girl he loved, and proved to be the world's most dependable lover. He fell for her faithfully, from Newark to Oakland, from Pittsburgh to St. Joe, wherever the tall stairs grow. Sometimes he dislocated a hip, sometimes his neck or spine. There was always an insurance adjuster to settle on the spot, and let dislocating Donald bring home the bacon to the little woman. He got away with it for years, because the dislocations, though voluntary, were actual, and verifiable by X-ray. But his amazing talent finally made Donald conspicuous, and he went, for ten years, to a place where they lock off the stairs.



④



"You don't have to worry about the body," Herbie Carpis said.  
"He was only an actor anyway."

# TEN PERCENT OF TROUBLE

By DAN GORDON

*It was the slickest kidnaping in a decade—until the baby opened its tiny mouth and said, "Any of you muggs got a cigarette?"*

**H**ERBIE CARPIS took one look at the thin, grey-haired man and filed him in his mind: character actor, banker, lawyer or English father. The only thing that made the odds bad was that Herbie had never seen the man

before, and everybody on Broadway drifted through his office sooner or later.

Maybe an angel. Only angels didn't come in to agents' offices. They hid some place, and you had to hunt them out and persuade them to make fortunes by backing plays.

The thin man was no actor when he spoke. His voice was up in his throat instead of down in his chest. A cold voice: "You are Mr. Carpis?"

"Yeah, sure. But I don't know you."

The grey head got out a card and handed it over. Herbie studied it impassively. "I'm a theater agent," he said. "Maybe you got the wrong guy."

"No, no." This was a fella knew what he wanted. "You are an *agent*? You *do* provide entertainers?"

"For ten percent, I do anything," Herbie grunted. "C'mon in the office. We'll see what you want."

He led the way into the shabby private office, reading the card again. Mr. Lewis Malcolm, Pres., the Lexington Bank & Trust Co. "Bankers is something I don't have much to do with," Herbie said, taking the flower out of his lapel and putting it in a glass of water on his desk.

"I want to hire a midget," Mr. Malcolm said. "A male midget."

"Yeah, that's right, they come in both sexes," Herbie said. "Like that. Like you say I want to buy a package of cigarettes. Turkish. What for?"

"Really, I can't see that it concerns you," Mr. Malcolm frosted.

Herbie said, "Okay. Go buy some midgets some other place. To me, Herbie Carpis, it ain't nothing."

Mr. Malcolm glared. "Well, if I explained my needs, could you get me one?"

Herbie said, "All right. Like I said, I do anything for ten percent. What kind of midget you want?"

"They are going to kidnap my baby," Mr. Malcolm said dramatically. "Look!" He tumbled some papers down on the desk.

Herbie Carpis said, "Yeah, yeah," nervously, and picked up one of the papers.

It was a letter made by pasting newspaper words together. It said, "We demand \$10,000 or you will lose your son."

Herbie pushed the papers at Malcolm

with one careful finger. "Take it," he said, "to the cops."

"Police!" Malcolm spat the word. "Bunglers! I want a midget."

Herbie shrugged. "Not me. Go find another agent." Then, reluctantly, "Why the midget?"

"To put in the baby's carriage. So they'll kidnap him. So he can catch them for me."

"You're crazy," Herbie said. "Look, sit down. I'll call the cops."

THERE was a gun in Mr. Malcolm's hand. "Sit down, Carpis. I tell you, I am desperate. If you go near that phone, I'll—I'll—Good God, man, have you any children yourself?"

"Too many, and another one due. But—"

"You've got to help me, Mr. Carpis. Got to." Malcolm put the gun away. "I'm sorry about that. But—"

"Well," Herbie said. "I'll call you a midget. I'll call you Jack Dadd, who is plenty tough anyway, the little heel. But me, Herbie Carpis, I would call the cops."

He picked up the phone, said, "Call that little Dadd midget. Tell him to come over here, and I don't want him chewing tobacco like last time. Tell him to sit it out in front of the Palace. I ain't got any acts playing there this week." He hung up the phone, said, "Dadd ain't worked for weeks. He'll be here like he had mosquito wings on. Now, you sit down. You want me to send a boy out for a drink for you?"

"I have some liquor," Malcolm said coldly. He produced a flask, took the flowers out of the glass on Herbie Carpis' desk, and threw them in the waste basket. He threw the water after them and used the glass to pour himself a drink. He did not offer one to Herbie.

"My wife raised those flowers," Herbie said.

"Really?" Mr. Malcolm made it plain that he was not interested in Herbie's private life.

Herbie shrugged and started opening the mail. He read mail till the girl said Dadd was outside. Then he said, "Okay, Mr. Malcolm, if you ain't changed your mind."

"No, no. Have him in."

Herbie sat back in his chair and pressed the button.

Jack Dadd was a small enough midget, if you liked midgets, which Herbie didn't.

The little man swaggered across the office, tucked his thumbs in his tiny waistband and said, "So you had to send for me, eh, Carpis? Last time I was in here, you threatened to step on me if I ever came into your place again." He sneered.

"I still don't like you, but Mr. Malcolm here has a job for you. Me, I make ten percent, I don't make friends."

Malcolm said, "All right, he'll do. Can you handle a gun, Dadd?"

"What is this act of yours, a rodeo?" Dadd asked. "Let's talk terms before we start probing into what I can and what I can't do."

Herbie Carpis said desperately, "I would drop this crazy business right here, Mr. Malcolm. The cops—"

Jack Dadd said, "I'm a busy man. The Shuberts would give me a job in a minute if I wanted it."

"What?" Herbie Carpis said.

"You will get a thousand dollars, Dadd, for a week's work," Malcolm said. "And you will be doing a favor for humanity. I want you to impersonate a baby. To ride out to the park every day in my baby's carriage, pushed by my baby's nurse—"

"Is the nurse good looking?" Jack Dadd asked in his grating little voice.

Malcolm disregarded that. "Until you are kidnaped. I have received threats against my child's safety. They will think you are a baby; they won't keep you away from telephones. They will probably leave guns around. If you succeed in trapping these people, or killing them, I shall give you another thousand dollars."

Herbie Carpis said, "You do not have to take this, Dadd, for me. If you turn it down, I would not hold it against you."

"What the hell do I care whether you do or not?" Dadd asked. "All right, Malcolm, I'll take it. Two grand looks good to me. Only you pay Carpis' commission."

"Mr. Carpis," Herbie said.

"All right," Malcolm said. He laid a hundred dollars on Herbie's desk.

Herbie shoved it back with the tip of a pudgy finger. "I don't need it," he

said. "Not from kidnaping, anyway."

"As you say," Malcolm said. He put the money back in his pocket, bowed and led Dadd out.

Herbie Carpis stared after them and then picked up the phone. "Get me Mr. Crantz at my bank. . . . Hello, Mr. Crantz? This is me, Herbie Carpis. This guy Malcolm that runs the Lexington Bank—how is he? I mean, what kind of a guy . . . ?"

He listened patiently while Crantz told him about the hardness and coldness of Mr. Malcolm. Then he hung up the phone and sat staring at the wall.

**J**ACK DADD puffed a cigarette and said, "How about giving me a bath, too, babe?"

The nurse said, almost sobbing, "I'll give you worse than that, if you don't stop talking so dirty, Mr. Dadd." She went on bathing the six-month-old Lewis Malcolm, Jr.

Jack Dadd laughed. "Pretty soft to be a baby. Getting pushed around the park in a carriage. Having your meals out of a bottle. Having a pretty girl give you a bath every day." He threw the cigarette out the window and swaggered across the nursery, incongruous in his baby gown and cap. "C'mon, sug, give me a kiss. What the hell, I'll pay you for it."

The girl said, "Please leave me alone. As soon as I finish bathing the baby, I'll take you for your walk, Mr. Dadd." She slapped at the man. "Go away, you'll make me let the baby slip."

Dadd laughed and went back to the window. He climbed up on the window seat, sat staring out. "Make it snappy, kid. Baby needs his air. This joint gives me the moans."

The girl took the baby out of his rubber bathtub, began toweling it. Dadd lit another cigarette, flicked the match onto the rug. It went out before it burnt more than a little hole.

The nurse finished, said, "All right, Mr. Dadd," and picked the midget up with obvious reluctance. He put his arms around her neck and kissed her.

"I'm an affectionate little baby, huh, nursie-wursie?"

"You're a pest," she said and carried

him out to the elevator. He relaxed there, put on the absent-minded look a six-month-old baby should have; Malcolm had warned him against letting the elevator man in on their secret. He was quiet while the girl tucked him into his carriage, quiet while the doorman helped her down the front steps with the carriage. Once headed for the park, he took up his conversation again, raining propositions and extravagant compliments on the nurse.

They went across Fifth Avenue and were nearly to the park when the taxicab swooped up to the curb. Two men were in it.

One of them opened the door, made a grab for the baby. He had Dadd out of the carriage and into the cab before the nurse could scream. The other man slammed the door, and the cab took off.

The nurse was a good girl. She put the covers back on the carriage as carefully as possible, lowered the hood and walked slowly back to the apartment house. The doorman smiled at her and said, "Short walk." He did not look in the carriage.

"The—the baby's had the sniffles," she said. "I didn't want to take him out too long."

She said something like that to the elevator man. She was a pretty girl, and they looked at her, not at the carefully wrapped pillow she carried. Upstairs she put the pillow neatly away, kissed the baby sleeping in his bassinet. He smiled in his sleep.

"Poor little thing," she said. "Poor little motherless thing." Then she went and phoned Mr. Malcolm. "They took the baby," she said.

"Good," he said. "You mean they took the . . . baby we meant them to, eh?"

"Yes, Mr. Malcolm."

"All right. You've been a good girl. These gangsters are tough; they'll be mad at you when they find out they've been cheated. You put on your traveling clothes and pack your belongings, and go down and take a train home. I'll meet you at the station with your ticket and enough money to make that farmer family of yours glad to see you."

"Oh, Mr. Malcolm, thank you!"

"Not at all. Don't tell the other servants where you're going. I'll know, and I can send for you as a witness when we bring those scoundrels to trial. If I need you. Hurry now."

The girl hung up the receiver and began to sing. Mr. Malcolm wasn't so bad after all, and she had hated him at first because he never came to play with the baby. If she had a baby she'd want to play with it all the time. Maybe it wasn't Mr. Malcolm's fault that his wife had left him. Maybe Mrs. Malcolm didn't understand that he was a nice, kind man under all that ice.

She hummed as she dreamed a day-dream in which she understood a rich banker, while she packed to go back to the farm in Iowa where she would undoubtedly marry the boy on the next farm, or the one past that.

She left the apartment without saying good-bye to the cook or anyone at all. It was such a good, healthy baby that it would be all right for half an hour, till she could see Mr. Malcolm, and then he would phone the apartment and tell the maid or someone to see the baby was okay.

**T**HE THREE MEN put the taxi back in its garage ahead of the usual time. One of them, wearing a driver's cap on the back of his head, bent over a very expensive bassinet.

"I wisht she'd hurry," he said. "What time did she say she'd be here, Paul?"

Paul was the one who had taken the baby. "Don't worry. She's flying. You never made two hundred bucks easier, Jimmy."

Jimmy said, "I dunno. This is federal stuff, this snatching. It means we're crooks. Big ones. An' that nurse might remember Howie's cab."

"Yeah," Howie said. "Mebbe she remembers the numbers. I ain't never done nuthin' like this."

"Forget it," Paul said. "I useta be this dame's gardener. She wouldn't get us into no trouble."

"Yeah, but Howie's me kid brother," Jimmy said. "I oughtn't ta go gettin' him into messes."

"Suppose we're grabbed," Paul said. "What jury would send us up for taking

a baby to give back to its own mudder? We're heroes, that's what we are. Heroes."

The baby let out a wail.

Howie grimaced and picked the baby up, began bouncing it. He promptly put it down again. "Hell, I'm scairt I'll break it."

The doorbell rang while the baby was still crying. The three men all made a dash for it. Howie turned back to watch the baby.

A woman came in, disregarded their polite greetings, rushed to the bassinet. She bent over it anxiously, grabbed up the child. "Oh, my—" She stopped, held the baby away from her.

"This isn't my baby!" she screamed.

Howie and Jimmy collapsed. Paul tried to straighten things out. "Well, then, that nurse was holding down two jobs on ya. This baby was in your baby's buggy."

"This—this hardly looks like a baby at all," she said. "It certainly isn't mine."

"Won't I do till your baby comes along?" Jack Dadd rumbled in a deep voice.

Mrs. Malcolm fainted and let Dadd fall to the floor. He picked himself up and said, "That's a hell of a way to treat a guy." Then he sneered at the three men who had backed away from him. "Well, why don't you take care of the lady? And has any of you muggs got a cigarette?"

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The doorbell rang again while Jack Dadd was stamping up and down the room, telling them what a bunch of fools they were.

Howe said, "G-men!"

Mrs. Malcolm said, "My husband must have known I was going to try this. Or he wouldn't have known enough to have this—this gentleman in the carriage. I guess it's the police."

"Listen," a muffled voice said through the door, "do I sound like a cop?"

Jimmy said, "It don't sound much like coppers. I never heard one whine when he wanted in."

Paul went and unlocked the door.

Herbie Carpis waddled in and said,

"Lady, you don't have to worry. It's me, Herbie Carpis."

"I've never heard of you," Mrs. Malcolm said.

Herbie Carpis said, "She lives in New York and never heard of me." There was sorrow in his voice.

"He's a ten percenter," Jack Dadd said. "He got me this job."

"Oh!" Mrs. Malcolm was icy.

"Yeah. I was a sucker for your old man," Herbie said. "I thought he was on the level, and all the time he was only shaking you down. Me, I hired him a midget."

"Shaking me—I don't understand."

"It means getting dough out of you," Paul said helpfully.

"Sure," Herbie Carpis said. "See, I dug up all the stuff on you. Like Winchell himself. Like this. It was *your* money when you married this jerk, this Malcolm. Only he got a job with the bank that handles it and chiseled up to be president. So when you wanted to leave him, him being an A-1 heel, he wouldn't give you a divorce. Right?"

"Well, you're right, but—"

"And he knows you come from the kind of people don't squawk. You don't like the papers to print a lot of stuff. So he hangs on to your baby and says you have to sign over most of your dough before you get back the baby."

"Yes, yes," Mrs. Malcolm said. "But I don't think my personal affairs—"

"With your agent you should never put on the dog," Herbie Carpis said. "Agents should know everything."

Jack Dadd screeched, "You keep out of this, you fat—"

Herbie Carpis said, "Shut up or I'll blacklist you on the vaudeville circuits. So then, Mr. Malcolm figures you'll try to steal the baby. He fixes up this little squirt. Now he can say you committed a snatching, and if you don't part with your dough he'll print it in all the papers, with Dadd here for witness."

Mrs. Malcolm said, "Oh. Oh, he's—"

"Don't say it. Leave the heat to me. You, now, you call him up and say, ain't it awful. When you see it ain't your baby you are so shocked you drop it, and it breaks its neck and is now dead."

"You can't do this," Jack Dadd said.

His eyes gleamed wickedly. "This is gonna cost you plenty, lady, and don't forget it."

"All right," Herbie said. "So we break his neck now, and then a nice lady like you wouldn't have to lie."

Jack Dadd looked at the fat man and subsided.

Mrs. Malcolm said, "I—I don't think I could do it."

"You gotta," Herbie said. "With a little time, I could grab a radio actress to be you on the telephone. But time's scarce. So you'll have to do the telephoning yourself."

She didn't do badly, all things considered. When she was halfway through, Herbie Carpis said, "Be sure and tell him he should come here, to this place, right away."

She rang off, and Herbie said, "Now we wait about three minutes. No longer, because I gotta be sure he's in. Not sooner, 'cause we gotta give him time to take a drink for the shock." He stopped speaking and took out his watch.

At the end of three minutes, Herbie picked up the phone, called the bank, got Mr. Malcolm. "Where would Jack Dadd be? he asked. "Some of his relatives are here in the office. They're worried. Will you please have him call me, Herbie Carpis?" He hung up and said, "Something good'll come of this. He's a very stirred-up guy, Mr. Bank President Malcolm."

Jimmy said, "While we're waiting, how did you find this joint? How did you know we was here?"

Herbie said, "Watched you take Dadd from his carriage, hopped a cab and came here. Which reminds me, Mrs. Malcolm. I have spent a dollar and a half on taxis and phone calls for your account. Where should I send the bill?"

**W**HEN Malcolm got there, they had Jack Dadd laid out cold. A little persuasion from Jimmy and Paul helped; Dadd was told that if he opened his mouth, they were really going to break his neck.

At Malcolm's knock, Herbie went into the back room. There was a door there that led to the hall. He waited until

Malcolm had had time to let things sink in; then he came around to the front door and knocked again. Malcolm let him in.

"Mr. Malcolm, I went to your office to see about Jack Dadd, and I saw you coming out. So I caught a cab and came after you. These relatives of Dadd's are rough—oh!"

Herbie rolled his eyes, and pointed at the still body of the midget. "You have killed my client."

Malcolm said, "What a mess, what a mess." He whirled and pointed at his wife. "This is all your fault. I'm going to call the police and have you arrested for murder."

"But, Lewis, I only wanted to get my baby back."

"You mean," Herbie Carpis said, "you were coming between a baby and its mama? What a heel! I never heard of such a thing."

"What are we going to do?" Mrs. Malcolm asked.

"You mean," Herbie said, "what is *he* going to do? He hired Dadd. I saw him. You go away, let him worry about it. You had nothing to do with this. A fine story he will have to tell the police. Who would believe it? And a fine guy. Getting my client killed."

Jack Dadd stirred, and Herbie said quickly, "But me, Herbie Carpis, I do anything for ten percent. Besides, I got a family of my own. Give this lady her baby. I'll take care of Jack Dadd's body. It's light, and he was only an actor anyway."

Malcolm said, "You mean it? You really mean it?"

"Yeah. Sure. Now get out of here. And you phone me, Mrs. Malcolm, when you get your baby back. I want to be sure of this thing."

He waited till he could see them going away, downstairs, then said, "All right, Dadd, you can get up now. And get over to the Wilkes Theatre; they need a midget. Tell them Herbie Carpis sent you."

He whistled and mopped his brow. "For a while I thought some other agent would beat me to that job before I got you back."

By FRANCIS K. ALLAN



She threw her purse  
at Ormand.

## WHILE THE CAT'S AWAY—

THERE was no definite time, no certain thing, that Ben could put his finger on. Perhaps it was something as casual as the way Sally said hello, or the way she kissed him, or didn't. Perhaps it was the glimpse of her eyes as they yearned for something that was not a part of the three-room walkup. Perhaps it was her silence, after the radio played the *Star Spangled Banner* at midnight, and the lamp light glistened in her dark hair. It hardly matters much what it was, really.

96

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*To the question: Who was that lady  
he saw those gun-packing muggs  
with? . . . Ben could have answered:  
That was no lady—that was my wife!*

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In the very beginning Nicky had told him he was crazy. "My sleepy friend, you're lucky," Nicky had said. "You know what lucky means? It means a little girl with the sweetest face and the cutest figure in New York; also, it means trouble, because Sally is like Latin to a guy from Pecos Pass. You wouldn't understand her with a floor-plan."

That had been seven months ago. Seven months, one week and a couple of days. Two months after Ben and Sally had gotten married. Ben and Nicky had been talking over a couple of coffees, downstairs in the Metro Broadcasting Building, where both of them were announcers at subway rates. They had known each other for four years and shared an apartment for three—before Ben got married, that is. But that day Ben was telling Nicky, and Nicky was trying to tell him.

**T**HE WAY it was, Ben had an easy way with a mike, and somebody named Gershart had heard him. Gershart is the same guy who makes the perfume and cosmetics. He had insomnia, and he had been thinking how nice it would be for Gershart Products, Inc. to have an all-night disc jockey like Ben. At five hundred a week, you see, starting Wednesday. This was what Ben was telling Nicky, and Nicky was shaking his head. Nicky understood women. He made them smile and sigh and feel tender, and he was telling Ben to stay home. At least with one such as Sally.

The way it worked out, Ben took the Gershart job. Mainly because he knew Sally was wonderful, and Sally said it was a terrific chance, and wouldn't it be silly not to? . . . She was so lovely. Blue eyes and black curly hair and a figure you wouldn't believe.

So Ben started making five hundred a week. It was just the same as five million to him. He wore glasses that he always lost and suits that didn't quite fit, and he had only one hat in the world. He got very serious and sentimental when he drank beer, and when he was very drunk he sometimes sang, not very well. He had a sleepy look, and as Nicky said, he wouldn't understand Sally with a floor-plan, not really.

So that was the way it was.

Later it worked out that Sally had time on her hands; anybody could see that, couldn't they? So she might as well be doing something as just sitting. Maybe she'd take painting lessons, or study interior decorating, or a lot of useful things. Sally was practical.

So in a couple of weeks when Nicky asked him, Ben said she'd started lessons with somebody down in Greenwich Village, painting lessons. It was as good as anything else and gave her something to do. Nicky said sure. Who was the guy?

Nicky was that way. He would trust a pretty girl around the corner, provided she was his sister.

Ben didn't know who the guy was. Just someone, you know. But the way Nicky grunted, it started Ben to frowning. The next morning he asked Sally.

"Who? Oh, you've never heard of him. People never hear of people who *teach* painting. You know that." She hesitated just a moment. "His name is Ormand." Just Ormand. She left it that way, and she talked a lot about when they would move to Long Island and have a house—an actual honest-to-heaven house. Her voice was very gay. The echo of it followed Ben all that day. Ormand . . . Just that and nothing more. Funny. . . .

At midnight that night he phoned Sally. Perhaps it worried him more than he admitted; he wanted to hear her voice. But the telephone rang patiently, and she did not answer. Funny. . . .

The next morning at breakfast (which was 2:30 in the afternoon, actually), Sally leaned over his chair and put her cool cheek against his and said, Did he mind if she ran? The coffee was all made and the toast was in, and there was something she just had to do—a sale at a little place on Madison Avenue where they had the cutest dresses, and today they were just giving them away.

Ben sat very still and suddenly he felt tired. It was all right. Sure it was, he said. He knew Sally was lying to him, and it frightened him. And even more, it dismayed him because he was not surprised. After she was gone the apartment was silent save for the intermittent roar of the Third Avenue El. It was hot July. A pigeon fluffed itself and drowsed on the

window ledge, and the cream turned to film on Ben's coffee. The door to the bedroom was open. The bed was unmade. It had been unmade yesterday, and Monday and Sunday, Ben remembered. But it was such a trivial thing. Then he noticed the ashtray. The tar coated the little grooves. A little thing too.

Ben got up. He washed the ashtrays and made the bed. He felt vaguely lost; there was nowhere to go, nothing to do for nearly nine hours. He gazed at Sally's black purse. Her 'champagne' purse, she called it. It was open on the dresser, where she had shifted its contents to her brown leather purse. There was a crumpled cigarette pack, a mirror, a match book, a handkerchief tinted with lipstick and a key. It was a shiny key, as if it had been newly made. It resembled no key that Ben knew. He picked it up slowly and went to the front door. It didn't fit. He looked at it again. It looked flimsy and cheap, and on one side was a name and number: Resino's . . . 2624.

At last Ben replaced the key exactly where he had found it. It didn't have to mean anything, of course. It might be the key to Sally's old apartment or to the agency where she'd worked. Perhaps she'd found it. There were a dozen explanations, of course. . . . Ben shook his shoulders. He picked up the match book. It was from Darriot's. A restaurant somewhere. Where? . . . He remembered. It was really a night club, just across the George Washington Bridge in New Jersey.

**S**ALLY was asleep when Ben came home. It was nearly six o'clock, and the bedroom was grey with morning. The scent of perfume was in the room; her dress was tossed over the back of a chair, and her stockings were thrown over the dress. The key and match book were gone. Ben opened the black purse and searched; they were gone. Nor were they in the brown purse.

He sat down and took off his shoes. He undressed and eased himself down on the side of the bed. Sally stirred and murmured and slept on, her fingers curled against her cheek as though she were trying to make some fascinating decision. Suddenly it seemed to Ben that she was a total stranger, and his marriage was a

mirage. He was this close to her, yet if he touched her, he would not touch Sally at all; he had never touched her. The love he had trusted seemed nothing more than a hollow masquerade—something made of shadows—and loneliness filled him.

From that morning on, Ben never asked Sally what she had done or where she was going. He lived suspended. He seldom laughed, and he spoke quietly, when he spoke at all. And then, one evening just before he went up to work, Kerry stopped him at the bar in the little place on Third Avenue where he usually drank beer. Kerry hated to mention it, but the check from last Tuesday had bounced. Sure, he understood how that stuff happened; a guy added wrong. He had to mention it, was all. Ben looked at the check a long time before he said, "Sure. Sure, I'll pick it up tomorrow."

Next day he went to the bank, where he and Sally carried a joint account. Sally handled those things; it gave her something to do. He sat in a small room with a small desk, and a precise little man brought him his statements. There was three thousand and something in the account now; last week there had been less than six dollars. Ben looked at the checks. Almost all had been written by Sally. There were checks given for as much as five hundred dollars, and deposits that weren't from Ben's salary. Sally's checks had been most often endorsed by someone named R. T. Randall. Ben had never heard of him. He thanked the precise little man and went away.

It was dumb of Sally, he knew. Careless was the word. But perhaps she was careless because she knew he was dumb. It didn't matter which: the hen or the egg.

That night, from five in the afternoon until one hour before work, Ben got very drunk. The next afternoon he got drunk again. On Saturday afternoon he asked Nicky to handle the show for him that night; it was only patter anyway. The engineer did all the work.

"Okay, but what will your perfume man say?" Nicky wanted to know.

"Nobody's asking him to say," Ben said. Nicky looked at him closer and blinked.

"Oh. Okay." He didn't mention he'd

told Ben so. He didn't say anything at all.

So, at five o'clock that afternoon. Ben parked the rented coupe across the street from the three-room walkup and pulled down his hat. He saw Sally turn on the lamp in the living room, and after a while she turned it off and the apartment windows were dim. A few minutes later she appeared. She was wearing the grey dress with the gold fringe and a hat Ben had never seen. She was lovely. She waved impatiently to a cab. Ben started the motor.

The cab turned west to Park Avenue, then went downtown to Thirteenth Street. Just west of Fifth Avenue it stopped, and Sally went down the half-flight of steps that turned under the main steps of the converted four-floor brownstone. She unlocked the door of the basement apartment and vanished. It was 6:40. Presently a light was turned on. It glowed warmly through the iron grille that covered the basement windows, and Ben saw Sally bending over a table, a glass in her hand. Her lips were moving as she spoke. Then she smiled. She laughed. She moved from Ben's view and a man crossed the room. He was slender, with thinning black hair, a lean face, and his suit was dark and well tailored.

Night began to fill the quiet Village street. Music from a radio drifted through the air. A man appeared at a second-story window and lit a cigarette. Ben could see a dog playing in the room behind him. He felt totally alone. He was no part of this, and there was no place where he fitted. There was nothing.

Later, two dark figures turned down the basement steps, and Ben saw them enter the room—a man, short and blocky and bald, and a taller woman, blonde and large. Her voice carried across the street as she said, "The damned cab! We sat there and sat there! Darling, I want neat whiskey. You should know that by now."

Ben hated the woman.

An hour later the lights went out. The door slammed and the four of them appeared on the sidewalk. They turned west, walking idly, and their mingled voices floated back to Ben. A cab passed, but they walked on. Abruptly Ben got out of the coupe and crossed the street to the basement door. He struck a match and

read the name on the plate: J. Ormand Waite. Ormand. . . . The match went out. Ben hurried back to the coupe. He followed them slowly until they went into a parking garage on Seventh Avenue. A Buick sedan was brought down and Sally got in with Ormand Waite. The blocky man and the blonde got in the back, and Ormand drove away. Ben followed them to the West Side Highway and up the curling approach to the George Washington Bridge. He wondered if it was going to be Darriot's again. It *was*.

**B**EN HAD never been there before. He knew it only as the 'Palace on the Hudson' from the radio plugs. It bore some resemblance to the Taj Mahal: an immense white-domed structure set far back from the road amid a sea of perfect lawn. There were few windows, and at the entrance glowed a blue neon scroll-work of name: Darriot's.

Ben parked the coupe and went in. The foyer was candy striped and utterly silent. A sad-eyed man in tie and tails looked pained at Ben's unpressed suit. "You have reservations, sir?"

"I just want a drink," Ben said coldly. The man indicated with a card.

"The stag bar is on the left."

Ben wondered what was on the right and straight ahead and down and up. It wouldn't be easy just to wander around. The stag bar was imitation English Tavern: gloomy and beamed-ceilinged and full of smoke. Half the men were in tuxedos or tails, and the others looked as if they'd left their yachts down the hill in the Hudson. Ben had a drink. He overheard a tall man telling another that he should have stayed later last night: the house took one hell of a beating. Maybe it would happen twice, he hoped. It gave Ben something new to wonder about as he remembered Sally's checks. Then a waiter appeared from an inner room and motioned to the bartender. The bartender went over and Ben caught the murmured words from the waiter: "Mr. Waite's here now."

The bartender's expression did not alter in the least, but he mopped his way down the bar to a stool where a large flabby-looking man of at least sixty was sitting, hunched over a drink. His eyes were

watery and bloodshot and his skin was the shade of dirty milk.

"Your party is here now, Mr. Hanford," the bartender said.

The flabby man blinked and a nervous twitch developed in his temple. "Thanks. Thanks," he said jerkily.

The bartender mopped his way back to the waiter. "Okay," he said. The waiter went away.

Ben exhaled a soft breath and watched the flabby man in the mirror. He finished his drink and rose. There was a look of extreme nervousness about him, an almost repulsive frenzy. He held to the bar a moment to adjust his balance, then crossed the room to a door and went out. Ben finished his drink. The bartender was busy. Ben strode to the door and stepped into a green-and-grey corridor. It was empty. To the left were two closed doors, and to the right were stairs that curved upward and out of sight. Ben could hear the flabby man climbing heavily and wheezing. He heard a door open, and for a moment the faint music of a waltz came down the stairs. Then the door closed and the music vanished.

Ben climbed the stairs and arrived at a dead-end hall of three closed doors. His hands were perspiring. The silence had a strangely flat quality. He bent his head and listened. At the door straight ahead he could hear the waltz faintly again. He touched the knob and turned.

Inside, the orchestra was playing in a misty golden glow. Tables were indistinct blurs capped by white cloth. Faces were featureless. The flabby man had dissolved into the haze. Ben wet his lips and flexed his fingers nervously. He moved to the next doorway.

He continued along the curving hall. The waltz ended. The band gave a rolling fanfare. Darkness slid through the room; then a blue light picked out a tall blonde girl in a strapless evening dress. She leaned back, her eyes closed, and she began to sing in a husky, aching voice. The room was totally dark save for the blue light.

Then Ben saw the flabby man. He was scarcely six feet from him, sitting alone at a table just within a doorway. Ben could just make out his milky face and the grey patches of his hands as they kneaded them-

selves together restlessly. Ben stood perfectly still and waited. The girl sang another song; the blue light turned to green. Then out of the darkness, the figure of Ormand Waite appeared.

Lean-hipped and graceful, he worked his way between the tables. He scarcely paused at the flabby's man's side. The blur of white hands mingled momentarily, then Waite passed on and dissolved in the darkness. The flabby man's hands were locked together in avid rigidity. As the girl ended her song, he pushed back his chair and stumbled out into the curving corridor. His face was flushed and his watery eyes glistened. He passed Ben and went down the stairs and fumbled with a heavy metal door. Ben glimpsed the night outside as the door opened and closed.

The man was crossing the lawn when Ben closed the door behind him, and in the distance the chrome of parked cars shone in the moonlight. The flabby man stopped and fumbled in his pocket. His hand went to his mouth, then his other hand lifted something shiny to his lips. A flask.

Silently, Ben approached. He seized the soft thick shoulder and spun the man around. A startled cry broke from the man's throat. Ben hit him. It was a short, ripping jab, carrying less than a foot. It caught the lax jaw, and the man moaned as he fell.

Ben knelt down and searched the pockets. He found the tiny packet with the five tablets; they were white, about the size of aspirin tablets. They were not aspirin tablets, Ben knew. They were probably heroin.

**S**LOWLY Ben rose. His chest and throat burned. He'd never thought of something like this. If Sally had wanted someone else, there were millions of men in the world. It wouldn't have been easy, but at least he could have understood. But Sally and filth were something else. He remembered the moment on the side of the bed when he'd realized she was a total stranger. Only this moment did he fully comprehend. His fingers and shoulders and arms began to shake. He wanted to feel Sally's lovely throat in his fingers and see her eyes as he hurt her. He wanted to see Waite's eyes as he broke his nose. In that moment Ben felt a clearer lust to kill

than he had known in three years of war. He turned and strode back toward the white-domed building that glistened in the moonlight. As he reached the darkness near the wall, a bleak figure stepped near him. Ben halted.

"Get out of the—" he started coldly. The dim shadow of a fist flicked into his face. A ring sparkled for an instant; then its sparkle seemed to shower fire into Ben's skull as the fist caught his jaw at the very point. He felt himself falling very languidly while he went to sleep.

He woke slowly, with the empty sensation that time had simply stopped for an instant. The odor of cigarette smoke touched his nostrils. It was night and the moon still glistened on the chrome of cars. The grass beneath his cheek felt moist and fresh. He inhaled the aroma of the cigarette again. It was the cigarette that warned him.

He scarcely moved; he made no sound. Presently he made out the figure of a man squatting on his haunches three feet away. As the man drew on the cigarette, a rosy glow tinted his lean face and shone in his black eyes.

In that moment Ben tensed and leaped. He swung a long right into the cigarette and smashed it against the lips. He followed the man as he toppled over and slammed a left into his stomach, then dropped on his knees on the man's belly. That did it. The man writhed and curled into an agonized knot. As Ben pushed himself up, he felt the gun in the man's shoulder strap. He hesitated, then thrust the gun into his own pocket. He opened the same side door from which he had come and started up the stairs. At the dead-end hall, tango music seeped from the door. He walked down the circular hall and stopped squarely in a doorway to the circular room. The lights were on again, now, and the dance floor was packed. A thin man was singing sweetly.

Somewhere in this room was Sally. But what did he want with her, Ben asked himself. Why did he give a damn? This was the way to get hurt, wasn't it? The answer was yes, and it made no difference. He stalked into the room and between the tables, searching, banging elbows, upsetting glasses. A headwaiter spotted him and started forward. Ben cut away from

him and circled the room. The headwaiter stopped looking smooth and started looking ugly. He gave a wave and a couple of waiters closed in.

Ben doubled back again and upset a busboy. As the dishes crashed, Ben spotted the big blonde's upswept hair at a table across the room. He saw the blocky man, Sally, Ormand Waite, and another man he'd never seen before. He was olive-skinned, bald, and he looked like a wrestler in a five-hundred-dollar suit. He was telling a joke; Ben could see by his cat-smile expression. It was going to be a wow, and very dirty. And Sally's eyes were adoring him. Something began to boil behind Ben's ears. A waiter caught up with him and got his arm.

"I'm afraid we'll have to ask—" He didn't get a chance to finish asking. Ben gave him a long right into his belly and the waiter started backward while his face turned purple. He hit a table and went down in a thin woman's lap. Somebody screamed. The wrestler stopped telling his joke and stood up like a man who owned the place. Then Sally saw Ben. Her expression began to decay. She looked unbelieving, then ill, then frightened.

"Get up!" Ben said. He reached for her. The wrestler put himself between Ben and Sally; there was a lot of him, and it didn't look soft. His voice, however, was very soft.

"I didn't catch the name, sir. I'm Randall."

"Oh, so you're Randall! And you endorse checks sometimes. My name is Gage. G-A-G-E. Ben L. Gage. Get it?"

The man got it. He puckered his lips and blinked. He turned and blinked at Sally. Ormand was standing up, and he didn't look pleased, either. Abruptly Sally bounced to her feet, her eyes blazing.

"You asked for it, Benny, and you can have it! Straighten your tie and run along! Say hello to the great big radio audience for me, also good-bye. If you think I'm going to—"

Ben slapped her. The sound snapped through the strange hush in the room and seemed to echo off the walls. Sally's face was dead white. Her lips moved soundlessly. She touched her cheek. Then Randall began to rumble deep in his

chest. Ben spun and back-stepped in time to lose a left that would have taken his head off. He crossed Randall with a right that froze the bear-like figure for an instant. Randall's face grew slowly gentle. His shoulders settled forward and he got ready to come in again. The headwaiter was working his way in from the side, too, and Ormand was bending his fists. Ben scooped up a chair, threw it at the headwaiter, and jerked out the gun. He pointed it at Randall's broad stomach.

"Tell them to stay a long way away from me," he ordered harshly. "And for you, Sweetheart—in fact, for everybody here who'd like to know—you've come to the right place to get your heroin. The guy right there with the black hair, or the fat boy, probably! Step right up and make a deal! Shake out their pockets and see what you get! If you thought it was a place to bring your mother, sit down and think again! If—"

"Ben! Hush it! Stop it before—" Sally wailed desperately.

"Keep it quiet? On the outside? Low and soft?" Ben raged. "If—"

**H**E STOPPED. A lot of things started to happen simultaneously. Ormand's hand was working into his coat. Randall was giving the low sign to somebody behind Ben. And with all this, Sally put her hand to her mouth as if to scream. But she didn't scream. She stuck two fingers between her lips and then came a piercing whistle. Then she yelled.

"Run, Ben! Run, run, run!"

Somewhere somebody yelled, "Stay where you are! Keep your seats!"

Ormand got his gun and Randall was getting his. Sally threw her purse at Ormand and Ben pulled the trigger of his gun. Ormand's mouth split open in a grimace of foolish surprise. He let the gun fall from his fingers and his hands closed suddenly over his stomach. He coughed.

Voices roared from the doors onto the circular corridor. Randall bent down and a table came rising toward Ben's face. "Lights out!" Randall roared. The table caught Ben and picked him up and carried him toward the wall. With that, guns began to talk to each other. Ladies screamed and men yelled. From the floor,

Ben could hear Sally screaming for him to be careful. Ben was very confused. He started crawling through a maze of threshing legs and falling tables. The lights went out and a shot caught him in the ear. He grabbed a table and held. Everybody seemed to be running from one side of the room to the other, then back again. Flashlights sprayed through the darkness, and then one gun began to fire with a strangely relentless finality. It fired four times and, oddly, silence gathered for a moment and a man shouted:

"That got him!"

That, Ben knew somehow, would be Randall. He felt his ear tenderly and rose. He found it hard to hear clearly. When lights went on, he found it hard to see exactly. He felt tired and shaky and very suspicious of something. He was right.

Sally saw him and came marching toward him, her face white and her eyes moist. "Oh, you—you big, stupid, silly lug!" she sobbed. And then she slapped him with every one of her hundred and fifteen pounds. "You almost ruined it! You could have gotten hurt!" she wailed.

A hardened young man with cold eyes and a hostile expression appeared. "Is this the way you cooperate and keep your husband busy somewhere else?" he demanded of Sally. Ben looked at him twice and realized: he was the guy who had been smoking in the dark, and the guy whose gun Ben had taken.

She explained, in a somewhat fashion. As it turned out, Sally had been working for the government. "I wanted to tell you. I wanted and wanted to tell you, but Fitzhugh kept yelling, 'No, no, leave husbands stay dumb until we make this big strike!' It was very important, honest, Ben, because this is the place where all the silk-stockings boys get their papers to peddle, and I just had to do it, and I had to make it look honest and all, you see? Say it, tell me, Benny, don't you see?"

Ben took a careful look at her. "Sally," he said coldly, "get your hat and get it in a hurry." He took her home. "Now," he stated, still coldly. "I am going to give you the beating of your life. But first—"

"Yes, Benny. . .?" she asked anxiously.

"First turn up your face, so I can give you the kissing of your life."

# GENIUS AT WORK!

*From his short crime career, highbrow Phil Stratton learned one lesson: It takes a jerk to make a smart criminal!*

**P**HILIP S. STRATTON, 22 years old, was a promising chemistry student at a large Southern university. Unlike most of his fellows, he did more than attend class, takes notes and bone up on his books the night before exams. He studied—hard—every night. And he read, widely, voraciously, in his field and out of it—literature of all times and all countries, languages, music, mathematics, philosophy, all of the sciences. The books were his undoing. Or, rather, one book.

The volume in question was a little-known report of psychiatric research on the criminal mind. Nearly all criminals were proved to be of low or inferior mental ability, the report claimed. Even the historic crimes of so-called fiends or evil geniuses turned out to have been committed by men or women who, by their mental equipment, were hardly able to perform such simple tasks as digging ditches or carrying bundles from one place to another.

Young Stratton's inquisitive mind was at once intrigued. "If criminals are stupid," he wondered, "how does it happen that they get away with so much loot each year? And if a really brilliant man went in for crime, what then?"

He was tempted. He sat up late for several nights, working out on paper the details of a projected raid on the local bank, a holdup at a gathering of wealthy, bejeweled women, and a hypothetical kidnapping. It seemed simple enough. His lip curled with scorn and pity for the poor fools who had tried, failed and suffered the penalty. Failure was not in his plans, and his plans were perfect. All he needed was confederates.

Boldly, he ran an advertisement in his college newspaper. "Men wanted for desperate adventure. Must have high intelligence." Over a hundred responded, among them several women. He refused to interview the women, for he sincerely felt that their sex was against them in any mental contest. From the other appli-

**By JIMMY NICHOLS**

cants he selected ten, later weeded out six who displayed a kind of moral squeamishness when he touched upon his theories about crime.

Four, however, proved excellent material. All were excellent students and outstanding intellectuals. They fell in eagerly with Stratton's plan to rob the homes of six multi-millionaires in the state. Harold Hickey, one of the four, later said he was motivated by a desire for adventure. The rest wanted money to continue their studies.

The university campus was serene and beautiful when the five students sallied forth on their experimental adventure on the night of May 26, 1922. It took them slightly under a half-hour to arrive at the entrance to the first vast estate they had chosen for their trial run. Together, they crawled over the wall, wriggled through the hedges and walked through long French doors into the drawing room where \$500,000 in jewels lay locked in a safe behind a tapestry.

The five students could have pulled off this incredibly bold robbery without any trouble at all. They had already opened the safe and selected the jewels when Stratton's eye fell on a magnificent phonograph standing in a corner. Among other things, Stratton was a gifted musician, but he had found little time to listen to music. Now he was sorely tempted.

"Just a few records," he said, selecting his favorites. The other four, equally happy, sat down to listen, and that is where they were found by the police who came at the urgent request of the millionaire's frightened servants.

"I guess," Stratton remarked a few days later, as he began serving a sentence for breaking and entering, "a criminal has to be dumb enough to keep his mind on his job!"

# FEATURED TONIGHT —MURDER!

## CHAPTER ONE

### The Golden Goose

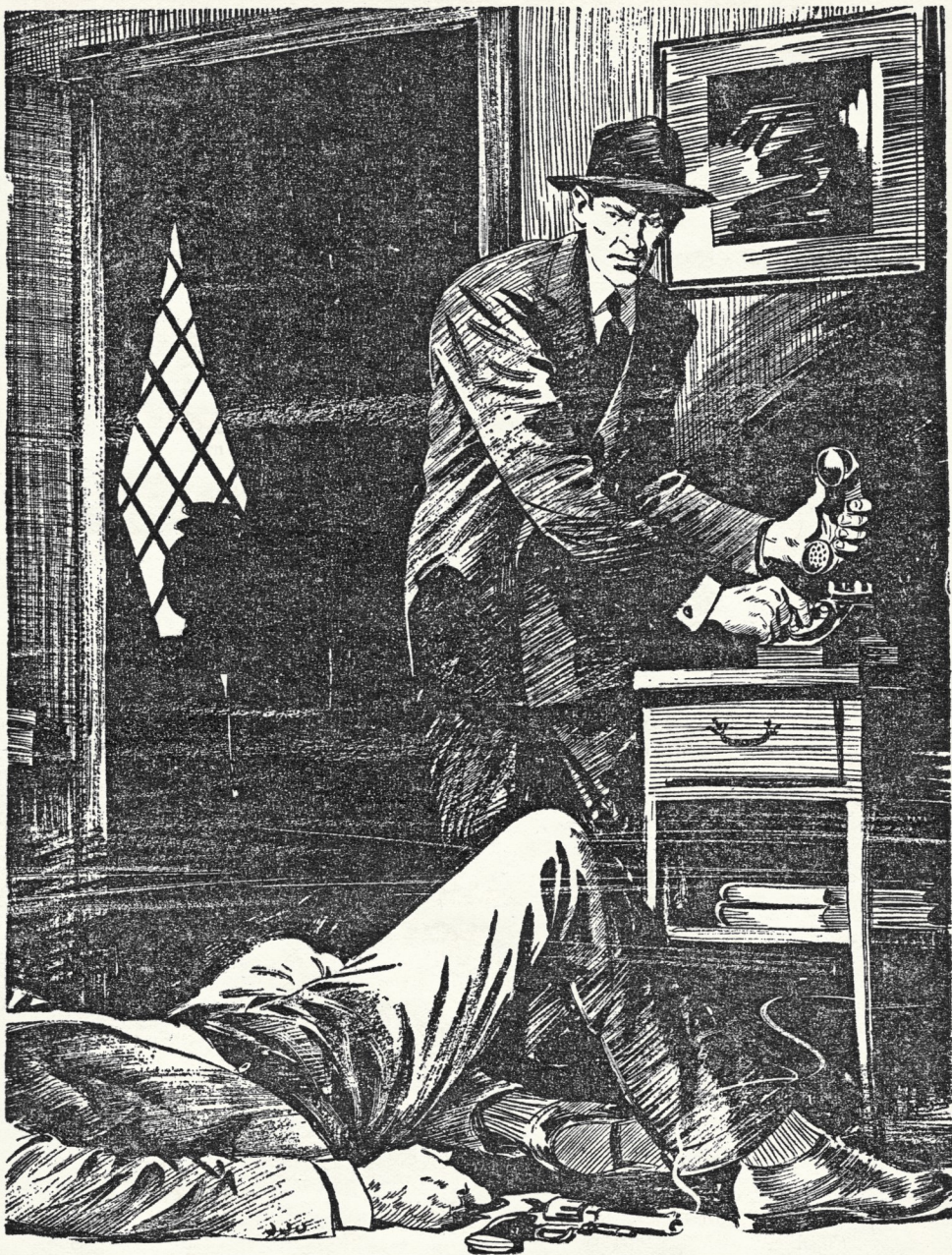
IN THE OFFICE of the Oliver Carlson Detective Agency all was quiet. Betty Boulder, the beautiful blonde secretary, co-owner under the late Oliver Carlson's will, contained herself in the outer domain. Within the sanctum, his feet on the desk, big Dan Trout surveyed



A

*"Dumb Dan Trout"*  
Detective Novel

By **WILLIAM R. COX**



There was a gun beside Baxter's right hand, and Dan noticed that as he dialed.

*When the rackets boys are fighting it out, Dumb Dan Trout reflected, it is no time for a shamus who likes his hide unpunctured to get in the middle of things. . . . But Dan didn't count on a strip-tease artist, two corpses and a hatful of what ain't hay—all crying for him to climb into the spotlight and do a duet with the Grim Reaper!*

the towers of Manhattan through the seventh-story window.

Dan Trout was not happy. Betty, as usual, was not speaking to him. The books showed no profits for the past weeks. He had muffed a divorce case in which his sympathy had been, not for the sparkling brunette who had hired them, but for her long-suffering husband who was being, he had found, beautifully framed by the brunette's current boy friend. The agency had nearly suffered a law suit when Dan tipped off the husband. . . .

He had, he reflected, few qualities which were necessary to the successful pursuit of his profession. He was not very clever at deduction. His hunches were his only asset. He hated detail, he was too big to tail anyone successfully, and leg work merely bored him. He delighted in action, he liked talking with people and he was gregarious—the besetting sin of any detective. He wondered if he should start looking around for something else, something adventurous, something not so boring. He was getting nowhere with Betty, who seemed to prefer Mike Corbally, a headquarters detective.

The door banged open. Miss Boulder's beautiful face appeared. She said icily, "Mister Trout, a gentleman to see you. Mr. Jerry Sullivan."

Dan's feet came down. He knew all about Jerry Sullivan. There were two Sullivans, brothers, and Jerry was The One.

A man came into the room. He was a tall man, taller than Dan. He had a long, solemn face. He had long arms and big hands. He wore dark clothing and a grey hat tipped over one eye. He had a hoarse voice. He said, "Okay, shamus. Take it easy now."

This, Dan knew, must be the Bishop. His name was Dan, too. Dan Bishop, formerly one of the toughest cops on the force. Now he was bodyguard to the political panjandrum, Jerry Sullivan. The Bishop had slate-colored eyes which went around the room as though suspicious that Dan had assassins hidden in the filing case or behind the water cooler.

Dan said, "You want to examine my drawers, too? In the desk, I mean."

The hoarse voice croaked, "Don't be a smart guy, shamus. . . . Okay, boss."

The fat man who wheezed in needed a

bodyguard, Dan thought. He was completely bald, completely rotund, sadly out of condition. He was not an old man—he was an ageless man. He had never been other than bald and fat. He had been ever the politician, sometimes a sycophant, now a czar, but he had always been pink and bald and obese.

Jerry Sullivan said, "Howdy, Trout. Met the Bishop, eh? Nice guy, the Bishop. No sense of humor, but a nice guy. Have a cigar, Trout."

THERE was a chair big enough for the political king. He lit the cigar Dan refused, a Cyrilla, made in Tampa. He left the gold band around the middle of the brown cylinder and puffed savory smoke at the ceiling by pursing his fat lips. He had a small, cupid's-bow mouth, almost babyish.

Dan lighted a cigarette and waited. The Bishop sat on a straight chair in the corner like a wooden Indian. After a moment Sullivan spoke.

"Naturally we gotcha cased," said the smooth, oily voice. "You're onna level. Baxter is a pal o' mine."

Dan flushed. Baxter was the husband in the divorce case.

Sullivan said, "Okay, it wasn't smart. It was human. You're a leveler. You ain't smart, but nobody can buy yuh. I need a character like you."

Dan said stiffly, "Well, we're pretty busy. . . ."

"Knockin' off those old-fashioneds, you're busy," smiled Sullivan. "I'm hirin' you at top rate, which is twenty per day and expenses, and don't pad them, Trout. I'm easy pay."

Dan said, "What would you like to hire me to do, Sullivan?" His dislike for this fat personage was growing momentarily.

"You heard of Taxi Hall? You know about me and Taxi?"

"Yes," said Dan. "Hall is your closest competitor."

"He ain't in politic," frowned Sullivan. "He's strictly a promoter. He takes dough for things he hopes might come out right—even if they don't, Taxi always manages to make money."

"But not as much as you. Just close," said Dan.

Jerry Sullivan stared, and his rosebud

mouth grew petulant. "I didn't come in here to listen to dirty cracks. I'm offering you real dough to tack onto Taxi. To protect him—or at least make sure it ain't me or the Bishop who knocks him off in case someone should knock him off."

Dan sat up straighter. "You want me to protect Taxi Hall? Your enemy?"

Sullivan said angrily, "The damned fool sent word to police headquarters that I was goin' to have him bumped, get it?"

Dan said, "Oh, I see. That would make it nice for your political opponents. A murder rap against you and the Bishop."

"Exactly," Sullivan said. "Taxi and that young wife of his are around the Fifties, mostly in the Golden Goose Club, spendin' some dough I shouldn't ask him where it came from. I don't want him killed in the first place. Me and Taxi have had fun for twenty years, battlin'. I'd miss Taxi. You keep him alive. But if he collects it—make sure you can testify it wasn't me or the Bishop or nobody connected with us. Even you oughta see that, Trout."

Dan said, "I don't like it, though."

Sullivan sighed. "You don't like it. You like twenty a day clear, don'tcha?"

Dan said, "No. Fifty is the least we accept. And I happen to know Taxi Hall is against being tailed. And I'm not good at tailing. So you'd better get a gum-shoe."

Sullivan shook his globular skull. "Don't want a gum. I want a big guy with moxie who will stick around and see Taxi don't get hurt. And you're goin' to be it, Trout."

"Oh, I am, am I?" Dan started to get up.

The Bishop said, "Siddown, shamus." He did not seem to have moved, but in his hand was a revolver, a short-barreled, heavy-calibered gun with a nasty snout.

Sullivan said, "Put it away, Bishop. Dan's going to be all right. Because if he ain't—remember me, Trout? Your license can be lifted. That divorce case . . . what you did for Baxter wasn't kosher, you know. Of course you returned Mrs. Baxter's money, but the license commissioners are also good friends of mine and . . . you see how it is, Trout. Also—I will pay you fifty. And start tonight."

He got up and smiled, showing surprisingly white and even teeth. He nodded, popped a felt hat on his bald pate and

walked briskly out. The Bishop, still expressionless, took a long, slow look at Dan. His grey eyes were deep-set, and at the corner of his mouth there was a slight twitch. He shook his head and said, "You sure are dumb, shamus." Then he followed his master from the office.

Betty Boulder came in like a storm. She said, "Hiring out to those awful people! Hiring out as bodyguard to a racketeer. This time, Dan Trout, you've gone too far. This is supposed to be a reputable detective agency. We're supposed to have a reputation for decency. . . ."

"Like you took the Baxter case for that poor, poor Mrs. Baxter?" asked Dan gently.

"You kicked that one all over the lot," stormed Betty illogically. "You almost lost us our license. . . ."

Dan said, "If you had eavesdropped a little closer you would have heard Sullivan threaten to get our license if I didn't take this job."

"He can't do that," she raved. "I'll get Mike Corbally!"

Dan picked up the phone, dialed a number. He said into it, "Headquarters? Can I get Mike Corbally, please?" In a moment the detective's voice came through. Dan said, "Hi-ya, pal? Your girl wants to talk to you. She wants to tell you to get tough with Jerry Sullivan. . . . Here she is."

He handed her the instrument. Betty's voice was strident, relating the threat made by the politician. After a moment, however, her accents cooled. She said, "Oh! . . . Is that so? . . . He is? . . . Ohhhh . . . Well, all right, Mike. I won't say any more. . . ." She hung up, her face crimson. She said to Dan, "And I'll bet you get into trouble with him, too. You haven't done anything right since . . . since . . ."

"I know, I know—since Moses was a cowboy," said Dan. "How about some advance expense money? Sullivan is paying my tabs at the night clubs. I expect I'll have to pick up a girl to make it look better. Best way to stay close to Taxi Hall. . . . Wonder who I'll get?"

She said energetically, "You don't get a dime of expense money to spend on girls. My evening dress can stand an airing. . . . And anyway Mike is on a case."

Dan said, "You mean I got to put up with you screamin' at me every move I

make? Well, all right, but I'm going to carry the money this time and you carry my gun in your bag. The gun tickles me and I'm sick of you paying the checks like you were my mother or something."

"If I were your mother—"

"You'd disown me," said Dan. "But you'd be a cute mother, at that. Take me in your arms, mother. Love me and stroke me. Are those grey hairs in your head, mother darling?"

Betty's hand flew to her up-swept hair-do. She said, "Dan Trout . . ."

"Ah, go on. You're beautiful, darling," he said. He sighed and turned to the case where he kept his few guns. He selected an automatic which would fit Betty's bag and turned to hand it to her. To his amazement there was moisture in her eyes and she was standing close to him.

She took the gun and said, "You big dope, you exasperate me, but you are sweet. Damn you!"

He almost grabbed her. But he had learned about that. She could switch moods too fast. Still, it was closer than they had been in weeks.

**THE GOLDEN GOOSE** was not as exclusive as the Stork nor as elaborate as the Copacabana, but somewhere between the two it had its own dignified and slightly raucous place. Charles Grayson, slim, debonair, wore a spiked mustache, white tie and tails and ran the place. There was a good band without a big name, and the food was excellent, if high-priced.

Betty and Dan came in at twelve and looked the place over. Dan spotted Taxi Hall at once. Grayson himself came over and said in a low voice, "Trout? Your table is ready."

Dan winked at Betty. He had fortified himself with several old-fashioneds and thought he looked pretty good in his dinner coat and black tie with his usually rumpled hair slicked into place. He followed the sleek curves of his blonde companion, grinning at the double-takes of the night club boys as they caught sight of Betty.

The table, as he expected, was discreetly close to Taxi Hall's. He arranged the chairs so that they could both watch that party unobtrusively and casually ordered imported champagne, Betty's only tippie.

The waiter hesitated, but Grayson shrugged and nodded. Sullivan had given them *carte blanche*, then. That suited Dan.

He sat back to study the situation at Hall's table. He blinked, stared at Betty. She was lifting her shoulders, her mouth set in disapproval.

Taxi Hall was a small man with a twisted mouth and high, narrow shoulders, a man who lived in evening clothes. His features were sharper than an axe, and his eyes were hungry, searching, unhappy. He had always lived by his wits and to the close observer that was obvious.

Taxi Hall's wife was a red-headed dish about thirty years old, with heavy make-up which did not quite conceal the fact that she had excellent skin and features and could have been beautiful. She succeeded in being merely smooth, smart and sharp. She also looked unhappy.

The Jelkes, George and Ida, were at Hall's table. They were rich, idle, stupid people, gossip column fodder, noted for their affairs and for their strange addiction to each other after ten years around the Roaring Fifties. Neither, their friends whispered, had ever thought of divorce!

It was the fifth person at the table who had caught the eye of both Betty and Dan. He was a young man with a nice face, slightly freckled. He had good shoulders; he wore his clothing well; he was well-behaved, mannerly. His name was Ted Baxter and he had recently fought a successful action against his wife in the courts. . . .

The spotlight came on and the band played muted music as a tall, striking brunette came into the glow and began to sing. She sang very well. The house lights went out and she held them, posturing with her superb body in a dress which left little to the imagination.

Betty murmured, "What is this, Dan? That's Ellen Baxter!"

"As if I didn't know," muttered Dan. She had really laced it into him. She had used language she oughtn't to have known. She had threatened him with things that didn't exist nowadays in New York. She had tried to bilk Ted Baxter and Dan had prevented her.

Dan squinted in the darkness. Baxter was hunched over, staring at the podium upon which his ex-wife posed, flaunting her curves and angles. The young man's

attention was rapt, and his shoulders sagged as though in despair.

He was a very soft young man, Dan thought. He had taken an awful beating from this woman for two years. Now he sat staring at her, longing for her. It was silly.

He suddenly realized that it was extremely dark in the Golden Goose. Baxter was within a few feet of them and was only a dark bulk in the reflection of the spotlight. Dan could not see Taxi Hall at all. His hackles rose and he began edging from his chair.

The lights went up dramatically, and the tall woman bowed her regal head. The applause was enthusiastic. To Dan's relief Taxi Hall still sat at the table, clapping, his predatory eyes shining. When others stopped, he still applauded.

Mrs. Hall's mouth drew down at the corners. Ted Baxter did not move, neither to clap nor to look at anyone save the woman on the stage. The Jelkes seemed always to be shrugging high shoulders. Taxi Hall beat palms together.

Abruptly the lights went out again, but not before Ellen Baxter had thrown a killing smile toward the table next to Dan's. The band played and the woman sang.

Betty whispered, "I don't like this. It feels . . . unhealthy. Baxter—he's so still."

Dan said, "Where's your bag? It's so damned dark. . . ."

He reached with his big hand. He was suffering one of his tremendous hunches. He fumbled. There were too many things in the big, black, sequin-covered bag Betty had purchased just to be able to carry a gun.

It had occurred to him earlier that Jerry Sullivan was no fool. The politician had come to him, had sent him to watch Taxi Hall. Maybe Jerry Sullivan did not care whether Hall was killed. Maybe he preferred him dead. But Sullivan would have a fine alibi tonight, Dan suspected, if anything happened to Hall. . . . And Dan was here to witness the proceedings.

The matter of how Sullivan knew was something to be delved into later. The whole thing was under the sheet, strictly political. Dan did not like it—but he was in it. He felt Betty's hand, quite cold, guiding his fingers to the gun. Betty was shaking,

so she felt it too, the same hunch. . . .

**T**HE FLAT SOUND of the shot, cutting through the music, and the woman's voice, did not surprise either of them. But they jumped, and the gun caught in the lining of the bag. Dan swore heartily and slapped the bag away from him. Lunging, he covered the distance between the two tables in a leap, bellowing, "Lights! Grayson, close the joint! Lights!"

The electrician, standing by for the song's closing, was prompt. The brilliant overhead illumination was too quick. Dan was blinded for the moment. He crouched like a big bear, trying to see through the film of red across his eyes.

The woman on the dais, having been in the spot, saw it first. She cried in her deep, contralto voice, "Taxi! My God, they got Taxi!"

She came down like a Valkyrie, striding to the spot where the little promoter lay on the floor. He had sagged over onto the polished wood of the dancing space. There was a hole in his white shirt front and a little blood had oozed out. But it had stopped at once. Hearts drilled with lead do not bleed much—they just stop pumping blood, Dan thought glumly.

Nobody else at the table had moved. Dan stepped back, rubbing at his eyes, casing the setup. There was a heavy drape. He went past the dead man and the woman who knelt beside him. Mrs. Hall had not moved, but he saw the shock in her eyes, saw the hatred that followed recovery of her faculties—yet she did not move. The Jelkes, open-mouthed, were frozen. Ted Baxter seemed dazed.

Dan reached the drapes at the wall. He yanked them open. There was a window, all right. It opened onto an alley.

The window was of the folding type, opening outward. It was closed—but unlocked.

Dan pushed it, and it sprang open. He stepped over the sill and dropped a couple of feet onto a paved alley. There were garbage cans, all neatly covered. He sniffed like a bloodhound, turning his head, straining to ascertain which way a killer would run. To the rear was a high back fence. Dan decided on the front. He ran to the street. The alley was open. There was traffic on the street, not much, but enough.

That was it. A smart killer would walk out and saunter away before the lights could come on inside the Golden Goose.

A smart killer? Well, a killer who knew something. Who knew the setup well enough to shoot Taxi Hall accurately through the heart in almost pitch darkness. Although, Dan amended, a shooter at that window would have had the Hall table lined up in silhouette against the spotlight.

He went to the front door of the club. Grayson had sewed it up, all right, with husky guards. They were tough-looking boys despite their tuxedos. Already the sirens were sounding on Broadway. Mike Corbally, on another case, would not be here tonight. Dan wondered if he should keep going and check later with Corbally on the details. He paused momentarily in the shadows to consider this.

There was a sound deep in the alley. Instinctively he swung, then dropped to one knee. A shot rang out and there was a breeze in Dan's hair which the heavens had not sent.

He rolled away from the mouth of the alley. He had once again gone seeking a killer without his gun. He cursed himself. It was an old failing of his, that driving impatience with weapons other than his fists. He would never make a detective. . . .

He waited, then showed himself once more. There was nothing in the alley but blackness and a faint odor of cordite on the heavy night air. Dan took a tentative step, sweating a little. No shot knocked him over.

Weaving and running, he drove back. He came to the window. He waited a moment, his hands sweating. Then he climbed back into the club.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Two Down—More to Go!

**T**HE POLICE were just coming in. A big beefy cop saw Dan coming over the sill and roared, "Stop where you are, you!"

"Yeah," said Dan. "This suits me." He sat on the edge of the window casing and folded his arms. He was angry at himself and angry at a cool killer who could wait, patient and still, to see if anyone came close to him, and then kill again. This

murderer was not only smart—he or she had nerves of steel.

Ellen Baxter was standing erect, like a statue, and in the bright lights it was even more evident that she wore nothing beneath her shimmering gown. Her eyes blazing, she was pointing a finger at Dan. "There! That crook. That is the double-crossing private detective who sold me out. Arrest him! You won't be far from right if you grab him!"

Detective-Lieutenant Cross shrugged. "Yeah, sure. Now let's have it. Who was where and what did everyone hear or see? I'll take you one at a time. I'm sorry to tie up this many people, but someone'll be down and help in a few minutes and we'll have you out of here quick. Grayson, we'll use your office and another room, if you got one."

Grayson said smoothly, "Certainly, Lieutenant. I have an office on this floor and there is an ante chamber off the check room. My men will help you in every way." He did not look at the dead man on the floor. His nerves must be plenty shaky, Dan thought, but he was keeping it smooth all the way.

The big cop came close to Dan and said, "You better be first, fellow. The lootenant'll wanta know why you were gumshoein' about."

Betty Boulder was alone at the table. Her eyes were wide and shocked. She clutched the black bag in both hands. Her gaze came to him, almost without recognition. He winked hard at her, and she gulped and managed to nod. Her complete attention went back to Hall's table.

They were getting up, stiff-limbed, like automatons. Mrs. Hall still had not wept. Ted Baxter held her mink coat. Baxter's eyes were upon his ex-wife. The Jelkes, always a team, managed to support each other.

Dan watched the Baxters. It was simple to deduce that Ellen had been one of Taxi's girls. The little promoter was notorious for his many women. Yet Ellen Baxter was not the kind to be one of many. . . . Dan wondered if it went deeper than that.

There was Baxter to consider too. He had been on the party with Hall, yet he was a friend of Jerry Sullivan—and had just finished a bitter battle with Ellen. How did that line up?

The cop said, "C'mon, you. I got a hunch you know something about this."

"Officer," said Dan, "if you were correct, I would be very happy. And at that, maybe I know more than anyone else. Lead on, MacDuff."

"The name's O'Leary," snarled the cop. "And step on it. There's a hunnert people got to be questioned."

Betty nodded as Dan went out. She was gathering her wrap about her and the bag was tight in her left hand. But the gun was handier, Dan knew. Betty had recovered from the shock of the killing so near to her and was perking up again.

Ellen Baxter still stared down at the corpse. Her eyes brooded, bright, hard, with pity perhaps, but no sentimentality. She was, Dan thought, a hell of a woman—definitely not the kind to have around, but a hell of a woman at that.

DAN TROUT looked across his desk at Sullivan. The Bishop sat in the same place, erect, listening without expression. Dan finished, "And there was no gun in the joint that the police could find; no one they could detect had fired one. They think the window was the spot, that the man escaped over a back fence after taking that shot at me."

The fat man said, "A hell of a body-guard you are, huh? No offense, Trout. You couldn't do anything in the dark."

Dan said slowly, "Our expenses were cab fare, that is all. Grayson never gave us a tab. I expect you took care of that."

Sullivan said, "Naturally I took care of it before you went in. I don't pay sucker prices for champagne."

Dan said, "Then you only owe us fifty-five dollars."

"You didn't earn that," said Sullivan without expression.

"I got shot at," said Dan.

Sullivan shrugged his shoulders and threw a bill on the desk. It was a hundred and Dan rang for Betty.

The girl came in. Sullivan said, "Never mind the change. Close the door."

Betty closed it. The Bishop's eyes went to her and stayed there, like suction cups. Sullivan chuckled and said, "Some dish. . . . Look, you two, we're alibied, all right. I was with the Bishop. He was with me. That'll stand up. But we were

not around, yuh know? We were . . . takin' a ride. It's just me and the Bishop. And there are certain people downtown . . . well, it don't suit me. I need maybe some help."

Dan said, "We don't frame alibis, either."

"Dumb," said the Bishop. "C'mon, boss. He's too dumb."

Sullivan spread his fat little hands. "I like 'em dumb and honest. What I want, Trout, is for you to nose around. Investigate this murder."

"You mean you want the killer brought to justice?" Dan said stiffly.

"Justice? That blind gal? Ha! You don't know me very well, do you, Trout? I want you to report to me. Not the cops. Me. I'll pay one hundred per day for this—if you deliver. Fifty if you just mess around. And expenses, includin' champagne for the babe, here."

Dan said, "If I find the killer, the cops get him."

"Just so you report to me first," said Sullivan. "You'd do that, wouldn't you, for a client?"

"It would be correct," said Dan. He spoke very carefully, realizing the very acute brain in the bald, pink skull was quicker than his own.

Sullivan said, "I ain't cryin' over Taxi Hall. The last contract he got from the county, he stole it from me and put down roads that won't last a year. He was in my way, plenty. But I don't want to be accused of murder. I got angles, understand? City Hall don't stand for rough stuff. Neither does upstate. I got to be clean. Keep me that way."

Dan said, "For a hundred a day."

"You and the cops together oughta turn up a killer," said Sullivan carelessly. "The mugg was a crack shot; he had iron nerves. There ain't many killers fit that description."

"And no amachoor shoots that good inna dark," said the Bishop. "Get that in your thick skull."

Dan did not look at the big ex-cop. He said to Sullivan. "All right. We'll take it. Now get your gorilla out of here before I take him apart."

Betty stepped back against the wall. There was a filing cabinet at her elbow, with oiled sliding drawers. She eased

one open and felt carefully around inside with her hand.

The Bishop came off his chair, his pallid face flushed. His gun was in his hand, pointing at Dan's middle. He said, "You dumb shamus . . ."

Betty picked out the big revolver. She held it steady and said, "Put it away, Mr. Bishop. And go out quietly."

Dan said, "Or drop it and start swingin', because you've got me mad, Bishop."

Sullivan chuckled. He said mildly, "They may be dumb, but they are fast movin'. Put the heat away, Bishop. Come on. These people will work. That's all I ask." He heaved to his feet, adjusted his felt hat and waddled out. Bishop breathed hard through his nose, staring at Betty. Then he wheeled and followed his boss.

After the outer door had closed, Dan said, "Baby, you don't know how brave you are."

She put the gun back in the drawer as though it were hot. "Oh, yes I do. If I'd had to pull that trigger—"

"Nothing much would've happened," said Dan. "I never keep loaded guns around. Dangerous."

She stammered, "It—it wasn't . . . loaded?"

He shook his head, then jumped to catch her. But she did not faint. She just wobbled a little on her beautiful legs. She whispered, "Dan, let's quit this case. Things aren't going right, I'm scared, Dan."

"Yeah," said Dan. "Me, I'm a little scared, too. Because Sullivan knows everybody a little too well. Like Grayson . . . and Hall . . . and Baxter. And the people down at City Hall. He's too big, that Sullivan. Why is he worried about a murder rap when no reporter, no detective, nobody has attempted to tie him in? When he hasn't been mentioned by a soul—except himself?"

"I can't figure that, either," said Betty. "Dan, I'm going to ask Mike Corbally some more. Mike says Jerry Sullivan is the hottest thing in town on fixing. If he fixes so well, why not a thing like this? Why us?"

"Lay off Mike," said Dan. "You might get him demoted to Staten Island. This is ours. We bought it." He had recovered

his bounce by now. "I'll got out and stick my nose around."

"Where will you begin?" she demanded. "The police covered the Golden Goose like a tent. There's nothing to learn there. They even went through the garbage cans, looking for a gun."

Dan said, "A gun's a small thing among those people and in a big place like the Golden Goose. I got a hunch about that gun. I wanta see the back fence by daylight, and when I ain't scared silly."

She said, "Dan, for once I don't like it. Not even for the money."

"You stay here and keep that small automatic in your desk drawer and the drawer open," said Dan. "Don't go home until you hear from me. If I don't call in by six—then you can get Corbally and send him after me. I'm starting at the club and working all the people." He wrote down the order in which he would try them, if possible. He ended, "We're probably being dumb, like the Bishop says. Sullivan is probably hirin' us because he's smart enough to be way ahead. But you feel it and I feel it. The deal is screwy."

"Quit," she urged. "Call Sullivan and tell him we're out."

"Without taking one sock at the Bishop?" Dan laughed. "I'm savin' a left hook for that lantern jaw."

Automatically she said, "You overrate that punch. Take a gun. Don't be silly all your life."

He peered at her, raising his left eyebrow an inch above its fellow. He said, "I wish Corbally worked hard cases all the time."

"Go on," she snapped. "Get out, if you're going. And stay away from Chadsey's barroom."

"Sullivan will pay," said Dan lightly. He took a .44 S. & W. from the drawer and loaded it. He strapped on his Berns-Martin upside-down holster and inserted the gun. It was heavy and unwieldy no matter how he wore it. He did not get along well with guns, for sure, he sighed. He said to Betty, "The whole thing is screwy. The Baxters . . . Mrs. Hall . . . the Jelkes . . . those drunks. . . I'll check what I can about them all. Hold the fort, baby."

He touched her arm and went out. She was nervous, all right, a rare thing. He

got into the elevator and went down to the street.

**H**HE WALKED over to the Fifties and there were cops still around the club. Taxi Hall had been a shady man, but important. His business had had ramifications which went deep into the structure of officialdom. The force would be assiduous, as always, and warier than usual.

Dan talked to a uniformed man and managed to get into the alley alongside the window through which he had gone the previous night. The board fence was seven feet high. It could be scaled by an active man, all right. But Dan stared at it for a long time.

He went back to Fifth Avenue and took a bus. He knew Ted Baxter's address well. He got off and walked a half-block to an apartment house in the Seventies. He rang the bell and was admitted to a pleasant suite of rooms by a maid. This was the place where the Baxters had lived until the breakup, and from which Ellen had hoped to bar her husband. The furnishings alone were worth a large sum, Dan knew.

In a moment, Tex Baxter came in. His manner was pleasant, although he seemed mildly surprised at Dan's presence. He said, "Hi, there. Saw you at the club, of course. Thought I wouldn't make a point of speaking. You know. . . ." He was a vague young man, sometimes, using his hands instead of words.

Dan said, "That was a great party you were on. How come?"

"Why not? The Jelkes, you know. Good friends. . . ."

Dan said, "And Taxi Hall?"

"Oh. . . . Well, he was the one. You know. . . ."

"You mean he was the one who was trying to frame you for Ellen in the divorce business?"

"Didn't you know that? Mrs. Hall was all busted up. I was watching. . . . Interesting, I thought. . . ." His hands were slim and well kept, waving gently.

Dan said, "You've got awful calm about the whole thing. Not long ago you were screaming."

"Well, it's over. Ellen . . . she's . . . you know how she is. In the blood. But

like a virus infection. Once out . . . cured."

Dan said, "Who told you that, a psychiatrist?"

"How'd you know?" Baxter's cheeks went pink. "You're smart. . . ."

"That's a switch," muttered Dan. He went on, "If you shot Hall, the way you got rid of the gun is all that bothers me. I could pin it on you easy, if I could find the gun."

"Oh?" Baxter grinned engagingly. "But you wouldn't. Because I didn't and you're honest and you wouldn't. . . ."

"Now that he's dead, what about you and Ellen? That cure still working?"

"Indubitably," said Baxter. "Cured. You know . . . cured. . . ."

"Then what's that pair of gloves doin' in the deep chair yonder?" Dan asked. "She wore 'em last night. Green gloves with a green dress."

Ted Baxter's color changed again, to a slight tinge of grey. He said, "Listen, Dan. I like you. But don't get into it. Your end . . . over . . . you understand? And besides . . ." His hands waved in agitation.

Dan got up. He said, "I like you too. And I'm telling you, there is something smelly about this. Look out for yourself. If you saw anything last night, if you suspect anyone, you'd better go to the cops, if you don't want to tell me, which I can see you don't." He nodded and went out abruptly, leaving Baxter to think it over. He would be back, he thought, later, and the young man would talk. He was positive Baxter's calmness wasn't natural.

He was in the self-service elevator when he thought of something else. He did not know Hall's home address, nor the Jelkes', and Baxter might have them. He reversed the elevator, not without fumbling, and went back up.

The hall was full of wild screams. He recognized the maid and raced for Baxter's apartment. The door was open.

In the middle of the fine living room lay Ted Baxter. He was bleeding like a pig Dan had once seen stuck in an abattoir. There was a gun beside his right hand, almost touching it.

Dan picked up the phone and dialed headquarters. There was an address book

on the stand and he found what he wanted in it and copied it down even as he talked.

He said, "Yes, Ted Baxter. . . . And he didn't commit suicide. . . . Never mind how I know. Send Mike Corbally if you can, otherwise Cross, who is in on it."

### CHAPTER THREE

#### The Tigress

**B**ETTY said, "How do you know he didn't kill himself?"

"I don't *know* it," said Dan patiently. "But wouldn't he have told me what was on his mind? There was someone in the next room with a gun on him and like a damned fool I didn't guess it. I knew he was different, that something was wrong, but I had those other people on my mind. There's a killer loose and a mean one, cold and nervy."

She said, "Sullivan called. He said he wanted to see you tonight at his place, downtown. Irving Place." She gave him the number. "Where are you going now?"

"After Ellen Baxter. But I got to see Mrs. Hall first. The Jelkes don't know anything. I saw them after I left Baxter's." It was evening, time to eat, and he was in Chadsey's with an old-fashioned in his hand, talking from a phone booth. Through the glass he saw a woman come through the door, pause and stare around. He said hastily, "Golly, here's Mrs. Hall now. G'bye."

He swallowed the drink, left the glass in the booth and came into the light. Mrs. Hall saw him and came rapidly to the back of the bar. It was a nice, quiet Third Avenue saloon, run by an old ex-racketeer, the most discreet place Dan knew. He slid into a booth and Mrs. Hall joined him. Her make-up was like armor, but she was breathing too fast and her eyes gave her away.

Dan said, "You were looking for me?"

"Mike Corbally said I might find you here. I didn't want to go to your office." She spoke too rapidly, running her words together. "I've got to know . . . are you working for Sullivan?"

Dan said, "Never mind about that. I want to ask you some questions." She could still be pretty, he saw, and she was much younger than Taxi Hall.

"I've talked to the police," she said. "I saw nothing. I know nothing. My husband was shot, that's all I know. But what about Sullivan? What's his angle?"

"How come you know Mike Corbally?"

She said, "Mike's an old friend. Of mine, not Taxi's. Mike's on the level—and he knows enough to be afraid of Sullivan. If Jerry had the Bishop shoot Taxi—" She paused abruptly and said in a different voice, "But you wouldn't know about that. Can I have a drink?"

Dan waved and old Emil came cautiously in and took their orders, served Mrs. Hall Scotch and Dan his old-fashioned and went far away, out of earshot. Dan said, "I wanted to talk about Ellen Baxter."

The woman swallowed her drink without choking—no mean feat, Dan knew. Then she said steadily, "I scarcely know the woman."

"Taxi knew her."

"Taxi knew too many women." She bit her thin lip.

Dan said, "Why should anyone want to kill Taxi?"

"You heard me the first time," she said grimly. "And besides, he was in the deals. All of them. Taxi was too smart and—he knew too many women."

"But you loved him."

There was a small silence. The widow of Taxi Hall drained her glass. Then she said, "I always will. And I want his killer caught. I'll hire you. Taxi left plenty of money. I want her—or him—run down."

"Ellen Baxter couldn't have done it," Dan said.

"No. Not with her own hand. But she could be responsible," said Mrs. Hall. "And what about her ex-husband? He sat there, all hunched over. It wasn't right. What about him?"

Dan said, "He killed himself this afternoon."

"He what?" She sat bolt upright. She seemed almost pleased. Then she said, "Ted Baxter? He never shot himself."

"That's what I say," Dan nodded. "But the cops think he did. They think he shot Taxi last night and himself today with the same gun. They are giving the gun the treatment down in the lab right now. In an hour or so I'll learn if they are right. About the gun. I'll never be-

lieve that Ted Baxter shot himself."

She said, half to herself, "Baxter dead . . . Taxi dead. Inside of twenty-four hours. It doesn't make sense."

"You're so right," said Dan. "I'm supposed to be dumb, but even I can see there is no pattern. It is completely screwy. Who gains by Taxi's death? Only you. . . ." He paused, watching her.

She said, "I could have done it. They kept asking me which way Taxi was facing when he got hit. How could I tell them, in the dark? They suspected me, all right. But what did I do with the gun?"

"If I could find that gun," said Dan softly, "allowing that the one the cops now have isn't it . . . if I could find that gun, I'd have the killer."

She said, "I'll hire you—"

"I've been hired," said Dan. "And you were right. This is confidential, of course."

"Sullivan." She drew in her breath. "He always hated us."

"Us? You too?"

**S**HE MADE a small notion with her hand. Emil brought two more drinks. She said, "Everything Taxi could do, Jerry could do better. You know the song from *Annie Get Your Gun*? Except one thing."

Dan said, "Women?"

She nodded. "Jerry's not the attractive type of fat man. I went with them both when I was in show business. Jerry hasn't got it—you know?"

"Like me," sighed Dan. "So that's it. Well, it answers a big question. Thanks, Mrs. Hall. I'm awful sorry about your husband. I was there to prevent it happening, but the killer was too quick and too smart."

She said tonelessly, "If they meant to get him, you and the whole police force couldn't stop them."

"You mean Sullivan and the Bishop? Mrs. Hall, if Sullivan meant to kill Taxi, he's not the smart cookie we both think he is. And I'll nail him to the mast before I'm through. Have another drink on me and think that over. I'll be seeing you later. . . ."

He slid out of the booth and got away before she could question him further. She was too tense and ready to go off,

like a cocked gun. He had to work fast now, he knew. There would be more killings and eventually the murderer might shoot enough people to get away with it. This was no kill-happy character, he thought. This was a smart, cool, determined killer who wanted several things. He was not killing for lust of blood, nor for money alone, nor for love alone.

He braced himself and went to an address he had learned from Grayson's manager at the Golden Goose. It was a small apartment at midtown and the place he sought was on the ground floor. He rang a bell and stood back.

A low voice said, "Who is it?"

He answered bravely, "Me, Dan Trout. The man you hate."

The door burst open. Ellen Baxter stood in the light, clad only in a negligee. In her hand was a gun and it was pointed straight at Dan Trout.

He reached out, quicker than winking, and used the Chinese slap, one hand on the gun, the other boxing the wrist. The gun dropped and he kicked it inside the apartment. He shouldered the girl across the threshold, closed the door behind him—and found himself in a brawl the like of which he had never dreamed.

She used tooth and nail. She used knee and elbow and a ready fist. He kept picking off the punches and evading the rest of the attack as best he could. His clothing was becoming torn and the negligee was ripping to shreds. She was as beautiful as a lioness and almost as powerful.

He fainted with a right, to see what she would do. She never noticed, being too busy trying to tear him apart. He caught a wrist, turned his back and reluctantly pivoted.

She came off the floor and went over his head. He aimed her for a low divan. She hit it and cushions scattered in all directions. He followed closely, caught up a silk cover from a grand piano and pounced upon her. It was an interesting job, muffling her in the folds of the silk. She was wiry and strong, but he got her lashed pretty well, and then he sat on her.

Her breath became labored. He said, "Say calf rope."

"You . . . you . . . dirty—"

"Say uncle, then," he suggested.

"I'll kill you. I'll—"

He said, "Someone killed Ted this afternoon, you know."

She slumped. He could feel her exhaustion, the nerves and muscles giving way beneath him. He promptly got up and took a deep breath. He said, "The cops turned you loose quick. You must have had an alibi as good as last night."

She rolled over and sat up, draping the silk about her. It was a multi-colored scarf and suited her tawny skin and sullen, bright eyes. Even now she was beautiful. She said, "Damn you and damn you, Trout."

"Well, you're human enough to feel something about Ted's death," he said. "Shock, anyway."

She said, "You're a dumb, bullying, stupid, dirty—" Her language became unprintable. She sat quite still while she cursed him. Without losing breath she said, "You were there when Taxi got it and you were with Ted a moment before he was killed. You're hard luck on top of being so damnably stupid you don't know which way is up."

Dan said, "You're wasting time, babe. You're in the middle of a merry-go-round with death and you still can't do anything but act like the native gal in *White Cargo*. You're very tough and very good looking, but how in hell do men ever put up with you?"

"Because they are men," she spat at him. "Not overgrown, illiterate, spying, double-crossing louts with ears like jug handles and—"

"She's beginning to love me," Dan said rapidly. "She notices my ears!"

"I'll kill you, so help me—"

He eyed her bare, shapely legs and said, "You're a gal with accent on the kill. Your gloves were in Ted's apartment. Just how tough are you, really, babe? Tough enough to kill Ted?"

"My gloves. . . ." Her voice changed, lowered. "They couldn't be. I left them at the club."

"You hoped," Dan chuckled. "You thought you *might* have left them there. But actually you left them at Ted's." He took them out of his pocket. He tossed them to her. "Now you can get me in trouble. Call the cops; say I took these from Ted's apartment after he was murdered."

SHE LET the long gloves lie on the divan. She said, "And get arrested all over again? They think it's suicide—but if they had found these gloves. . . ."

"You'd be in the poky, darling," Dan grinned.

She said, "Why? Why did you take them?" Her shoulders were bare, and his eyes rested on them.

"Two reasons," said Dan briskly, determinedly removing his stare from the rounded flesh. "One: I felt I owed you something even if you were wrong in going against Ted the way you did—and I found out who put you up to that, too, incidentally. . . . Two: I want you on my side to help clear up these two killings."

She said, "Thanks. I'd help if I could. . . . I did go up to Ted's place after three this morning, after the police were through with us. He never knew it was Taxi. . . . and I didn't tell him. We both needed a little comfort and I went up and had some drinks with him. Nobody knows I was there."

Dan said, "I think someone knows."

"No one could. I let myself in with an old key I had held out."

Dan said, "Can you remember what you told Ted about the killing?"

She said doubtfully, "Ted was very nervous. Not himself at all. He didn't want to talk about it. He was. . . strange."

"Oh?" Dan got up and found the telephone. He called headquarters and asked for Lieutenant Cross. The homicide man's voice was a growl.

"It was the same gun, Trout. You see? You never will be smart, pal. The same gat that knocked off Hall. And we turned up somethin' else. That broad, Ellen Baxter, was the cause of it all. Taxi was romancin' her before the divorce. You never knew that, didja, when you was workin' the case?"

"Nope," said Dan. "Wish I had. I still think Baxter was murdered, Cross. I wish you'd talk to Mike about it."

"Open and shut," snapped Cross. "Case is closed."

Dan gently hung up the telephone. He said, "The killer took the gun with him, somehow. Or. . . wait! Yeah, it could be like that. . . . Well, I'll see you later,

at the Golden Goose. You'll sing tonight?"

She stood up. Dan shielded his eyes. The scarf was inadequate for such a tall woman. She said, "I wasn't going to—but I'll do it."

"That's right," nodded Dan. "Might be helpful. Look, babe, we'll never be pals, nor anything like that, but how about layin' off, huh?"

She nodded toward the green gloves. She said, "Considering those—okay. I'll be seeing you, Dan." Her eyes were penetrating. She was rubbing a bruise on her wrist where he had seized her and thrown her. There was a speculative glint in her gaze. Dan shivered and bolted through the door.

**J**ERRY SULLIVAN had a house on Irving Place, a narrow brick house, beautifully kept by his brother and sister, quiet people, a house which had once been owned by aristocrats who would have shuddered at Jerry and the Bishop. There was a sort of den and in it the politician and his bodyguard smoked cigars and listened to Dan Trout.

Sullivan said, "Nobody's got after me yet. But somebody is goin' to. I knew Baxter too."

"You mean you haven't got an alibi for this afternoon—just in case the cops don't maintain their suicide theory?"

"No alibi," said Sullivan. "None that would stand up." The fat man regarded the end of his cigar with calm appreciation. "Stay with it, Trout. Keep nosin' around. I like what you've done. You seen everybody. You damn near were in on the Baxter kill. You're gettin' close to somethin'."

"Close to his own tail," sneered the Bishop. "He couldn't ketch cold."

Dan said, "I can see how you get by, Sullivan. You have the feeling that something is very screwy. Baxter didn't kill himself. All right, it was the same gun that knocked off Hall. How did it get out of the Golden Goose?"

Sullivan said, "I'm no detective, but I'd nose around the club if I was."

"I'll be there tonight," said Dan.

"Free-loadin'," said the Bishop. "Him and the gorgeous twist. Champagne on your tab, boss."

"Leave them alone," said Sullivan.

"They're all right. Worse people have free-loaded on me. . . . You stick with it, Dan." His tiny eyes became very bright. There were muscles beneath the fat of his face, and a square jaw above the three chins, Dan thought at that moment. He wondered just how dangerous Sullivan could be.

He said, "I think I can guess about the gun. I think I'm onto somebody. I bought this thing and I'm riding with it, all the way. But I still don't like it, Sullivan, I might as well tell you. It smells of the double-cross."

"Yah, you oughta be right at home," jeered the Bishop. "You crossed the Baxter dame, din'tcha?"

Dan ignored the big man. He said, "I'll check with you tomorrow. Maybe you were right. Maybe it's no use trying to convince cops of anything. I'll report to you alone."

Sullivan said, "Now, that's fine, Trout. That's copasetic. You're catchin' on. You do that. I'm thinkin' about this. You do your part and I'll do what little I can."

"Uh-huh," nodded Dan. "You'll do all right." He went out of the house.

He walked over Sixteenth Street, head bent, trying to sort things out in his plodding mind. He had a small hunch, based on matters which were obvious to him but would never stand up in court. Cross' news that the gun which killed both Hall and Baxter had been the one in the uptown apartment almost proved that the murderer would go free unless Dan trapped him. The gun was the one link that could tie the killer to the crime. The witnesses knew nothing and there was no other evidence.

This, then, was another in the long series of crimes which might never be officially solved, although the perpetrator could be guessed by those on the inside. Dan shook his head.

He saw a shadow across the street as he gained the corner of Third Avenue and glanced that way. It was late dusk, the uncertain time of day, and there was an autumn haze over the city. A figure ducked behind a deserted green newsstand.

Dan moved. He jumped for the steps of the elevated. He dragged out the gun from his convenient holster, almost

dropped it in his fumbling anxiousness.

The first shot from the assailant over the way clipped Dan's hat. The second narrowly missed his shoe.

He did not wait for the third. He snapped a wild shot in the direction of the newsstand and leaped upward.

He was not going to remain and shoot it out with a marksman like the one who had shot Taxi Hall in the dark. Dan was no shot at all with a revolver. He flung himself up the steps, had much trouble finding a nickel for the turnstile, raced across and stared down at the newsstand where his attacker had taken his position.

There was no one there. Sixteenth Street was empty. Dan put his own gun away and shrugged his coat into place, trying to act like a man who was returning home after overtime at the office or store or factory. The few people on the platform paid him little heed. Pistol shots sound like backfires of trucks and this was a trucking neighborhood.

Dan got on the next train and shivered all the way uptown. If he had not happened to see the shadow out of the corner of his eye, the deadly shooter would have picked him off like knocking down ducks in a gallery at Coney.

**H**E TOOK a cab across to his office and went up in the night elevator. There was a light burning and he went in. Betty, loyal to the end, had waited, then. He felt a glow of pleasure and almost knew the feeling of the character he had tried to portray on the platform—the man returning home from work to the bosom of his family.

Mike Corbally, a lean man in a grey topcoat, sat on the rail alongside Betty's desk, swinging his leg, smiling down into her eyes. Betty was smiling right back.

Dan said flatly, "Don't mind me. I only work here."

Mike's sharp eyes came around reluctantly. "Hi-ya, pal. We didn't ask you to come in right now, did we?"

"You're supposed to be findin' a murderer upstate," said Dan. "Don't you ever catch anyone without me to help?"

"I caught him, and how are you doing without me?" Mike Corbally laughed. He was a very nice guy and Dan knew it and appreciated him.

Dan said, "Okay, pal. I got one by the tail. I really bought a lemon."

"I know," said Mike. "You got Jerry Sullivan. I've been checkin' him ever since this case of mine closed today at noon. Nobody thought to check him, except me. I know Grayce Hall—known her for years."

Dan said, "Yeah, yeah, she loves you. I know all that. And I can recite the result of your checkup." He did, covering Sullivan's activities as he had got them from Sullivan himself, watching Mike closely as he rattled off a description of the politician's movements.

Mike said, "Uh-huh. That's the story. He could have killed both Hall and Baxter, so far as his alibis are concerned. The Bishop is no rock, not in a courtroom against a good D.A. cross-examiner. Now, I happen to know there is a strong faction against Sullivan downtown. Nothing would tickle them like hanging something on Jerry. Jerry is very big—too big. He interferes with cop business . . . you know?"

"Tell me one thing—does the opposition hire guns?"

"Could be," said Mike. "Why?"

"Somebody took a shot at me and might have hit me, they scared me so," said Dan. He related the incident.

Betty Boulder said, "Sullivan got you down there, remember? Dan . . . you must know something dangerous to him."

"If I do," said Dan, "it can be any of a dozen things. Because I am getting a hunch about this thing right now. That gun . . . the board fence . . . the smell of cordite . . . those women . . . the strange tie-up among all the people in the case—except the Jelkes."

Mike Corbally said, "The Jelkes own half of the Golden Goose, among other things around midtown."

"I didn't know that," muttered Dan. "I thought Grayson—"

Mike said, "Pal, Grayson don't own tiddley winks. The owner of the other half of the Golden Goose is Jerry Sullivan."

Dan blinked hard. He sat down and put his twisted, strong fingers together, forming a steeple with his hands. His lips moved.

"He can't be praying," said Betty. "He

is not the type. He's been wrestling around with women all day."

Dan winced. If she knew about his rascal with Ellen, Betty would make something out of that too. He went back and started all over again in his mind, checking the stories he had listened to that day, the actions of all the people involved.

He asked, "Mike, would you know if the Jelkes are close to Sullivan?"

"They scarcely know him, I imagine," said Corbally. "They just stuck dough in. They like to own pieces of things."

"Grayson," Dan said. "Grayson is too smart to be just manager."

"The Jelkes like him," said Mike. "He is smart. He always operates a successful joint."

Dan said, "I suppose the cops are off the case? It's murder and suicide by Baxter to them?"

Mike Corbally took his leg off the rail and stood straight, a slim but rugged figure with an intelligent, rugged face. He said, "I'm a cop, as you both know, from way back. But I have to admit—they like a package of that kind. All wrapped up, no loose ends, see? They buy that. It solves everything—and who cares about Taxi Hall, a grifter on a big scale? I wouldn't admit that to anyone in the world except you two. And I wouldn't admit it now, except I think Sullivan is in this and I'd like to see that fat crook get his. Maybe you can do it, Dan. You're a bulldog and it will take you all you've got. But maybe you can do it. I can't help, this time."

Dan said, "Thanks, pal. Thanks. . . ." He watched Mike pat Betty's hand before he left and make a date for the next evening. He swallowed hard and managed to like Mike right on through that, too.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Murder Party

DAN had to go home to dress, and he wanted a drink or two and some time by himself. He went into his apartment and took a shower and donned a robe and sat down with a bottle and a glass. He preferred mixed drinks, but right now whiskey was consolation and a sharpener for his wits and it didn't matter.

The doorbell rang. He hesitated, then reached for his gun. He went over and unlatched the door and stepped aside. He said, "Come in."

The door jumped open. A small whirlwind slammed through, and the door banged like a pistol shot. Mrs. Grayce Hall said, "Where are you? I've been shot at!"

Behind her, Dan sheepishly pocketed the gun. He said, "So was I."

The woman whirled. She said, "I was leaving the house to go to the store. Someone fired a shot at me. I ducked into the store."

Dan said, "You must know something, too. You and me. But what is it that we know? Are you sure you told me everything about last night?"

She said, "There's nothing to tell, nothing that would help. The shot came, Taxi fell. I was frozen. I couldn't think. How could I?"

Dan said, "Could anyone at the table have shot Hall, then got rid of the gun without you knowing it? Betty Boulder was there watching after the lights came up and she didn't see anything like that. She was looking for it too. But it could have happened, couldn't it?"

The woman sat down. "I don't know. I—I'm frightened. That's all I know. I'm alone. Taxi was—well, he protected me, at least."

"Yeah, I know," said Dan softly. She was holding onto the ragged edge of courage and he felt great sympathy for her.

She said, "Could I—could I rest here a while. I'm afraid to go home."

"You stay here tonight," said Dan. "I'm going to the Golden Goose. You stay here and if this thing doesn't blow wide open tonight, I'll go to a hotel and call you. But don't answer the phone unless it rings twice, stops, then rings again. Get it?"

She said, "Thank you, Dan. I'll pay for this. I know you're working for Sullivan, but I don't think you'd let him harm me."

Dan said, "Okay, Mrs. Hall." He went into the bedroom and donned his dinner jacket and slicked back his hair. He found a shoulder holster and slid the .44 into it, first reloading the chamber he

had emptied. He might need every bullet.

He left Mrs. Hall in his favorite chair, with his best whiskey and the radio and some magazines. She seemed still able to keep up her chin. He hoped she would stay put. He knew how hard it was to wait, alone.

He picked up Betty in a cab. She had the same black bag and wore a black evening dress. They stopped in Chadsey's for a drink and she looked like an angel, but Dan had no fast conversation for her tonight. He was moody, thinking as hard as he could.

When they left Chadsey's he thought there was a tail on them. He had the cab driver circle the block, turn into a one-way street the wrong way, make another turn and drop them on Broadway. He put the breathless Betty into another cab and they slipped into the Golden Goose at about ten o'clock.

Grayson met them, slick as usual, but a bit worried. He said, "The police are no longer interested in us, Trout. I don't see—"

Dan said, "Jerry sees."

Grayson said, "Well . . . if you're still working for Mr. Sullivan . . ."

"The same table as last night," said Dan.

"But—" Grayson's teeth showed beneath the waxed mustache. His eyes were set much too close together, Dan thought. "That table is reserved. The Jelkes, you know—important people."

"Good," said Dan. "We'll sit with them. We're important too. Tonight."

"Impossible!" Grayson chewed at the mustache.

Dan said, "You've got a lot of tough boys around here. Noticed them last night. You want trouble? I'll provide it. I'll call Sullivan first, then I'll interest the headquarters boys."

Grayson said, "Don't be vulgar, Trout. Go ahead, if you must." He turned away and hurried into his office.

"There's a guy getting instructions," said Dan. "Let's sit."

They went to the table and ordered champagne. The orchestra played and Dan said, "We haven't danced in months."

"I don't feel like dancing," said Betty. "This is scary. Even Mike—"

"Forget Mike." He led her onto the floor. There weren't many people in the Golden Goose yet, just a scattering. After the theater the sensation-seekers might turn out, but now the floor was deserted and they danced smoothly about its rim. Dan, a former athlete of renown, was a good dancer, but his mind wasn't on it now. He kept watching the people in the club, particularly the shadowy captains of waiters, who were notable by their numbers.

He said, half to himself, "The joint's lousy with hoodlums. Why?"

"They were around last night," said Betty, following a pivot. "They surrounded the table after Hall was shot."

Dan said, "Sure. They would. But there's too many of them. The place don't rate so many. Is that Jelke coming in?"

It was. Grayson hurried to greet the half-owner of the place. Dan watched the colloquy. Grayson was much more excited than the blasé couple who were veterans of the midtown scene. The Jelkes wandered toward the table, shrugging, smiling.

Dan led Betty over and introduced her. "Sorry for the intrusion," he said. "I wanted to do a little reconstruction of last night. Grayson said you insisted on this table."

"Grayson is nuts," said Jelke. "The jitters. Can't blame him, eh?" He had a silly-ass way of speaking and his mouth was always half open. But his eyes were sharp enough. Mrs. Jelke just smiled and said nothing.

They sat and partook of the champagne. They ate—the food was excellent. They talked about the food and how important it was and how few night clubs had the common sense to make it good. They carefully avoided the subject of the murder and suicide which the evening papers had proclaimed.

ELLEN BAXTER appeared upon the dais. She wore a bright red dress tonight but she also wore the green gloves, Dan noted at once. She rolled the gloves slowly on her smooth, round arms. She had a high-class strip-tease routine that gripped the attention of everyone in the room. She smiled, rather wearily, Dan thought.

The lights went down. They did not go altogether out, tonight. They just went down low as the spot fell upon the high, rounded bosom of the widow of yesterday's making. There wasn't a sound in the room. She had been divorced from Baxter, true, but her presence was a shock to those who read the daily papers and were aware of the facts.

And then she sang *My Man!*

"Who is it for?" whispered Betty in Dan's ear. "The hussy!"

Dan said, "Shhh. That means something. . . ." He watched the singer. When she was finished she moved stiffly backwards on the dais, bowed and disappeared. She did not favor the applauding crowd with an encore. Neither did she glance toward the table where Dan sat, his eyes glued to her.

Betty whispered, "You're dumb enough to fall for her too. Pay attention, will you? Stop staring."

He was watching the drapery through which she had gone. He saw a hand, a man's hand, holding its folds together. Then the hand disappeared.

He turned to Betty and said, "Excuse me, please."

The window through which he had chased last night was opposite the table. Then came the table where the killing had taken place, which was close to more draperies. They were dull gold, and they lined the room. He examined them as he went past the concealed window.

A short, wide man in a tuxedo said, "Wrong way, mister. The men's room is around the other side."

Dan said, "I'll go this way, through the rear."

"That's a wall," said the man. "You can't go through no walls. Across the dance floor."

Dan said, "Oh. I see." He sauntered past the bandstand. The musicians were getting ready to play. He found a corridor and went into the men's room and washed his hands. He gave the attendant a coin and drifted back into the club and around to the front. Grayson was not in sight. He stood there, smoking a cigarette, watching the place.

Betty was talking easily to the Jelkes. The tough captains kept roaming, all except the one who guarded the rear wall,

the one who had spoken to Dan. People were eating and drinking and dancing. The theaters were not yet out. Dan hesitated, not yet ready to attempt what was in his mind.

He thought of phoning Mike Corbally, but that might get the detective in trouble if Dan was wrong in his hunch. There were too many political angles to this thing.

He started back toward his table, then suddenly switched direction. He went back past the men's room, into the hall which led to the rear of the building. There should be dressing rooms and an exit for the musicians and a storeroom or something, he knew.

A man stepped out. It was one of the tougher of the employees of the Golden Goose. He said, "Mixed up, ain'tcha, buddy? Back that way is the bar."

"People keep telling me," said Dan. "Always telling me." He staggered just a bit, as though he were drunk, but not too drunk.

The man came close and took his arm. "This way, buddy. Lemme show ya."

"Oh, you go on!" said Dan playfully. "Let me show you." He hit the man very hard with a left hook. He hit him on the jaw and the man pitched to the floor without a word. Dan lugged him into a corner and somewhat reluctantly hit him again, to make sure he would stay out a while.

He worked his way down the hall. He located the band and found himself directly behind it, in a corridor. There was a door and he tried it.

One of the green gloves lay across a dressing table, beneath a make-up mirror. There was the odor of heavy perfume. The room was empty. Dan nodded. That was adding up. . . .

He kept on down the hallway. A door was at the end, blocking it. He paused outside, listening. Then he turned the knob, put his shoulder against the portal and shoved. It opened quite easily and he stepped inside.

"Well, it's the shamus. I tole yuh he'd show!"

Dan looked at the Bishop. He held the gun low, pointing it at Dan, a tall, ugly man, with bony knuckles.

Dan said, "Recognized that big mitt holding the curtain when you covered

Ellen Baxter. You got a big hand, fella."

"Now ain't you cute?" said the Bishop. "Close the door, shamus, close the door. You're lettin' in a draft."

Reluctantly, Dan closed the door.

**E**LLEN BAXTER was against the wall. Her arm was bruised. She leaned hard, her hands outspread, pushing against the wall.

Grayson walked up and down, taking short steps. It was a narrow room, running from front to rear of the building which housed the Golden Goose. Along the side where there was a window, the dull golden drapes of the outer decor were repeated. Grayson said, "He came in and insisted—"

"Sure. He's an insistent shamus," said the Bishop.

Jerry Sullivan sat on a chair which perilously balanced his bulk. He looked at Dan. He did not say anything, which seemed strange.

The tough hoodlum who had prevented Dan from investigating the wall which he knew was now to his left, and within five paces of him, stepped forward and slapped him expertly under the arms, then removed his gun. The Bishop laughed. It was not a pleasant laugh.

"Whaddaya know? He sometimes does stiff around with heat on him. He can't shoot, but he can carry heat because he's got a license. They should oughta be more careful downtown about them licenses, huh, Jerry?"

Sullivan said, "Everyone shoulda been more careful."

"Well, things can't always be copasetic," said the Bishop. The tic at the corner of his mouth jumped several times in quick succession. His long, solemn face remained turned upon Dan.

Dan said, "If you are waiting for the Jelkes, don't bother. They're being held at the table."

"I don't wait for people," said the Bishop. "I go to them when I want 'em. Why should I wait?"

"They put up the dough," said Dan. The thing had turned out just as his hunch had warned him. He had been very dumb to walk into it, but there it was, all neat and packaged. The wall, the motivation, everything. It did not make

sense and it was very dangerous, but there it was.

"Dough? Who needs dough? I'm all right, shamus."

"He is, at that," said Jerry Sullivan. He looked sick, sitting on the spindly chair.

Dan said, "You were a little too slow in figuring it, Jerry. Or else you should have tipped me off, instead of letting me find it out the hard way. These people have got an organization."

"It was complicated, Trout," said Sullivan gently. "It was not simple. Taxi Hall was in it, at first. Then he got scared and sent that note to headquarters."

"That's the thing the cops lost sight of. Me too, for a while," said Dan. "That thing about Hall. How come he thought you were going to murder him? You never had, and you'd been fighting each other for years. You even fought over Grayce Hall, didn't you?"

Sullivan's face grew pink. The Bishop guffawed. The Bishop held the police positive very steady all the time, though, and the hoodlum had Dan's gun and looked as though he knew how to use it.

Sullivan said, "Taxi and me were enemies. Let it go at that. It made it complicated, you see?"

"Then Taxi and Ellen brewed a storm," said Dan. He glanced at the girl. She was frightened, and her gaze never left the Bishop. He had not thought Ellen Baxter would be frightened even by imminent death. "You weren't after her, too, were you, Jerry?"

"No," said Sullivan heavily. "No."

"But Ted Baxter was your friend and you wanted to give him a hand. So you exposed the plot against him by lettin' me know it was Taxi who framed the deal. Right?"

"Yeah, you're right."

The Bishop said, "This shamus is dumb, but he can add, huh? Two and two makes four. Brilliant dope! That's him."

Dan said, "Taxi didn't like that. Ellen was supposed to collect some dough from Baxter. So Taxi was tossing around, looking for a chance to get even. He knew you owned half the Golden Goose. He moved in on the Jelkes. He tried to get to Grayson. He was going to muscle in,

somehow. He put Ellen in here, singing, to spy on things."

Sullivan said, "You've got the general idea, Trout."

"So Taxi had to be eliminated. That was maybe overdue. He was a guy who lived on the edge of being murdered. . . . But why Baxter? Why kill him?"

Sullivan's little eyes seemed tight closed. He said, "You tell me, Trout."

The Bishop said, "Aw, the hell with this."

Dan said, "I'd rather tell you about the kill. How it was done. How the shot was fired through the window. Then the killer took a few steps and came back in this window. When I went out, he watched me, took a shot at me. I could still smell the cordite when I came into the alley. I thought it came from the other window, inside the club. Now I know it came from this apparently blind one."

The Bishop jeered, "Then the killer swallowed the gun and walked out."

"Nope. He waited until I got inside. Then he went out and scaled that high fence, taking the gun with him," said Dan. "He had to have it to knock off Baxter the next day. Which brings us back to Baxter. . . ."

"I'd like to see the D.A. with all that muck," said the Bishop. "Hogwash. And a dumb shamus spittin' it out."

Dan said, "Baxter knew about the two windows. He knew this club well. He was friendly with the Jelkes and he knew all about the deal when they bought an interest in the club. Baxter knew all about it—and Grayce Hall might have known the same things. So they had to be killed. Because only one person could have got away with the killing of Taxi Hall." He shot the last words out as though from a gun.

**T**HERE WAS a moment of profound silence in the narrow room. Dan balanced, watching the trigger finger of the tall, solemn man. He said, "There is only one man with the size, the shooting ability—and the motive."

Ellen Baxter screamed, "Look out!"

The chair crashed beneath Jerry Sullivan. Dan sprang left, grabbing. Grayson's pacing had brought him within reach. Dan drew the night club manager

to him, shifted his grip and threw him away.

A loud explosion filled the room. Then there was another, not so loud. Dan saw Grayson go down and jumped over him. His fist swung in a short arc. It landed on the jaw of the hoodlum who had Dan's gun just as that worthy fired. The bullet went into the ceiling. The hood hit the floor.

Dan plunged on, a large young man gone berserk. He dived clear across the room toward the Bishop.

The Bishop was down on one knee. But he held the gun in his bony fist and his eyes were still clear. He was bleeding from a hole in his chest, but he still could lift the gun.

He fired just as Dan hit him. Dan's skin crawled, but the bullet missed him. It had not been intended for him, he had known, and he had failed to stop it. He crashed on top of the Bishop and his ready fist found the long jaw and slammed there unmercifully, once, twice, three times. The gun did not go off again.

Dan got up slowly. People were hammering at the door. Betty's voice said, "Dan! Dan, let us in!"

Jerry Sullivan lay in the wreckage of the chair. He looked ridiculous, like a fat man in a comedy routine. Dan went over and gently picked him up. He was a tremendous burden, but Dan managed to get him upright against the wall and prop him there.

Sullivan said, "Thanks, Trout. You're a thoughtful gee." He was bleeding from a body wound.

Ellen Baxter unlocked the door. Mike Corbally ushered Betty and the Jelkes in and closed it again. The detective glanced around and said, "You sure this is all right, Dan?"

"I think the Bishop is dead," said Dan. "I think Sullivan killed him and saved us all."

"Sullivan killed him?" Betty and Mike were a duet of amazement. "Murder?"

Dan said, "That wouldn't be Sullivan's way. You know that. He had a little revolver—it didn't stop the Bishop in time. The Bishop shot Sullivan. He could have had me. He could have had Ellen—he meant to get her next. She was scared and ready to talk. Weren't you, Ellen?"

"I wasn't in on it," said the tall woman. "I only guessed it. This room—and the Bishop had been making passes."

Dan said, "The Bishop wasn't too smart. Smart enough to make a kill and get away with it. Smart enough to fool Sullivan for a while. Smart enough to line up some hoods and Grayson into a deal whereby they would take over Sullivan's half of the Golden Goose, and maybe the Jelkes' too, if they got in the way. Eventually, surely the Jelkes. But not smart enough to keep his mouth shut nor his gun in its holster."

Mike said, "There's no case, Dan . . . is there?"

Dan said, "Who else could have done it? Who could shoot like that, move in and out of those windows, get over that high fence? Who would have gone up to Baxter's place and stayed there? Who had the nerve and the ability?"

Mike said, "That's no proof of anything."

Dan said, "Headquarters got word Sullivan was going after Hall. You think Taxi made that up? The Bishop threatened him—in Sullivan's name. That's what tied it up, for me. Sullivan didn't threaten Taxi—but Hall didn't imagine he was threatened. So it had to be the Bishop. Then, when Hall and Baxter were killed, Sullivan had no alibis. Why? Because the Bishop wasn't with him. So the Bishop had no alibis."

Sullivan moved. He said weakly, "That's right. I didn't figure it fast enough. Then I was scared. I'm no—no gun-fighter. . . . The Bishop was murder. . . ."

There was a rap at the door. Mike admitted a medical examiner's office doctor. Dan went on, "Between Ellen Baxter and Sullivan, you've got a case. Maybe without anything more than circumstantial evidence, sure. But enough."

Mike said, "I don't see it. The gun . . . it had the numbers filed off. The Hall-Baxter case is closed. This might make trouble for you, Dan. . . ."

The doctor arose from the side of the Bishop. He said, "Get the basket. This man is dead."

Jerry Sullivan sighed. He said, "So, now what? Grayson—he was a stooge.

Nobody else is guilty. Who needs a case?" The doctor was leaning over him.

"I didn't shoot anybody," said Dan, grinning at Mike. "Sullivan fired in self-defense. Even Grayson would testify to that."

The doctor said, "Bring in the stretcher. We'll have that bullet out of you in no time, Mr. Sullivan. You'll be up and around in a week."

SULLIVAN closed his little eyes. He murmured, "So help me, I'll never pull another deal. So help me, I'm goin' stra—what am I saying?"

Ellen Baxter said woodenly, "If you don't need me any more . . ."

"I guess you can go lie down a while," said Mike. "I guess this will clean up—if Sullivan lives to get his fix in. I guess you were lucky, at that, Dan. The Bishop shooting at you and missing, twice."

"You can say that again," said Dan. "I piped that bony hand of his downtown, but like you say, it wasn't evidence. I thought Sullivan was maybe in on it—but that warning at headquarters didn't fit. . . . I guess I was lucky." He brightened. "Let's go outside and have a drink, huh?"

They went to the bar. Betty was trembling a little. Dan said, "It was close, at that. But we get our fee this time, baby. From Sullivan."

She said, "And he better pay for these drinks, too. . . ."

Within, the customers never did know what went on. They were eating, drinking. Then the lights went dim and the band played softly. A woman stepped through the dull gold curtains. It was Ellen Baxter.

She sang *My Man*.

Dan gulped his drink. He said, "Oh, my! I forgot. I'll see you both later."

Betty was listening, and beaming upon Mike. Neither noticed his departure. He had just remembered. He had a woman in his apartment. He started for the phone to tell her she was safe. He looked back. Betty was smiling fondly upon Mike. He returned the nickel to his pocket.

He went outside and got into a cab and gave his home address. Under the make-up, Grayce Hall was a very pretty girl.

## MAYHEM IN THE A. M.

(Continued from page 51)

Johnny had called the headwaiter aside and slipped him a bill. It was supposed to be a surreptitious gesture but he made sure she saw him.

"I just remembered a cancellation," the headwaiter said, smiling, and led them to a table by the band.

"What did you give him, Johnny?" she asked.

"A twenty."

"Oh, but you shouldn't!"

He squeezed her hand. "Nothing is too good for my baby!"

"Oh, Johnny!"

And she thought he was the superintendent in some plant! She had never



Nothing was too good for her, Johnny thought.

been inquisitive about where he worked or what he did and for that he was thankful. You couldn't get away from it—she was the perfect wife!

Outside, the horizon was beginning to light up with the birth of a new day. He rose from his stool and fished in his pocket for some change. Thinking about Judy had made him feel expansive and he left the waiter a large tip.

He walked around the corner to the lot where his car was parked. Slipping beneath the wheel he put the key in the ignition and snapped the motor to life. He sat a moment, waiting for it to warm up completely.

While waiting he brought out the loot for the night. There was a wallet with three hundred dollars cash, a pair of gold cuff links, a woman's wedding ring. . .

He stopped breathing as he read the inscription inside the narrow gold band:

*To Judy with love, Johnny.*

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## DETECTIVE TALES

(Continued from page 56)

on his face and his hands were nerveless.

He shut his eyes to clear the tears from them and brought the plane around for the landing. The landing would be very tricky.

He climbed down from the plane, calm now, and happy, and he walked toward Barbara. Billy came behind him at a respectful distance.

He got to Barbara and he saw her face and he knew.

She stood away from him, not sobbing, but the tears coursed down her cheeks. "Max Stanton," she said.

"Yes," he said and smiled. "How long have you known?"

"A long time," she said. "From the first. I saw your picture in the paper . . . and when you shaved—"

"I was going away," he said. "I knew I couldn't walk across the border. I was going away."

Billy came up cautiously and saw his sister's tears. He tried to speak but no words came.

Max Stanton turned to him. "Do you want to be a hero?" he asked softly.

"Awww . . ." Billy began.

"I want you to take me down to San Diego," Max Stanton said. "You see, Billy, I was an Ace. But I'm no longer an Ace. I'm an escaped convict. You'll be a hero."

"Max," Billy said chokingly. He walked over and put his arms around Max Stanton and his wet face against his side.

"Max," he said.

Max turned and looked at Barbara and the contempt and the hardness were gone from his face and he looked young. "I'll start now," he said.

"Max, darling Max."

"But some day I'll be back. Always remember that. Some day I'll be back."

He took Billy by the hand and started down the hill. "I'm kinda hot," he said to Billy. "They wanted me five grand's worth. The reward—you give it to Barbara, will you?"

"We don't want the damned old money," Billy said then. "We'll keep it for you—sure, we'll keep it for you. For when you get back."

## THE CORPSE IS FAMILIAR

(Continued from page 84)

"Been here. Somebody heard this ruckus early tonight. I just got word about this guy you call Bill English. They caught him all right. He ain't dead. Just kind of pale around the gills."

"He didn't die?" Al Fast mumbled hoarsely.

"You're lucky. You'll get off with attempted murder. Hell, we been hunting for 'English' Williams for six years—ever since he hoisted an Ohio bank. And his woman—who's the stiff in the bedroom."

Al Fast's mouth looked like a battered-open valise. "What?"

"She's his wife—Doris Williams. They been loose for eight years, driving us nuts. Way we got it figured, the babe tried to get you to bump off her husband. She knew the law was closing in on him. His prints are on file all over hell and gone. But hers ain't."

"She figured that if she could destroy him and switch the body for somebody else—some guy that looked sort of like him—she'd have a clean husband, and she'd be safe. Get me?"

Al Fast nodded slowly.

"You didn't kill him—you just tried to. 'Cording to the doorman, could be you were the one saved him from the sandbag. We can't be too sure about that. But anyhow, way things are, you'll probably get off light—considering what you deserve diddling around murder—and women like that one."

"That dirty little blonde tramp," muttered Al Fast. She was still a powerful memory. He might get over her in a couple years. Yeah. More likely a couple lifetimes.

The cop smiled. "Got a kid at home, Faustino. Nuts about magic. How do you do that trick with the rabbit in the hat?"

Al Fast's face loosened up and his mouth slanted flat. "Simple," he said. "Deception. Keep their eyes off the hand that's doing the dirty work."

He lit a cigarette. He felt a hell of a lot better, now that it was all over.

"Only be sure you got a rabbit in the hand. My God—don't get hold of a woman!"

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## DETECTIVE TALES

*(Continued from page 88)*

His heels echoed in the corridor. Patterson's office door was open. Patterson, in shirtsleeves, sat behind a green steel desk kidding with an older man, also in shirtsleeves.

They both glanced absently at Harmon Wade and Patterson waved him toward a chair. Wade sat erect on the edge of the chair, his hat on his lap. They seemed to forget he was there. It was oddly disturbing. Patterson called the older man Al, and they were laughing about some sort of a party the night before.

Finally Patterson said, "Well, back to work, Al. Have George come in with the stenotype and you better stick around yourself."

Al glanced briefly at Wade and left. He was back by the time Patterson had lit a cigarette. George, a pimply man, accompanied him, sat at a table in the corner, plugged in the stenotype and chewed gum with a blank expression. Al shut the door and leaned against it.

The room was very still and very warm. Wade took out a handkerchief and dabbed at his forehead.

PATTERSON gave Wade a charming smile. "Well, Wade, I guess we've made life pretty tough for you for the last year."

"You have," Wade said firmly. "You certainly have."

Patterson leaned back, blew a smoke ring. "Police work is funny, Wade. There's lots of angles. The average guy believes a lot of screwy things. For example, he thinks that the criminal always returns to the scene of the crime. That's funny, isn't it?"

Harmon Wade felt a small area of uncertainty begin to grow in his mind. Not quite fear. Just uncertainty. He didn't know what to say. He smiled faintly and shrugged.

"We're about to take the tail off you, Wade," Patterson said.

Wade smiled more broadly. "It certainly is time that you—"

Patterson stopped him with a lazy grin and an upheld hand. He turned to George. "Start taking this. Wade, we'll leave you alone, but first we want to show you some—"

## SCENE OF THE CRIME

thing. If you can give us an adequate explanation of it, we'll let you go. If you can't explain it to my satisfaction, we're going to charge you with murder. Is that fair?"

"Completely!" Harmon Wade snapped. "I ask nothing more."

"Fine. Now then, Wade, you're your own boss as far as your collections are concerned. You handle accounts all over the city. You decide who to call on and who to write, and you lay out your own route. Right?"

Harmon Wade didn't understand. The uncertainty came back. "Yes, that's right," he said.

Patterson walked over to the wall and pulled down a thing like a windowshade. It was a map of Naron, New York. Population 58,000. Rotary meets Friday at 12:15 at the Graydon Hotel.

With the air of a lecturer, Patterson took a wooden pointer, and said, "Spotted on this large map, Wade, are all your accounts. Each one is indicated by a small India ink circle half as big as a dime. The ones you have called on since the murder are filled in red. The ones phoned are filled in green and the ones written to are also filled in in green. Clear?"

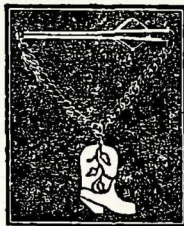
The small room was silent except for the muted clack of the stenotype, the sounds of traffic on the street outside.

Wade nodded, and the uncertainty had turned almost to fear.

"We have followed every move you have made for the last year, Mr. Wade. It has been an expense. We were trying to prove something. You can see whether or not we have proved it. Here is the place where the victim lived. You will note that the accounts near it were not called on. You phoned or wrote to them. They are all filled in in green."

"But that doesn't—"

"Let me finish," Patterson said. "Every trip you made in your car has been marked on this map. On the basis of the trips you have made, we have shaded certain areas. Streets you have driven on ten times or more are shaded in deep grey. Streets you have traveled on between five and ten times are in lighter grey. Streets traveled on less than five times are in paler grey. Streets you have avoided are in white."



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"But—"

"Shut up, Wade. Look here. Here is a street that is white. There are hardware stores on that street. A hammer could be purchased on that street. Fourteen times in the last year you could have saved time and distance by going through that street. You avoided it. Why? Here is the street where the victim lived. Eighteen times during the last year you could have saved time and distance by going through that street. Why didn't you? Here is the North Bridge. You did not go over it once. Each time you took the South Bridge. Thirty-three times you could have saved time and distance. And here is an odd thing. A residential section. Many vacant lots. A view. A place for neckers, high school kids. Nineteen times you should have gone through there to get from one call to another. You didn't. You took the long way around."

Wade opened his mouth, but it was as though there were fingers on his throat.

Patterson threw the pointer aside with a clatter that startled Wade. Patterson was no longer smiling. His face was full of hate. "Wade, your subconscious mind betrayed you. We contend that you bought the hammer on that street there, drove her to that spot there from her house, killed her and took her to the North Bridge and tossed her over the rail. And you have gone to absurd lengths to avoid those four places."

"But I—"

Patterson suddenly smiled. But not with his eyes. "We have a bargain, Wade," he said gently. "All you have to do is explain your movements during the last year, explain why you have avoided those four places, and you can walk right out of here and we'll never bother you again. Never."

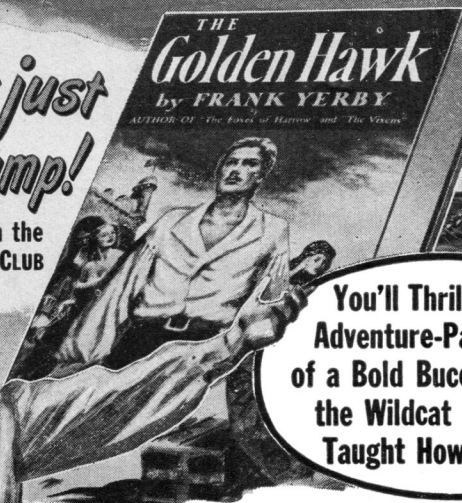
The stenotype ceased its soft clacking. Somewhere in the building someone shouted. A man walked down the corridor beyond the closed door, his heels clacking loudly.

Harmon Wade sat erect in the chair and sucked his lips.

He leaned forward, elbows on knees, face in his hands, and began to sob as though his heart was breaking.

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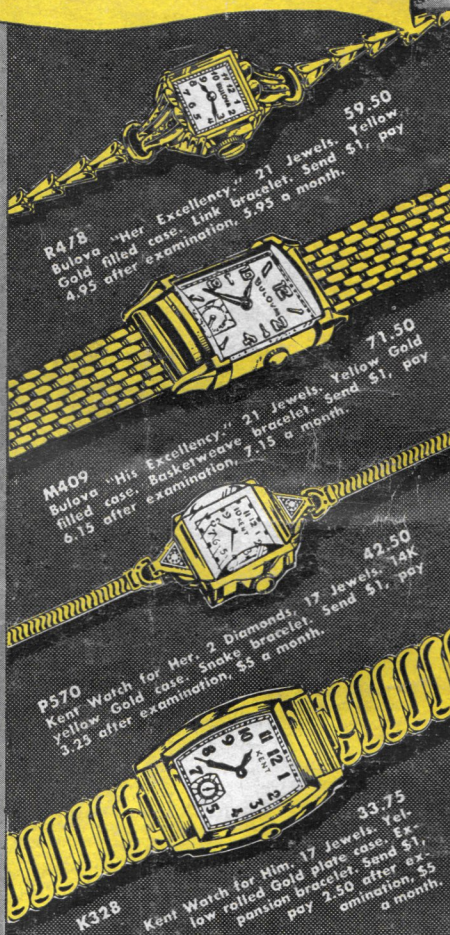


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