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VOL. FORTY-ONE

JANUARY, 1949

NUMBER TWO

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—but, friends, take a lesson from Willoughby Tudor: Don't marry her!
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—for Helen from those hungry guns was all right with her—as long as Ralph got his chance to live!

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—got along fine until he kicked her dog—and uncovered a killer!
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# DETECTIVE TALES

## ON THE SPOT

*For Next Month*



As soon as Jeff White saw that little dump called Camel, he knew it was going to be his town. But when his dimwit brother Jig rolls up later, he swears angrily, for Jig has brought along his beautiful wife, Lana, and Lana hates Jeff's guts.



The first step in showing Camel who is boss is to take on the Camel Mine's blast man, Ernie Collins. When Collins won't kow-tow, Jeff feints the man into going for his gun, while, behind Collins, Jig blasts the man down.



Then there is Chicago May, score-wise saloon owner, who thinks he is too tough to be bullied into paying off. He is disillusioned, too, with a slug in his belly. Jeff figures, with that example, the rest of Camel will fall into line.

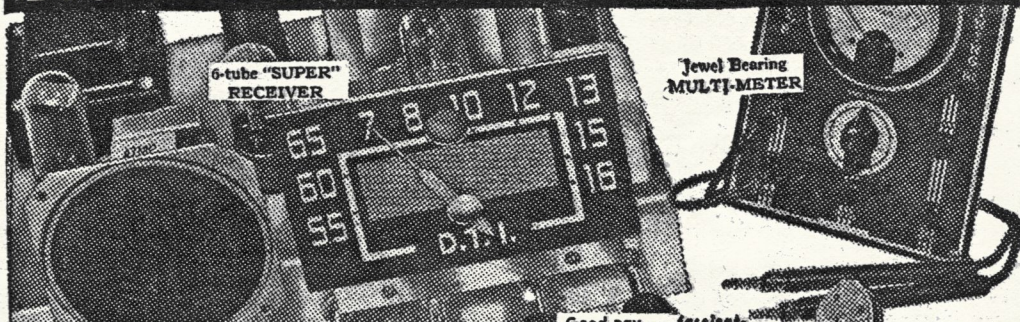


Now there's only one fly left in Jeff's ointment: The gun with which he shot Chicago May has been turned over to the opposition forces by Lana. So now Jeff must convince Camel that it wasn't his gun—but his brother Jig's!

For the rest of this story, read Dan Gordon and Richard Wormser's dynamic novel, "Mr. Murder Goes To Town!" . . . featured in February DETECTIVE TALES.



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*"I don't know where you're getting it or how—that's not my business," Dr. Whitehead told him. "But, Mr. Tudor, someone is slowly and systematically poisoning you." . . . And to Willoughby Tudor that meant just one thing: Somehow, the source of that poison had to be dried up—even if he had to take a red-hot poker to the head of his beautiful wife Dixie to do it!*



She sprang clumsily down the step and fled along the flagstone walk. She had seen the blood on his hand.

## By G. T. FLEMING-ROBERTS

### CHAPTER ONE

Dixie

WILLOUGHBY TUDOR sat on the edge of the bed with his head in his hands. This was something serious, he thought, not just a hangover. He'd had a couple of drinks last night, maybe three—not more than four, anyway—but that wasn't it.

He tried his legs. They ached, and he had an idea they'd be stiff. They weren't stiff, they were rubbery, and he sat down again. He dug damp palms into his lean middle where there was sharp, burning pain.

Ulcers, he decided. That was probably it. Something seriously wrong—not just



the shrimp last night—because he had it all the time.

In her room, separated from his by the bath, Dixie was singing some inane ballad she had heard on the radio. Tudor scowled at the bathroom door and wondered, Whoever told you you could sing? I'd like to have him by the throat. . . . He clenched his hands on the edge of the mattress as though he had whoever it was by the throat.

He stood up and this time concentrated on his knee joints to keep them from hinging. He toe-fumbled into his slippers, put on his robe. Knotting the cord of his robe his fingers were all thumbs, and the term *multiple sclerosis* fell into his brain with an alarming clatter. Dr. Crankshaw, in his column in the *Times*, had described this rare, obscure disease, and one of its manifestations was an inability to control the fingers.

Willoughby Tudor shuddered.

Dixie was still singing in that high, sweet voice of hers, only to him it wasn't sweet, it was thin and shrill, and he hated it.

Oh, for God's sake shut up. You never have any consideration for the way I feel. You never have had in the six years of our marriage. There's no sensitivity about you at all. No perception.

HE STUMBLED into the connecting bath and slammed the door hard. In the adjoining room, Dixie stopped singing. Tudor went to the lavatory and hung over it while he examined his face in the mirror. A pale face with dark circles under anxious grey eyes, thin except for full, sullen lips. An esthetic face, he sometimes thought of it, but this morning, in a mood for brutal frankness, it was only thin and sickly, sallow complexioned.

He stood for a moment, heavy browed, scowling, then nodded conclusively. Gastric ulcers. It was an assuring diagnosis only because it was a damned sight better than multiple sclerosis, and he sold himself on the idea. . . . I'm the ulcer type as described by Dr. Crankshaw. Thin and high-strung, and living with Dixie doesn't help at all. I've got to talk with Uncle Thad about Dixie. He's got to realize that this is one instance when

divorce is absolutely essential to the well-being of one of the individuals concerned.

Uncle Thad was a childless widower worth three-quarters of a million dollars, and he had the absurd notion that marriages were made in heaven and were not to be dissolved in unhallowed chambers of some court. Moreover, in his dotage, the old goat seemed to be quite gone on Dixie.

Tudor ran cold water into the bowl and sloshed his face. That didn't help. It didn't stop the pain in his stomach, or mask the tarnished metal taste on his tongue. It did not sooth the ache in his legs. He wondered about his legs. He couldn't remember that Dr. Crankshaw had mentioned leg pains as symptomatic of gastric ulcer. He'd have to have another look at that particular column—he clipped Dr. Crankshaw daily—and check on the symptoms.

His eyes came up haggardly out of the towel to find Dixie standing in the door that opened from her bedroom. She was wearing a negligee of black chiffon and lace. A disgustingly healthy woman of twenty-eight, her smile was radiant.

"Sorry, Will, dear," she said. "I didn't know you were in here."

He grunted and went on drying his face gently. That's a lie, he thought. You knew damned well I was in here. You're not deaf, are you?

He gave her another glance, an angry one. She was small and softly rounded, with fine, dark hair flowing about a doll's face. Beautiful, he thought with distaste. Glamorous. . . .

Then he ducked into the towel again, rubbed angrily as though to scrub that last adjective from his mind. . . . Glamorous. That's one of her Hollywood words. All of her shoddy inadequate words sneak into my vocabulary. That's just the trouble. I can't lift her up to my level. She's dead weight. I'll gradually sink down to hers. . . .

Though if I ever catch myself saying something is 'perfectly divine' I'll cut out my tongue, so help me!

Dixie. I ought to have known what she'd be like before I married her, with a name like that. A night-club chanteuse. A clothes horse. I ought to have my head examined.



"Stupid arrangement," he said aloud of their marriage.

"What is, dear?" She hadn't left the room. She was standing close enough to him now so that he was aware of her closeness without looking up from the towel. The faint, sweet scent of her was mildly disturbing.

"This bathroom," he said. He turned to rack the towel on the bar most distant from her.

"Why, I think it's perfectly divine."

He whipped around, furious, but she didn't notice. . . . You never notice anything, do you? You're blind and deaf and dumb. But essentially dumb.

She was standing beside the wash stand, looking down at it with an expression approaching childlike wonder on her face. Her small, pink palm caressed the coral-tinted porcelain as though she had a genuine affection for plumbing.

He thought acidly, Why didn't you marry a plumber? Why didn't you marry anyone but me?

She turned toward the door of her room, and he said suddenly, "Dixie—"

I'll tell her now. Tell her I can't stand any more of it. Break off cleanly. Finish it right here and now.

But there was Uncle Thad, damn his Puritanical hide.

She was waiting, looking back over her right shoulder. Her "Yes, dear?" was edged with eagerness.

"Uh—haven't you anything to put on in the morning except that thing?" He flung out an impatient gesture. "It's positively indecent."

"Why, yes." Her brown eyes looked at him wonderingly. Then, as she went through the door, "All right." Meekly, but not as though she were hurt.

She's soft and boneless, he thought as he followed her to close and latch the door. But she's resilient too. Brush her off and she's right back on your lap, purring like a damned cat. You probably couldn't hurt her if you hit her with . . .

There was a sudden twinge of pain across Willoughby Tudor's stomach, an upsurge of nausea. He sank down on the broad edge of the bathtub, doubled over, kneading his middle.

When the pain had passed, he put out a shaking hand to the tap and ran warm

water into the tub. Maybe that would help.

HE THOUGHT he felt a little better as he drove away from the house. His mood was more inclined toward optimism. His stomach distress, he decided, might very well have been caused by the shrimp he had eaten the night before. Yesterday had been the cook's day off, and Dixie had given him shrimp for dinner. Dixie invariably served shrimp. Tudor suspected that she had once read an article on twelve ways to prepare shrimp, or there was some association there between a small brain and small things that extended even to food stuffs.

She knows damned well it doesn't agree with me, he thought angrily. If there was any awareness about her, if she had a memory only slightly better than a mirror, she'd realize I always have distress after eating shrimp.

By the time he had reached downtown he had so far convinced himself that his trouble was only the shrimp and Dixie's cookery that he returned the parking garage attendant's good-morning and paid the blind man at the newsstand a dime for the *Times*. He was pleasant to Dodson, the attorney, on the way up in the Consolidated Building elevator, and as he walked down the sixth-floor corridor his footsteps were brisk and light.

The door of his office—it was conservatively lettered WILLOUGHBY TUDOR, CARPETINGS—was locked, indicating that he was early, because Miss Hazelton, his secretary, was never late. Miss Hazelton was precise, efficient and intelligent. He imagined her a woman of excellent breeding, from some fine old family that had met with financial reverses.

Damned fine looking, too, he thought as he entered the office.

His first act after removing hat and coat was to turn to Dr. Crankshaw's column in the *Times* which was concerned this morning with some newly discovered antidote for metallic poisons and was titled "Arsenic Is Old Lace." He did not read it thoroughly, because he could not see where the subject concerned him in the least. He could not conceive of it concerning any of Dr. Crankshaw's readers, for that matter, but he took library scissors from their leather case, cut out



the column and left it on top of his desk to be added to his collection later.

He glanced at his watch. Five minutes to nine. He went over to Miss Hazelton's desk to see if she had had a new inventory list sent up from the warehouse—and of course she had—and became interested in a slim, well-worn volume he noticed on top of Miss Hazelton's shorthand pad. He picked the book up, frowned at the title, *The Best of Robert Browning*. His brow cleared, remembering. Depth was the word associated with Robert Browning in college literary classes. Depth.

"Depth," he said, liking the sound of it, and idly riffled the pages. You would expect a woman like Margaret Hazelton to be reading Browning in her spare time.

If Dixie would only make some attempt—but then Dixie wouldn't. Dixie never read anything except movie magazines, discounting the article on twelve ways to prepare shrimp. Dixie had found a snug berth for herself into which she had curled, complacent as a kitten, to allow her brain—if any—to stagnate.

Tudor's eye alighted on one of Browning's titles which seemed vaguely familiar to him—"My Last Duchess." He became immediately engrossed, sat down slowly on the corner of Miss Hazelton's desk and read the poem from the beginning. He had finished the last line when Miss Hazelton opened the door on the dot of nine.

He looked up and traded his frown for a smile. "Good-morning, Miss Hazelton," he said, and she said, "Good-morning, Mr. Tudor." Her smile was pleasant, but it was not one of those all-out, tooth-paste-ad smiles. Not in the least like Dixie's.

Yet she reminds me of someone, Tudor thought as he often did, and his eyes followed Miss Hazelton to the closet where she removed her sensible hat and tailored cloth coat. She returned, adjusting the buttoned cuffs of her immaculate white blouse.

None of your shoddy made-in-Hollywood glamor for Miss Hazelton. She was a tall, slim woman, younger in years than Dixie, flat-hipped, fine-boned, with clean, shining blonde hair that framed classic features. Her intelligent blue eyes, as she approached, touched the open pages of the

book in his hand, then moved to Tudor.

Tudor rapped the page with the back of his hand. "You know, I can understand Browning's Duke of Ferrara."

"Yes?" Her head tilted interestedly. "I'm afraid I find Browning a little obscure."

"No, no," he denied with masculine superiority. "Not obscure here, certainly. The Duke of Ferrara simply did away with the duchess, his wife. See here—" He found a line and read aloud, "I gave commands; then all smiles stopped together." He had her killed, if you remember, not because she had any one particular fault he could put his finger on, but because she was spineless, always smiling, completely agreeable." He nodded. "I can understand such a motive."

Miss Hazelton raised a hand in a restrained gesture of feigned alarm. "I must remember not to be too agreeable," she said, laughing.

His thin face was thoughtful. "Can't you just see the duchess?" He could. She looked remarkably like Dixie. "A shallow, altogether complacent woman. Beautiful . . ."

He broke off, his thoughts dark and frightening. He put the book down, moved away toward his desk. "If you'll bring that inventory, Miss Hazelton, and your book. Some new quotations on broadloom for our regular customers."

Miss Hazelton's brisk, sure fingers picked up notebook, pencil and the warehouse sheet. She came to Tudor's desk, moved the clipping from this morning's Dr. Crankshaw column, put the warehouse quotations down in its place. She seated herself beside him, crossed her knees, composed herself with a minimum of fuss, and remained poised and alert.

**W**ILLOUGHBY TUDOR was not alert. His brain was muzzy. He picked up the warehouse sheet and, as it betrayed trembling fingers, put it down again.

"Uh—a blanket letter, Miss Hazelton. You will of course supply the personal salutation in every case."

Miss Hazelton understood. She always understood. Unlike Dixie. Hmm. Broadloom. Bound to take a jump if the new wool tariff is passed. I ought to have



taken a bromo. I could have, while waiting for Miss Hazelton. Ought to have taken a bromo to steady myself a bit instead of reading that damn fool poem.

"Uh—in view of the probable increase in the price of wool— This is the letter, Miss Hazelton."

"Yes."

He glanced over to see if she had that. She had it, of course, and she was waiting for more. He moistened his lips. "Let's see," he mused.

There was that gnawing ache in the pit of his stomach again.

"Let's see—uh. Miss Hazelton, do you happen to know the number of the new wool tariff bill that is now before Congress? That might be useful here. Throw a bit of scare, eh?"

Miss Hazelton shook her head. "No, I'm sorry. I don't know, Mr. Tudor."

You don't know, he thought. Miss Hazelton, I'm surprised at you; you usually have everything right on tap. Damn fine-looking woman, though, with ten times the character that Dixie—

The pain, no longer gnawing, cut like a hot knife across his belly. He could feel the pinpoint of sweat start out all over his body. He banged forward in his chair and reached for his handkerchief. He patted his face, hiding an expression of anguish from Miss Hazelton.

"Uh—where were we, Miss Hazelton?"

"'In view of the probable increase—'"

"Oh, yes." I'd better take a bromo. I can't think clearly, feeling the way I do. Damn Dixie and her twelve ways to prepare shrimp! "Excuse me a moment, Miss Hazelton."

He got up. The pain had knotted inside of him so that it was difficult to straighten, but he straightened in front of Miss Hazelton and walked to the door of the lavatory on the south side of the office. He entered, took down the bromo bottle from the shelf, poured white granules liberally into the bottom of a paper cup, added water from the tap and let the drink fizz a moment before he tossed it off.

I'll be all right. This will steady me, clear my head, straighten up my stomach. Too much acid, probably. Shrimp are acid. All sea food . . .

He stepped back into the room, and

Miss Hazelton straightened in her chair. She had been leaning over his desk, possibly checking over the warehouse sheet. She was looking directly at him when the pain came again, more severe than before. He must have winced, because Miss Hazelton's eyes were suddenly bright with alarm.

"Mr. Tudor . . ."

He didn't answer. He couldn't.

"Mr. Tudor, are you ill?"

He pushed his lips into a watery smile. "I'm not feeling well, certainly. Not well at all. My wife insists— That is, I ate some shrimp last night—"

Miss Hazelton interrupted him. "But yesterday morning you weren't feeling yourself. Nor the morning before."

She'd noticed then. She was always completely aware, so unlike Dixie.

"I'm all right," he said nobly, returning to the desk. But it isn't the shrimp, he thought. It's something else. Something serious.

Miss Hazelton put a cool, not altogether impersonal hand on his arm. There was a slight, concerned frown on her Madonna-like brow.

"Won't you see a doctor, Mr. Tudor?" she pleaded.

"I should, I suppose. I'll have to one of these days."

"Now," she said, gravely urgent. "You ought to go to some good hospital or clinic for a period of observation."

He reached across and patted her hand lightly where it lay upon his arm. "I couldn't possibly. Mrs. Tudor would—" He broke off, thinking that if he went to a hospital for observation Dixie would insist on going along. She'd want to play nurse. She'd mother him, embarrass him to death in front of the whole staff.

Miss Hazelton said, "You don't want to worry Mrs. Tudor. But then you *could* tell her you were going out of town for a day or so on business. After all, it's not as though you were having an operation."

HE SHUDDERED inwardly. I'd better do that, he thought. If it's an ulcer, I'd better know about it. Neglect a thing like that and it's apt to go into cancer.

"Suppose I could get into the Whitehead Clinic?" he asked. Dodson, Judge



Lindlow, Mark Havens, men of their caliber had been through the Whitehead. It would be absolutely top-drawer.

Miss Hazelton reached for the phone. She had the number of the Whitehead Clinic at her fingertips. She only waited for his nod of confirmation.

He nodded. "Make all necessary arrangements. I've got to find out. Can't possibly go on like this." Then he went into the lavatory and for a while he couldn't tell whether he was going to hang onto that bromo or not.

He came out, feeling greenish, and Miss Hazelton met him with a look of assurance on her face. "The clinic will expect you at eleven, Mr. Tudor. That will give you time to slip home and get your bag. They'll start you through the—the ritual—" she smiled at the word—"this afternoon, and you can expect to be released either tomorrow evening or Thursday morning. Then—"

"Then I'll know," he broke in distantly.

"You'll know. In all probability it's some little thing easily remedied by proper diet and rest."

He sighed deeply for himself. "I hope so, Miss Hazelton." He stepped to the desk, picked up the phone and dialed the number of his residence. The maid answered. He asked for Mrs. Tudor and waited.

If I've got to have an operation, he thought, I don't want Dixie around. I don't want her having hysterics all over the place. I don't want her mothering me. She's never been any help to me, and she'd be even less at a time like this. I've got to have a talk with Uncle Thad about Dixie just as soon as I get straightened out physically. I've got to—

Dixie's bright, lilting hello came out of the receiver. He set his teeth for an instant, then: "Can you throw a few things into a bag for me, dear? I've got to rush off to Chicago for a day or two on business."

"Oh, honey," she said. It could have meant anything or nothing at all. It was exactly the inane sort of remark he had expected from her. "Is there anything else I can do? While you're gone, I mean. Anything to help out at the office?"

"Good Lord, no," he said emphatically.

He thought, I wish to heaven you wouldn't try to pretend interest in my business when you can't grasp the complexities of the newsboy's bill. "Miss Hazelton will be here to take care of anything that comes up. You pack my bag, and I'll be out to pick it up in twenty minutes." He hung up on the liquid suction of her kiss.

He turned to Miss Hazelton and smiled thinly. "Well, I'm on my way." He went to the closet for hat and overcoat, put them on.

Miss Hazelton walked to the door with him, her fingers touching his arm. He paused, looked into her clear blue eyes. He thought, If Dixie had half the intelligence in her head that you've got in your little finger . . .

Her hand tightened on his arm. "Best of luck," she said simply.

He cleared his throat. He swallowed. "Thank you, Miss Hazelton. Thank you very much."

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Visitor

LATE the following afternoon, in the barren, buff-walled room that had been assigned to him at the Whitehead Clinic, Willoughby Tudor dressed himself. Except for nervous exhaustion he was feeling fit, no stomach pains, no cramping ache in the legs. . . . But, damn it, they hadn't told him anything. . . . For thirty-odd hours he had been a voiceless ninny, doing exactly what he had been told while they pushed him around from one doctor to the next with assembly-line efficiency.

Look here, Whitehead, it's my money and, oddly enough, my body. Now what the hell is the matter with me? That's the way I'm going to talk to him, he resolved as he lighted a cigarette. Look here, Whitehead, I don't want sympathy, God knows, but you're dealing with a human being, not a microbe.

The door opened. Tudor whipped around. He moistened dry lips with the tip of his tongue. Look here, Whitehead, he rehearsed once more, but then he didn't say anything. His arms dropped limply to his sides. His strength drained down his legs, out through the soles of his feet, prickling like dry sand.



Dr. Whitehead closed the door and turned. He was a short, heavy-set man with a ruddy face and an appropriate shock of white hair. He took vigorous bouncing strides over to where Tudor stood trembling, fumbled down a black ribbon for a pair of steel-rimmed glasses which he perched on the bridge of a small red nose. He looked Tudor up and down twice.

"Look here, Whitehead—" Tudor began. His voice was faint. He sounded ridiculous.

Dr. Whitehead said, "Sit down." He was quietly brusque.

Tudor, his heart thumping, stumbled backward to the only chair and sat down. Dr. Whitehead moved over to the bed, sat down on its edge, the toes of his wrinkled, old-man shoes just touching the floor. He eyed Tudor over the tops of his glasses and grunted.

"Gastric ulcer—" he began, and Tudor interrupted with, "I knew it."

"Gastric ulcer, my foot!" said the doctor. "Young man, whatever gave you the idea that you had gastric ulcer?"

Tudor stared at the grim ruddy face. "Wh-why, I have all the symptoms as described in Dr. Crankshaw's column." He added meekly, "Haven't I?"

"Huh! You're in carpeting, aren't you—floor coverings for hotels, theaters, and the like?"

Tudor asked, "What's that got to do with it?"

"Would you care to let me handle your next consignment of broadloom, Mr. Tudor?" Dr. Whitehead thundered. "No. Of course you wouldn't. Absurd, isn't it? Almost as absurd as your attempting self-diagnosis from a newspaper article. You no more have gastric ulcer than I have, and I assure you, in spite of my sixty-seven years, I have an excellent stomach. Excellent, sir."

Tudor didn't relax. He fingered the plain arms of the chair.

"Organically—" Dr. Whitehead inflated his broad chest through flaring nostrils—"there's not a damned thing wrong with you."

"Do you mean to imply—" Tudor began.

The doctor broke in with, "Organically, I said." This with some sharp peering

over the tops of his glasses. "You're nervous, and you think you can relax by drinking excessively. You *think* you can."

You don't know what it's like to live with Dixie, Tudor thought defensively. That's the only way I can get away from her—by taking a few drinks.

"In the morning you usually have a headache, so you take a pick-me-up, eh?"

"Yes," Tudor admitted.

"Well, stop it," Dr. Whitehead ordered curtly. "Oh, a drink now and then isn't going to hurt you, but stop those confounded pick-me-ups. Some people can get by with it, but you can't."

"But—" the doctor exploded, and then his voice became quiet and grave, "that's not your trouble. Not the main source, at least. We gave you an injection, you may recall—BAL, short for British Anti-Lewisite—as an antidote."

"Antidote?" Tudor breathed.

For an exasperating moment Dr. Whitehead stared at Tudor in silence. "Well, yes, an antidote. I don't know where you're getting it or how—that's not our business—but you were being poisoned, slowly and systematically."

The doctor stood up briskly, shook his head—a movement which dislodged his glasses and left him less formidable.

"The old, old favorite," he said. "Arsenic."

A WINTRY SUN sank into sleazy grey clouds, cast long, ragged shadows from the old elms along the street and plated the leaded-glass windows of the Tudor house with red gold. Tudor switched off the ignition and hitched himself across the front seat of the car to the right-hand door, then stopped.

I can't go in, he thought. I can't go in there and face her. I never want to see her again. Poison. My God, after everything I've done for her.

He shook his head, stared bewilderedly at the house. Spineless, agreeable Dixie. He couldn't get over it. It couldn't be Dixie, yet it had to be. She was the only one with a motive. Not much of a motive, though. He wasn't wealthy. With high taxes and high prices, he was just making ends meet.

Now, if Uncle Thad were dead, she'd



have good and sufficient motive. . . . Life insurance, he decided. That's it. Twenty thousand, payable in a lump sum.

He reached for the latch, pushed it over angrily. He got out and took his bag off the floor of the car. Easy, he cautioned himself. I can't let her know anything is wrong. I've got to catch her with the stuff. I've got to have evidence. Walk up to the door now, go in, pretend I'm glad to see her. . . . Hel-lo, darling. . . . No, not that way. Don't spread it on. Just, Good-evening, Dixie, my dear. . . . And she'll turn up her soft little face for a kiss.

His lips curled distastefully as he went up the flagstone walk. . . . I'd like to smash her face in, yet I've got to kiss her, otherwise she may get the idea that I know what she's been trying to do to me. I mustn't let on. I've got to go on posing for a little while. Just a little while, then I'll be finished with her. She'll be out of the way, and . . .

The door was locked.

He stood, frowning and indecisive, on the stoop, then finally knocked. When there was no answer, he put down the bag, took out keys, and unlocked the door. Inside the house was murky red from the dying daylight which poured through the western windows, and the closing of the door fell muffled into silence.

"Dixie," he called. His voice trembled.

There was no answer. He thought, She has stepped out somewhere, and Sarah has locked the doors. Sarah is always scared to death some burglar will slip in.

He took his bag into the study where he had always conducted his business until Dixie's pretended and irritating interest in his affairs had compelled him to take an office downtown. He removed his hat and coat, walked back through living and dining rooms, pushed open the kitchen door.

The kitchen was dark and empty. He let the door swing slowly to. . . . Damned queer. But of course if Dixie has gone somewhere she'd let Sarah off for the evening. She always treats Sarah as an equal—had Sarah calling her by her first name until I put a stop to it. She's always a damn sight more considerate of

Sarah than she is of me, as a matter of fact.

He stood in the semi-darkness for a moment, then opened the kitchen door a second time, went out, turned on the light. . . . The poison. She's got to keep it somewhere convenient to add to the 'Shrimp Surprise'. Only she wouldn't put it in the shrimp because she eats shrimp. But she's got to have a supply of it somewhere.

He began a thorough search of the kitchen cabinets, among the spices and staples. Under the sink, where the soap chips were kept, he came upon a small pasteboard box labeled ATLAS ANT CAPS and noted that the active ingredient was arsenic. He opened the box, looked at the contents—small metal bottle caps lined with bright green stuff that looked like blotting paper. He remembered buying them last summer at Sarah's request.

He shook his head. It won't work, he thought. She couldn't put a metal bottle cap in any of the food. She couldn't even take out that poisonous green lining and chop it up in anything without risking immediate detection. Something more subtle than that.

Subtle? He uttered a short dry laugh. Dixie is about as subtle as a blunt instrument.

He put the ant caps back where he had found them. Wherever the poison was, it wasn't in the kitchen. He realized now that it wouldn't be. Dixie prepared meals only once a week. She wouldn't dare keep the arsenic in the kitchen because of the risk that it might be discovered by Sarah.

No, it's upstairs somewhere, among her personal things.

**H**E WENT back through the dining and living rooms, into the hall where he turned on the light and climbed the stairs. He first entered the bathroom that connected his room with Dixie's and there searched the medicine cabinet. There was nothing that carried a poison label except the iodine bottle.

But I've got to have all these analyzed, he decided of the various headache remedies and digestive aids. She might have adulterated any one of them.

He stepped into Dixie's room, crossed to the dressing table where he sat on the



bench and began to go through drawers. His hands were shaking. Dixie's face powder was distinctly face powder, and the cream jars contained cream. He looked through the shoddy costume jewelry which he had asked her not to wear—which she had meekly refrained from wearing but still treasured, childlike, in an old candy box—until he found a small, gold-plated pillbox studded with colored glass stones.

The pillbox was empty. There was no indication that it had ever contained anything. . . . She bought it because it was 'cute,' he thought. Probably never took a pill in her life.

He looked up suddenly, his mind on a different track. Suppose she had somehow discovered I was going to the clinic. I don't know how the hell she could have, but suppose she did. She'd have the sense to know they'd find the poison. She'd be afraid to brazen it out, wouldn't she?

She's run away. Discharged Sarah and left town.

He went to the closet, striding, yanked open the door. There was the long row of dresses and gowns, all of her frivolous things, on satin-padded hangers. She loved clothes. If she took nothing else away with her, she would have taken her clothes.

He slammed the closet door against the sponginess of trapped air. He left the room, went plunging down the carpeted stair and into the study. The heavy silence closed in on his footsteps.

He stood beside the walnut desk, listening to the silence, biting his thick lower lip. . . . I don't get it. She would have taken her clothes. . . .

Miss Hazelton. Tudor glanced at his watch. It was then seven-thirty, and Miss Hazelton would be at home in that furnished room or whatever it was she lived in. He found the number written on the cover of the phone book and dialed. After four rings a shaky, old woman's voice answered.

"Miss Hazelton," he said, "please."

The voice said, "Miss Hazelton is out of—No, wait a moment. This is Mr. Tudor, isn't it?"

"Yes," he said impatiently. And I don't know who the hell you are and care

less—just give me Miss Hazelton.

"I think Miss Hazelton has just come in, Mr. Tudor, if you'll hold the wire."

He held the wire. He thought, Miss Hazelton is the only one who knew I was going to the clinic, and, damn it, she wouldn't have let it out. Wild horses couldn't have dragged it out of her. She's loyalty itself. Absolutely dependable.

Miss Hazelton said hello. He said, "Mr. Tudor, Miss Hazelton. How are you this evening?"

"How are you, Mr. Tudor?"

Her concern pleased him. "Oh, perfectly all right, Miss Hazelton. I just got back from—well, you know where, and they've given me a clean bill, virtually. Simply a matter of being careful about what I eat."

Miss Hazelton said, "I'm delighted."

"Yes. Well, uh—" It's so damned ridiculous, he thought angrily, having to call one's secretary to find out where one's wife is.

"Yes?"

Miss Hazelton won't know, of course. How could she?

"Hello, Mr. Tudor."

"Hello." He forced a short laugh. "My wife—that is, Mrs. Tudor didn't drop in at the office while I was away, by any chance?"

"No, Mr. Tudor."

"No." He laughed again. "Then you haven't seen her at all. Naturally not. I thought perhaps—But then it doesn't matter at all, Miss Hazelton."

"Mr. Tudor—"

"Yes?"

"I know you must be exhausted, but would it be possible for me to see you this evening for a few minutes?"

"On the contrary, Miss Hazelton, I feel fine. And I'll be delighted to see you."

"Very well then. In half an hour, if that is convenient."

"Perfectly convenient."

They said good-bye, and Tudor hung up. . . . A perfect brick, that Miss Hazelton. Fine-looking woman, too. . . . He moved around the desk to the cellarette on top of which stood twin decanters, the rye almost full, the Scotch almost empty. He put his hand on the Scotch decanter, lifted it, and then he put it back.



He felt suddenly pale. His hands were shaking.

I can't even take a drink in my own house, he thought. I can't eat and I can't drink. I don't know how she's been getting the stuff into me. But it could be liquor. She never drinks. I've never seen her take a drink since that night at Dean Jason's party over six years ago when the little fool made a spectacle of herself. In fact, I told her I never wanted to see her touch another drop. . . .

**H**E PICKED up both decanters, carried them out into the kitchen where he removed the stoppers and dumped the contents down the sink. He rinsed the decanters thoroughly, was drying one of them with a towel when it occurred to him that he had just done a very foolish thing.

Now I haven't got any evidence, damn it. If she's been doctoring my liquor with arsenic, then I've just thrown away every shred of proof. I can accuse her until I'm blue in the face, but if I haven't any proof, I'm stuck. I'll still be tied to her. If I were to go to Uncle Thad right now and say, "Look here, Dixie has been trying to poison me, and I want to get a divorce while I'm still alive," he'd laugh at me. I can't go to the police without proof. I've got to live under the same roof with a murderess. A potential murderess who may try something more direct than poison next time.

Cold sweat came out all over his body. . . . She's probably insane. I don't know anything about her, really. Nothing about her family. All I know is that she's out to kill me.

He went back through the silence and emptiness into the study with the two clean decanters. He put them down on top of the cellarette, stooped, took an unopened bottle of Scotch from the interior. He examined the seal carefully before he broke it, then poured nearly all of it into the proper decanter. The rest of the Scotch in the bottle went into a double shot glass, and he gulped it down.

I needed that, he thought. I never needed anything so much in my life.

As he put the glass down, he noticed that there were logs and kindling on the brass andirons in the fireplace.

I need that, too. Anything to dispell the gloom around here.

He went over to the hearth, knelt, struck a match and ignited the paper. He watched it flare up, and a moment later thick smoke tunneled and seeped through splintered pine boards to curl across the smooth grey face of beechwood logs. The kindling caught and crackled. He straightened, propped an elbow on the mantel, stood there warming lean legs in front of the fire.

The front door-knocker clacked.

Miss Hazelton, and I'll be damned glad to see her, he thought as he went to the door.

"Well, well!" he said heartily. "Good-evening, Miss Hazelton. Come right in."

"Good-evening, Mr. Tudor." She stepped over the sill. She had on the same tailored cloth coat she always wore, the same sensible hat. Her scarf was white, and she carried a serviceable-looking brown leather purse.

"Let me have your things, Miss Hazelton."

"No, really—" her pleasant, restrained smile—"this won't take a minute. It's about the floor of the Gaynor Hotel cocktail lounge."

He touched Miss Hazelton's arm. "Come into the study. I have a roaring fire. That is—" his laugh was almost gay — "I hope it's roaring. Just lighted it. Thought something of the sort was indicated."

He led her into the study. Miss Hazelton said, "Oh, how cheerful," and went to the hearth. "It is chilly tonight, isn't it?" She stripped off her gloves and stood fronting the fire, flexing her long, fine-boned fingers.

"How about a drink, Miss Hazelton?" he suggested.

"I'd like that," she said. "The Gaynor is enlarging the cocktail lounge—"

"Scotch?"

"That, too, I'd like. With soda, please." She turned, smiling. Her clear fair skin caught the glow of the fire, faintly orange on the high cheekbones, deepening to rosy shadows in the hollows of her cheeks.

Tudor rubbed his hands. "Good. Good!" He started toward the liquor cabinet.

"How is Mrs. Tudor this evening?"



One of his steps dragged a little on that, but he completed it and stooped to the door of the cabinet. "I'm sure I don't know. I haven't seen Mrs. Tudor, and I haven't the slightest idea where she is."

"Possibly she didn't expect you back from—" Miss Hazelton laughed softly—"from Chicago so soon."

"Possibly," he clipped the subject off. There was a split of soda in the cabinet, and he took it out together with glasses and bottle opener. "Now, ice. You just sit down, Miss Hazelton. I'll get some ice from the kitchen."

When he returned with a bowl of ice cubes, he found that Miss Hazelton had lighted a cigarette which smoldered in the tray on the desk, and she was trying to open the split of soda.

"Having trouble?" he asked and thought, I've never seen a woman yet who could open a bottle of any kind.

"Not in the least," she said, and there was the hiss of escaping carbonic gas to prove it. The soda, excessively warmed by the temperature of the room, boiled up over the mouth of the bottle. As Tudor took the bottle out of her hands, Miss Hazelton said gravely, "An efficient secretary should always know how to open bottles."

He laughed. "Exactly." He picked up a glass and the decanter. "Say when, Miss Hazelton."

She said when on about the two-finger mark. He poured four fingers into his own, added the ice.

"Fill mine, please," she said. "The weaker sex, you know."

He filled her glass with soda, put what was left of the split into his own. He raised his glass, smiling at her. "A toast, Miss Hazelton, to the most efficient bottle-opening secretary I have ever had."

Her color deepened. "Thanks." And she raised her glass.

The instant before the drink touched her lips, Tudor's glass slipped from his fingers, struck the carpet where it overturned. His hand shot out to Miss Hazelton's arm.

"Don't touch that drink." His voice was thin, taut. He heard her sharply indrawn breath but didn't look at her. He was staring down at the liquor cabinet, at the distorted crown cap that had come

off the soda bottle. It lay there beside the opener, lining side up, and the liner was neither cork nor foil, but something deep blue-green.

An Atlas ant cap.

"Mr. Tudor, what's wrong?" Her voice was hushed and anxious.

"Your drink," he said. "And mine, too. They're poisoned. Arsenic."

He saw from the ends of his eyes a flash of reflected light—her glass falling from nerveless fingers. He heard the thump on the padded carpet, the faint clink of ice against glass. Then the shocked silence into which his short laugh fell harsh and grating.

No, I guess I don't know Dixie very well, he thought. I've underestimated her. That's almost—almost clever.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Blood on His Hands

HE THOUGHT, Now I've got proof. It doesn't matter that the drinks were spilled. It doesn't matter that that was the last split of soda in the house. She replaced the bottle caps with arsenic ant traps, and I can prove it now.

"Care for straight Scotch, Miss Hazelton?"

"No. No, thank you." She was sitting on a low stool in front of the fire, knees close together, long fingers laced, cradling her knees.

He said, "It's all right. I just opened a fresh bottle before you came. I've been drinking it. I'm quite an authority on arsenic now. That's been my trouble, they learned at the clinic. The stomach pains, the nausea, the leg cramps—all symptoms." He spilled Scotch into a shot glass. "Fortunately, I haven't been using much soda . . . Sure you won't have one, Miss Hazelton?"

She quarter-turned on the stool, toe tips in place, knees pivoting. "Well," she assented, "a small one." Her eyes had a luminous, dazed look. "I—I can't believe it."

He shrugged. "It couldn't be any more obvious." He filled a shot glass for her, carried it brimming to the fire. His hands were steady now that he had found the chink in his armor. Her hands, less steady,



slopped a little of the Scotch. He watched her drink . . . . No choking. No disgusting faces. Not in the least like Dixie who couldn't drink, who couldn't hold her liquor at all. He remembered the last time he had seen Dixie with a skinful at Dean Jason's party. They'd both had too much, and Dixie was sick. She'd only reached the powder room in time.

He looked sharply at Miss Hazelton's clean profile. Again that nagging notion that he'd seen her somewhere a long time ago, or that she reminded him of somebody he'd once met.

Too bad, he thought, I didn't meet you before I ran into Dixie. Things might have been different. A hell of a lot different. You're a perfect brick. A man's woman. You'd be great on a fishing trip, or hunting quail in the hills.

He took his drink to the lounge chair, sat down, stretched lean legs toward the fire. The phone rang, and they both turned startled eyes toward it, then exchanged glances. It rang again. He tossed off the Scotch, got up, went to the desk. He lifted the handset, said hello. There was no answer, only a sound like breathing.

"Hello, hello," he said impatiently.

The someone hung up.

He missed the phone and stared at it. Then he let it slip from his fingers onto the stand and sank down in the desk chair, his eyes haggard . . . . Damned queer . . .

Miss Hazelton stood up. She put her glass on the mantel, turned, came toward him, erect, her arms straight down, sparing of motion, a strained expression on her face.

He said, "I don't know who it was," as though to himself.

Miss Hazelton sat down on the arm of his chair. His pulse quickened at the nearness of her. He heard the faint rustle of her garments that accompanied her breathing.

"Poor boy." Softly.

"Miss Hazelton. Margaret . . ." His voice struggled up out of the oppressive closeness of her. Her fingers touched his cheek. His jaw muscles swelled against her touch. Then the shadow of her head fell across his face smotheringly. Her kiss was hot and damp.

She pulled back from him, and he looked at her, wondering. There was a

faint, regretful smile on her mouth.

"That's something I've been wanting to do for quite a while," she said. "And I oughtn't to have."

"I don't know why—why not." His mind pawed blindly through the tangled skeins of thought. "No, I don't know—"

She was at the front window, her reflection mirrored darkly in the glass. She was adjusting her sensible hat. She was suddenly Miss Hazelton again. Miss Hazelton, not Dixie.

He didn't say anything. His eyes followed her as she turned, and she didn't look at him but walked steadily into the hall.

"Good-night, Mr. Tudor." The way she always said it when she left the office. Or when he left the office before she did. He didn't speak. Not until he heard the closing of the door and her footsteps receding into silence did he cry out faintly after her.

"Miss Hazelton. Margaret . . ."

Then he hunched forward across the desk, his face in his hands. . . .

**H** E GOT up finally to stir the fire. He hadn't moved for an hour except to replenish his glass, but now he stirred the fire with the brass poker and watched the bright sparks hurrying upward.

The knocker on the front door banged, and he thought, That isn't Dixie. She wouldn't knock. I don't think she ever knocked at a door in her life. . . . He straightened, swaying a little, then walked out into the hall and opened the door.

"Telegram for Mr. Willoughby Tudor. Sign here." Tudor looked down into a young face, pink-cheeked, pinched between ear muffs hanging down beneath a visored cap, mouth open gasping frostily.

He took the book in his left hand, noticed that his right was grasping the poker. He leaned the poker against the door jamb, then signed for the wire.

"Reply, sir?"

He said, "How the hell would I know." He ripped the envelope open . . . If it's from Dixie . . .

It was from the Cushman Carpet Company in Chicago listing two patterns he had ordered as no longer available. He crumpled the message and envelope to-



gether, dropped it into his coat pocket. "No reply," he said. "Here, wait—" and he dug into his trouser pocket for a quarter tip.

"Thanks." The boy was gone, puttees flashing down the steps. Tudor picked up the poker, closed the door, went back into the study. He racked the poker, tossed the wadded telegram into the fire, went to the lounge chair and sat down.

She'll be back, he thought of Dixie. She wouldn't have left without taking her clothes. She'll be back, and I want to see her face when I tell her that I know she's been trying to kill me. I want to see her face when I show her the evidence.

That could have been Dixie on the phone a while ago. She might have been checking up to see if I was home.

But I'll have to be damned careful. When she realizes what I can do to her—what I most certainly will do to her—she'll be desperate. She'll try anything. Anything she can lay her hands on.

He shuddered slightly and decided a drink was indicated. Pouring Scotch into

the glass, he thought, I've got to lay off this stuff. Beginning tomorrow. I'll taper off. But good Lord, when a man knows he's going to face a murderer . . .

He gulped the Scotch and went back to the lounge chair. He waited.

He didn't know whether the single chime of the living-room clock indicated half past ten or half past eleven. He didn't look at his watch. He simply heard the clock strike somewhere in the background, and near at hand the opening of the front door. Cold air flowed across the floor, swirled about his ankles. He came forward in the chair with an effort and stood up beside the fireplace, facing the door into the hall.

"Woosh!" Dixie said. It didn't mean anything. Just one of those animal sounds of hers that never meant anything. She came to the study door and looked in, her small body tilted forward on four-inch heels, her mink coat hanging open, no hat, a lock of dark hair straggling over her left eye. She held her blue, alligator-grained overnight case in one hand. Her face had a soft, puffy look.

# Country Doctor

Good-natured...  
mild-mannered!

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"Woosh, it's cold!"

So that's what it means, he thought acidly. Last summer, woosh, it was hot.

She came a step into the room. She shook her hair back from her face. She looked at the fire and smiled. "Cosy." She looked at him, her smile taunting. "I'll bet you had a peachy time in Chicago, ol' Willoughby-Willoughby-Willoughby." She made a bird-call out of his name.

He said, "You're drunk."

She went to his desk, stumping on high heels, her shoulders loose. With an exaggerated effort that included both hands and one knee, she boosted the overnight case onto the desk. She fumbled with the clasps.

"Drunk?" Her laugh was shrill. "I'm actually stinko. But actually, I mean. 'Sfirst time I been stinko since Dean Jason's party five-six years ago. Remember, Willoughby-Willoughby-Willoughby?"

"Stop that!" He thought, I can't stand much more of this Willoughby-Willoughby business. Good Lord, what a little sow she is. What a common little sow. But maybe it's a good thing she's drunk. Maybe she'll be easier to handle.

He asked interestedly, "Where have you been, Dixie?"

She turned completely around, nestling against the desk. Her eyes crinkled. Her full lips smiled. "Wouldn't you jus' like to know, Willoughby-Willoughby."

And I, quite accurately, don't give a damn, he thought.

"Sauce for the goose," she said. She turned back to the overnight case, began taking out toilet articles which she piled on the desk. She began to sing in her high, thin voice, "What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander . . ." She went on humming without the lyrics, then broke off. "I'm the goose, an' Willoughby is a sly ol' gander. But you'd think any sly ol' gander would wash the lip-stick off his face."

He remembered, then, Miss Hazelton's kiss. He said, "Good Lord, Dixie, you don't—"

She had turned. She had taken her black chiffon negligee from the case, was holding it admiringly in front of her. He got it then. It fell shockingly on his

brain. The motive. Her reason for wanting to poison him. . . . Funny, I never thought of it before when it happens every day. She's got another man somewhere, and the little fool hasn't the sense to know I'd like damn well to be rid of her. But there's the money, too. This house and the life insurance . . .

HE WATCHED her moving toward him, sauntering, head tilting first to one side and then the other as though critical of the wispy black gown she held in front of her.

"Indecent, he calls this," she murmured. "'Smatter of opinion."

He caught the negligee with one hand and tore it from her grasp, unintentionally yanking her close to him as he did so. He flung the negligee backwards into the fire. She lifted her soft face. Her dark eyes were shimmering, tear-filled.

"Willoughby—"

"Tramp!" he said, trembling.

She gasped. It was a hurt sound, as though he'd slapped her. He hadn't. . . . She'll never know though how close I came to smashing that soft face of hers. She'll never know . . .

"No man," she said, her voice small and shaky, "is going to call me that. Not even you, Willoughby Tudor."

She hit him, not with the flat of her hand, but with a small, hard fist that struck him squarely in the mouth. He reeled backward, one leg striking the fire-tool set that clattered and toppled. His hand dropped. His fingers closed blindly on the poker, and he brought it up and down, hard.

He quoted in a low, toneless voice, "Then all smiles stopped together." He nodded. "I can understand that."

He glanced at the poker on the floor where he had flung it, staining the taupe carpet with her blood . . . He thought, I must have hit her pretty hard. I must have hit her awfully damned hard. . . .

His lips curled. He drew air deep into his lungs. Well, he thought, she's dead. I killed her before she could kill me. A defensive move. And now I'm free. I'm rid of her. . . .

He looked down at his wife's face . . . Only I'm not rid of her. Not entirely.

He stiffened, listening to a sound re-



peating itself in clamorous urgency. The front door knocker . . . The police? Absurd. It couldn't possibly be the police. Somebody else. But I won't answer. I'll pretend—no, that won't do. They can see the light. I've got to get rid of whoever it is, that's all.

He stepped to the door of the study, his breathing shallow. He went into the hall, closed the door quietly behind him. He fumbled the switch that lighted the entry-way lantern, peered through the leaded-glass pane in the massive door . . . . Some woman. Rabbit fur squaring broad shoulders, a face large and pale with powder, a hat perched on frizzed blonde hair. He opened the door and pale blue eyes popped at him. There were teeth, sparkling white teeth.

"Well, hello, Mr. Tudor!" the woman crowed.

He frowned down at her, said stiffly, "I don't believe I know you."

She giggled, fumbling with a shiny patent-leather purse. "Not since I've put on weight, is that it? Inez, at the Club Calabrian, remember? I checked your hat every night when you'd come to hear dear little Dixie."

He remembered vaguely. But what was she doing here? He said, "Mrs. Tudor happens to be in bed. Asleep."

**THE WOMAN** held up a plump, gloved hand in a totally unnecessary restraining gesture. "Oh, don't disturb her, Mr. Tudor. It's just that she left her engagement ring—her lovely diamond—on the window sill above my sink. She took it off when she was helping me with the dishes tonight. I was afraid she wouldn't get a wink of sleep without it, so if you'll give it to her . . ."

He held out a hand. The wrong hand. The left hand with the blood upon it. He jerked it back. He put out his other hand and stared down at the woman's face. Her eyes were lowered. Her gloved fingers shook a little as she dropped the ring into his palm. He heard the startled gasp. Then she looked up, eyes popping, mouth drooping.

He pushed his lips into a smile. "Won't—won't you step in, Inez?"

She knew. Her mouth closed, then stammered something unintelligible. She

wheeled, sprang clumsily down the step, and fled along the flagstone walk. Across the street, a car waited, lights on, motor idling. He heard the door of the car slam and the quickening thrum of the engine.

He closed the door. For a moment he leaned against it, wiping ineffectually at the stain on his left hand with a wadded handkerchief . . . . She'll go to the first policeman, he thought. The first telephone. God, what a mess I've made of everything!

He straightened away from the door, jamming his handkerchief into his pocket. His hat and coat were in the study. The bag he'd taken to the clinic. He got them. He put the hat on his head, carried the coat and the bag. At the study door he paused, glanced back at his wife where she lay on the floor. He thought, What a damn fool thing to do. How childish to go to Inez's and then imply to me you were with some other man.

Or had she implied it? Thinking back, he couldn't remember distinctly that she had. It didn't matter now, anyway.

He went out the front door and down to his car. He had money, he didn't know how much, but some. The robbers at the clinic had left him some. Enough to get a railroad ticket to somewhere. Anywhere.

He started the car, shifted, let the clutch slap in. He felt the forward thrust of the cushions against his back. . . .

\* \* \*

A ticket to anywhere. He was the sixth person back from the window now, and he had his money out. Thirty dollars. Enough to go somewhere. Quite a way in a day coach. New York, possibly. Philadelphia . . . . Some big town where I can lose myself. But, damn it, I hate the idea of a coach. Absolutely no privacy. People sprawling everywhere, mouths open. Shoes in the aisle. Couples clinging to each other in a disgusting display of affection in public. I ought to have stuck to the car, that's the thing.

Somebody touched his arm. Tudor's head jerked to the left. It was a youngish man, tall, but thick through chest and shoulders, a rugged wind-bitten face.

"Your name Willoughby Tudor?" the man asked.



Tudor swallowed. He shook his head. "Lennox," he said. "Arthur Lennox. St. Louis." He wondered, Why St. Louis, when I don't know the name of a single damned street in the town? I've got to start using my head.

The other was smiling, his manner almost apologetic. "My name is Farrell," he said. "Police Department. We're after a man, and you seem to fit the description pretty close, Mr. Lennox. So if you don't mind showing me some identification . . ."

The hand tightened on Tudor's arm. He glanced about at the gathering circle of faces that closed about him . . . All right, stare, why don't you? Gawk with your stupid mouths hanging open.

His eyes moved appealingly to the cop named Farrell. "Let's get out of here," he said quietly. "I'm your man."

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Post Mortem

**W**ILLOUGHBY TUDOR kept thinking, I'm not going to get out of this.

The thought had first occurred to him on the third day of the trial when Carr, the prosecutor, had called up one Richard E. Fisk, a gangling youth with gaping mouth and flaming ears who stumbled on the way to the witness chair, then slumped into it and looked about with a silly, self-conscious grin on his face.

"Who the hell is that, Dodson?" Tudor had whispered, plucking his attorney's sleeve.

Dodson had been obviously puzzled. And worried.

"Mr. Fisk," Carr had addressed the flushing youth, "what is your occupation?"

In a voice half choked with adenoids, the boy had replied, "I'm a messenger for Western Union."

"Good Lord!" Tudor had gasped, knowing suddenly what Carr was getting at. Carr was trying to establish premeditation. This Richard Fisk was the boy who had brought that telegram to the house the night of—of the tragedy . . . It was always *tragedy* now, for the words *murder* and *killing* by their ceaseless repetition had worn a cankerous sore on his

brain . . . Tudor had gone to answer Fisk's knock with the poker in his hand. Two hours before Dixie's return he had actually showed himself in possession of the murder weapon. As though he had made up his mind to kill. As though he had waited with malicious intent.

He had thought then, I'm not going to get out of this.

Sometimes, during Dodson's final impassioned plea, Tudor had clutched at hope. But now, with Carr—that small, fiercely energetic little man—taking the jury to his bosom, Tudor knew that he was finished.

Carr, his voice suave, was saying, "Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I do not wish to leave with you any implication that the defendant *might* have been poisoning himself with minute doses of arsenic, though we have established that Willoughby Tudor was in possession of certain facts, gleaned from the newspaper, which indicate that arsenic need not be fatal, nor even vastly dangerous, due to a recently discovered antidote. . . ."

Tudor muttered, "Of all the back-handed, rotten methods—" And Dodson silenced him with a pat on the shoulder.

" . . . For, what possible advantage in a court of justice could the defendant—a man of intelligence—hope to gain by such a subterfuge? Surely not that he killed in self-defense.

"If," Carr continued, "during these painful and arduous proceedings, I have vigorously denied that my opponent has presented good and sufficient evidence that Mrs. Tudor was poisoning her husband, credit that to an inherent sense of fair play on my part which cries out against heaping accusations upon the head of one who is not here to defend herself. There is not a man or woman among you who would not have acted as I have acted in defending the good name of the helpless victim.

"My opponent has made much of an arsenic-impregnated ant trap which, because of design and manufacture, might conceivably have been used as a bottle cap. And we have heard Dr. Whitehead, whose medical opinion we cannot refute, testify that Mr. Tudor was suffering from arsenic poisoning when he presented himself at the Whitehead Clinic. But—" and



here Carr pounded the rail for emphasis—"but the defense seems utterly unable to present any evidence in the way of food or drink adulterated with arsenic which might have been made available to the defendant through any overt act on the part of the late Mrs. Tudor."

Tudor sent a sidelong glance at Dodson. Dodson's face was grey with worry.

I'm not going to get out of this, Tudor thought. Except for that damned messenger boy and his adenoids, I might have. Except for that moron, I might have beaten this.

Carr, with a weary shake of his head, continued, his voice low in pitch yet reaching the farthest corner of the courtroom.

"There has been altogether too much talk of arsenic and poisoning. Was the victim, that helpless young wife, poisoned, or was she bludgeoned to death by her husband? The answer is perfectly apparent. Why, then, this talk of poison? What Mrs. Tudor did or did not do is not a matter for this court to decide. To do so would be the height of irreverent presumption. Your task, ladies and gentlemen, is to decide whether or not Willoughby Tudor did attack his wife with the poker from their fireside and did so unmercifully beat her about the head as to cause her death . . . Even the defendant, cornered and desperate as he is, has not denied that he did so attack his wife, though he has offered the half-hearted explanation that he *presumed* her unfaithful."

Carr paused dramatically. Then, with both hands on the rail, he leaned toward the jury. "Did Willoughby Tudor bludgeon his wife to death?" he all but whispered. "If your answer is yes, and it cannot be otherwise, then you must concern yourselves with the answer to one more simple question: Was this murderous assault by Tudor preceded by malicious intent?"

"I ask you to recall the testimony of Richard Fisk, his exact words. 'He met me at the door with the poker in his hand. It sort of gave me a start.' And again, 'The look on Mr. Tudor's face was kind of queer.' A sullen, brooding look, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, because he had murder in his heart."

WILLOUGHBY TUDOR stirred in his chair. He thought, I won't listen to any more of this. I can't stand it. I'm sunk, and I wish to hell they'd get it over with.

He shrugged off Dodson's hand, which had been resting on his shoulder. He looked backward and to the right, feeling a sharp, cold stab of disappointment.

If only *she* had been there, this day of all days, in the courtroom. Miss Hazelton. Yesterday and the day before, he had been able to look back and to the right and catch a glimpse of her clean, cool face, to see her calm, encouraging smile. On the witness stand she had been magnificent, never hedging from the truth, yet deftly avoiding Carr's attempted implication that she had something more than friendly regard for her employer.

She wasn't there now. In her usual place was a fat dragon of a woman glaring daggers at him from the shadow of a cartwheel hat. His eyes glanced from hers, scuttled farther to the right, and there he saw Miss Hazelton. At least he saw her cameo-cut profile against the plain buff wall of the courtroom. Or was it she?

I've never seen her wear anything like that before, he thought.

She had a scarf knotted over her head—a babooshka—in the manner of a peasant girl, and her coat was a shiny blue serge thing that must have been at least five years old. She looked younger, and as she leaned forward, intently interested in Carr's haranguing, she had three fingers up against the side of her left cheek.

And then Tudor knew. She was always reminding him of someone he'd seen somewhere years before, and always the association had eluded him until now. Now he remembered.

That girl the night of the party at Dean Jason's place, Miss Hazelton isn't the girl, of course, Tudor decided. It's only that in that outlandish get-up she looks like her. The babooshka. That pose with three fingers against her cheek.

That had been six—no, six and a half years ago, more or less. Anyway, he and Dixie had been married only a matter of months. They had gone to a party at Dean Jason's and Dixie had got herself disgustingly drunk.



He had been pretty well spiffed himself, he recalled.

He and Dixie had got home from the Jasons' at around two in the morning, and Dixie had just made it to the bathroom before becoming violently sick at her stomach. He himself had been keeping just about two paces ahead of a terrific hangover.

Somebody had knocked at the door. This girl in the babooshka and the blue serge coat. He'd never seen her before. An anemic-looking little thing, her face robbed of prettiness by an ugly red birthmark on the left cheek. Facing him across the sill, conscious of his stare, she had raised her hand, hiding the mark with three fingers.

As Miss Hazelton is doing now. Only Miss Hazelton hasn't any birthmark. They're not the same. They couldn't possibly be.

The girl in the babooshka had asked to use the phone, he remembered. Something about a stalled car. He had let her in, embarrassed by the disgusting retching sounds that Dixie was making in the powder room.

"My wife is—uh—a trifle indisposed," he had felt called upon to explain as he showed the girl into the study. He had waited in the hall until the girl had come out again, and he had been damned glad when he'd been able to let her out the front door.

He'd never seen her since.

But there is some strange resemblance there, he thought.

Carr had finished. The judge, after a perfunctory tap of his gavel, began to charge the jury, summing up the case, defining the degrees of murder.

Tudor looked back over his shoulder again . . . I wish she'd look at me. Miss Hazelton. I'm not going to get out of this, but I'd like to feel that she's with me all the way.

She was with him. She looked suddenly at him and smiled. But differently. Not the same chin-up smile at all, but something he didn't understand.

She's overwrought, he thought. Emotionally upset, poor girl. Naturally.

The jury was filing from the room—the mechanic who looked as though he hadn't quite got the grease off his face,

the bullnecked man who might have been a wrestler or a bouncer in some dive, some know-it-all school teacher . . . And not one of them looks as though he or she possesses a modicum of intelligence. Nine men and three women, my "equals," stumbling over each other to get out. To pick over what's left of my carcass.

Dodson's voice came from seeming distance. "It doesn't look too good, Will."

Tudor said, "I'm not going to get out of this."

"Well, you never can tell about a jury."

But he could tell about this one. This one was convinced of his guilt. He sent a trapped, frantic glance back over the restless room, and again he glimpsed Miss Hazelton . . . I wish she'd come down here a second. I'd like to tell her something. I'd like to say . . .

To say what? To tell her she'd been a brick?

The jury was out twenty minutes to the second. They filed back in, not looking at him—not one of them looked at him—and there was an anticipatory rustle among the spectators, then a hush. The judge, ominous in his black robes, took his place. His throat-clearing sawed a thin slot through the silence, and then he addressed the nine men and three women.

"Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, have you reached a verdict?"

The foreman stood awkwardly, left hand fumbling for and not finding a pocket, his eyes on a slip of paper in his hand.

"We have, your honor. We find the defendant guilty of murder in the first degree."

## CHAPTER FIVE

### The Man in Grey

THE BLONDE WOMAN in the babooshka, in the old blue serge coat, the bobby socks and worn saddle oxfords, was lost in the throng of spectators leaving the court. She floated, rode with the tide moving toward the door, her eyes dead ahead and strangely fixed. The voice of the crowd came up to her, but she was above that, floating.

She stepped into the sunlight of the February afternoon. She hurried into the fringes of the crowd, down the steps of



the courthouse, onto the sidewalk where there were other crowds moving.

*Eddie, you heard, didn't you? Guilty. First degree murder.*

Her step quickened, lightened along the walk, as though there were someone at home to hear the news she had to tell.

There was no one.

Once there was Eddie. There were two Eddies, really, the man who had died in the ship and the man-child born of him, his immortality. One the man who was dead, the other the child in the blue snow suit toddling along in front of her. The blue snow suit he'd outgrown at three, and his scuffed white shoes.

*Eddie, wait at the curb for Mother. Always remember to wait.*

Eddie had waited. He was always obedient. He waited with one blue mitten dangling. . . .

She came to the curb on Washington Street. There was no child waiting. There were people waiting for the light to change. There was a street car in the safety zone, her car, loading. The light changed, and she hurried forward, cut to the left and ducked in under the chain of the safety zone to get into the lineup in front of the trolley door. She dug in her purse, took out a quarter, then waited for her turn to board.

She got off at Sixteenth, walked half a block to the dark, green-painted, barn-like house with its gables and bay windows and scalloped wood cornice.

She climbed the stairs, moved off down the murky corridor to her room at the back, pushed open the door.

The first thing that she always saw when she opened her door was the Teddy

bear. Brown and woolly and sly, in spite of the missing left eye, she saw it now on the window sill, propped against the left side of the frame. She stepped into the room and, in turning to close the door, saw something else that arrested her movement.

The man in grey.

He was sitting in the one wholly comfortable chair, grey hat, grey topcoat, a tall man in his thirties, square-shouldered as Eddie had been, his skin leathery from the wind, his eyes light grey, sharp, and curious. He looked up at her from what he was doing with his hands.

She didn't close the door but stood there, wooden and straight, her eyes on him.

"Who are you, and what are you doing here?" she asked. She simply asked it; there was no indication of alarm.

"Right now, Miss Hazelton, I'm opening a bottle of coke," he said.

That was what he was doing—opening a bottle of coke. He retrieved the cap, put it down on the arm of the chair together with the bottle opener.

He said, "If you've got a glass, I'll split with you."

She shook her head. "You're the—the police, aren't you?"

"Well, one of them. Farrell." He drank from the bottle, then: "How did it come out? I left the courtroom about the time you came in today."

"Guilty." She steadied her voice. "The chair."

FARRELL nodded. "That's about what I expected. Look here, Miss Hazelton, you were in Tudor's office a year, year

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and a half. You know him pretty well." He cocked his head quizzically. "What kind of a joe is he, anyway? Kind of funny, huh?"

"I never laughed at him," she said soberly. She went to the other chair—the stiff wooden rocker—and sat down.

"He was a snob, for sure," Farrell said.

"Incidentally, he was a snob," she said.

Farrell took another drink of coke. "Sure you won't split this with me before I drink it all. No? Well, why do you think he killed Mrs. Tudor?"

She looked away from him. "It was inevitable, I think. It was only a matter of the proper time, the proper incident, perhaps. He hated her. One day in the office he came across a poem in a volume of Browning I had, 'My Last Duchess.' It's a dramatic monologue concerning a man who killed his wife because she was too agreeable."

Farrell grunted. "That's a new one. Too agreeable."

"Mr. Tudor said he understood." She looked at him. His eyes were shrewd shining eyes but rather nice.

She untied the babooshka and removed it from her shining hair. She dangled it from the tips of long, fine-boned fingers, swung it idly back and forth.

Farrell pointed at the gay scarf with his coke bottle. "You oughtn't to have worn that today," he said quietly. "But of course I know why you wore it. Even with that birthmark removed—they do such wonderful jobs nowadays with dry ice—I knew today exactly where I'd seen you before the trial. Because of the scarf."

The scarf stopped swinging. She stared across at the rugged face of the man in the chair, and all things stopped for her. Time stopped in its headlong rush, turned back in a sickening swoop. . . .

\* \* \*

April 10, 1942, the second date engraved on the little headstone; the date engraved on her mind. The time? Somewhere close to eleven P. M., after the movie. She and Eddie had gone to the movie. Little Eddie, child of the man who had died at sea. Walking along she had felt guilty to have kept the boy up so late. He was only three, outgrowing his blue snow suit and the scuffed white shoes. She saw him running on ahead

of her, unafraid of the shadows; herself afraid of the shadows and the increasing distance between them, yet wanting him to grow self-reliant.

She had watched the white shoes in the darkness.

"Wait at the curb for Mother, Eddie."

He had waited. Always obedient. Too good to live, was the frightening thought.

And then the car. The long, blue, shining car that came rocketing out of nowhere to slew around the corner with rubber screaming, to jounce and bound over the curb and off, and then roar on. For an instant its lights had shown her the tiny figure in the too-short blue snow suit, the startled little face, the mitten dangling.

She had screamed. Just that once she had screamed, and never after that. Then, running toward the child, she had somehow followed the car with her eyes. A blue Packard. Indiana plates MA-657-457. Two occupants. Two drunken, wanton killers. Her eyes had followed them. For six and one half years her eyes had followed Mr. and Mrs. Willoughby Tudor.

She had held the child in her arms that one last time. The child dying. The man in the child dying again. And she was alone. Even when the others came—a car had stopped, the door of a house had opened, a cop had come on the run—even then she was alone.

"Did you see the car, ma'am?"

"Yes." Tonelessly but without tears.

"Yes, a light grey roadster. A Ford, I think, with Ohio plates."

"We'll get 'em, ma'am."

Yes, you'll get them. Then what will you do? Suspend their license? Give them a stiff fine? Fine them for murder?

\* \* \*

She had looked up at the cop's earnest face then, as now she looked into Farrell's earnest face.

She said, "You're the cop."

He nodded. "When I saw you in court this morning with that scarf around your head, I knew you were the one. I knew that night you were different. You didn't cry. You didn't have hysterics or scream or anything. It was all bottled up inside, wasn't it?"

She didn't answer.

He said, "You lied about the car. There



wasn't any grey Ford with Ohio plates. It was the Tudors' car, wasn't it, and you'd got a good look at it. You called the Motor Vehicle Bureau and found out who owned it."

"They were drunk," she murmured. "I made sure. I went out to their place that night."

**H**E KEPT staring at her as though she were something he couldn't quite believe. "The ones who bottle it up inside—people like you—they're the ones we ought to watch. I ought to have watched you from that night on, but I didn't get it until this morning when you walked into court." His smile was rueful. "I haven't got much now. Too late and maybe too little."

He parked his coke bottle on the table beside the chair, leaned back to dip into the pocket of his coat. He brought out a small, round medicine bottle with a metal cap and held it up to the light so that she could see its emptiness.

"Bromo," he said. "Tudor's favorite brand. Not only empty, but you'll notice the hard-water stains inside the glass. Washed out clean. No arsenic."

She drew a short breath. "That's not—" She broke it off, lips twisting slightly.

Eyes shrewd, he said, "No, this isn't the one. You'd have done more than wash it out. You'd have smashed it to bits or hidden it somewhere . . . But why arsenic?"

She said, "Availability, I suppose. You don't have to sign anything. And then my education could have hardly included a course in pharmacy." She smiled a little. "Dull of me, I suppose."

He shook his head. "You're anything but dull, sister. What gave you the notion that he suspected he was being poisoned? That clipping from the paper, I suppose, about metallic poisons and the newly discovered antidote. You knew your scheme wasn't going to work—not that scheme, anyway—so you did an about-face. You were the one that urged him to go to the clinic, knowing what the diagnosis would be. And while he was there, that busy little brain of yours started out on another tack. You'd put the blame for the poisoning on Mrs. Tudor. With Mr.

Tudor hating his wife the way he did—you had him doped out to a T—no telling what might happen if you could convince him his wife was the one who was doing the poisoning.

"Look here—" Farrell took from a vest pocket something that looked like a crown bottle cap but wasn't. An Atlas ant cap. The Atlas ant cap, its metal surface distorted by the bottle opener. She watched him, dull-eyed, not caring, as he carefully compared the ant trap with the cap he had just removed from the coke bottle.

He said, "Your bottle opener is exactly like the one in the Tudor kitchen except that somebody didn't machine the end of it very well. Yours makes a slightly different dent in a bottle cap. You want me to tell you what you did?"

She lifted her shoulders. "If you like."

He pushed his hat farther back on his head. "Well, yes," he said, "I like. After all, I've got to have some satisfaction for all the trouble I've taken . . . You knew somehow that the Tudors used Atlas ant caps to keep ants out of the kitchen. I guess you'd been to the house often enough to know. So you bought a box of ant caps—I found some here before you came in—and also a dime-store dingus to seal bottles with crown caps. You took a bottle—any coke bottle, say—sealed it with an Atlas ant cap to get the right impression on it. Then you removed the cap with your opener. And then you were all set.

"The night of the killing, you went to Tudor's house on some flimsy excuse. He asked you if you'd have a drink. He probably always asked you, so you were all primed for that. When he opened the soda bottle—or maybe you opened it—you simply palmed off the ant trap you had prepared for the ordinary cap that had come off the bottle."

She looked at him through half-lowered lips. Her smile was half a smile. "Will it add anything to the necessary self-satisfaction if I tell you you're right?"

"It helps."

"Then you're quite right, I did something else that evening—the hardest part of the whole thing. I kissed Willoughby Tudor."

Farrell leaned forward, his hands on his knees. "The hell! I see what you mean—the hardest part. You were gambling that



he mightn't get the lipstick off his face before his wife got home. Fomenting a little family argument you hoped might lead to murder."

She nodded coolly. "With just a little hope it would lead to murder. After all, Willoughby was—well, different? I knew when I kissed him he was different. I think I put most of my hope in Dixie, because there was nothing different about her. You see, when Mr. Tudor went to the clinic, he didn't tell his wife. He told Dixie he was going to Chicago. Two hours after he had left the office, I called the Tudor house and, holding a wadded handkerchief over my mouth to disguise my voice, I talked to Mrs. Tudor. I pretended that I was opening a tea room and wanted some carpeting for the floor. I said that I had tried the Willoughby Tudor office only to learn that Mr. Tudor and his secretary had gone to Chicago. To clinch the matter, in case Mrs. Tudor called here to double-check, I phoned my landlady and told her that I was going to Chicago. Then I simply locked myself up in the Willoughby Tudor office for thirty-six hours until the clinic was through with Willoughby."

**F**ARRELL rubbed his jaw thoughtfully. "Mrs. Tudor's reactions must have been pretty normal. She must have started the fight."

She stood up. She moved over to the window and stood against the light. Her right hand dropped, absently fingered the woolly ear of little Eddie's toy bear:

She said, "You understand, don't you? They killed my baby. They were driving recklessly and they were drunk. They were equally to blame. One or the other must have seen the child, yet they didn't stop, neither before nor after. They killed the child and in killing him they destroyed the father's immortality, as I understand immortality. And there was no law to fit the crime."

Farrell drew a long breath and sighed it out. "Oh, I see. I get the point. Only, I can't let you get by with it."

That cool, slow smile again. "Can't you? But I *have* got by with it. At most, it's only attempted murder, and you can't prove that, can you? Even if you could—"

she looked away dreamily—"what's ten years? Or twenty? Or a lifetime of years? Or even death?"

Chin in his hands he studied her. "Impervious, aren't you? It's all bottled up into a case-hardened shell of hate and vengeance. You think I can't touch you?"

"You can't touch me."

He leaned back in the chair, drummed on the arms of it with his fingers. "I might," he said quietly. "I just might. I could, for instance, tell you a story about two little punks. We'll call them Joe and Morrie, if you want to. They had so many aliases it doesn't matter. Two tough young kids that had themselves quite a time, while it lasted. They held up a few filling stations, swiped a few cars, things like that. On the night of September 10, 1942, they swiped a car from in front of the house of Dean Jason. There was some sort of a party going on inside, pretty wild, so it was easy for Joe and Morrie to steal this big blue Packard."

Her face stiffened. Her lips just apart murmured, "Oh, God!"

Farrell went on relentlessly. "A big, blue Packard with Indiana plates MA-657-457. Between the hours of ten and midnight, Joe and Morrie were batting around town on two wheels in that Packard. When the gas got low, they turned into a filling station and tried a holdup. The attendant scared them off with a gun, and they left the Packard right there where the police picked it up and returned it to the Tudor house. The Tudors, incidentally, went home in a cab that night."

"No," she breathed. "That—that isn't true."

"Afraid so," Farrell said. "And do you know what finally happened to Joe and Morrie?"

She didn't say anything. She couldn't utter a sound, all bottled up inside that shell of hers.

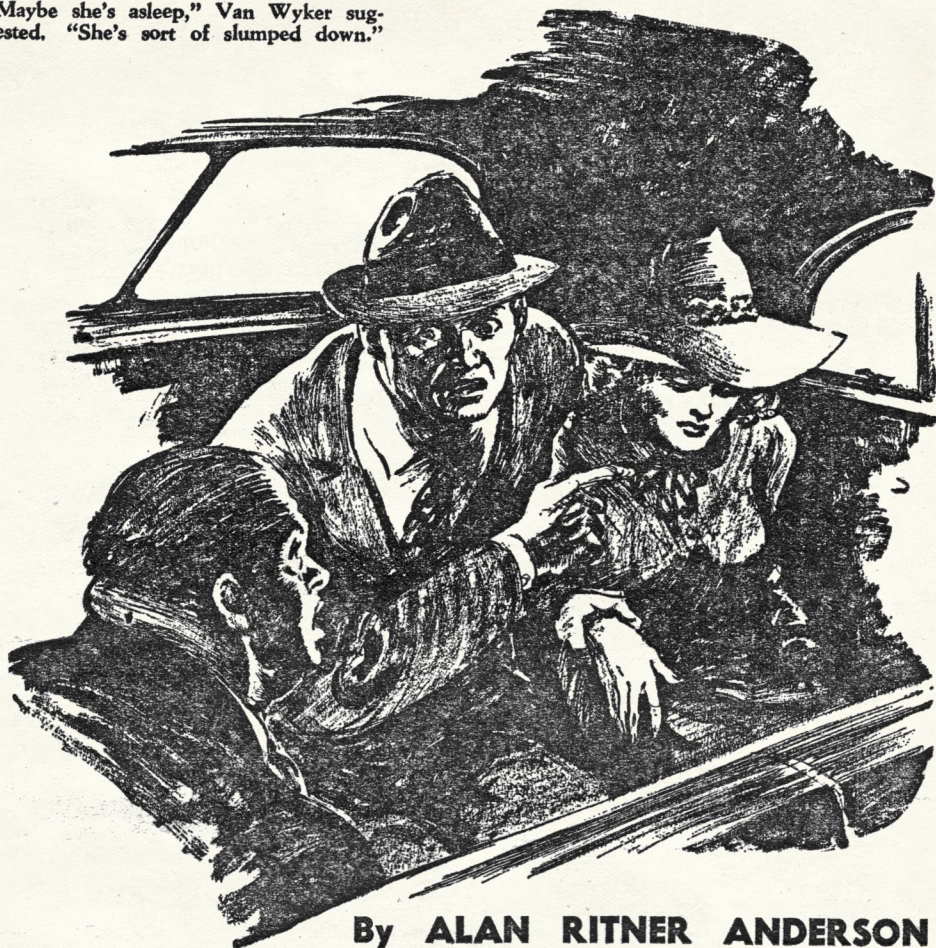
"Well, Joe and Morrie, who started out as a couple of punks swiping cars, worked up—or maybe down—to other things. Like robbing a bank. Like killing a state trooper. So last March, sister, Joe and Morrie both went to the chair. For murder."

He watched the white shell crumple.

THE END



"Maybe she's asleep," Van Wyker suggested. "She's sort of slumped down."



By ALAN RITNER ANDERSON

# HOW CRAZY CAN YOU GET?

*Maybe the bells that punchy Hank Clore heard didn't exist, and possibly the voices that fruitcake-nutty John Van Wyker listened to were only in his head. But one thing is sure: When two screwballs shake hands over a corpse, anything can—and probably will—happen!*

THE JOB lasted two days. It was almost a career for punch-drunk Hank Clore. Most of his jobs washed up in a matter of hours. And, like all his jobs, it ended with blood and violence.

Clore stood at his post between the two rest rooms. He was listening to the bells in his head. He liked being the bouncer of a swank cocktail lounge. All he had to do was stand around and listen to the bells



in his head. Although he had the build of a small gorilla and the face of a Neanderthal man, not even a drunk laughed at him. His eyes stopped them cold. Large and brown, his eyes possessed a murky yellowness in their depths that killed humor with a rash of goosepimples.

It was the off hour of the afternoon. The only customer at the forty-foot bar was a pint-sized, big-bellied man with a bald head and sad blue eyes. Now and then he hauled out a handkerchief and blotted his eyes. He was surprisingly young for all his flabby softness and bald head.

The fat man stared moodily into his beer. "Anita!" he sobbed. "My Anita!"

Hank Clore frowned disapprovingly. It wasn't the first time the little man had uttered his cry of anguish. Clore was beginning to resent it.

Luke, the elderly bartender, came around the bar and went up to Clore. "Don't bounce him," he advised. "He's John Van Wyker. Nutty but rich. He's got wife trouble."

The street door opened. The blonde wore black—a low-cut, tight-fitting dress with a wasp waist and flared hips. Tall and slim, her honey-yellow hair was in a pageboy, slickly lacquered to the gloss of a new automobile. The man with her was a six-foot redhead with the build of a boilermaker. The blonde marched to the bar and stopped beside John Van Wyker. The redhead joined her. He wore bright green slacks and a tweed coat. He worked his shoulders and the pleated back of the jacket opened like an accordion.

Fat John Van Wyker spotted the blonde, cried joyously, "Anita! My Anita!"

The redhead walked up and chopped Van Wyker down with a sizzling right that cracked the fat man between the eyes, then slid down and flattened his nose. Van Wyker sat on the floor with a bounce. His nose began to leak, and his glazed blue eyes stared unseeingly at the front door.

**H**ANK CLORE moved toward the bar. The blonde skidded a chair in front of him. Instead of going around it, Clore grabbed the chair back to push it away. The redhead dinged him with a left hook.

Clore's head rocked. He got his fists waist high just as the redhead nailed him on the point of the chin with a savage right uppercut. Clore blacked out. His knees sagged, and he hit the floor on his face. He got up with threshing arms windmilling vicious rights and lefts.

"They've gone!" cried Luke shakily. "They're gone."

Clore snapped out of it. He was hot. Bright yellowness crowded the brown from his eyes. He didn't say a word. He reached down and gave John Van Wyker a hand up.

There was an explosion of white brilliance. Clore twisted his head around. A pimply faced young man backed through the front door. He held a Speed Graphic with a flashgun attachment. He grinned in sardonic triumph as he left.

Van Wyker was crying, softly and unashamed. Tears coursed down his cheeks in a steady stream. He made no effort to check the flow of blood from his nose and it dripped off his chin to spatter his white shirt with dark red spots.

Clore steered the casualty into the men's room and got him bent over a washbowl.

"Anita!" moaned Van Wyker tearfully. "My Anita!"

"Shut up!" Clore snarled.

The door opened. Max Sertz, owner of the place, came into the room with fire in his eye. He fancied himself the working girl's George Raft and played up the faint resemblance to the point of absurdity.

"The former middle-weight contender!" he raved. "The tough guy! Bouncer! What a laugh! You're fired. Get out!"

"I don't like you," said Clore, eyes muddy. "I don't like you at all."

"Get out! Get out, punchy!"

Hank Clore's flashing right scored a bull's-eye. Sertz' nose blossomed redness as he reeled back and struck the wall. He slid down the cracked plaster with mouth foolishly agape, a black void where his two upper front teeth had sparkled so whitely. He kicked feebly. Clore bent over and put him to sleep with a left jab.

"I don't like you," he said.

John Van Wyker looked on in horrified fascination as Clore whipped out his pocket knife and opened the big blade he kept honed to razor sharpness. He bent



over Max Sertz and began to hack off the long black hair the tavern owner considered his crowning glory. He cut it close to the skull and stuffed the oily locks into the breast pocket of Sertz' coat.

Hank Clore straightened up and surveyed his work with vast satisfaction. "Got a bad temper," he confessed. "Can't keep a job long."

"Oh, dear!" said Van Wyker.

The door opened. Luke stuck his head in, then backed out hurriedly with his seamed face sweaty pale.

"Where's that redhead hang out?" Clore asked.

"I don't know. I don't even know who he is," said Van Wyker.

"The blonde dame?"

"Anita. My wife. She's my wife."

"Why'd that guy take our picture?"

John Van Wyker blotted his nose with a paper towel. "It's a long story."

"Stow it!" ordered Clore testily. "The redhead I want. I got a notion to slap your wife in the teeth."

"You can't hurt Anita!" Van Wyker wailed. "I love her."

"Shut up! I got no time to hear you yak-yak. Let's go to the bar."

They went out to the bar where Luke was completely absorbed in a racing form he was reading upside down.

Clore said, "I quit! Gimme my wages. Two days. Twenty bucks."

Luke handed over two tens without protest. He said, "Look! Max has plenty tough monkeys working for him in the pinball racket. He'll get you for cutting his hair if he has to fry for it. You better move."

"I am moved," admitted Clore ruefully. "A guy hogged the bathroom and I busted the door down. The landlady gimme the bounce. I checked my bags at the station."

Said John Van Wyker eagerly, "Perhaps I can offer you gainful employment. My pride is injured. People laugh at me. The three million dollars doesn't matter."

Luke dropped the racing form. He stooped to pick it up and cracked his forehead on the bar edge.

"Since when don't three million bucks matter?" Clore wanted to know.

Van Wyker sighed. "It's a long story. My grandmother was very strait-laced and

Professor Oberlander wants to hunt for blond Indians."

LUKE, remembering that Van Wyker was slightly nuts, said, "You better blow, Hank. Max can go out the back door of the men's room and latch on to his .45."

"I ain't afraid of nobody," Clore growled. "Gun or no gun, I stay, see!"

"Okay," Luke said. "So you let the redhead get away with it."

"Like hell I will!" cried Clore, hot with rage. He grabbed Van Wyker's soft elbow and steered him out to the sunny sidewalk. "Where's your wife live at, huh?" he asked. "Where?"

"At an apartment on River Drive," said the fat man. "We're separated this week. I wouldn't dare go up. She'd be angry. I know it doesn't sound very sensible. About Professor Oberlander and the blond Indians, I mean."

"Why don't it?" asked Clore, as if he understood perfectly.

Heartened, the fat man said, "It was an accident. They were making picture maps of the jungle. They enlarged one and there were a lot of blond Indians in a clearing looking up at the plane." He looked up and down the street, added, "They were naked."

"You don't have to go to no jungle to see a naked blond," Clore objected. "For a five-spot I can get you a ticket to a stag beer bust. Hey! Where's your wife live at? That redhead I got to take."

Van Wyker began to cry. "Anita!" he wailed. "My Anita."

Clore patted a fat shoulder sympathetically. "Lookit, Mac! For three million bucks a dame would pitch Gregory Peck a curve, even."

Van Wyker perked up. "Oh, thank you!" he cried. "No one ever listens to me. I guess I'm not very bright."

"I ain't bright either. All the time I hear bells."

"I hear voices," the fat man confessed. "Women's voices."

"What do they say?"

"I can't make it out. They're so soft. Sometimes I lean over so I can hear better. Then I fall down."

"Bells is safer," said Clore. "Hey! What we yak-vakin' for? Let's grab a



hack and go see your wife. I will kick that redhead in the teeth."

"My car is in the parking lot down the street," said Van Wyker eagerly. "You can drive. You can be my bodyguard. Everywhere I go, Anita shows up with the redhead. He hits me in the face and that man takes a picture."

"Ha! Then all I got to do is stick with you to get that scurvy redhead. I'll take the job."

"I'll pay you ten a day," cried the delighted fat man. "You can sleep over the garage and eat with Fifi."

Hank Clore went indignant. "I don't eat with no dog."

"Oh, Fifi isn't a dog. She's my wife's French maid. Anita didn't take her this time. To test my love, maybe. Of course, if I get fresh with Fifi, Professor Oberlander will get all the money and go hunting for blond Indians."

Nettled, Clore cried, "There you go, yak-yakin' about them blond Indians. You mix me up. Button your trap and show me where your heap's at."

Van Wyker locked his jaws and nodded furious agreement. He waddled down to a parking lot some hundred feet from the cocktail lounge. It was the type of lot where you surrender the claim check to an attendant in a shack at the entry and go get your own car. The man took the ticket and did a double-take on Van Wyker's bloody shirt front.

The two men walked back into the lot. Van Wyker looked around unhappily. "I forgot," he confessed. "I have a bad memory. That's why I go to the hospital in the country once in a while. I string beads. I'm very good at stringing beads."

Clore jerked to a surprised stop, cried, "Ha! Did they wrap you in wet sheets? Did they wrap you naked in wet sheets?"

**I**T WAS the beginning of a beautiful friendship. The fat man nodded vigorous agreement. "The tank treatment, too," he declared with pride. "That's why I can't remember which car I brought. This must be the place. The man took the ticket, didn't he? It's black. All three of them."

Instead of annoyance, Clore displayed sympathetic understanding. Half the time he couldn't remember where he lived. "A

big car?" he asked. "A big black car?" "Oh, yes. A seat in front and a seat in back."

The only big black sedan in the lot was in a corner and obscured by shadows cast by a ten-foot fence. Clore squeezed between the driver's side of the car and the fence. A woman sat on the far side of the rear seat with her shoulders wedged into the arc where the seat back flared into the body of the car. She was small and dainty, and the upper half of her face was concealed by the floppy brim of a red hat.

"A dame," Clore said.

Van Wyker peeked around the windshield post. "It's Fifi," he said. "It's her hat, anyway. I think I drove her to town. Or she drove me. Maybe I was supposed to meet her."

"Well, she's met."

"Get in and I'll introduce her."

Clore opened the rear door and slid to the center of the seat to make room for Van Wyker to settle beside him. The fat man got in, cleared his throat, said, "Fifi, permit me to introduce . . ."

"Hank Clore," said that individual.

The two men shook hands.

Van Wyker did it again. "Fifi, permit me to introduce Hank Clore."

Fifi didn't move, didn't speak.

"A pleasure," said Clore.

"Maybe she's asleep," Van Wyker suggested. "She's sort of slumped down."

Clore leaned over and peeked under the hat brim. Glassy blue eyes in a waxy white face stared at something in the next world.

"She's dead," said Clore matter-of-factly.

"Oh, dear. What do we do now?"

"Why, we sit in front," declared Clore impatiently, as if explaining the obvious to a small child. "If we sit in front, how the hell are we supposed to know there's a dead dame in the back seat?"

"You make it sound so simple, Hank," said the fat man admiringly.

"Wonder who killed her?" Clore mused. "Bet the redhead did. Who's got a reason to kill the dame?"

"Me," admitted Van Wyker modestly. "I have a reason."

"You?"

"Yes. If Fifi lied and told the judge I got fresh, then Professor Oberlander



will get all the money and go looking for the blond Indians."

"Always them blond Indians," Clore grouched. "Okay, tell me about them blond Indians."

"I did."

"Lookit! Why'd the redhead slug you? Why'd the punk take your picture?"

"My grandmother was very strait-laced. Her will says I get the three million dollars next month when I'm thirty. But if I am involved in a scandal or am guilty of moral misconduct, the money goes to Professor Oberlander. My lawyer told me."

"You're being played for a sucker!" Clore cried, then frowned. "It don't make sense. Why'd your wife want the professor to get the dough, because then she couldn't get her hooks on it like she could if you got it?"

The jumbled statement didn't confuse Van Wyker in the slightest. "I have a guardian," he explained. "Anita says he's stingy. My lawyer says Anita probably has made a deal with Professor Oberlander. He won't have to pay big taxes because it's a scientific expedition, or something."

Hank Clore reached a decision. "We see your lawyer. We'll carry Fifi up to his office and let him take it from there."

"My lawyer is in Bermuda."

Clore happened to glance through the windshield. Four tight-lipped men had entered the parking lot.

"Guess Max is mad," he confessed without a show of worry or excitement. "Them guys is his goon squad. They persuade guys to put in Max's pinball machines."

"I'm not good at pinball," Van Wyker confessed.

"Lookit. I'll hide. You sit next to Fifi and make out like you're giving her a play. Tell them monkeys I blowed."

"But Fifi's dead!"

"Then she won't give you no trouble."

CLORE climbed out and eased the door closed. He crawled under the sedan and stretched out on his stomach. It wasn't long before they reached the car.

"I been lookin' for you!" a voice growled. "Where's Hank Clore?"

"Who?"

"Let go that dame and listen!" ordered the man, and launched into a profanely graphic description of his quarry.

"Oh, him!" said Van Wyker. "He went to see my wife."

"Where?"

The fat man reeled off the address glibly.

The men took off on the double.

Clore got out from under the car and opened the back door. "That was slick of you to send Max's squad to your wife's dump," he said.

"Oh, thank you!"

"Lookit. I got an idea. The professor might have chilled Fifi so you'd take the rap. Let's go see the guy."

"He's in Brazil," said Van Wyker.

The detective appeared out of thin air. He loomed between the hood of the car and the fence, a barrel-chested man with a lantern jaw and nervous brown eyes. Hank Clore was well known in police circles, and the detective was wet with nervous sweat.

"I'm Mannering," he said, flashing his

**Next time try...**

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badge. "I got a warrant for your arrest, Clore. Assault and battery with intent to kill."

"That a fact?" asked Clore idly. "How'd you find me? Max's goon squad missed the boat."

Mannering relaxed. Sometimes Clore accepted arrest with quiet resignation. He said, "Why, a red-headed man and a blond woman tipped me off. They're across the street shadowing a cheating husband."

John Van Wyker stuck his head out of the rear window. "I did it," he confessed. "I did it with my couteau. A couteau is a double-edged dagger, if you don't understand French."

Mannering's jaw sagged. "Did what?"

Van Wyker jerked a thumb at the opposite end of the seat. "Killed Fifi," he announced. "Just like that!" He snapped his fingers.

Mannering shaded his eyes with a cupped hand and peered into the interior of the sedan. He knew a stiff when he saw one. For a moment he was too astonished to move.

Clore rabbit-punched with his left hook. Mannering's forehead connected with the window glass and a lacy network of fine lines spread out from the point of impact. The detective collapsed on the ground beside the fence.

"You shouldn't have confessed," Clore chided.

"Oh, I didn't kill her. I thought we could go to jail together and sit in the same cell."

"You got a double-edged doodad?"

"Oh, yes! As a letter-opener. It makes a fine letter-opener if you don't cut your fingers like I do."

Clore opened the rear door. "You sit up front. Let me drive. I got no car. I don't get to drive much."

Van Wyker got out, circled the car and climbed into the front seat. Clore stared down at Detective Mannering. He said, "I'd better take this flatfoot's gun in case I got to shoot somebody. Max is mad. His goon squad is tough monkeys." Clore bent over and took the detective's badge, .38 revolver and a pair of handcuffs. He straightened up and displayed the loot. "See! I didn't take his dough. That would be dishonest."

"Honesty is the best policy," the fat man agreed.

Clore settled behind the wheel. The attendant didn't even look up as the black sedan left the lot. Hank Clore had gotten his driving experience wheeling a half-track through Germany. After ten blocks John Van Wyker's legs ached from pushing on the floor boards. At a stop light he turned around and looked into the rear of the car.

"Fifi's on the floor," he said. "The back of the seat is all red where she was sitting."

"Bad," Clore admitted. "It'd be bad if a flatfoot flagged us down."

The light changed to green. Clore drove a half a block, then angled into the curb and parked in front of a dime store. He got out, said, "I got shoppin' to do. You keep an eye peeled for that scurvy red-head."

Five minutes later Clore came out with a cardboard carton filled with an array of paper bags that held his purchases. Van Wyker was kneeling backward on the front seat, staring out of the back window.

"I didn't see Anita or the redhead," he said.

CLORE parked the box on the floor under the dashboard. He took a card of large safety pins from his pocket and climbed into the rear of the sedan. The fat man looked on with awe, wonder and a few chills as Hank Clore restored Fifi to her original position and pinned the back of her dress to the seat cushion. He tugged the brim of the red hat down to a raffish angle and studied the effect. "She won't fall off the seat no more," he said.

"Shh!" warned Van Wyker. "A police officer."

Clore climbed out of the car and almost bumped noses with a traffic cop.

"What's wrong?" asked the cop. "What were people looking in the car for?"

Clore resisted the temptation to slug the cop in the teeth. "It's a free country, ain't it?" he demanded. "Citizens can gander a dame, can't they."

Van Wyker stuck his head out, told the cop, "You're talking to a detective."

Hank Clore wasn't too sold on the idea. But he palmed the badge and flashed it,



said, "I made a pinch. The dame's drunk and the fat guy's her husband."

The police force was large and the inter-departmental rivalry bitter. The cop decided that Clore was stupid enough to be a bona fide detective. "Okay, okay!" he said, turned and walked back to his post.

Clore got behind the wheel and drove away.

"Did I do good?" asked Van Wyker anxiously.

"I guess. Impersonatin' a flatfoot is a tough rap. But I might have slapped him in the chops. That's worse."

They were doing a brisk fifty miles an hour down River Drive. The fat man pointed excitedly, cried, "That's the apartment house!"

Clore wheeled the sedan into a side street, ignored the imposing twenty-story apartment building and turned into an alley. The doors of a two-car garage were open, the place empty. Obeying an impulse, Clore drove in and stopped. He climbed out with the carton and peeked up and down the alley. It was deserted. Van Wyker climbed out of the car and smiled at Fifi.

Clore put the carton on the floor and emptied the bags. "We disguise the heap, see?" he said. Van Wyker's eyes bugged. He saw tightly rolled streamers of crepe paper in every hue of the rainbow. There were a lot of gaudy, gummed paper stars the size of half-dollars.

"Like a carnival float?" he asked.

"Sort of. We make the hack look like a couple of dopes got married, see? Cops don't flag down no newlyweds. It ain't polite. You drape the hack good while I take a gander for that scurvy redhead!"

John Van Wyker was so overcome with admiration and delight that he clapped his hands. He grabbed a handful of stars, licked them avidly, then began to star-stud the right rear fender with a slapdash relish.

Clore opened the door at the rear of the garage and stepped into a grassy back yard, backed the door closed. The house, some sixty feet away, was obscured by a profusion of shrubs. His intent had been to keep an eye on the apartment house.

"Hell," he mused as the truth dawned, "if the blond and that scurvy redhead was watchin' the parking lot, it's a cinch they trailed us and know where we're at."

The circumstances called for a one-man ambush. Clore glanced around. The garage roof! He grabbed the edge of it and shinned himself up. The roof sloped up toward the alley. Flat on his stomach, he wriggled forward like a stalking Indian and stopped when he was able to peek over the roof edge into the alley. He took out the .38 revolver and laid it on the roof where it would be handy.

Below, John Van Wyker chortled happily as he went about his task of decorating the sedan as a vehicle befitting a festive bridal party. The sun beat down on Clore's back and softened the bells in his head. He felt good. The redhead would appear and get his skull dented by the revolver butt.

A black coupe nosed into the alley and stopped. Apparently the driver liked the looks of things, for he shifted into second and drove in. A tan station wagon followed the coupe almost bumper to bumper.

**H**ANK CLORE frowned. The station wagon was the one Max Sertz used to transport pinball machines. He got a tight grip on the butt of the .38. That Max's goon squad, the blond and redhead would combine forces hadn't occurred to him.

When the coupe drew abreast of the garage the driver saw John Van Wyker going about his job decorating the sedan. The coupe stopped on a dime. The station wagon ran into it and the air filled with the metallic crash of connecting bumpers.

John Van Wyker came running out of the garage like a well-trained fire horse.

The redhead got out of the coupe in nothing flat and twisted the fat man's right wrist up between his shoulder blades. Anita got out of the coupe. Her face was pale and she was breathing hard. The redhead forced John Van Wyker into the car and got in himself.

The goon squad was out of the station wagon pushing down on the front fenders to uncouple the locked bumpers. The blonde went into the garage. She came out and stood a few feet outside the open doorway.

"He isn't here," she said. "Clore isn't here. He's gone. Clore's gone." Her voice was tight and jerky.

The leader of the goon squad, a jockey-



sized tough named Hoke, started for the garage. Anita sidestepped and blocked his progress by gripping his upper arms, cried, "He isn't here. Clore's gone, I tell you."

The redhead stuck his head out of the convertible. "Clore is looking for me," he said. "Your husband just told me."

Hoke rubbed his jaw and stared at the car. The blonde released his arms and stepped back warily.

Hoke asked, "Why the fluff?" He nodded at the sedan.

The redhead consulted the fat man, said, "They were going to a wedding."

"Why?" asked Hoke in surprise.

Anita Van Wyker raised her right hand to the side of her head and made a cranking motion.

Hoke admitted, "Hank Clore is nuts."

"So is my husband," she said. "See here! I'm the only person who can tell Clore where Red lives. He'll have to go to my apartment."

"Yeah," Hoke admitted.

Anita opened her purse and gave Hoke the key to her apartment. He accepted it and walked back to the station wagon. The goon squad piled into the car. The blonde watched the station wagon back out of the alley.

"What now?" Red asked.

"Drop John off some place," she ordered. "Take his money. Make him walk back. But don't go too far. It's a dirty, stinking mess. Damn that Clore, anyway! Now beat it!"

Red drove the coupe out the far end of the alley and turned left.

Clore thrust his face over the roof edge. Anita Van Wyker faced into the garage directly below. The car fascinated her. The top of her head was a bright yellow oval in the sunlight.

Hank Clore was no gentleman and the blonde had cost him a good job. The revolver swished downward in a blue-black arc. The base of the butt connected with the back of the blonde's head with a faint, muffled crack. She pitched forward with yellow hair whirlpooling around her shoulders.

Clore dropped from the roof. Anita Van Wyker was face down on the garage floor, her bright yellow hair fanned out on the concrete above her head.

Sensing that the great wealth of blond hair, like Max Sertz', was her pride and joy, Clore knelt beside her and took out his knife. He honed the big blade on the palm of his left hand, then went to work. He gave her a crude crew haircut. The effect was startling. It handed Hank Clore quite a jolt.

He got up and stared at the sedan with mouth agape. The fat man had gone hog wild. The car looked like a Christmas package decorated by a four-year-old. The coverage was terrific. Even the windshield, windows and the side walls of the tires were star-studded.

Clore glared at the blonde. "That's for shovin' that chair in front of me," he said. He massaged his hands with satisfaction. "Ha! All I got to do is go to the apartment an' wait for that scurvy redhead to show up." His eyes widened and his jaw sagged in dismay. "Hell!" he growled. "Max's goon squad is at the apartment. I'd get plowed under."

It was a vexatious problem. He mulled it over a moment. Then he saw the answer. It was on the floor. All he had to do was take Anita Van Wyker to some secluded spot and wait for her to regain consciousness. He could persuade her to give him the address of the redhead.

Clore picked her up and deposited her in the center of the back seat. She slumped down on her spine but didn't threaten to topple right or left. As he straightened up, the handcuffs fell out of his pocket. He blinked. Then he picked up the cuffs and joined Anita Van Wyker's right wrist to the left wrist of the corpse under the simple logic that he was preventing her from escaping from the car when he stopped for a traffic light.

**H**E SLIPPED behind the wheel and backed into the alley. He decided to drive past the apartment house and see if the black coupe was parked there. River Drive continued westward over a three-mile causeway spanning a swamp area and terminating in a fifty-acre state park. The park would be an ideal hideout while he waited for the blonde to regain consciousness.

Clore drove out into the side street. The stars on the windshield were a distracting

*(Continued on page 122)*



# THE DEARLY DEPARTED

By JIMMY NICHOLS

THE ATTEMPT of the living to communicate with the spirits of the dead is an experiment that has fascinated men and women for many thousands of years. No one has ever proved to a skeptic's satisfaction that the thing can be done. On the other hand, no one has ever proved to a believer that it can't be done. What is certain is that the cults of mediums and spiritualists, however sincere in their origin, have long been the happy hunting grounds for quacks, magicians, sharpsters, blackmailers and confidence men of all sorts. Court records all over the United States are full of astounding cases of fake mediums who have deluded hundreds of gullible people before they were thrown behind bars. Probably no such practitioner, however, was brought to a more appropriate bar of justice than Harold Planish of Chicago in the year of 1902.

Mrs. Ella Planish, his wife, had been a widow, or so she thought, for more than a decade when just after Christmas she visited the seance session of Madame Luboff on a shady residential side street in Chicago. She went with her friend and landlady, a Miss Gannett, who was a devout believer in ghostly contacts.

"You'll see," she told Mrs. Planish. "Madame Luboff is wonderful! Of course, most of the people who come to her want to speak to departed relatives, but Madame Luboff can get in touch with anyone. *Anyone!* Why, last week we had Napoleon and Julius Caesar! And once we had Mary Queen of Scots! She cost twenty-five dollars!"

Mrs. Planish said hurriedly that she didn't feel quite up to Mary Queen of Scots—not yet. She thought she'd start with something simpler.

"Perhaps Harold," she said reflectively. The idea of once more addressing her departed spouse pleased her. She had been in the midst of giving him a piece of her mind when he'd slammed out of the

*No one could expect, least of all Mrs. Planish, that when she asked for her dead husband he'd come back to her—with a shroud on his back!*

door that rainy night and walked into the river. Suicide? Heavens, no! Just carelessness. He'd been too angry to remember his glasses and he was so near-sighted! His shoes and his wallet had floated to the shore the next day. She'd ask him, she decided, where his body was. It wasn't quite decent to have a member of the family floating about in the river.

And so, a few minutes later, speaking from the dusky drawing room of Madame Luboff, where all the shades were drawn and a charmed circle of suckers leaned breathlessly together, Mrs. Planish said firmly, "There are a few words I'd like to say to my husband, Harold."

Madame Luboff had a standard "husband" that she produced on such occasions. He was a nondescript sort of a man, neither short nor tall, his face neither round nor long, his voice neither deep nor high—in short, he looked just enough like almost everyone's husband to get by, especially when he was wrapped in a sheet and shrouded in gloom. He made his entrance at that moment.

Mrs. Planish was really startled. "Harold!" she gasped. And then, "Who gave you that awful haircut?"

"Ella!" the ghost said weakly, and then, knowing when he was licked, he took off his sheet and went home with his wife. He turned state's evidence in the case against Madame Luboff and lived the rest of his natural life, without any more attempts at desertion, with his wife.



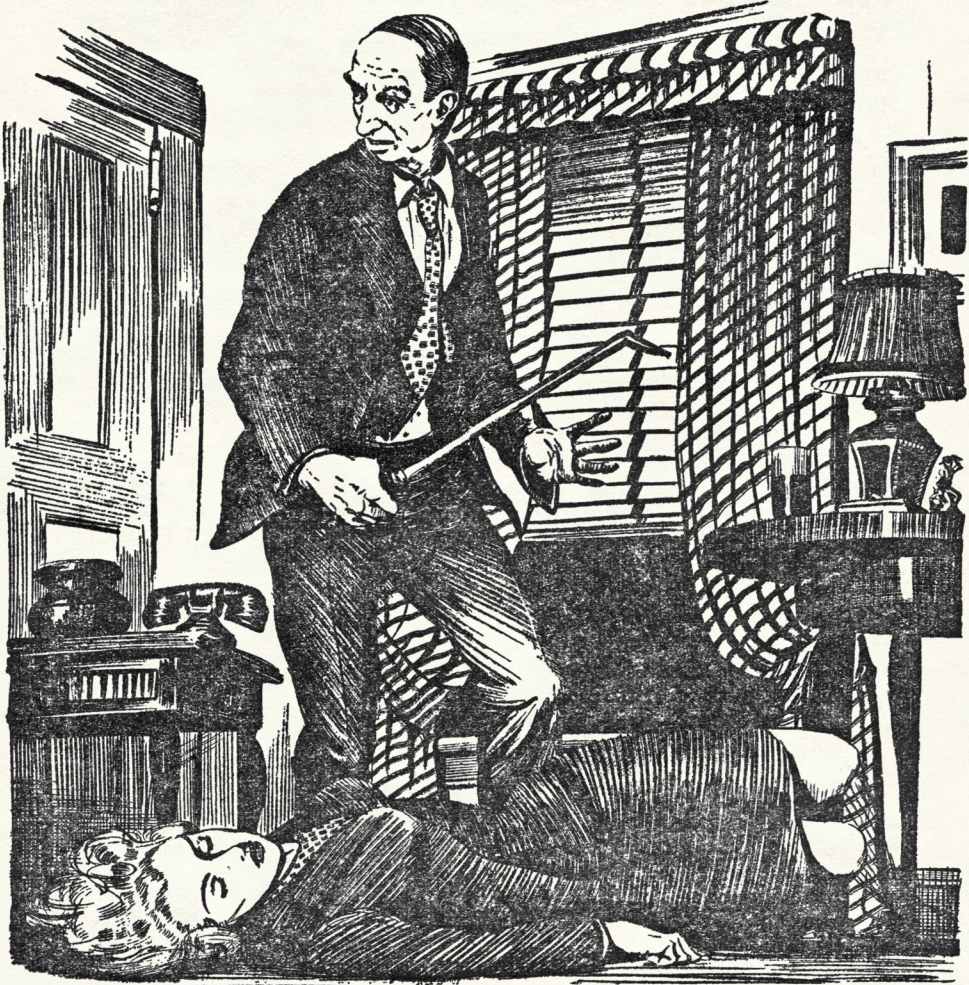
# A BETTER FRAME

By DAVE SANDS

*There was only one way for Paul Sherrod to crawl out of that murder rap, and that was to tie a frame around Hugh Belnapp. . . . And how could Sherrod find more beautiful material to make a frame with . . . than Nora's dead body?*

PAUL SHERROD came awake slowly, not because he wanted to, but because he couldn't hang onto oblivion any longer. At first he refused to open his eyes, as if he hoped that would bring the drugged sleep back to him. It didn't. He listened to the swift whirr of the electric fan across the room and felt the late-summer heat drawing sweat from

Behind Sherrod, the voice boomed through the paneling, "This is the police! Open that door!"





the pores of his skin. Rain beat heavily against the windows, and he had always hated rain. Rain and death—he hated both, and tonight he had them both.

He opened his eyes after a while, not because he wanted to, but because he was afraid to keep them closed any longer. He rolled his legs off of the davenport, let his feet drop to the floor and sat up. He rolled his head around and saw the body still lying across the room on the floor. He shuddered, all at once as sick again as he had been when he had first seen Nora's body over there. As sick as when he had crouched in the far corner of the room, staring, horrified, at what he had done to her and trying to drown his horror with whiskey from the bottle he had grabbed out of the liquor cabinet.

He knew now that getting drunk enough to pass out had been a mistake. It had consumed a few hours of time, had put daylight behind him and brought darkness that was broken in this room only by the neon lights winking on and off on the roof of the building across the street. Other than that, nothing had been changed. Nora's body was still lying there, her brown gabardine suit tight-twisted around her body by her fall, the back of her blonde head sickeningly crushed in. But he couldn't see the wound, and he was thankful for that.

Paul Sherrod pressed his palms against his temples and stared at the girl. Nora was as beautiful in death as she had been in life. But harder looking now, like chrome. Death had sharpened the lines of her mouth and had put a strangely brittle expression across her face. That same suggestion of brittle hardness had been there in life, and Sherrod realized that now. He wondered why he had not recognized it before this.

Still, he knew the answer to that. It had been the warm softness of her that had blinded him, the way she had stood close to him and teased him with her eyes as she raised her head and offered him her lips.

And all the while she had been playing him for a fool. Sherrod knew that now. Thinking back, he could remember every trick she had pulled to get what she had wanted out of him. It had been a part of her plan the day she had bumped into him while he was coming out of the bank. She

had dropped the packages she was carrying, and he had been aware only of her beauty and the music of her laughter as he stooped quickly and picked them up.

"Why, you are Mr. Sherrod, aren't you? The banker?"

"Well, you see—ah—" It was her eyes, clear blue and teasingly bold that had made him stammer. "Ah—only the teller, I'm afraid."

He might have understood about her even then if he hadn't been such a small, meek and utterly plain man. Beautiful women were creatures that he dreamed about as lonely men always do, and Nora's first smile and warm friendliness had blinded him.

He stood up from the davenport with his eyes still riveted on the girl's dead body. The blue-white light from the neon sign across the street spilled across her, dropped back, and came on again at even intervals. He forced himself to cross the room to where she lay. He stooped, touched her arm and jerked his hand back from the cold feel of death.

He was a small, meek man who had always lived a carefully regulated life, and this was the first time he had ever been close to death. It was the first time he had killed.

He stared down at her, hating her for what she had tried to do to him and for what he had done to her. He hadn't intended to kill her. He had come directly to her apartment from the bank, and he had used the key she had given him. He was opening the door when he heard her talking to someone over the telephone. Something in her voice had halted him.

"I tell you it's all set, Hugh. A girl could wave a hip at the little fool and get anything she wanted. He'll bring the money with him, all right, and after he's embezzled this time we can clip him for more. He should be here in a few minutes now. That's right . . . Sure . . . I'll call you later."

That was when Sherrod had walked into the apartment. He had seen the startled alarm flicker in her eyes and had watched her hide it behind a quick, warm smile.

"Why, Paul, darling! You're here earlier than usual. That's wonderful, darling; now we'll have enough time—"



He had struck her then. He hadn't really intended to, but the anger had come spilling through him like hot gall. He had remembered her kisses and the promises she had made and the five thousand dollars he had almost taken from the bank vault. Something had snapped in his mind, and he had hit her.

He remembered how she had fallen, slowly and loosely. Her head must have struck the corner of the cocktail table, but he wasn't sure about that. He had hit her and then fled from her apartment. Not until an hour later had he become worried enough to return to the apartment.

**T**HE TELEPHONE rang while Sherrod was bending there beside the girl's body. He snapped erect and whirled to the telephone like a trapped animal. It rang again, and he stared at it. A thought came slashing desperately into his mind: If he didn't answer it they may come here to investigate!

He picked up the receiver and tried to disguise his voice. "Hello."

"Is Nora there? Miss Drake?" A man's voice.

"No. As a matter of fact—" His tongue was thick and seemed to stick to the roof of his mouth. He didn't remember what he intended to say. The thought slid across the surface of his mind and instantly lost itself; he couldn't remember.

The man's voice laughed softly. "Oh, then it's Mr. Sherrod I'm talking to. You don't need to bother about Nora. She couldn't answer the phone anyhow, could she?"

Sherrod took a breath, held it. "I—I don't believe I understand you. Who are you?"

"Hugh Belnapp."

Sherrod's heart stopped beating. Hugh Belnapp! He remembered now. This was the Hugh whom Nora had been talking to when he opened the apartment door.

Belnapp said saftly, "You shouldn't have hit her so hard, Mr. Sherrod. That's what happened, isn't it? You argued with her about something, and then you hit her and killed her."

Sherrod opened his mouth, but nothing came out. He closed his mouth again and tried to swallow.

Belnapp said, "Murder is a tough business, Mr. Sherrod. Especially for a bank teller who gets mixed up with a girl like Nora Drake. You know what you'll get for this, don't you?"

Sherrod spoke then. He could hardly hear his own voice, it was so thin with panic. "How—how did you know about it?"

Hugh Belnapp's laugh was slow and cold across the wire. "I tried to call Nora about an hour ago. I knew she was in, but she didn't answer. I got to wondering and came over to find out."

Wind gusted outside, and rain thudded heavily against the windows. Sherrod shuddered and closed his eyes tightly.

"So you have a key, too," he said hoarsely.

"Not me," Belnapp said coldly. "Nora was a one-man gal—you're the only one who had a key to her apartment. I came up the fire escape and had a look through the window."

Sherrod tried to think of something to say, but his mind was empty.

Belnapp said softly, "You're on one hell of a spot, Mr. Sherrod. You want to get off of it?"

Sherrod nodded mutely at the telephone. He opened his eyes and stared at the girl's body, and he had a sudden wrenching desire to be sick. "Yes . . . yes."

"If the body can't be found, the police won't be able to pin the murder on you. No corpus delicti, no murder—understand? But it'll cost you money to have that body moved, Sherrod, a lot of money. You'd better come out to my place right away so we can talk this over."

"All right," Sherrod whispered. "All right."

He cradled the receiver, and then with a sudden grabbing feeling of guilt wiped it with his handkerchief.

He gripped the receiver, his hand sheathed in his handkerchief, and carried it to Nora's dead body. He picked up the lifeless hand, wrapped it around the telephone, and then heard a girl's voice metallic voice come through the silence.

"Yes? Hello . . . hello?"

He almost screamed. Then he realized that it was the switchboard girl's voice he had heard, not Nora's. He jerked around



and dropped the receiver onto its cradle, closing the line. He took a quick step back from the telephone, still nudged by panic.

Sweat ran down his face and under his armpits, and he couldn't seem to get enough air into his lungs. He was gripped by a sudden desire to run, out of this building and down the street and as far as he could get from Nora's dead, staring face. But that was a crazy impulse, and he knew it. His only hope for escape lay in buying help from Hugh Belnapp.

He started for the door and then abruptly halted, remembering his hat. He went to the davenport, got his hat and turned again toward the door. He halted again. He couldn't risk being seen leaving the apartment by that obvious way.

HE STOOD there, staring around the room and trying to think. He would have to use the fire escape, of course, but still he hesitated, nagged by the feeling that he might be forgetting some piece of incriminating evidence that would point to him.

He began prowling the room, searching the apartment in the blue-white flare of the neon sign across the street, then waiting in darkness until the light came on again. He tried to remember the things he had done those times he had visited Nora Drake here in her apartment. She had fixed him a meal one night, and later he had helped her with the dishes. He searched the kitchen, but he found nothing.

He returned to the living room, and this time he saw the pipe on the end table. It was the one he thought he had lost three days ago, the one with his initials lettered into the stem. A thousand ants began running up his spine on tiny cold feet as he slipped the pipe into his pocket. What if he had missed seeing that briar and the police had found it? He shivered and wiped the sweat from his forehead.

He returned to Nora Drake's dead body, nervous and on edge. He was glad now that he had not bought her the gold wrist watch, for there was no chance of the lapel pin he had given her instead being traced. Standing there, his eyes were drawn to the horror that was the back of her head. It was a vertical wound, deep and narrow.

He remembered the way he had struck her in that senseless flare of pride-shattered anger, and how she had fallen. He knew then that she had not been killed by striking her head against the corner of the table. The wound was not right for that. He tried to think that out, to find an answer, but his brain was a sponge that soaked up panic-laced impressions, and refused to give out cool logic. Something else had killed her, not the corner of the table, but he had no way of telling what it was.

He turned away from the girl's body and went to the window that gave out on the fire escape. He paused there, staring unseeingly down at the water pooled on the floor below the window, back-tracking his thoughts. He had searched the apartment, and there was nothing left in it to point to him. Nothing but the girl's body and the fact that he had been seen entering the apartment with her by one of the building's residents.

He could almost hear the questioning of the police. "You were seen entering the apartment with Miss Drake at four o'clock. She was murdered at approximately five. Where were you between the hour of the murder and nine o'clock tonight?"

His stomach squeezed in at the thought, for that was a question he could not answer without proving his guilt.

The neon sign fell away and again flared its blue-white light into the apartment. He saw the water pooled on the floor beneath the window then. He bent and touched it; he straightened and looked at the sill. Water was there, too, but there was none on the sills of the two adjoining windows.

So Hugh Belnapp had lied! He had not stood on the fire escape landing outside and peered through the window at Nora's dead body. He had lifted the window and climbed inside while Sherrod lay sprawled out on the davenport.

Sherrod wheeled away from the window and swept his eyes around the room. The numb feeling of shock and guilt drained out of his mind, and his thoughts sharpened. This was something like balancing his accounts at the bank every afternoon, like adding a column of figures to get the sum total.



Hugh Belnapp had lied about not entering the apartment. Sherrod centered his hopes on that. And Nora had not been killed by striking her head on the table corner when she fell; some narrow, rod-like object had made that wound in the back of her head. Sherrod added that fact to Belnapp's lie and began searching for the answer.

He found it at the fireplace across the room. The wood tongs and the small three-fingered rake showed the black smear of ashes, but the poker was clean. It was too clean.

Someone rapped on the apartment door. Sherrod spun, and the air turned rancid in his lungs as he heard the man's voice through the panel.

"Everything all right in there, Miss Drake?"

Sherrod stood in an agony of flaring panic, and the man's voice came at him again.

"Hey, in there—Miss Drake? Something is wrong or you wouldn't have hung up on the phone a while ago without answering the operator. This is the police—open up, Miss Drake."

Sherrod's heart began kicking the walls of his chest, and a trapped feeling squeezed his throbbing temples like iron bands. The cop banged on the door, louder this time. He tried the knob and then raised his voice sharply.

"Open up, you in there, or I'm comin' in anyhow!"

Sherrod grabbed up the poker and backed to the window. The cop's shoulder jarred against the door. Sherrod spun in an agony of fear and heaved the window open. Rain came slashing in on his lower body, and he heard the cop's shoulder crash against the door panel again as he scissored his legs through the window.

He didn't have time to close the window as he stood on the metal fire escape. He heard the first splintering of wood as the cop threw his full weight against the door. He began running down the inclined stairs, came to the second floor landing and felt the counter-balanced fire escape swing down to the ground under his weight. Above him he heard the door crash open, the officer's harsh shout as he saw the dead body of the girl.

Sherrod forced speed into legs that were

numb with fear. His feet struck the pavement, and he began running desperately through the rain toward his parked car around the corner. A shot roared at him from the upper window. The cop shouted, fired again, and Sherrod heard the vicious whine of the slug shunting off the pavement just ahead of him. He dodged frantically around the corner of the building, saw his coupe at the curb and dived into it. He could hardly fit the key into the ignition, his hand was shaking so badly. He kicked on the starter and knew a swift grabbing of terror that the engine would not start after being left out so long in the rain. Then the motor sputtered, roared, and the tires shrieked as he let out the clutch.

**H**UGH BELNAPP'S Los Diablos Club was north of town, in the foothills of the mountains. Sherrod swung the coupe through the wrought-iron archway and brought it to a halt on the broad concrete slab at the side of the building. The rain was not as bad here as it had been in town, but the wind was just as gusty, clacking the bamboo trees that flanked the black glass entrance of the club.

Sherrod climbed out of the coupe, the iron poker hidden up the sleeve of his coat. He started toward the main entrance, but a cunning that he had never before known in his quiet, well-regulated existence changed his mind. He angled around the side of the building, came to an oak-paneled door at the rear and opened it. He stepped into a dimly lighted hallway that was familiar from the night Nora had brought him to Hugh Belnapp's office to cash a check. The carpet was deep and soft underfoot, and he could hear the muted whispering of music through the walls from the Club's main room.

He paused at the office door, a small, timid man, wondering if he had the nerve to go through with this. He pushed the poker farther up the left sleeve of his coat and rubbed the length of it through the cloth to destroy any fingerprints he might have put on it. He took a deep breath, but he couldn't stop the thudding of his heart against the walls of his chest. He opened the door and went in.

Hugh Belnapp looked up from his desk, grinning. He was a big man, with hard,



black eyes and a broad mouth and hair that was like polished jet.

"I've been expecting you, Mr. Sherrod."

Sherrod looked nervously around the office. It was not a large room, but it had an elegance. The walls were rough plastered, finished with a swirl of the trowel, and it was softly lighted by fluorescent tubes. An oil painting, well done and in good taste, hung on the wall behind Belnapp's mahogany desk, and there were three russet leather chairs, and one tapestry-covered, overstuffed chair with deep-packed removable cushions. Sherrod walked to that chair and stood behind it. He gave Belnapp a shallow, agitated smile.

"I don't suppose you would believe me if I told you I didn't murder Nora Drake," he said. His voice shook, and he couldn't steady it, and it was hard for him to meet Belnapp's narrowing grin.

"No," Belnapp said, "and the police won't, either. You're in a bad way, Mr. Sherrod."

Sherrod flexed his small soft hands against the cushion at the chair's back. "I know," he whispered. "I know."

"You'd been running around with Nora, and I saw how it was when I looked through the apartment window. You were dead drunk on the davenport..."

Sherrod shuddered. "I drank that whiskey only because I was scared. And sick. It was the first time I was ever drunk, Mr. Belnapp."

Belnapp wasn't listening. "You were dead drunk, and Nora was just plain dead. Murdered. That makes it bad for you, don't it?"

Sherrod nodded shakily. He pushed his left hand between the cushion and the chair back, released his grip on the poker and let it slide out of his sleeve. His nerves were so taut that he thought they would break, and he shivered.

Belnapp's voice thinned down and turned cold. "I understand you have thirty thousand dollars in your personal account at the bank, Sherrod. That is exactly how much it'll cost you for me to have that apartment cleaned up and Nora's body removed before the police find it."

Sherrod said unsteadily. "But I wiped my fingerprints off of everything, the whiskey bottle, furniture and door—everything I might have touched."

Belnapp's eyes were like black marbles, hard and bright. "It's worth thirty thousand to have the body moved, Sherrod. No corpus delicti, no murder. That's my price; you can take it or leave it."

Sherrod said bitterly, "You murdered her. You were working with her to get me to embezzle money from the bank. I almost did that today. I almost took five thousand dollars out of the vault to give to her, but I changed my mind at the last minute. I went to her apartment early this afternoon to tell her, and when I let myself in I heard her talking to you. That's when I learned she was as crooked as you are, and that she had been playing me for a fool."

He walked around the chair, to Belnapp's desk. "You murdered her. You climbed through the window while I was dead drunk and murdered her with the poker. You knew I'd think I had done it, and that's how you planned to collect."

**Joe Kelly**  
of the  
**Quiz Kids**  
N.B.C.  
SUNDAY  
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Belnapp started to smile, and Sherrod hit him. He was a small man who knew nothing about violence, but bitter anger was in him, a remembered terror that made his mind sharp and scheming. He hit Belnapp in the face and threw himself across the desk at the man, clawing out with his hands. That was when he slipped the apartment key into the man's vest pocket. Belnapp heaved out of his chair and sent Sherrod spilling to the floor. He jerked the little man to his feet, slapped him viciously and slammed him into a chair beside the desk.

"You're not half as smart as you think, little man. You figured some answers, and maybe they're good. But you can't prove anything. The price is still thirty thousand. Are you going to buy or do you want the gas chamber?"

Sherrod dropped his head. "All right." He looked at the blank check Belnapp pushed in front of him, and picked up the desk pen. He began writing slowly, the pen tightly cramped between his fingers.

For services rendered, pay to the order of  
Hugh Belnapp the sum of thirty thousand  
dollars.

Signed: Paul Sherodd.

SHERROD was getting dressed for work the next morning when the police brought Hugh Belnapp into his apartment. Sergeant McNear was a short, square man with a weather-red-dened face and a thin saddle of roan hair across his balding head.

"I'll come right to the point, Mr. Sherrod," he said. "A girl named Nora Drake was murdered yesterday. I understand you were acquainted with her. Is that right?"

"Yes," Sherrod said. "We saw each other once in a while." He looked briefly at Hugh Belnapp. "I heard over the radio a while ago that she had been killed. I'm sorry about that."

Sergeant McNear's eyes were grim and hard. "The beat patrolman almost caught the killer—almost but not quite. When we went through the girl's papers we got a lead on Belnapp here. We went out to his place last night and found the murder weapon—a poker—hidden behind the cushion of his chair."

Belnapp's eyes were black and hating. "Sherrod put it there. He tried to frame me with that poker, and he slipped the apartment key into my pocket when he took a swing at me."

McNear's gaze was narrow and brittle. "That's what Belnapp claims, Mr. Sherrod."

Sherrod tried to smile, but he couldn't. He said in a thin, cracked voice. "Do I look capable of fighting a man like Mr. Belnapp?"

McNear grinned wryly. "If you'll pardon my saying it, you look about as likely of doing that as you would to buy the Brooklyn Bridge. Just what I figured—Belnapp is lying."

Panic put a glassy edge in Belnapp's voice. "But what about the check? Sherrod wrote out a thirty-thousand-dollar check to bribe me to get rid of Nora Drake's body. It's got his signature on it—you saw that yourself, Sergeant. Ask him about that!"

McNear shrugged his blocky shoulders. "You might as well settle the business of the check, Mr. Sherrod. Give us a sample of your handwriting. We could check at the bank, but you can do it just as well here. Write the words 'thirty thousand dollars,' and sign your name. That ought to do it."

Paul Sherrod did. He held the pen lightly between his fingers, and he wrote with a fluid smoothness of movement. He handed the paper to McNear. McNear compared the sample with the check, and his smile was bleak.

"You should have figured a better alibi than that, Belnapp. You weren't even half smart in this murder. You had the murder weapon and the key to the girl's apartment. And your story about the check won't hold water. You forged that check, and it was a lousy job. The handwriting is as different as yesterday and today. You even made the mistake of spelling Sherrod's name with one *r* and two *d*'s when you faked the check. You'll hang, Belnapp."

Paul Sherrod looked up at Hugh Belnapp and saw the complete horror that was in the man's eyes. He saw that with a mild man's feeling of sympathy, for he knew just how the murderer felt.



# THE WITNESS



"You can't scare me," Crennan said. "You wouldn't dare put a kid through a thing like that. The clubs and organizations and citizens would crucify you!"

By  
**TALMAGE  
POWELL**

*Only the one man on the Force who had nothing to lose—Riley—would have taken that crippled kid into the back room . . . where his screams could ring down the corridor to tear at his father's heart!*

A COUPLE of nights after he inherited the hundred grand, Riley and I had coffee together in the restaurant down the street from Headquarters. The coffee was a sort of ritual. I was teamed with Riley in Homicide, and we had started the coffee-after-duty habit when I'd got my promotion three months

ago. We almost never missed a night now.

This night I sat looking at him, and for the first time I felt a dislike for Riley. Don't ask me why, I couldn't exactly put my finger on it myself. I knew it was the hundred grand bothering me, and I tried to figure out why.

I eyed him. Riley looked morose, not



like a man who had just come into a fortune. He was a big, horse-faced man who'd been on the cops practically since I was in diapers. He was balding, and he had the sentimental eyes of the Irish. But in my opinion he was none too bright, just a work-horse cop. He was married to a little woman named Maureen whose world revolved around Riley. His idea of a fancy meal was a plate of heavy, steaming stew, and his idea of fancy drinking was beer out of a glass instead of directly from the bottle. You just couldn't imagine Riley with a hundred grand, and I guess that's what bothered me. I looked at him and thought, That's fate for you, handing a guy like this big goon a hundred grand, while there are plenty of guys on the Force who are young enough and smart enough to enjoy it. Me, for example. I was suffering from one of man's oldest diseases—envy.

Riley slurped his coffee. Hell, I thought, he'll be a scream drinking coffee in the kind of restaurant a hundred G's lets you into.

"Goode," he said, "I'm retiring. Handed in my resignation yesterday."

"Yeah?"

His big hands worked around the coffee mug. "'Tis hard to think of quitting, but now I am a rich man." He sighed, tasted the words—almost as if he found them bitter. He said again, "I am a rich man. 'Tis not fair that I should stay on the Force and keep younger men back just because of my seniority. Anyway, now I couldn't be comfortable. Something has gone—the way the lads look at me, speak to me, whisper behind my back. Yes, I'm quitting, Goode."

**I** THOUGHT of the way he'd got the hundred grand: Back in the days when kidnaping had been a favorite past-time of the mobs, Marlowe Corday's daughter had been snatched. Who was Corday? Just Corday of the oil millions, that's all. With the luck of the Irish, Riley had followed the contact man one dark night, so the story went, found the kidnapers' lair, killed one of them, captured the other two and delivered the daughter and old Corday's ransom dough safe and sound. Years had passed, until just a few days ago, old Corday had died. With the hereafter

staring him in the face, he'd written Riley into his will, leaving a handful of his loose change to show he'd never forgotten what Riley had done for him. Riley was now a rich man.

He scratched his freckled bald spot and looked troubled. "Goode, would ye think me crazy if I said I wish I hadn't inherited that hundred grand?"

I goggled at him. He meant it! His gaze was heavy as it came up to mine. "'Tis me wish that I could explain to you, Goode. But no, you're young, you'd not be the one to understand." He was going to try to explain, anyway, I could see in his eyes.

He curled his hands around the coffee cup. "Twenty years ago it might have been different, but now—well, Goode, now I'm an old dog, too old and thick, mayhap, to learn new tricks. Ye see, this money is tangling me all up. Me and Maureen, we're just people. We settled in our place in life many years ago, lad. We became contented. We realized how far up the ladder we could go in life and we liked it okay. We were satisfied. We fitted, lad, the kind of life we've lived. We wouldn't fit any other. We just wanted peace from here on out, me to reach retirement age, and to stay put in our own house where I can take off me shoes and smoke me pipes in the living room. We wanted our neighbors around us, and the biggest of me worries was to be the size of the pole beans in the back-yard garden.

"Now, Goode, we don't know what to do. It's all spoiled. We don't know how to live with a hundred thousand dollars. Me picture has been in the paper, and the neighbors have changed. They call me mister now and act different toward me, and me peace is gone. 'Tis like I have become a stranger to every mortal after all these years, and it makes me lonely and sad, Goode. A whole flock of strange faces come to our door, slicksters, shylocks, all trying to sell us something, get a cut of that hundred grand. I wish I could be the same old Riley again. I mean, I am—to myself—but to me friends and neighbors and people that count I am a stranger. The money has killed something, lad, that twice the money couldn't buy back. 'Tis me wish that Mr. Corday had let me end me days in peace."



Well, I said he was none too bright, didn't I?

Late the next afternoon, the Crennan murder broke. As if Homicide didn't have enough on its hands already! In addition to the usual hit-run cases, the back-alley stabbings, the sordid messes the tabloids call crimes of passion, we were up to our elbows in the Ansel Dunloff murder. Dunloff had been a pawn shop proprietor who lived alone in a room off the back of his place of business. Somebody had entered Dunloff's abode in the dead of night, put a gun to the old man's temple, made him open the vault in the shop. The criminal, as yet unknown, had cleaned the vault of several thousand dollars in jewelry pledges, and had then coolly shot and killed Dunloff.

Old Ansel Dunloff had been a harmless soul, a respectable business man with a name for square dealing in his neighborhood. The kill was a natural for the papers, and the hue and cry was getting worse by the day. The *Journal* was turning its guns on the police in what was amounting to a crusade, and every mother's son on Homicide had been promised a fate unprintable unless the Dunloff murderer was uncovered and delivered to the blind, hungry, arms of Justice.

The afternoon of the Crennan murder, Riley and I were downstairs in a back room trying to coax a confession out of a punk with an arm-long record who'd once tried to rob old Ansel Dunloff. The punk was sobbing that he hadn't been in the pawn shop neighborhood the night of Dunloff's death. He had an alibi. He wanted a lawyer. Riley, of course, had only a week and a half to go until his resignation went in effect, but he was working on the punk as if he intended to be a cop the rest of his life. I wished to hell I'd never heard of Homicide.

Then the inspector himself came in. He was a short, greying man, his dewlaps sagging as if he hadn't been sleeping much. He looked at the punk and told us wearily to let him go. "I'm pulling you off the Ansel Dunloff case," he said. "I want you to get out to 404 Eastland Avenue as quick as you can make it. We've already got prowler cars converging on the neighborhood."

"What's happened out there?" I said.

The inspector turned his dewlaps toward me. "Some guy named Crennan just got home and found his wife shot to death."

**E**ASTLAND AVENUE just missed being slums. Once it had been a suburban section of small frame houses on large lots, but that was ancient history. The city had swallowed the section up. A few warehouses, garages and cheap eating places had moved in, then a junkyard or two, and the wide lots had grown over with weeds. The houses had gone to seed, 404 being no exception.

A sizable crowd had gathered near the two prowler cars at the curb when Riley and I drove up. They were the morbidly curious who gather at such scenes, housewives with dishwater still damp on their hands, men who'd just got home and momentarily forgotten to raise hell because their dinners weren't ready after a hard day's work.

Riley and I pushed through the people and went inside. The bungalow was a small, story-and-a-half place, gloomy inside and smelling of beer. The living room held a pair of cops and some lumpy furniture. It looked as if it hadn't been cleaned for a century or two, grimy curtains, ashtrays spilling over on tables beside empty beer glasses.

One of the boys from the prowler cars said, "She's down in the basement. We got her husband and kid in the next room."

"We'll look at the body first," Riley said. "The M. E. is on the way over."

We went back through the house, and it was the same as the living room, dirty dishes on the dining room table, more dirty dishes back in the kitchen sink. The whole place smelled as if it hadn't been aired for a long time.

We went down the narrow, dark basement stairs from the kitchen. She was lying on the earthen floor of the basement, a small, bleached blonde, garbed in a gay print dress and cheap red shoes. She had on so much pancake make-up, mascara and lipstick it was like a mask. But beneath the mask was the stark terror that only the split-instant knowledge of death can leave on a face. She had been shot in the forehead.



"No weapon," said Riley.

I hadn't noticed. He always went about these things a bit differently than I.

Overhead we heard a pounding of footsteps that was like a young army. The tech squad and medical boys had arrived. Riley and I went back upstairs.

"What do you think, Goode?"

"She looked like a little chippy to me,"

I said. "It may turn out to be one of those crimes of the moment. Anger, a shot, then a killer running, leaving us at a dead end. May be a tough nut to crack. When they plan in detail, we always catch them, they'll always trip themselves, but when they kill like this and run in panic, well . . ."

"Sometimes their luck is pretty good,"

Riley finished for me. "Let's see her husband."

One of the prowl car boys stood before the closed door of the downstairs bedroom where they were holding her husband and son. He turned the knob, pushed the door back, and Riley and I entered the room.

It was the same as the rest of the house. The sheets on the bed were soiled, and the bed was unmade. A couple of shoes lay at odd place on the floor, and some magazines were scattered on the table beside the bed.

A man was standing over near the window, lighting a cigarette, looking up as we entered, the flame of the match cupped in his hands, smoke trickling from his nostrils. He didn't speak, just finally blew the match out and toyed with it in his hands. He was a lean, slim man with a long, narrow face that was rather bony; his hair waved back from his forehead in a dark sheen. He might have been considered handsome by some women.

Riley and I sensed movement over in the corner, and there we saw the boy. He was cowering in a chair, a thin, anemic-looking kid with tousled sandy hair that had needed cutting a month ago. His face was fine boned, but had that gaunt, oldish look that comes from an improper diet and not enough of it. He was dry eyed. His face showed no grief, only fear. I judged he was about five years old. The movement that had attracted our gaze had been the shifting of his slight body to ease the pressure of the metal brace he

wore on his left leg. He was lame.

LOOKING into the kid's eyes, which stared at us with all the wide intensity of a scared young owl, and thinking of her down in the basement, I could imagine the quick sounds of her footsteps, I could see her shoving things back on the bureau to make a space large enough to set a cosmetic box down and I could see him dragging that left leg to stand in the doorway and look at her. "*Mama's going out. There's somethings in the icebox if you get hungry at supper time.*" "Yes, mama." "If I'm not back, don't listen to the radio too long, but go on to bed." "Yes, mama."

Riley said, "How are you, son?"

"All right, mister."

"What's your name?"

"Donny, mister. Donny Crennan."

The man by the window said. "What are you talking to him for? Don't you want to talk to me?"

"Yeah," said Riley. Riley looked at Crennan. "Your face looks familiar."

"I'm Cole Crennan. All right—so I've got a record. That's why I knew I better call you right away, level with you."

"I never forget a face out of a line-up," Riley said. "That your wife downstairs?"

"You know it is!"

"How long she been dead?"

"Ain't your boys supposed to answer that?"

"When did you find her?"

"About half an hour ago. Maybe thirty seconds before I put in the call to you."

"What did you do with the gun?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"You don't seem very put out about her death," Riley said.

Crennan dropped the match he was toying in his fingers. "Why should I try to ham up an act with you, copper? Look, I'm leveling with you from the beginning. I know it's going hard with me because of my record, but I know that any other course of action might go even harder. Susie and I didn't get on very well. She ran around. I'm sorry she's dead, but I can't feel any real grief for her. She killed that. Satisfied?"

"Just one of those marriages that got started and just slopped along without



anybody actually caring enough to do anything much about it?"

"I guess you could say that."

"You're pretty cool, Crennan," Riley said quietly.

"I didn't kill her. I'm not afraid. But I know I'm going to need my nerve for the things you guys'll probably put me through."

"You'd better tell us just what happened."

"I came home. I walked in the front door. I saw the kid limping down the stairs. I said, 'What's wrong, son?' and he said, 'Daddy, I think I heard a shot. Then I saw a man running out the back alley.' I looked over the house and didn't find Susie. Then I noticed the basement door standing open. I looked down there. I saw her. I went down, saw that she was dead and ran back up here. I told Donny to sit there in the living room, and I went to the corner to use the phone at the grocery. The people in there heard me calling Headquarters. A crowd had started to gather outside by the time the first prowl car came up. Then you came. That's all I know."

"Nice and simple," Riley said.

"I'm leveling," Crennan said. "You won't crack this story."

"We'll try," Riley turned to the kid.

"Tell me what happened, Donny?"

"Why don't you lay off him?" Crennan said.

"Afraid?"

Crennan laughed. In Riley's face. Like he was spitting. "Go ahead and tell them, Donny."

"I was upstairs in my room," Donny said. "I heard a shot—like on some of the radio programs. I heard somebody—running, downstairs. I looked out the window, and saw a man running across the back lot. I started downstairs and saw my daddy come in the front door. I told him. He looked and found mama."

"'Tis a brave lad ye are."

"Yes, sir." They were just two words, meaningless, to be polite. Being brave or not brave seemed long ago to have lost any value to Donny.

"Did ye fetch a look at this running man, Donny?" Riley had slipped into his brogue, slurring it thick as cheese, which meant he was upset.

"Yes, sir. I saw him as he crossed the yard. He was a short man and had yellow hair."

"Yellow hair, Donny?"

"Yes, sir. The sun made it look kind of like gold."

Riley looked at Crennan. Crennan gave him a cold smile and lighted another cigarette, using a wooden match from a box of safeties. He toyed with the match and held the cold smile on his lips. "Well?"

"I'm taking ye to Headquarters. And the lad I'm sending over to Saint Mary's Home. I'm thinking ye'd best leave him there till this is all over, Crennan."

The rest of our tour, Riley and I sweated Crennan, but he didn't crack. So we put him in a cell and left him there, and I went home and straight to bed. The day had left me so upset I got up after twenty minutes, put on my clothes and went out and walked the dark streets for nearly half an hour. Until I was tired. I came back and got back in bed. This time I went to sleep.

**R**ILEY and I arrived at Headquarters the next day to find that Crennan had phoned a lawyer. The lawyer had showed up and effected Crennan's release. Riley and I set out to find yellow-haired men who'd been in the life of Susan Crennan. We found two, a saloon owner and a trumpet player. At the time of her death the saloon owner and four friends had been at the race track; the trumpet player had been on a bandstand, rehearsing.

The tech squad's reports were all in, but they might as well have been blank pieces of paper. They gave us the exact time of Susan Crennan's death, and they informed us that it might be barely possible to run ballistics on the slug that was taken from her brain. The impact with bone had messed the slug up pretty badly, but the lab boys figured they could lift some markings off of it if we ever found the gun.

The reports went on to tell us that plenty of fingerprints had been found in the basement, which might or might not mean anything, if we got our hands on a suspect.

I pushed the reports back on my desk, turned to look at Riley, who was standing at the window, looking out at the



dying day outside. "It's a barren kill, Riley. Just a body, and that's all. No motive. No clues."

"He killed her."

"What?" I said to Riley's broad back. "You mean Crennan, her husband?"

"Yes."

"Then why'd he call us? With his record, if he'd killed her, he would have tried to cover—"

"That's exactly what he thought we'd think. This was his one way of getting away with it. He shot her. He had a dead body on his hands. He had to think fast."

Riley was silent a moment, then he said, "Tis a filthy rat he is! Using a wee lad to shield him!"

"Look," I said, "you must have reason for talking like this."

"The lad. Donny. The witness. A shy one, yet when we ask if he saw the running man, he not only says yes, he plunges into a description."

"You mean, as if he'd been rehearsed? I noticed that myself, but it's pretty thin reasoning. It's little more than a hunch."

"I know," Riley said, "but it's the one thing that don't ring right. In the minutes before he called Headquarters, Crennan could have put such a devilish fear in that child the lad would have said anything."

"You've got to have more than that, Riley, a lot more."

"I know. Crennan could fool most people, convince them his actions are the actions of an innocent man, that he's leveling." He added, "I wish he would try to leave town. If he ran we'd have at least something then—but he won't. He'll play it through to the end."

"He'll have to," I said. "We've looked into both Cole Crennan and Susan. He's a punk and she was no better. But he's got nerve—if he's guilty—and he's smart."

"I think I'll have another look at Crennan's house," Riley said. "Meantime you might as well check back on her some more, see if you can dig up another yellow-haired man in her life."

Riley went out of the office, and I mentally cursed the leg work before me. I spent the next three hours having a late dinner and trying to dig deeper into her past. I located a first husband Crennan had mentioned while we'd sweated him

yesterday, but the first husband didn't have yellow hair. He owned a small pool-room in a tough end of town. He had just got back in town after a week's absence. He told me that he hadn't seen Susan in over six years. Just a kid when he married her, he said. It hadn't lasted long, only a couple of months. He'd heard that she had married again and had a child. He said he had just read in the papers about her death. He claimed to be shocked, but it didn't seem to bother him too much.

A HEAVY cloud-swollen night had settled over the city when I got back to headquarters. Riley was sitting at his desk, looking glum. I hung up my hat, and he gestured at something on the desk before him.

It was a stick match from a box of safeties. It had been cracked in three places, bent at these points to form a square O. I felt my pulse pick up speed. "Where'd you find that, Riley?"

"I found several of them in Crennan's house. I remembered the way he was toying with those matches after he lighted his cigarettes yesterday. It was just another hunch, Goode."

I felt the closeness of the office now. "We found a match like that near the vault of old Ansel Dunloff, Riley."

"That's right," Riley's eyes were gathering pinpoints of light. "Just a habit, just a way of using his hands, just a little thing he never realized he was doing. Natural, like breathing. Everybody's got a habit or two like that. Even if he didn't shoot his wife, it looks like we're getting a break at last on the killing of the old pawnbroker. Say it was Crennan who shot the old man. He had to have a smoke. He held the gun in one hand and toyed with the match in the other while the old man opened the vault. Then he dropped the match, never even aware that he'd been touching it."

"But there may be other people who crack their matches like that when they smoke, Riley. Big as the city is—"

"I know. But we'll look into it."

I stared at the things on his desk. "Riley," I said, a little thickly, "what are you planning on doing?"

"I'm not sure yet. Meantime, you go to



the Home and bring that kid here. I'll put out a call on Crennan and try to have him here by the time you get back."

Riley swung up from the desk. His actions worried me. His face worried me. I closed the door softly behind me when I went out.

Riley was still in his office when I returned with the kid. "Hello, Donny," he said.

"Hello, mister." It was just about bedtime for kids his age, but he wasn't sleepy. His wide gaze darted around the office as he stood beside me.

"You get Crennan in yet?" I asked.

"Not yet. But some of the boys'll have him in shortly. I've got four prowler cars checking his usual haunts, and it'll be part of his game to be in his usual haunts until this thing is over." Riley turned to the kid. "Son, let's go down the hall, and let me hear all about you, eh?"

Riley led the kid toward the door. He paused there and said, "When he shows up, tell him we're questioning a witness, under the light, in the back room down the hall."

Under the light . . . in the back room? A kid? A crippled, helpless, five-year-old kid? I didn't believe my own ears. "Riley," I said hoarsely, "the Sisters were none too keen to let me bring him down here tonight in the first place. They're going to know what happens. They'll find out. If the papers, the public, hears about this, our scalps won't be worth a plugged nickel!"

"You," Riley ordered, "sit down and give my message to Crennan!" He held the kid by the hand and went out. I sat down limply.

I suppose it was about ten minutes later that Cole Crennan swaggered in beside a prowler car officer.

"Well, what is it this time?"

"Riley's in the back room, Crennan," I said, "giving your kid the third degree."

He stared at me. I saw the sweat break out on his face. "You're lying! You're trying to scare me!"

"I wish to hell I was lying," I said.

Crennan looked toward the door. It was closed, the prowler car cop standing stolidly before it.

"Listen," Crennan said, "you can't scare me. You wouldn't dare put a kid

through a thing like that. The clubs and organizations and citizens would—"

"No, I wouldn't dare. Neither would any other man on the Force—outside of Riley. And Riley's got a one-track brain, and he thinks he's going to break this case. He's my superior. I'm under his orders. This is his show."

In the artificial light of the office, Crennan's face had grown so chalky it looked like the face of a dead man. I saw the trembling of his hands as he fumbled for a handkerchief. He said again, "You can't scare me!" He had spoken quite loud, but he was telling himself, not me.

I watched him walk back and forth across the office. Long minutes dragged past on broken legs. The office was charged with a silence that hammered at my eardrums. You could almost smell the animal fear in Crennan, and he looked sick under the oily sheen of sweat on his face. I watched him slowly rotting away inside, until at the end of two century-long hours, there was only a shell left of Crennan. A trembling, haggard shell that had sunk in the chair against the wall, breath bubbling in and out like little flies tearing into his lungs, his eyes glued to the door. He had smoked incessantly, until he ran out of cigarettes, and now in the chair, he was chewing his lower lip, a tremor passing over his body every few seconds. Twice he had said, "Listen, you can't do this to the kid!"

I looked at him cowering in the chair, the waiting and silence eating at him like acid, and I knew that he was guilty. He had played it smart. He had never believed that the cops would dare put a five-year-old through a third degree. He would make the kid lie, he had planned, and that would be that. We'd never be able to prove a thing—but he had reckoned without Riley.

I sat there thinking of little Donny, hating Crennan. But I almost hated Riley, too, wondering if the end justified the means. From what I had seen of him, life had already scarred the child enough.

**T**HE OFFICE DOOR opened. Crennan whipped out of his chair, staring at Riley, who entered. Riley didn't speak for a moment, and Crennan backed away from him against the wall.



Then Riley laughed.

Nothing else happened; there was Riley, looking at Crennan, the laugh dripping off his lips like vinegar. Then Riley turned to the desk. "Book him, Goode. Charge him with murder. The kid has talked."

"You—you can't scare me!" Crennan said. "How do I know you even got the kid?"

"You know it," Riley said. He walked over to the door, jerked it open. The office was practically sound-proof, but when the door opened, noises filtered in: the sound of footsteps somewhere in the building, the faint ringing of a telephone on an extension somewhere. Then, after a few seconds, from far down the corridor came a thin, wailing scream. It was little Donny's cry. You couldn't mistake the listless note in that voice which apparently even pain couldn't erase. It was as if he possessed such a first-hand acquaintance with hurt that he cried out merely because by crying out a person can ease pain at times.

Riley closed the door. The prowler car cop who'd stood guard looked uncomfortable, and I was afraid to look at Riley because I knew my present feelings for him must be naked in my eyes.

Crennan groped through space until he was slumped in the chair. He put his hands over his face. "You've made the kid lie! You can't prove anything!"

"We'll prove everything. The lad told us where he saw you hide the gun."

"But he didn't see where I—" Crennan made an awful choking sound to hold the words back.

Riley said quietly, "We're going to put you in the electric chair, Crennan."

Crennan began crying through his hands. I'd seen it happen before; when the ones with nerve crack, they always crack the widest. Crennan was babbling, slipping to his knees, begging to take a rap. Words were pouring out of him. He hadn't anything to do with it. The words were just coming like pus out of a festering sore that had to break. It was Crennan's mind trying to defend itself. No matter how much control he had had, his mind knew subconsciously that it was talk or lose its sanity.

I was taking it down at fever speed.

We got it all. Crennan had robbed old Ansel Dunloff, hidden the jewels at home to let them cool. His wife had found them. We had put a description of the jewels in all the papers. She had recognized one or two of them, and he'd known that she'd never let him keep them. She would take them from him and walk out, on threat of turning him in. He'd killed once for them, and now that he had them, it was easier to kill a second time to keep them. But this time he hadn't been able to pick the time or place.

I thrust a pen in Crennan's hand, and he signed. Riley nodded, and the prowler car cop took Crennan out to put him in a cell.

Riley and I were alone.

"'Tis a shame he had no more faith," Riley said.

I didn't speak. I was afraid of what I might say. I kept my hands out of sight under the desk, because they kept knotting into fists. We had got a confession, true, but we had put a scar on a boy's life that might never heal, hadn't we? This final scar on top of all the others he had endured. . . . The only person I pitied in the whole mess was the witness.

I felt Riley looking at me. I raised my eyes, stared back at him. His brown eyes were soft, faintly sad. He said, "Ye hate me, Goode."

I still didn't speak.

"Let's go down the hall," Riley said.

We walked down the hall.

We stopped before a door.

Riley said, "'Tis me wish that ye forgive me for keeping ye in the dark, Goode. I was afraid that if ye knew, something in yer face might give it away."

Riley flung the door open.

Trant was sitting in the room. Trant was almost the baby cop of the Force. He was big and handsome and had mild black eyes and curly black hair. Donny Crennan was sitting on Trant's lap. Trant was saying, "Once more, eh, chum? Just like on the radio. I'll pretend I'm Eagleman and the evil inventor has captured you, and you let out a squall so I can trail the sound and find where he's got you hidden. Now let's hear it, pal, and really make it good this time, make it—"

"'Tis okay, Trant," Riley said. "'Tis all over. Give our laddie another dish of



that butter-pecan ice cream, Trant."

"I'm kind of full of ice cream," Donny Crennan said. "And reading funny books for so long and finally playing games has made me kind of sleepy, if you don't mind, mister."

Again I experienced the feeling of not being able to look at Riley, but this time it was to keep him from seeing my shame.

Riley laid his hand on my shoulder as we walked down the hall. "'Twas quite a third degree Cole Crennan gave himself, wasn't it? I gambled he'd not be sure whether Donny saw him hide the gun."

**T**HAT should be the end of Riley's story, I guess, only it isn't, because yesterday I went down to the station to see him off. I spotted him and his wife over by the baggage window checking some suitcases.

I rushed over to them. "I was afraid I'd miss you, Riley. Something that came up at Headquarters. Well, I . . . just came down to say good-bye. It surprised me when you phoned you'd decided to leave town."

"We're going down to the Warm Springs Foundation," Riley said.

"Warm Springs?" Then I followed Riley's gaze. Donny Crennan was over at the magazine stand, buying himself some funny papers. There was still that

listless sag to the kid's shoulders, but it struck me suddenly that a guy like Riley might get that listlessness out.

"The Sisters are fixing it for us," Mrs. Riley said, "to make the adoption complete and legal." She smiled. "Warm Springs will hurry the brace from his leg. Riley grinned awkwardly. "Funny the way a new path can open up to a man. That hundred grand brought my old life to a close. Now I got a new life, all laid out before me, ready to start living. We won't be spoiling the lad—'twould be like spoiling a gift we've always wanted but never been blessed with. But the money will make a lot of things possible; and now I'm glad old Corday wrote me into his will. I guess I've found me peace again, Goode."

Their train was called then, and I saw the three of them on it. I walked back across the big rotunda of the station, and I was glad I'd had a chance to know Riley. He'd taught me lots of things about being a cop. But he'd taught me something else, too, something that you didn't know in your head, that you didn't put into words, but something that you learned down in your heart.

And like Riley, I had found my own peace. I didn't envy him his dough any longer. I might have squandered it. Riley was going to invest it.



Plus other thrilling detective stories in the suspenseful January issue—on sale December 3rd.

## The Corpse and I

Would be brothers under the soil . . . unless I was front-page killer Duke, with a blonde in my heart—and blood on my hands.

Peter Paige's Blitz-Paced Novel

**DIME  
DETECTIVE  
MAGAZINE**  
COMBINED WITH FLYNN'S DETECTIVE FICTION





He was standing there with a gun in his hand, and his black eyes were blazing.

# TOO BEAUTIFUL TO LIVE!

*Eddie told her, "You're the only one who knows who took those jewels." Eddie told her, "Whoever it is, is going to get nervous about that, maybe, and fix it so you can't talk." Eddie would have told her more, too, but she couldn't hear him—above the roar of the shot that filled the room.*

**By JOE KENT**

**A**T PRECISELY four o'clock in the afternoon, Serena of Serena Perfume Creations, Park Avenue, threw a tantrum, which is something like saying that a couple of big fast trains had a head-on dispute.

It started in her office, a large, circular, cathedral sort of room. She screamed, picked up a paperweight and threw it at the head of Percy, her husband and a small and nervous man. It missed him.



"My pet, be cautious—" Percy began.

Serena screamed again and threw a letter opener at Karl Kurtman, a tall, pallid, nervous man who was her publicity director. It hit him.

"Serena, angel, you're overdoing—" Karl implored.

"Both of you go straight to hell," she said frankly. Serena had not lived on Park Avenue all her life, by any means. She was large. Her hair was black and her eyes were black. She was not a timid woman. She powered her way out of the office and slammed the door. Twenty minutes later she arrived at the ivory and blue reception room of Warren Harrison's model agency on Fifth Avenue. She walked straight down the corridor to Harrison's office, and again she slammed the door. Harrison jumped and began to perspire.

"Serena, darling, now don't start throwing—" he begged.

"Where is that little tramp, Katherine?"

Harrison tried to retreat without seeming to. He was a portly man in pinstriped trousers and a gardenia. "You simply must not become agitated, Serena. I am on the trail. I am pulling the wires. Katherine will certainly be there at seven—"

"At five, you idiot! The cocktail party starts at five-thirty!"

"Oh, dear. Five? Serena—"

"Stand still and shut up," Serena commanded. "I hired Katherine from you because she was the type to express Serena's Blue Nightkiss. I've spent one hundred and fifty thousand dollars spreading her face and phony figure in the magazines! There's not a blind jackass in the country who hasn't got Katherine and Blue Nightkiss wrapped together in his mind. And now, where is Katherine?" Her voice rose to a knife-edged waver and Harrison began to gesture desperately.

"Where is she?" Serena screamed. "The twenty-fifth anniversary of Serena Creations! Buyers from Paris, Cairo, London! The formal opening of my new shop! The grand launching of Blue Nightkiss! *In less than an hour, you hear?* And the Blue Nightkiss girl simply vanishes! I could kill myself. I—I could kill you!"

"Serena! No, no!" Warren Harrison circled the desk frantically. "Let me think

calmly. There must be something we can— Serena! Have you ever laid eyes on our little Miss Martha Shaw, our *lovely* Miss Shaw?"

"No. Who in hell is she?"

"Ah, it's an inspiration!" Harrison rushed to the door and flung it open. "Send Martha Shaw in here at once," he bawled. "Just take a glance, Serena. She is the image of Katherine, but even more beautiful!"

Martha appeared in the doorway. She was obviously frightened and obviously lovely, with a delicate petal face, blue eyes and dark hair and a slender breathless figure. Serena took one long look, then grabbed Martha's shoulder.

"Come on, hurry! Move, move, child!" In the cab she explained. "There'll be cocktails and a showing of the new shop, then dinner. You are Blue Nightkiss in the flesh, understand? Yearning, lonely, lovely—and don't forget the sex, either. Don't get drunk. Keep drifting about. Montgomery will direct you. Montgomery, the new dress designer. You'll make half a dozen changes of dress. Montgomery has charge of that. You'll simply disappear, then reappear in something different. But the point is to sell the buyers on Blue Nightkiss by selling them *you*. Make every woman envy you and every man want you. But don't get drunk and *don't* lose any of the jewelry! I had to promise Carberi's my soul and all before they agreed to lend the stuff."

"No, yes. I mean, no," Martha agreed breathlessly. She tried to stop trembling. She hoped there'd be time to eat a sandwich. And she'd *have* to call Eddie and say she was sorry about tonight. She prayed she'd do just what Serena wanted. Martha had been in New York only six months and was finishing her first month at the Harrison Agency. It was important.

FROM the moment the cab stopped in front of the new blue-grey building on Park Avenue, there was no more time to think. There was a race through a lobby where florists and caterers were fighting with each other. Then there was a small room and the dress designer named Montgomery. He was tall, with glistening dark hair, cold impatient eyes, a tan cigarette



in a long holder, and a soft impatient voice. There was also a shabby man in a worn tuxedo named Herb, who turned out to be a private detective to watch the jewelry from Carberi's. He looked sleepy.

Montgomery threw a blue satin dress at her. "Put it on. In there. Leave your hair down. I'll fix it. It needs it." Martha hated him. She dressed in frantic haste. Montgomery did her hair. "Pearls. Pearls this time," he snapped at Herb. Herb pulled a velvet-covered box from his pocket.

"Watch 'em, sis," he said. "Don't go away."

"Hurry!" Serena wailed. Two minutes later Martha walked into the huge room. It was packed with people—people with long dresses, short dresses, tuxedos, tails, dinner jackets, plain suits, monocles, glasses on black and white ribbon, and hands clutching cocktail glasses. Serena seized her arm and started her through the crowd. "Sexy," she whispered. "Look sexy, child."

Martha tried and did it. She had three cocktails and, on an empty stomach, they gave her a spinning feeling. She ate and smiled and looked sexy, and at midnight she was exhausted. Serena gave a vast sigh of relief. "Child, you were marvelous. Now you can go home. From now on people are going to be too drunk to see you, anyway."

She put on her street clothes again, feeling like Cinderella. Montgomery was still smoking a tan cigarette in a long holder and Herb was still looking sleepy. The street was moist with fog and silent with night when she stepped outside. Her feet hurt. Bed was going to feel so good. She wondered if Harrison would give her a bonus for tonight. And then she remembered she hadn't phoned Eddie. It was too late now, and he was going to be awful mad.

When she got to her one-and-a-half-room apartment on West Fifty-sixth Street, she couldn't find her key. She emptied her purse on the floor of the hall, but the key was gone. Finally she had to wake the superintendent to let her in. He grumbled and she said she was sorry. She turned on the light and closed the door behind her. She started to take off her jacket. She paused and stood very still.

Something was wrong. She knew it vaguely but certainly, and suddenly she was frightened. But how did she know? What was telling her? She frowned and scarcely breathed. Slowly she began to look around the room.

Just as she moved her head, she saw the flash of shadow as it sped down the wall. She started to scream. Then something struck her head. The shadow, the room, even her scream vanished, and she felt as though she were falling through eternity.

**S**HE WOKE with the sensation that time had simply stopped for a while. The reflection of a blinking neon sign winked against the ceiling. The room was dark. Her head ached but not greatly. She reached out and touched the couch. She sat up. The room was utterly silent. At last she rose. She felt dizzy and her head ached more. She snapped on the light. The room was normal, but there was something peculiar, Martha realized: Her first sensation, that something was wrong, was gone now. Whatever had given her the premonition was now lost or changed.

Martha was still frightened, though. She began to tremble and her hands felt cold. It was nearly two o'clock. Over an hour since she had come in. She looked around her, and suddenly she sobbed. She knew she would never go to sleep in this room tonight. She jerked the door open and ran as though someone were following. In all New York, she knew of only one person to go to—Eddie Daniels, a red-haired, blunt-chinned newspaper photographer who sometimes made her buy her own beer. It was Eddie's camera and a contest that had landed Martha in the Harrison Agency. She'd thought it was wonderful, and Eddie had broken his camera.

"All models marry rich old men or polo ponies," he had said sourly.

Eddie was sleepy and Eddie was mad when he opened his door. He didn't even kiss her. "All models are double-crossers," he stated.

"Listen to me, please. Somebody hit me, Eddie. I just went in—"

"Great! They should have— Who hit you?"



"I don't know. I'm trying to tell you. Quit looking at me like a mean truck driver. It was like this. . . ." She told him all about it, from the moment Serena had arrived at the agency. Eddie looked at her suspiciously.

"I expected something like this to happen some day," he said wisely. "Is your money still in your purse?"

"I only had four dollars." She looked. "It's still here."

"Where do you think you lost your key?"

"I don't know. I don't remember losing it at all."

"Probably not. What do you think was wrong with the room at first?"

Martha frowned solemnly. "Something was different," she decided.

"When you were a little girl in school, honey, did you make good grades and study all the time?" Eddie asked.

"Oh, no. A lot of things I didn't understand for a long— Listen, what has that got to do with anybody hitting me?"

"Nothing," he said patiently. "Sit down until I get dressed. Something is going to be wrong, and I think Edward knows what it's going to be." He went into the bathroom. "Why didn't this original Nightkiss kid show up for the party?" he called out.

"I don't know. Nobody seems to know. She just vanished."

"Hmm," Eddie said. In a minute he reappeared. "Let's go see your room." As they started down the steps, Martha's heel turned. She clutched the railing and the heel bounced down the stairs.

"My very best brand new ones," she wailed.

Eddie retrieved the high heel. "Some-day you'll break your—" His words evaporated. He struck a match and after a long moment he whistled very softly. "Let's see the part you've got on. This— No, this is *not* the heel to this shoe. It's too big at the top, see? And actually this heel is brown. It's been smeared with something black. It rubs off."

"Like mascara, almost. It— Why, Eddie, it's hollow inside!"

"Move to the head of the class," he said. "A hollow heel of another color that doesn't fit the shoe. . . . Tell me carefully: Did the detective named Herb

search you before you left the party?"

"Of course not. Why would he? He had every last bit of jewelry right in his pocket. I saw him count it and put it there."

"But, sweetheart," Eddie explained, "there are diamonds and emeralds, and also there are things that look like diamonds and emeralds, but later someone finds out and there is hell to pay. If you doubt me, wait until Carberi's takes a peek tomorrow. What is Herb's last name?"

"Patrick. He said we ought to go to Coney— Eddie! Oh, I see what you mean!" she gasped. Eddie was already hunting through his Manhattan phone directory.

**M**R. HERBERTSON BOOTH PATRICK was sleeping. He listened and woke up fast. In a very short time he came lunging up the stairs and into Eddie's apartment. "Huh? Huh?" he wanted to know. He had on a pajama coat, houseshoes, no hat, and the rusty tuxedo. He listened and looked and began to sweat as he circled the room. "I didn't like the layout from the start," he said bitterly. "I felt something in the wind. I— Listen, you!" He stopped squarely before Martha. "Maybe you know more—"

"No, she doesn't. In fact, she probably knows less," Eddie said. "She's like that. Listen to me and quit acting like a cop. There is something called the Achilles Heel; it's also called the weakest link. In this case, think about Katherine Carver, the Nightkiss girl who did not appear. Why didn't she?"

"She got cold feet!" Herb cried. "She was in the steal and lost her nerve at the end. And two to one that heel will fit a brown shoe that Katherine's got and planned to wear tonight. She lives in the Village. I know. I took her to Coney Island last week. Listen, you don't think she was looking me over that day?"

"Oh, no. It was strictly for the rides. Come on," Eddie said.

"Yeah. Oh, I've got to do business tonight or I'm ruined tomorrow. And just when I got my little business on a paying basis almost."

"Think of me!" Martha sobbed. "Mr. Harrison will fuss like mad."

"Oh, the innocence of fools," Eddie



groaned. "When we get this Katie Carver, the idea is pressure. Push and push hard and make her spit out the name of the guy she was going to work with."

"I've got my own ideas," Herb muttered. "Montgomery. Yeah. That cold-eyed guy with his long tan cigarettes and such. And I didn't like Karl Kurtman, either. He looks like a guy who would steal lilies from church. And that little jerk, Percy! Looked like a transatlantic pickpocket. Oh, I've got my own ideas!"

"Keep polishing at them," Eddie advised. The cab halted before a four-story brick building on Twelfth Street in Greenwich Village. Herb began to hammer on the door of the basement apartment. Presently a light was turned on.

"What? Who is it?" a girl's sleepy voice called.

"Trouble. This is Herb Patrick, baby. Open up."

Katherine Carver unlocked the door. She was slender, black-haired and beautiful. At the moment her face was pale. She sounded sleepy and she had on a gown and robe, but her eyes didn't look misty. Herb stuck out his chin and worked her into a corner. "What happened you didn't get to the perfume party tonight?"

"I had a headache, a terrific headache, and I took sleeping pills and I think I must have taken too many. I didn't wake up until ten tonight."

"And what were you worrying about that gave you this headache?"

"I don't know what you mean," she flung back. She worked out of the corner and backward. "Hey, where do you think you're—" she started angrily at Eddie. "Stay out of my—"

"Just poking, Katie," he called from the bedroom. "Oh, yes. Brown, too." He reappeared, his eyes shining. He had a high-heeled shoe in one hand. "Now, look carefully." He pried off the heel and fitted the heel Martha had lost. "Perfect."

"What the hell do you mean?" Suddenly Katie had stopped looking so dewy and beautiful. She looked frightened and older and hard.

"Quit stalling!" Herb barked. "It's plastered all over your face. You and somebody in that perfume outfit decided to get rich in a hurry. For two weeks

they've been hanging over the counters at Carberi's, deciding which jewels they wanted; that was plenty of time for the guy to get a second set made of glass. You were going to hustle the stuff out in a hollow heel. Then you lost your nerve, so you put yourself to bed with a tough headache. Look, now, baby, I want an answer: Who was the guy in the steal?"

"I don't know. I don't understand at all," Katie faltered. She kept backing along the wall until she reached the back end of the long room. She looked as though she were about to cry or scream, or both.

"Who was he?" Herb yelled at her. "Be smart, baby. You backed out. You're not in the business. You're riding free, see?"

Suddenly Eddie moved in, his voice soft but fast. "Look, kid. You hid out. You figured that without you there wouldn't be a steal, right? Right? But the guy pulled the thing anyway. You've been here thinking how sore the guy was going to be at you, but that would be all. It isn't all, kid. The guy pulled it. While Martha was making with the cocktails and the sex at the party, he went into the dressing room, took her street shoes and fastened on the phony heel you had made. That heel contained the Carberi jewels; Martha was wearing the phonies he had made. Then he went to Martha's place and picked up the gems after she got home. . . . But listen now, kid. That guy knows that you know who did it. He'll get nervous tomorrow or next week, won't he? And one day when he's nervous enough, he'll make up his mind to fix it so you can't talk. Does that make you feel warm and comfortable?"

Katie's lips began to tremble, and she stared wildly around the room.

"But if you'll tell us," Eddie said, "the guy will get put where he won't be around to worry you."

"You'll just be saving your own life," Herb threw in. "Tell us, baby."

KATIE sobbed. She opened her mouth. It was coming, Martha knew. But it didn't come. Instead there was a blasting roar from beyond the rear window, less than two feet behind Katherine Carver's

(Continued on page 125)

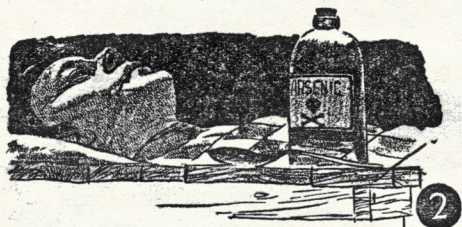


# ODDITIES IN CRIME

By MAYAN and JAKOBSSON

It looked like just another robbery where a trusted employee had opened the company safe, and absconded with the funds. Trouble was, there had been too many such over the past dozen years. Police decided the very cluelessness was a clue, and decided it was an outside job, a decision which led them straight to William McLaren, the greatest safe-cracker of them all.

Even after he confessed, though, they could hardly believe his story themselves—until he demonstrated by opening the precinct safe while they watched. Twirling the knobs, he listened with inhuman concentration to the falling tumblers, and then, as though he had read the combination in visible numbers, opened the door.



Silly Lonnie Lockamy is dead. His wife and her second husband were acquitted of his murder, but one fact stands out above all others. Lonnie was a no-good, a drunk, who barely supported his family and never paid his bills. Little by little, his family became poorer, more friendless, until only one caller was left at the shabby little house in Charlotte, a caller more faithful than Lonnie himself. And when Lonnie was dead of arsenic poisoning, Mrs. Lockamy married the caller, whom no one could blame for his visits. Her second husband was, naturally, the bill collector!

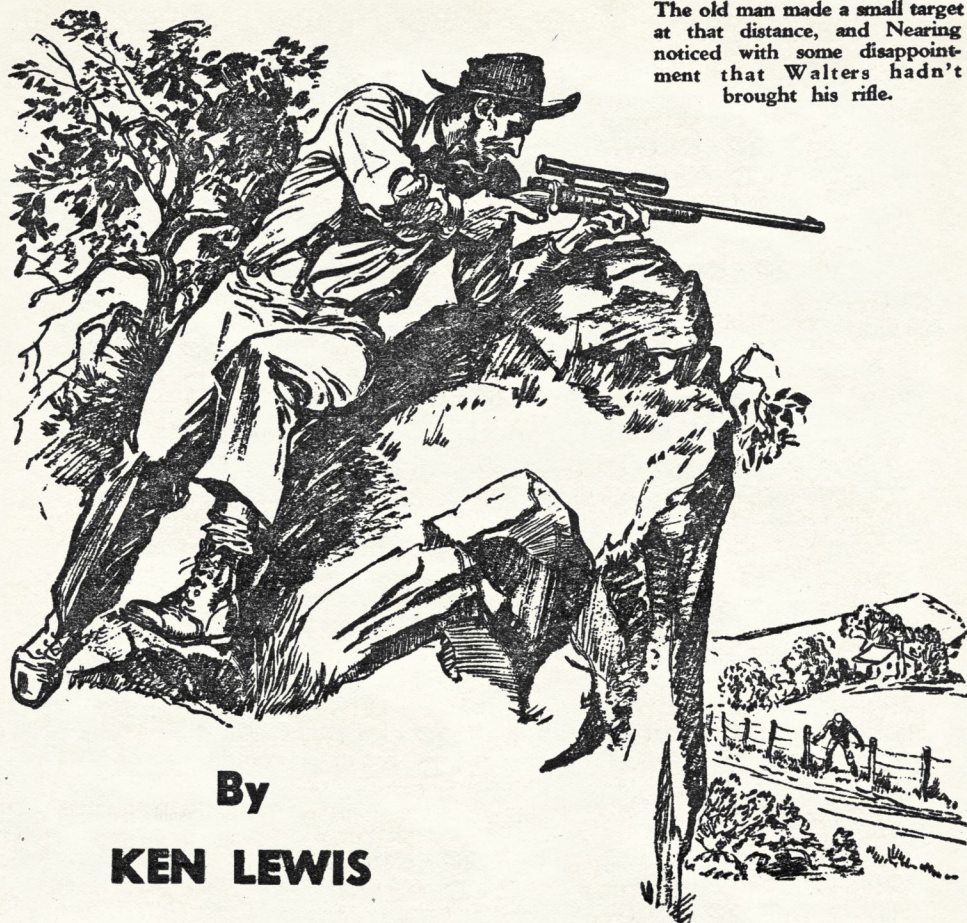
They say crime doesn't pay. But statistics don't always prove it. Take the case of Louis Fine, who was electrocuted in 1933 for the murder of his elderly fiancée, a widow named Mrs. Schaaf. Police, back-trailing their man, discovered that Fine had started his career of marrying and murdering rich women as far back as his late teens—made a fair thing of it, too. They caught him for it—in his mid-sixties. Average life-expectancy, the year Fine paid for his crimes? Fifty-nine.



A generation ago, Dr. Frederick Albert Cook was as famous as Charles Lindbergh. This self-styled explorer performed history's coldest swindle when he laid claim to the North Pole in the name of the U. S. A., in April, 1908. So seriously were his claims taken at the time that he made \$100,000 in lecture fees alone, and eclipsed the glory of Peary, who actually discovered the Pole a year later. Then he welched on a \$3200 bribe to companions who had helped doctor his records—and they exposed him before the world.

Ironically, after Cook's death, scientists re-opening records decided that Cook in his travels had stumbled on the Pole after all, and hadn't even known it!





The old man made a small target at that distance, and Nearing noticed with some disappointment that Walters hadn't brought his rifle.

By

**KEN LEWIS**

# CORPSE-KILLER!

*Shooting Old Man Walters was pie compared to Joe Nearing's next job—shooting Old Man Walters' corpse!*

**J**OE NEARING was panting from the hurried climb when he reached the bluff top overlooking the road which separated his farm from Hank Walters' place. He was small for a hill man—a runt, some folks called him—and his face, beneath its two-day growth of stubble, bore the leathery shine that comes from too high a percentage of alcohol in the diet. But he had implicit faith in the new deer gun.

He lined it out across a boulder at the cliff's edge, checked his windage and distance calculations, and waited for Walters to show. The morning sun had topped the ridges to the east now, and the smoke from the oil can Nearing had set afire made a thick black plume above the low knoll that sheltered his house from the road.

It was less than five minutes before he saw Walters break from the last fringe of



undergrowth on the ridge flank opposite and start across the roadside clearing five hundred feet below. The old man moved swiftly yet awkwardly because of his twisted foot. Watching from the bluff top, Nearing realized that his crippled neighbor made a small and uncertain target at that distance. He noticed, too, with some disappointment, that Walters hadn't brought his rifle.

Oh, well, you couldn't expect all the breaks. And the telescope sights would take care of the distance. He let the cross-hairs mesh on the old man's gleaming bald head, and when Walters bent to crawl through the barbed-wire fence that margined the road down there, Nearing wet his lips, held his breath and squeezed the trigger.

**T**HE GUN made a hollow, barking sound in the stillness. At the moment of recoil, Nearing saw the bald head pop up, then fall forward again. After he'd lined up the scope once more, he made out the sprawling figure below, hanging head down, with one leg still caught grotesquely on the middle strand of wire. It was too far to see the blood, but he knew it must be there.

He waited a moment longer, alert for some movement, some sign of life. Then, satisfied that the slug had gone home all right, he lifted the gun and began to make his way casually down the winding back trail that threaded the far side of the bluff.

"That'll teach the old fool to meddle," he thought. "That'll teach him to come between a man and his wife again!" The expression, *like shooting fish in a barrel*, passed through his mind, and the thought seemed to please him. His stubbed lips relaxed in a brief, remote smile.

The bluff completely hid the road now, blotting out any sight or sound from that direction. But he wasn't worried. He knew that the chances were a thousand to one against anyone passing along that rutted hill track during the twenty minutes or so it might take him to round the base of the bluff and come within sight of the body again.

Now all he had to do was plant the gun in the weeds near Walters' body, then go up to Walters' shack and reclaim the

identical rifle from the wall there. That way, it would look as if Walters had died in a hunting accident. As if he'd propped his gun carelessly against a fence post while he crawled through the wire, and in stretching the strands apart had dislodged it again—so that, in falling, it had gone off and sent a bullet through his brain. No one would know that the gun that killed him hadn't been Walters' own.

The business with the guns was an inspiration, one of those once-in-a-lifetime breaks. Nearing had known for weeks that he was going to kill Walters, sooner or later. But it wasn't until that afternoon last week, when he'd walked into Len Perkins' store down at The Gap and found Hank Walters buying himself a new deer gun, that he'd known exactly how and when the old man would die.

Then he'd looked at the eight new rifles in the rack, each an exact duplicate of the one Walters was paying for, and all at once the last detail of the plan fell into place. He noticed that Len didn't keep a record of the gun's serial number; there was no registration law in the state.

He'd waited two days before buying his own gun, the one he now held in the crook of his arm. By then there were only two like it left in the store. Plenty of men had been buying guns that week in preparation for the coming deer season. There was no reason why his own purchase should be remembered or questioned later.

There was no chance, either, that anyone except Hank Walters might have seen the pillar of oil smoke rising above the knoll this morning—the smoke that made it look as though Nearing's house might be ablaze. Walters was his only neighbor in this lonely back-country pocket.

He'd counted on Walters answering his distress signal—the three shots he'd fired in the air after lighting the can—just as he'd counted on the old man taking the short cut over the ridge, instead of following the longer route along the road. Oh, Walters might grumble a little about it, after that trouble he and Nearing had had over Kitty. Might growl that Joe Nearing was better off dead, and his place burned to the ground. But in the end he'd answer his neighbor's call for help.

And now that he had answered that



summons, all that remained was to put the finishing touches to the plan. . . .

All these thoughts passed through Joe Nearing's mind as he wound down the bluff's less precipitous back slope in the morning stillness. He wasn't afraid that he himself might be suspected of having a hand in the old man's death. After all, he and Hank Walters had lived on adjoining hill farms for twenty years with no hint of bad blood between them, so far as the world knew. They'd always kept pretty much to themselves, till Walters had stuck his nose into that trouble between Joe and Kitty last month.

But only the three of them knew about that—knew that it was to Walters' shack that Kitty had run, moaning and sobbing, on that last night when Joe had come home from town with a skinful. It was Walters who had dressed the cuts on her face, who had given her something to put on her bruises. And it was Walters, too, who had held Joe off with a shotgun, when Joe had followed her there to drag her home again.

Joe had called the old man everything he could think of for coming between a man and his wife. But Walters hadn't wavered. Joe could still see the scathing disgust in his neighbor's eyes, hear the old man's brittle voice declaring:

"Any skunk that treats a woman like you do, don't deserve a wife. If you won't give her the money to get back to her folks in Tennessee, I will. Now, get out!"

Kitty had left that same night. And no one except the three of them knew that it was Walters who had walked her, gun in hand, to the crossroads bus stop; that it was Walters' money that had paid her fare. Joe hadn't told anyone; neither, he knew, had Walters. It was a private quarrel, the kind of thing a taciturn hill man doesn't discuss with others.

Kitty, meanwhile, was three hundred miles away now. She wouldn't come back; probably she wouldn't even hear of the old man's death. Not till it was too late to stir up suspicion, anyhow.

No—Walters' fatal "accident," Joe was certain, would remain just that in the eyes of the law. . . .

He reached the base of the path at last, cut back to round the last clump of undergrowth that shielded the road from his

view. And there he stopped short, jaw slack, eyes glued to the length of fence on his left—the patch of barbed wire where Walters' body had hung, limp as a button, after the slug crashed into it twenty minutes ago.

The wires stretched taut and rustily gleaming under the sun. But the body was gone.

NEARING could feel the blood pounding through his temples, could feel his stomach muscles beginning to knot. But was this the place, after all? Maybe the altered perspective had thrown him off. Surely, Walters' body must be waiting for him, around the next bend. He passed a gloved hand across his eyes and began to run forward drunkenly, the rifle trailing out behind him.

No—this was the place, all right. There was a tuft of blue denim, caught on a barb of the middle strand. Here was the blood—the few errant spatters of red staining the dusty leaves by the roadside. He was down on his hands and knees now, pawing the weeds, searching frantically for some reassurance.

It came—but not the kind of assurance he wanted. He followed the trail of blood, of matted weedstalks, away from the fence and across the ditch. And there, in the hard-packed clay of the roadbed, he lost it.

All he was sure of now was that Walters was still alive.

Wounded—on his last legs, maybe—but still strong enough to stop the flow of blood from his wound, to stagger back up the road toward his shack again.

And he had a gun of his own in the shack. Sheriff Mike Some might not know who had reason to take a pot-shot at Walters. But Walters would know. And he'd handle the situation his own way.

There was only one thing to do now—get up to that shack and the waiting gun, before Walters reached it. Nearing grabbed up his own gun, crawled through the fence and began to run.

Across the clearing, into the underbrush, up the ridge flank, the way Walters had come in answer to his signal for help half an hour before, Nearing ran. Even without the wound, Walters was



slow because of his twisted foot. There might still be a chance of beating Walters.

Joe Nearing was groaning, the wind rasping his lungs like a file, when he topped the ridge. He paused a moment, legs quivering with exertion, to scan the shack and the drive leading to it, ahead.

Nothing. The drive was empty; the shack door stood wide. So Walters hadn't made it.

Or had he?

Was the open door an invitation to death, instead of merely being the result of Walters' hurried exit, earlier? Was the old man already crouched inside, gun ready, waiting to give his visitor the same welcome that he himself had received, down there in the clearing?

Nearing stretched full length in the brush and waited.

Waited—while the shadows darkened along the ridge and the western sky turned from gold to purple and whippoorwills began to throw their soft, sad notes into the dusk.

Still nothing. No sign from the shack. No step on the drive.

And gradually, as his muscles cramped and the breeze rushing up from the hollows grew cooler and cooler, Joe Nearing found himself sweating with reaction. He told himself that Walters hadn't made it, that he was still lying back along the road somewhere, dead or unconscious. Or that, if he had crawled into the shack, it was only to die. He tried to picture to himself the old man huddled inside there, too weak to move—too weak to lift the gun his dying fingers caressed.

But reason as he would, he simply could not force himself out into the open,

to face the possible menace of that open door. To take the few steps necessary to make *sure*.

At last he realized there was only one course left: Go back to his own place and start the Ford. Disappear. Get out of these hills, before Walters or the sheriff caught up with him.

He inched around in the darkness, still shaking, and began to stumble back the way he had come.

**B**ACK AT his own shack, he didn't risk lighting the lamp. Maybe Walters wasn't bad hit, after all. Maybe the old man was on his way here right now, was lurking out there in the shadows somewhere, waiting for a sure shot at his ambusher.

So he didn't light the lamp. He just groped in the darkened kitchen for the teapot, took the car keys and the fifteen dollars in change out of it. He was already climbing into the Ford in the side yard, when the sound of another car turning into his drive made him freeze, with the rifle leveled across the car's door top.

Eyes straining through the darkness, he made out the silhouette of the pickup truck stopping in front of the house. Even before its driver got out and started for the front porch, he knew who it was: Del Walters, Hank Walters' son, who ran the combination drugstore, funeral parlor and post office down at the Gap. He let his gun muzzle follow the lean, tousled figure across the porch, waited till Del banged on the door and called:

"Joe. Joe Nearing! Are you in there?"

It would be easy to pull the trigger now, dispose of this new menace to his safety.

# COLDS

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He could be miles away, maybe, before the body was found.

But first he had to know. He had to know what Del knew and what had happened to Hank, Del's pa. He heard his own voice answering, hollow, strained:

"Here, Del. In the car. What's up?"

He saw the younger Walters turn, blinking uncertainly in the sudden glare of the Ford's lights, pinpointed against the house front like a target drawn on paper.

"Why—nothin', Joe. I was just lookin' for the old man. Thought he might be over here, when I couldn't find him at his place."

"You—you already been to his shack?" Nearing's voice was still cracked, unnatural. He eased the gun muzzle forward an inch over the door rim.

Del didn't see it. His eyes were still dazzled by the lights. "Just come from there. Letter came for him on the afternoon train, and I thought I'd fetch it out to him 'stead of waitin' till he come in Saturday. Give me a good excuse to look in on him, I thought."

"But—but he wasn't there? Nowhere?"

Del shook his head. "Couldn't find hide nor hair of him. Funny—the front door was open, too. And a pot of coffee'd boiled dry on the stove, like he went out in the middle of breakfast and never come back. Just thought you might've seen him."

Nearing's breath was a whistling sigh between his teeth. "Why, no, Del," he said. "No, I ain't. Ain't seen him for two-three days now." He weighed the thought carefully, balancing it on his tongue. "The—the rifle," he said at last. "That new deer gun I seen him buyin' last week. That was still on the wall?"

Del's black brows knitted thoughtfully. Then he nodded. "Why, yes. Yes, it was, now you mention it. And that old shotgun he always kept behind the door, that was there, too. Why, Joe?"

Nearing's words were shaky with relief. "Oh, nothin' much, I guess. I—I just thought mebbe he'd seen a buck or somethin' up on the ridge this mornin' and gone after it. Mebbe he'd hurt hisself in a huntin' accident."

Del grinned and shook his head. "Reck-on not, with them two guns still there. More'n likely one of his cronies from the

other side of the ridge stopped by and took him home for the day. Josh Banker does that sometimes, y' know. Oldtimers like that, they get lonely sometimes. Like as not, he'll come roarin' home about midnight, drunk as a lord."

Nearing joined his own shaky laughter with Del's. "Like as not," he echoed. "But if there's anything I can do, help you look or anything, just ask. I was goin' into town myself, but it ain't important."

"No," Del said. "I ain't gonna look for him—maybe spoil his fun. I ain't gonna worry about the old scoundrel. I'll see him Saturday when he comes into town. But much obliged, anyway, Joe."

"Sure," Nearing said, trying to keep his voice level, trying to keep the singing exultation out of it. "See you, Del."

He sat in the darkened Ford for a long time after Del's truck had pulled away again, while wave after wave of relief and new hope swept through him. Del's visit had given him a new lease on life. He knew now what had happened to Hank Walters. He was *sure*! It was the only thing that could have happened. And it gave him another chance. Maybe even a better chance than if his scheme had gone through the way he'd originally planned it.

Because somewhere up there on that darkened ridge flank, or hidden in the underbrush which margined the road, Hank Walters' corpse was waiting for him. It had to be! Not in the shack—Del had already looked there. And not on the road, or Del would have seen it. But somewhere between the fence and the shack, Walters had crawled off in the weeds to die.

And now all Joe Nearing had to do was to find that body before someone else did. Find it and dispose of it. There were plenty of places in these hills where a body could be hidden in such a way that it wouldn't be found for years—maybe never.

Sweating again with the excitement of his new hope, Nearing took his flashlight and scrambled from the Ford.

**H**E BEGAN his search from the length of fence beside the clearing, crisscrossing the ridge flank laboriously, fol-



lowing each nook and cranny of the weed-grown ditch beside the road. It was slow work, bending down to thrust the flashlight's beam into each bush or clump of undergrowth, penetrating each gully and ravine. And gradually, as the moonless night waxed darker, he became increasingly obsessed with the need for haste.

Del had said that he wasn't going to worry, that he'd see the old man Saturday in town. And Saturday was still two days off.

But what if Del changed his mind? What if he drove out tomorrow morning, after all, to see if his Pa had returned home okay? What if, in the light of the morning sun, he himself stumbled across the body which Joe had somehow missed in the moonless dark?

He began to run frantically from bush to bush, tripping on hidden vines, tearing his legs on the brambles. Once he slipped on a bed of pebbles and sprawled full length among the rocks, smashing the flashlight lens.

After that he went on in the dark, dropping to his knees to feel the bushes with his hands, to explore the pits of darkness behind each boulder. The sound of hounds baying a treed coon on some distant ridge drifted to him, and the sky began to lighten with approaching dawn.

He reached the clearing surrounding Hank Walters' shack at last, too far spent to continue the search any longer. And still he had found nothing.

The shack door was closed now; Del must have closed it. But he put out one work-glove-sheathed hand, pushed it wide, struck a match to scan the interior.

Yes, there were the deer gun still on the wall, the rusty shotgun in the corner, the coffee pot and breakfast dishes, just as Del had described them.

The sight of the coffee pot reminded him that he himself hadn't eaten in almost twenty-four hours, and for a moment he yearned to touch a match to the stove, to add new water to the pot and at least have himself a cup of coffee.

But he didn't dare do that; he couldn't change anything from the way Del had seen it. There would be an investigation, whether Hank's body was found or not.

So he backed from the shack at last, closing the door, and began to trudge

wearily down the drive toward his own place. The eastern sky was completely pink now, and he knew he couldn't afford to stop hunting for long. Just long enough to get enough fuel in his belly for him to go on. He cursed the thirst that had caused him to drain his last quart of pop-skull two nights ago. There wasn't time to go into town for more now. But at least he could boil himself some coffee.

Back in his kitchen, he touched fire to the cobs in the old wood stove, filled a pot with grounds and fresh water from the well, broke a dozen eggs into a grease-scummed skillet. Ten minutes later he was dumping plenty of sugar into a steaming cup, while he spooned eggs ravenously with his other hand. He blew on the coffee a moment, lifted it, gasped as the half-scalding liquid flooded his throat. He choked and followed it with a tincup of cold water.

But the water only made the pain worse, if anything. Gradually it came to him that the fire in his throat was not caused by heat alone. There was a horrible, burning nausea in his stomach now, a bitterness as of gall that made him retch.

He stumbled to the cabin door and was violently sick.

He realized later that that was all that saved him—the fact that the shock of the stuff had been too much for his empty stomach, causing it to disgorge again. But now he just stood there, weak and shaken, puzzling over the cause of his sudden illness.

Reaction? Strain? He shook his head. The taste of the stuff was still bitter in his mouth. After a while he re-entered the shack, bent above the coffee pot, sniffing and smelling.

He took another sip of the water in the bucket, and then suddenly he was breaking for the well in the draw out back.

**H**E DIDN'T notice the empty carton right away. It had been tossed carelessly into the weeds beside the well's rim. So the footprints caught his attention, first.

They were there in plain sight, in the soft loam beside the well. And from the way the left sole turned in at a forty-five-degree angle, he knew right away whose



they were. Only one man in these hills had a foot that twisted like that!

He knew now that Hank Walters was still alive. That the old man had merely been playing cat-and-mouse with him, torturing him with the uncertainty of whether his victim was alive or dead, till it pleased Walters' fancy to pay him back for that shot from ambush yesterday morning.

And he knew, too, a moment later, when he found the empty ten-pound carton in the weeds, that Walters' had taken his first step toward retribution. For the carton was labeled Paris Green!

It was like the old man to want to mete out his own revenge, instead of relying on Del or the sheriff to do it for him. He could picture Walters hiding in the woods on this side of the road last night, chuckling to himself as he watched the glow of Joe's flashlight on the adjoining ridge. And he had made no attempt to conceal his visit here, while Joe was scouring the adjoining countryside for his body. He had counted on Joe's first drink from the poisoned well to be his last. It had probably pleased him to hope that, in his death throes, Joe might stumble down here and learn that Walters was responsible for his end.

The old man could back and cover his trail later, let people think Joe had drunk himself to death at last. It was the kind of grim jest that would appeal to Walters, after what had happened.

Well, it hadn't worked. It hadn't worked, and it wouldn't work! It was between Joe and Walters alone now—this business of mutual death. Only now Joe was forewarned, knew for certain that the old man was still alive. And Walters wouldn't be so alert. He would think that Joe was dying or dead from the poisoned drink.

It should be a simple matter to sneak up on Walters now, finish him off as originally planned, then lug his body to the Ford and dispose of it somewhere in the woods.

Only—it was so far across that ridge. So far, in the bright morning sun, after everything else he'd been through in the past twenty-four hours. His head ached from the long lack of food in his stomach, and his throat still burned from where the

poison had seared it. First, he had to have a drink.

He stumbled unsteadily toward the spring a quarter-mile down the draw. Walters wouldn't have poisoned that. He was so tired he could hardly make his feet track, and every bone in his body throbbed with weariness.

He reached the spring at last, stretched out full length beside it to suck the gleaming water from a pool among the rocks. The water was so cool, so sweet; the sun so warm, so good on his aching body. He would lie here a moment longer, gathering his strength.

No hurry, anyway. Walters would be lulled into a false sense of security by now. He'd be back at his own shack, cooking breakfast. He wouldn't hide out in the woods any more, mocking Joe. Maybe it would be better to wait till after nightfall. Creep up on the shack with less chance of being observed, in the darkness. Catch the old man asleep.

Sleep. . . . The hum of bees drifted from the nearby grass, and the trickle of water was a gentle murmur. . . . It was so quiet here, so pleasant, he would lie here a moment longer, anyway, before he went on with his search. . . .

**I**T WAS almost completely dark when he awoke. His muscles were cramped from their long contact with the ground, and his head still throbbed dully. But he felt a lot better, strong enough now to finish the job. He took a final sip from the spring beside him, moved back up the path to get his rifle.

It took him an hour to crawl through the brush to Walters' shack; he was that careful. But when at last he reached the clearing edge, saw the thin plume of smoke from the chimney greying the stars, the cheerful glow of lamp shine through the lone window, a groan of almost physical release escaped him.

He checked his rifle and bellied forward to the window, then pulled himself up the wall, inch by inch, till he could peer through the dusty pane. Still there was no sign from inside. No indication that his presence here might be suspected.

Then he saw why. Walters was sitting there at the littered table beside the lamp, his bandaged head slumped forward in



his arms, cradled among the supper dishes.

The old man had fallen asleep over his vittles. Fast asleep! All tucked out, from his two days' adventures.

Nearing wanted to laugh hysterically. Now that the time had finally come, it was almost too easy. Too cheap a price for Walters to pay, after all the misery and anguish he'd caused Joe Nearing. He'd almost be doing the old man a favor to kill him that way.

"Walters!" he howled. "Hank Walters! Wake up! It's me—Joe Nearing! I didn't die, after all. I'm not dead! But you will be in a minute!"

He shoved the rifle through the window, shattering the glass, and squeezed the trigger.

The figure at the table twisted with the slug's impact, fell woodenly on its side, beside the chair. Its face turned to the light, at last. And Joe Nearing just stood there at the window, staring. Staring hollowly at the thing on the floor.

Because he saw now that it wasn't Hank Walters, at all. It wasn't anybody. It was just a dummy. A decoy Walters had rigged up to trap him.

He whirled from the window, but he was too late. A searchlight probed suddenly from a tree to his left, blinding him, pinning him to the wall of the shack like a moth. A stern voice called, "All right, Joe. You're covered. Drop it!"

He blinked, trying to shade his eyes from the glare, and the rifle slipped numbly from his fingers.

Del Walters came from around the far corner, stepped into the reflected glow of the light. He held a long squirrel gun under one arm.

"Satisfied, Sheriff?" he called.

Another figure stepped from the woods to the right. Vaguely Nearing made out the grizzled, close-cropped head of Sheriff Mike Sones. Sones nodded grimly.

"Reckon so, Del," he said. "Reckon he's the one shot yore pappy, all right. Reckon even a jury'd believe that now."

Nearing's voice lifted in a screech. "You're crazy!" he yelled. "I didn't shoot nobody! That wasn't Hank Walters in there—it was just a dummy!"

Sones nodded. "Shore. Just a dummy. Just a clothin'-store dummy we borried from Len Perkins and dressed up in Hank Walters' clothes. But you *thought* it was Hank. You called him by name. And you put a slug through what you thought was his head—just like you done yestiddy mawnin', when it really *was* his head!"

Nearing stared at him incredulously. "But—" he began. "But—I didn't kill him!"

"No," the sheriff said. "You didn't kill him. Not right off. When Del come along in his truck a few minutes later to deliver a letter that'd come for the old man, he found him lyin' half through the fence there, unconscious from the wound but still breathin'. So he loaded him into the truck without wastin' no time and started out to find Doc Weatherby. You musta still been comin' down the back side o' the bluff at the time—didn't know about Del showin' up, a-tall."

Nearing drew a hand dazedly across his face. Then relief flooded over him again. "Then Hank's still alive! He ain't dead, after all!"

"Yep. Hank's still alive. Doc Weatherby says he's even got a good chance to

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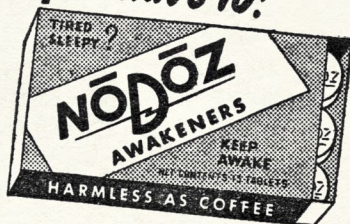
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pull through now. But when the Doc dug that bullet out'n his skull, it was mashed too bad to tell what gun it had come from. At first, Del thought it musta been a stray slug fired by some deer hunter. Then he remembered the letter that had come for his pappy that mornin', and opened it.

"It had a fifty-dollar bill inside it. And a note from Kitty, back in Tennessee, thankin' Hank for loanin' her the money to git away from you, Joe, and apologizin' for takin' so long before she could pay it back.

"Well, that was enough for Del. He figgered you as the bushwhacker right away. But it wasn't enough for me. And I knew it wouldn't be enough for no jury. A jury's gotta be convinced beyond a reasonable doubt before it finds a man guilty of attempted murder. And all Del had so far was a possible motive. No witnesses, no evidence, no nuthin'. Hank himself hadn't seen who took that shot at him. If we picked you up, you'd deny it, o' course. And it would just be his word agin yore'n, anyhow. The bullet wasn't no good. It still mighta been a stray from some deer hunter's gun, for all we knew.

"So then Del thunk up this idea of git-tin' you to take another crack at th' old man, with witnesses present. He come out last night to tell you Hank hadn't been found yet. He figured that would keep you around long enough huntin' the body for us to set the stage fer his little plan."

**N**EARING'S face was red with protest. "But—the well! Hank Walters come back and poisoned my well last night! I seen his footprints—"

Somes shook his head. "Del himself made them footprints," he said. "With the old man's shoes. While you was over on the ridge last night huntin' the corpse. He dropped that empty Paris Green carton in the weeds, too. He had to convince you Hank was still alive so you'd come back and take another crack at him when we was ready.

"You wasn't really poisoned, Joe. He just mixed enough cayenne pepper with the coffee in that can in yore kitchen to

make you think you was when you drun some of it. And enough chloral hydrate crystals with the sugar in the bowl on yore table to knock you out for a while, while we set the stage here. He noticed your whiskey bottle was empty, and he knew how a drinker craves sugar when his alcohol's cut off."

The sheriff turned toward the light on the left. "All right, Len. You can come in closer now while I put the cuffs on him. Reckon you've heard enough to make a third witness."

Len Perkins stepped from the trees, the beam of the heavy electric lantern at his belt narrowing on Joe's face as he advanced. But Del Walters spoke out abruptly.

"Wait a minute, boys. Let's finish this off right now. Let me knock a full confession out of him." He laid the squirrel gun on the grass and stepped forward purposefully toward Nearing, bony fists balling.

Nearing shrank back against the wall like a cornered rabbit. He waited till Del's body cut between himself and the light, momentarily masking him, and then he whirled and broke for the woods to the right, think only of the pain of those fists chopping into him—trying desperately to prevent it.

He heard the sheriff bawling at him to stop. But he had almost reached the first fringe of undergrowth when the shot rang out. He felt something like a giant hand grip his spine, crushing it; and he sprawled forward, legs doubling under him, his own final scream echoing in his ears.

Dimly, just before the last darkness set in, he heard the sheriff's mildly complaining voice: "Had to shoot out his backbone to keep him from gettin' away, dang it. I can see he ain't gonna keep for no trial, now. You hadn't ought to've stepped in front of the light thataway, Del. Nobody but a damn fool woulda done a thing like that—less'n it was on purpose."

Del chuckled wolfishly. "He had a better chance than he give my old man," he said. "At least, he knew that slug was comin'. . . . What would he of got for attempted murder, anyway, Sheriff? Mebbe three or four years?"



# HANGMAN WANTED!

By  
**PATRICK STUMPE**

*Hangman Arthur Wakeman never really enjoyed his work—until he had to slip a noose around the neck of the man who wanted his job!*

**N**O HANGMAN likes his job. In New Zealand, in the year 1913, the job of executioner at the county seat of Lyttleton was vacant but there were no applicants. No one worried about it very much because the population of that island continent is usually peaceful and law-abiding and no one could really remember when the last murder had taken place.

Unfortunately, in October, a man named Alfred Biddle was convicted of slaying a farmer's wife and condemned to death. For a while, it seemed as if the usually swift wheels of British justice would be bogged down, for there was no one with stomach enough to perform the hanging. At last, two applicants came forward. The first was Arthur Rettman, under a cloud as a German alien in that tense pre-war year. Reluctantly, the prison officials were about to give him the job when from the outlying Waipara district came Henry Wakeman, a farmer, who said he would hang the condemned man in order to protect his family and all womanhood and donate his fee to charity. Impressed, the warden granted him the appointment and it was Wakeman who faced Biddle the following week in the prison courtyard.

But just as Wakeman put his hand on the rope, a man broke from the crowd of curious spectators and raced up to the gallows. It was Rettman, the rejected applicant.

"Let me hang him!" he cried. "Please let me! The job is mine—I asked for it first!"

Angrily, Henry Wakeman shook the man off and proceeded with the execution. Prison guards rushed the still-protesting

Rettman to the gates and threw him roughly into the street.

Wakeman wiped his face. He was pale and covered with sweat. His hands trembled. "Fellow unnerved me," he said, but he knew that it was not Rettman, but the taking of a human life, that had upset him. Late that night, back on his farm, he said to his wife, "Never again!"

He was not allowed to resign, however. In the summer of 1914, another capital crime was committed near Lyttleton and Wakeman was persuaded to hang the criminal. But just as the trap was about to be sprung there was another commotion among the onlookers and again the queer, wild-eyed figure of Arthur Rettman rushed forward and attempted to pull the fatal lever.

This time Wakeman knocked him to the ground. "Take this man out of here!" he shouted, and after the execution he sat down, completely unnerved.

A year later, a farmer, his wife and his children, distant neighbors of the Wakemans, were brutally murdered with an axe. But Wakeman did not even want to hear about it. He refused to read any of the details in the newspaper, and when the murderer was caught he snapped, "Don't tell me! I don't want to know his name!" Flatly, he refused to fulfill the duties of his job. Finally it was his wife who urged him to go.

"We might have been the victims," she reminded him. "You and I and our children. Someone has to avenge the dead." Slowly, Henry Wakeman rode into town, into the grim prison courtyard where he had twice before ended a man's life in the name of the state. With his eyes

*(Continued on page 128)*





# THAT DEADLY DAILY DOUBLE

*It was a big day at the race track for Steve Randall and Nancy Arthur. The horses came in on schedule—the Randall-Arthur schedule—and the long green rolled in as though someone was tilting the table in their direction. So it was too bad that such a perfect day had to be spoiled by two things: (1) Someone wrapping a belt around Nancy's throat; and (2) Someone wrapping a murder frame around Steve!*

**Smashing Detective  
Novelette**

**By  
FRANCIS K. ALLAN**

## CHAPTER ONE

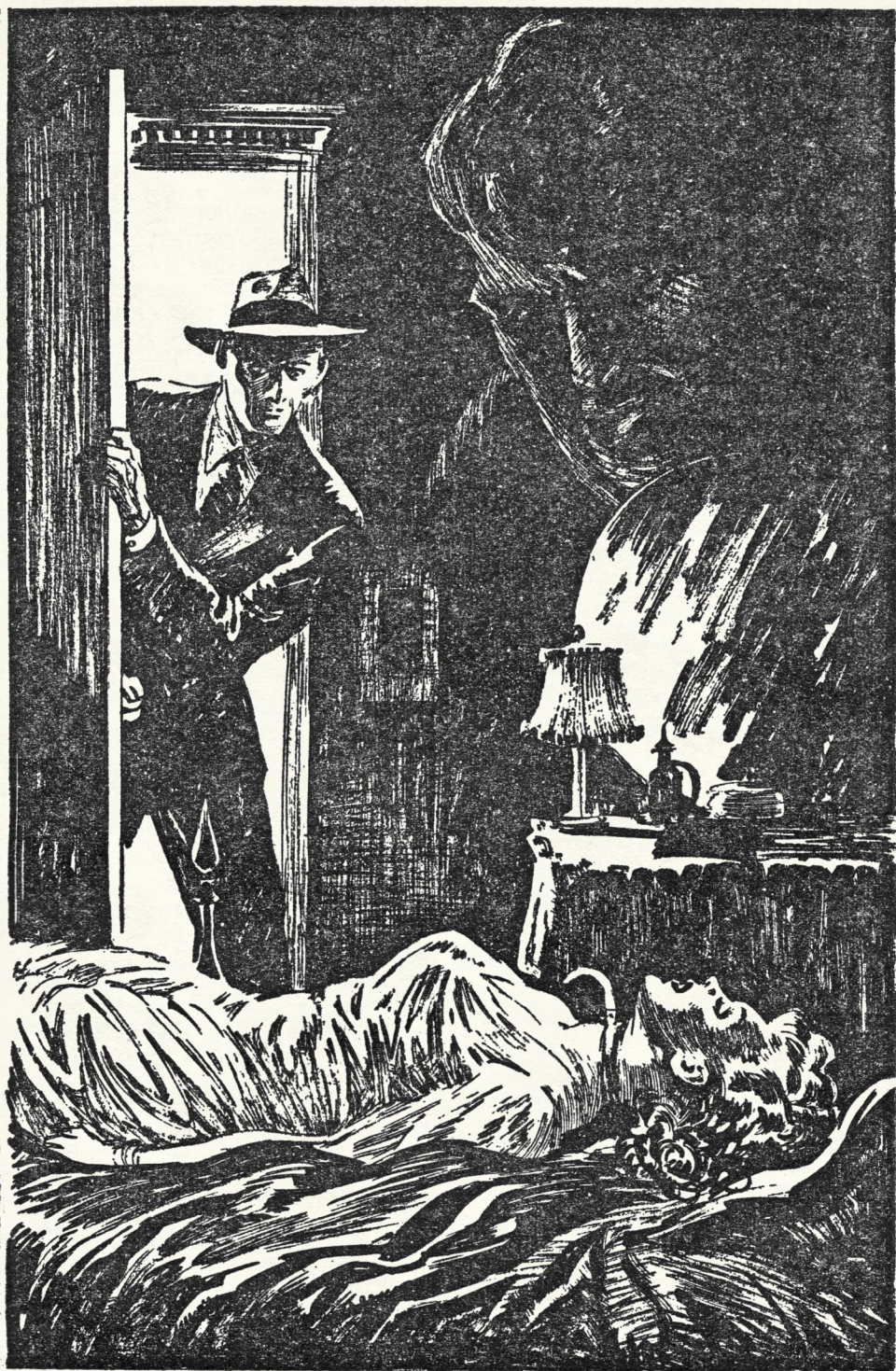
### Death Parlay

SATURDAY morning was hot and lonely. Steve had forgotten to buy cream for his coffee, and then he discovered he was out of cigarettes. The four rooms seemed to echo with heavy silence that depressed him. He thought of phoning Carol at the summer cottage, but he'd phoned her last Thursday. Anyway, she'd have to walk to the filling station to get the call, and she probably wouldn't

Steve tiptoed to the bedroom door and looked in. She was lying there just the way Dotty had said.









be dressed this early. He thought of going to bed, but it was too hot. So in the end he shaved and put on his wilted grey suit and took the bus to the office on East Forty-sixth Street.

His footsteps echoed with a hollow calm as he walked down the corridor to his door. Inside, he pulled off his coat, loosened his tie and got out the sketches for the Walcott job. Immediately he began to feel even more tired and irritated. The job didn't interest him at all. Remodeling jobs seldom did. The Walcott Rug Company wanted a new front on its old brick building on Madison. Something with shiny steel and light wood, but cheap. What with inflation, people weren't buying many rugs.

Steve pushed the sketches aside and looked out the window. He heard someone coming down the corridor. It was Les Marshall, another architect for Consolidated Engineering. He paused in the doorway and tut-tutted. "Only a slave comes here on Saturday, son."

"My wife's away for August and I was starting to hear the furniture talk. This is a day when even a good man might get himself drunk."

"An interesting thought." Les frowned. He was shorter and more stockily built than Steve. His face was ruddy and his eyes were sleepless. He rubbed his hand across his blunt chin and scratched his neck. "Let's grab a beer in a little while. I've got to finish an estimate, but it won't take long. See you then." He nodded and continued down the hall toward his own office, and presently Steve heard a girl's voice—Nancy Arthur's. Apparently, he mused, nobody knew where to go.

Steve concentrated on the Walcott pictures until eleven o'clock, when Nancy stopped in his doorway. "Are you crazy, too?" she asked.

"Just like you." Steve grinned. Nancy was tiny and pale blonde, and before Carol, Steve had known Nancy more or less. She had a pretty face with soft lips and amber eyes and a lovely figure. At the moment she looked astonishingly cool and attractive. "Do you want a beer?" Steve asked abruptly. "Or a Tom Collins and a cool place to just sit and say the hell with it?"

"And never add those ugly old columns to see whether Consolidated is going broke or getting rich?" she said. "Yes, I do. A tall Tom Collins with two cherries is exactly what I want."

"Wait a minute," Les called. "I know just the place."

So they went to Les's place that he knew: a cool shadowy downstairs place on Fifty-second. They talked about how nice it would be to wake up rich some day—or not wake up until October. They had two drinks, then three and then four, and then Les got the idea of going up to Majestic Park to see the horses run. "It's beautiful up there. Swans floating around in the infield or whatever they call it, and trees and stuff. The buses leave from Times Square every half-hour."

"Uh-huh," Steve said, "and I have exactly fourteen dollars."

"I've got seventy. I'll lend you some. Nancy?"

"I've never been to the races. I've got almost twenty dollars. Are they real live swans?"

THEY went to Majestic Park. Les knew all about it, and he knew a lot about horses. He explained how to read the sheets and how to make the bets. The only thing, Les's horses didn't win, and in the middle of it, Nancy whispered to Steve, "I don't like Les's horses. Let's pick up some horses of our own." Her eyes were very bright and excited, and for the first time in days Steve felt good. So they picked some horses of their own, and their horses won. Les's horse lost again.

Then Nancy said, "Let's bet on the longest shot in the race, just for fun, Steve." It was Tulip, at thirty-to-one. They bet ten dollars and Tulip won. Les didn't say anything except, "Damned lucky."

"That's fun. Let's do the same thing again," Nancy said. This time it was Wanderlust, at fifteen-to-one, and Wanderlust won. Les had stopped talking, and his broad face was getting dark red. On the last race he had to borrow money to make a bet. He lost and Steve and Nancy won, and Steve could scarcely breathe.

"Nancy," he whispered, "do you have any idea how much money we've got?"

"Oh, a lot. Five hundred dollars?"



More than that? Let me guess. A thousand? More even than that?"

"We have got nearly three thousand. Fifteen hundred each, I swear."

"Lucky, son. Very lucky, beautiful," Les said bluntly.

They took a cab back to Manhattan and, because they were sorry for Les, they decided to go to a night club. "The Paradise, just this once before we put the money in the bank," Nancy said gaily. Only Les had been to the Paradise before. It was very expensive, and Broadway columnists were supposed to spend a lot of time there. Les wanted a Scotch. They all had a Scotch, then another, and then Les said, "How about a bottle of champagne on the horses."

Nancy didn't know. "Champagne on whiskey . . ." she began.

"Makes you frisky," Les completed. "Anyway, what the hell? Three thousand little soldiers can stand it, can't they."

"Sure," Steve said quietly. Les was beginning to annoy him. They drank the champagne and ate, and afterwards Les said they ought to stop in at Paddy's on Third Avenue. Steve was drunk and he knew it; Nancy was also feeling it. But they went to Paddy's, and somewhere in all of it, Steve saw a clock and it was almost three in the morning. Nancy was half drowsy, and then Les just vanished, leaving Steve and Nancy. He took her home in a cab.

"I've had a won—wonderful time, Steve," she said at her door.

"So've I. Just a minute now." And he started to count the money. It came out fourteen hundred and fifty-two dollars each. Then Steve kissed her. In the beginning it was warm and good, then both of them remembered, and the moment was lost. Nancy smiled sleepily. "It was wonderful," she repeated.

"Good-night, Nancy," he said. He walked home to clear his head. It was the first time he had kissed any girl save Carol in two years, or since he'd gotten married, and he felt strange. There was always a first time again, he supposed. Or call it a party. That was it. It had been just a party, and almost a fairy tale made of gold. . . He stumbled, straightened himself, and began to sing softly. He was

quite drunk and tired, but he was happy, too.

SUNDAY morning was hot and the sun was veiled by a steamy mist. Steve woke with a headache and the dry-throat. He got up and took an aspirin and drank cold water. The Sunday paper was outside the door in the hall, but his eyes hurt too much to read it. He lay down on the couch in his pajama pants and dozed fitfully. The sounds of traffic floated up through the window, and the couch was hot. He got up again at one o'clock and took a shower. He was hungry for something cool. He went across Lexington to a Swedish place and drank a beer and ate cold salad and meats, and then he began to think of Nancy again.

He realized that he was lonely and wanted to see her, talk to her. He frowned and caught his reflection in a wall mirror. His slender face seemed thinner today. His dark eyes were darker. His hair looked very black. For a moment he felt that he was staring at a stranger. He told himself he would forget about Nancy.

He took a walk up to Central Park and back down Lexington, and when he stopped he was standing in front of Nancy's apartment building and he knew he was going upstairs. He knew he had always known he would go up the stairs, and he would finish the kiss of last night.

But there was no answer to his knock on her door. He knocked again and the silence endured until the door of the next apartment opened and a large man came out, locked the door behind him, nodded absently at Steve and went away toward the elevator. Steve did not knock the third time. Perhaps it was better this way, he was thinking. He got into the elevator with the man and rode down. He went to a movie and then went home early to bed.

That night it rained and a wind came up, and Monday came bright and cool. The strangely dream-like weekend was over. Nothing had happened to regret, and Carol would be home by Friday. It had all worked out. . . .

In the middle of the morning, Les stopped by his office and shook his head in mock awe. "Lucky, lucky, lucky," he murmured. "But what happened to



Nancy? Take a trip to Paris on the profit?"

Steve blinked. "Isn't she around?"

"Not that anybody can see. I was telling Herb that you'd probably done her in and disposed of the body to get her fortune. Oh, well, as I said, lucky, lucky, lucky." He wandered on. Steve kept staring at the empty doorway, and a strangely restless anxiety drifted through him. He shook his shoulders and turned back to the Walcott sketches. Presently he thrust them aside and went down the corridor to Nancy's office in the auditing department. But she hadn't appeared yet and no one knew. No, she didn't answer the telephone. But say, what about the races that Les was telling about . . . ?

"We went," Steve said curtly. He didn't want to talk about the races or the money suddenly. He couldn't put his finger on why, precisely. At lunch he called Nancy's apartment himself; there was still no answer. He remembered that she had a sister in Matawan who worked in a Ford agency. Steve had met her a couple of times in the days he was taking Nancy around. Dotty, they'd called her.

At five o'clock, Les paused on his way out. "Want a drink today?"

Steve shook his head. "I've got to make a call." He phoned the Matawan operator, got the only Ford agency in town, and finally got Dotty. She remembered him after a few moments.

"Nancy? . . . No, I haven't seen her since week before last. Why?"

"She didn't come to work today. She doesn't answer the phone. Do you have any idea where she might have gone?"

"Gosh, no. She—but she wouldn't," Dotty decided. "Do you think something has . . . gone wrong or anything?"

"I don't know," Steve said slowly. "She had some cash—quite a bit in her purse. I don't know. Listen, you call me and I'll call you if we find out anything. It worries me."

"Yes, I will if—wait a minute, Steve! Wait. I'll come in tonight and I've got a key to her apartment. I'll look and see if she packed any bags or anything. Only I don't think she'd do it that way."

"No, neither do I. Call me after you've looked, Dotty." He ate and went home, and at 8:25 the telephone rang. It was

Dotty, and her voice was low and trembling.

"She's here. I found her, but she's dead. She's dead."

**B**Y THE TIME Steve reached Nancy's door, a cluster of neighbors had gathered in the corridor. He knocked and rattled the knob, and finally a cop opened the door.

"Hey, where're you pushing to so fast?" he demanded, blocking Steve's way.

"I'm Steve Randall. I just—" Then Dotty appeared. She had been crying, and her face was tense and white now. She looked very much like Nancy: pale golden hair, a pretty face and big gentle eyes. The cop decided to let Steve in. He locked the door again and mopped his reddened neck.

"Both of you just sit down and wait until Becker gets here," he ordered. He looked harried and angry. The door into the bedroom was closed. On the ledge outside the window, three pot-plants shone softly in the mixture of light and night, and on the couch was the purse and the red-and-white jacket that Nancy had worn Saturday.

"I just unlocked the door and everything was so still," Dotty whispered to Steve. "Somehow I almost knew, right then. First I listened, then I opened the bedroom door and there—that was where she was."

"How did—how was it, Dotty?" Steve asked. "I mean, how?"

"She was stretched across the foot of the bed, sort of with her face turned toward the wall, and she had on her robe, and one of her house shoes had fallen off, and the little leather belt—the belt to her grey dress—was around her neck. I—I touched her and then I think I screamed. I don't know what else. I guess the people heard me screaming."

Steve got up and tiptoed to the bedroom door and looked in. She was lying there just as Dotty had said. He came back and sat down again.

He stared at Nancy's purse and thought of the moment. Unthinking, he started to reach out.

"Hey, stay back from there!" the cop said harshly. "What's the idea?"



"She had a lot of money in that purse?"  
 "Nobody asked you to see what—"  
 Then another knock came at the door. It was Detective Becker, a short grey-eyed man with cup-shaped ears and curly grey hair. A taller, younger man with an Irish face followed him in, and then came a Dr. Powell, who looked totally indifferent and thoroughly bored. Becker looked at Steve and Dotty while the cop gave a terse explanation of what had happened; then Becker left the cop with them and strode into the bedroom. Neither Steve nor Dotty spoke. The low murmur of voices sank in from the corridor, and then Powell's weary voice muttered. Becker replied inaudibly. Powell grunted. The cop mopped his neck again and lit a cigarette. Steve hunted for his. The bedroom door opened and closed behind Becker and he cleared his throat. He started with Dotty.

Dotty spoke in a stiff voice, telling little more than she had already told Steve. Becker turned to Steve. Steve started with Saturday noon and explained what had happened. Becker's features tightened in concentration and Steve could almost see him nailing the pattern into his orderly brain.

"And you came here yesterday, Sunday afternoon," Becker asked, "and the door was locked? You did not have a key?"

"No, of course not." Their eyes met. "I told you, I'm married. My wife is at a summer cottage with our daughter, a year-old baby."

"Oh, yes, that's right. And Nancy Arthur was simply a friend, I believe you said. You'd known her before your marriage, did you say?"

"I said that," Steve agreed. Already he disliked and vaguely feared Detective Becker. Becker frowned and carefully opened Nancy's purse.

"Fourteen hundred and fifty-two dollars?" he asked absently. He looked up and smiled apologetically. "You're sure it wasn't just fifty-two, Mr. Randall?"

"It was fourteen hundred and fifty-two," Steve repeated rigidly.

Becker pursed his lips. "The fourteen is gone. Or perhaps she hid it. We'll see." The door opened and Dr. Powell reappeared. He handed Becker a scrap of paper. "Thirty-six to forty-eight

hours," Becker mused aloud. "In other words, she was probably killed soon after you left her in the early hours of Sunday morning. . . . Laceration on the back of the head; death due to strangulation." He looked up again and wrinkled the paper between his fingers. "The murderer knocked. She admitted him—or her, of course—so she must have known him, or her. She was slugged and then murdered. Fourteen hundred dollars is missing. You were the last person known to have seen her alive." He paused and then sighed. "Well, thanks for your help and information, Mr. Randall. If I think of anything else, I'll give you a ring or drop by. Good-night."

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Weak Link

IT WAS so sudden and so mild that at first Steve scarcely understood. Becker was telling him to go. It was over. Over for tonight, anyway. But for some reason Steve felt tricked. This was too easy, too phony, he realized. He walked home slowly. He stared at his telephone and thought of calling Carol. Then he decided that it was best not to worry her. Besides, it was going to be the devil to explain.

He felt cold and clammy. He made a highball and then forgot it as his mind returned to the scene at Nancy's apartment. Then his mental focus shifted, and he realized with a curious start that he was thinking of Les Marshall; his fingers had stiffened and he had almost stopped breathing. His throat felt tight and hard. Les. He'd been drunk and angry that night. He'd lost his money. Anyway, what sort of a man *was* Les Marshall?

Steve hardly knew. The way he acted, it was a good guess Les wasn't married. He knew places like Majestic Park and the Paradise Club. His clothes were better than most. Rather handsome in a heavy, sporty way. He'd come to Consolidated a year ago from some firm in Jersey City and he made about five thousand a year, probably. He liked a drink. That was all Steve really knew, and it wasn't much. He looked at his watch. It was 10:45. Les had seemed to like the place



called Paddy's on Third. Maybe . . . Steve rose suddenly. . . .

The bartender said Mr. Mitchell hadn't been in, but then, it was still early. Like as not he'd drop in before the night was over. Yes, sir, Mr. Mitchell liked a good Scotch and plain water. A fine fellow.

Steve had another highball and watched the clock. From time to time he shook his tense shoulders and reminded himself that all of this meant nothing. Just before midnight, Les came in. His eyes were bright brown and his heavy face was flushed. He wanted to buy Steve a drink. Believe it or not, he'd been working on some damned plans since 8:30. Steve didn't believe him. He stirred his drink and spoke slowly.

"I've been to Nancy Arthur's apartment this evening."

"I don't blame you. That little girl doesn't need any changes made."

"Somebody made some, however." Steve looked up at him. "Someone murdered Nancy." He kept looking while Les moved his jaw laxly. He blinked and for only an instant Steve wondered if he saw the furious striving for dismay. He couldn't know.

"You're kidding me, Steve," Les said jerkily.

"I'm telling you the truth. She was murdered at least thirty-six hours ago, and someone took fourteen hundred dollars of her winnings."

"For God's sake," Les whispered. He mopped his forehead. "Thirty-six hours? Saturday . . . early Sunday morning, that would make it. I was— Yes, I was playing head-to-head poker with Artie Marsh at his hotel room then. What were you doing?"

"Sleeping. What makes you ask that?"

"But the money." Les gestured. "Why else would anybody kill her, and who besides us knew she had that much cash in the sock? See?"

"I see," Steve said slowly. "I just didn't see it that fast." He stared at his highball again. "You left here that night—that early morning—and went over to Artie's to play poker?"

"Yeah. It's second nature. I get a load on, I want to play poker. Artie doesn't even need a load. You know how Artie is."

"I know Artie, yes," Steve agreed. Again he paused. "But you lost all your money at the track that day, remember?"

"I borrowed. Gave a check and played the money back at Artie," Les said. He said it swiftly, after only an instant's faltering, and then he gripped Steve's arm and hauled him around. "Why? What's the cross-examination about?"

"Nothing, Les," Steve said haggardly. "It's only that . . . I keep thinking about her. I liked her. Perhaps too much. Anyway, I keep thinking about it and trying to figure it out."

That was the way Steve left it. After another drink, Les shook his head and repeated softly, "For God's sake. . . And just a little while before all that, we were sitting here in a booth and she was laughing. I'm going home, Steve. I don't feel good."

Steve finished his drink and went home, too. Long after he'd turned out the lights, he lay in the darkness and tried to remember every word and every expression of Les's. He tried to weigh and balance and judge, and when he was through, Steve realized that once more he had ceased breathing. His muscles were tense. He felt as though he had been watching a tense panorama of escape. And in his soul Steve knew that he was convinced of Les's guilt.

**T**HE NEXT DAY it rained. When Steve reached the offices, the talk was moving tensely. Did he know? Had he heard about Nancy? What did he think? Steve shook his head and said he didn't think. At lunch he wandered down the hall to the advertising department and Artie Marsh's cubicle. Artie was putting on his coat to go eat. He was a short, pale-haired man who looked older than his thirty-five years. His eyes were blue and moist behind the glasses. He had been a radio actor once, then slipped into advertising, and now somehow he'd drifted here. No one seemed to know him well, except that he played the piano and always had a numbers ticket.

"Let's eat," Steve said. "I don't feel like talking to myself about this thing that's happened."

"Neither do I," Artie said. They went across the street to Lorado's. Artie



talked very little, and when he spoke, he seemed to blush. Only once did Steve ask him direct and pointed questions.

"How was your poker game with Les, Artie?"

"I won. Yes, I won that time," he said quickly.

"Sixty-three dollars, Les told me, wasn't it?"

"Six—I think so. Something around three."

Steve frowned at his fingernails. "Or didn't Les say *ninety-three*?"

Artie said nothing for several moments. "I can't remember exactly. Les would know." He didn't look up. Steve stared at his bowed head, at the wide division in his pale hair, then presently he talked of other things. He even told a joke and Artie laughed in his jerky, self-conscious manner.

The girl at the reception desk looked at Steve oddly when they returned to the offices. As he walked along the corridor to his cubicle, he thought he sensed a quietness, a hush in the other rooms. He sat down and lit a cigarette and stared at the sketches while he thought of Artie. He heard the click of the latch and looked up. Detective Becker was standing against the closed door. He nodded and smiled; it was a totally artificial smile and Steve knew it.

"You wanted to talk to me?" he asked. His voice sounded gaunt.

"If you're not too busy." Becker sat down on the corner of the desk and scratched his cup-shaped ear. "Your salary is approximately a hundred a week, I believe," he said absently. Steve nodded slowly. "Married two years ago,

didn't you say? Have a baby daughter now. I understand your wife was sick for a while after the baby came. Spent six weeks in Mercy Hospital. Right?"

The room seemed to grow very quiet and hot. Becker was smiling.

"All of that is right, yes," Steve agreed.

"Must have been a heavy load financially. I suppose you had to get a nurse for the baby. And prices—Lord knows they've gone up! In a way, a hundred a week sounds like a lot; but when you add it, and throw in a little trouble, such as illness, it gets to be pretty small." He paused and swung his leg, pendulum fashion. "I say, I guess money looks pretty small," he repeated steadily.

"I heard you," Steve said stonily. "I know what you mean, and you're wrong. I did not kill Nancy Arthur for the money. I won as much as she did. I had heavy expenses, yes, but I'd saved some money on my Army pay and I borrowed two hundred and fifty from my father. It would take a hell of a lot more than fourteen hundred to make me think of killing anybody."

"Please, don't get annoyed at me," Becker said gently. "I'm only—as we might say—feeling my way around. And I'm afraid Nancy Arthur was killed for much more than fourteen hundred. Fifteen thousand seems to be closer to right."

"Fifteen thous—she never had that much money in her life!"

"Oh, no, but Consolidated Engineers did, and she worked here as cashier and auditor." He stopped smiling. "It may be a great deal more than fifteen thousand, Randall. A quick checkup shows that much is missing. Now, possibly she took

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the money and someone knew she had—”

“Nancy was not a thief!” Steve broke in bluntly.

Becker stared at him. “Perhaps she wasn’t in the very beginning. I think Nancy listened to someone too long and too easily—someone she cared for. You see, Randall?” Again he smiled. “Presently she was persuaded to take certified vouchers from the safe and pass them along to this person she . . . was fond of. She adjusted her books to conceal the loss temporarily. She knew, as most anyone up here probably knows, that an outside audit is taken only once a year; perhaps she was told that the money would be replaced by then; or perhaps she was too fond of this person to really think at all. At any rate, the money was taken. The time for the full audit is approaching. Nancy knew and the killer knew that Nancy would be forced to confess. So he killed her. So that brings us back to the very simple problem: Who killed her?”

Steve was on his feet, breathing hard, and his face was red. “I don’t know!” he almost shouted. “But I *do* know I didn’t! I have ideas, but I don’t think you’ll listen to them. If you want to hear, I’ll tell you what I think.”

“Of course I’ll listen. Listening and looking is the only way to learn. For instance, this little thing here . . .” He rose and picked up a bronze figure of a man in ski clothes; it was about ten inches high and solid. “Interesting. Where did you happen to find it?”

Steve’s throat began to grow cool. “I got it in Italy during the war,” he said. “An old man made them. I liked them. I used to ski a lot. I traded him cigarettes for them.”

“*Them?*” And Becker raised his brows. “So you *did* have the other one?”

STEVE swallowed. The room was beginning to glaze in his vision. For some reason he knew precisely what was happening and what Becker was going to say; and he knew, helplessly, that it was terribly dangerous to act as if he knew; he could not help it.

“I sent the other one to Nancy. We used to ski together. I knew she would like it. I sent it to her. Sent it from Italy to her.”

“Oh, now that’s entirely different. I had thought that possibly—” He shrugged. “She was slugged with a statue like this. I didn’t tell you, did I? We found it at the bottom of the incinerator chute at her building. No fingerprints, unfortunately. Just her blood and a few strands of hair.” He was speaking softly, almost as if were telling a bedtime story to a drowsy child. “I had only wondered if, possibly, the killer had been sitting in his—let’s say, his office. He thought of the approaching audit. He knew Nancy would talk. He realized he must kill her. It was late Saturday night, early Sunday. He had been drinking. Perhaps he had come here to try to make a last big haul of certified vouchers. He sat here. He was desperate. He knew what he had to do, but because of his drinking, his mind seized a foolish, too-easy way. It seemed so simple, then, and he walked over here and picked up a bronze statue and then—”

“Becker,” Steve choked harshly. As the detective turned, Steve hit him high on the temple. There had been no plan, no conscious thought in the action. It was solely and purely the reflex of desperation. The blow knocked Becker off balance and for an instant he stared at Steve with a stunned and vacant expression. Steve was terrified at what he had done; there was no going back. He swung wildly and the blow smashed into Becker’s mouth. Becker fell and lay still while a trickle of blood ran from the corner of his lips. Steve whispered, “Oh, dear God.”

The room seemed unbearably hot. The silence seemed to curdle. He listened for sounds in the corridor. He tried to breathe, to think. He knew that he must get out of here instantly. How? Quietly, without confusion. . . .

He mopped his face. He straightened his tie and smoothed his hair. He opened the door halfway and glanced out. A man he had never seen—obviously another detective—was standing at the end of the corridor, and he glanced at Steve curiously. Steve turned half back into the office.

“I’ll find it for you,” he said loudly. “It may take five minutes.” Then he closed the door and made himself walk easily toward the other detective. He passed him, turned the elbow of the corridor, turned



the next el, then bolted through the doorway to the emergency stairway and shuttled frantically to the lobby.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Stand-In for the Corpse

STEVE had been to Artie's flat at the Briar Hotel only once before, at a New Year's Eve party. It was a small hotel near Washington Square, and it strove for an arty air; instead, it was merely drab and vaguely dirty. Artie's rooms were on the fourth floor back and one window opened onto a meager terrace. It was in the dead heat of midafternoon that Steve walked from the subway to the dusty lobby. A few men were watching a baseball game on the television set in the bar; the lobby was empty save for the ancient clerk. He scarcely noticed Steve.

Steve climbed the stairs to the fourth floor. The corridor was hot and silent. He knocked softly, insistently, at Artie's door and got no answer. The lock was an ordinary keyhole job. There was no way to reach the windows from the corridor. Quietly, Steve returned down the stairs. On Sixth Avenue he found a key-maker's shop. At 4:45 he unlocked the door and entered Artie's crowded little flat. The piano took up most of the living room. It was draped with tapestry and set with a pair of blue vases. Corner shelves were filled with smaller vases. The bed was unmade, and soiled shirts littered the bedroom. There was nothing to suggest that Artie had a wife.

Steve started with the drawers in the living room chest. Finally he discovered one deck of cards in the bottom drawer and beneath stacks of music. He asked himself: If they *did* play cards, wouldn't the deck have been on top of the music?

In the drawer of an ivory bookcase, Steve found a saving book issued to A. L. Marsh. It showed deposits totalling nearly four thousand dollars since Christmas. That was probably more than Artie made, Steve realized; it was his slice of the kitty. It was the last thing Steve needed to be certain.

He fingered the book and frowned. He started to put it back. Instead, he left it in plain view atop the bookcase. He

opened the drawers of the chest wide and overturned them on the floor. He kicked the contents about the rug. It was almost six o'clock. Artie should be coming in soon. Steve opened the closet in the living room and pushed a few carton boxes aside. At 6:20 the lock rattled. Steve pulled the closet door nearly shut behind him and draped an overcoat in front of him.

The main door closed. Footsteps started across the room, then halted abruptly, and Steve heard a choked sound. Slowly Artie crossed into Steve's margin of vision and stood before the chest. He fingered his lax chin. He touched the savings book, then looked frantically around the room, into the kitchenette, into the bedroom and bath. He rubbed his chin again and mopped perspiration off his palms. At last he sank down in a chair, lifted the telephone, hesitated and finally dialed. When there was no answer, he began to cough jerkily. In fifteen minutes he dialed again.

"Les?" He clutched the telephone tightly against his moist lips. "I told you it was going to go wrong. I told you," he wailed softly. "Now he's been here—*here* in my room! He found some things! Things. The book. Bank book. . . Yes, I *know* he found it. What am I going to do, Les? I'm not getting stampeded, I'm just frightened! I never did know you were going to do what you did, anyway, and I wouldn't have—I'm *not* yelling! I'm just telling you! You caused it, and now you've got to do something fast, I tell you. You've got to!"

There was a long pause while Artie listened and moved his mouth mutely. "But what good will that do?" Artie demanded uneasily. "Well . . . no, I'm not going anywhere or saying anything. . . All right, but when? Yes, yes, all right, but don't take too long. We've got to think of something in a hurry, Les. . . All right." He replaced the receiver. Slowly he went into the kitchenette and Steve heard the rattling of ice cubes in a glass.

Quietly Steve pushed open the door and tiptoed to the kitchenette. Artie was pouring gin over the ice. Steve lifted the small iron frying pan from the stove.

"Hello, Artie," he said calmly. "Don't start anything, or I'll bash your damned skull in."



ARTIE jerked around. The glass crashed to the floor. A wave of terror flooded his face. His lips sucked open with a frightened whimper. Then he dropped the bottle. It smashed at his feet and he seemed not to have heard. His lips tried again, and this time they spoke Steve's name thickly.

"Come this way, Artie. You're going to make a telephone call."

"Call?" His fingers fluttered limply, as if he were thrusting away tormenting insects.

"A call," Steve repeated. "It will be to Detective Becker, and when you get him, you'll invite him up for a talk?"

"Aw, Steve, I—God, Steve! Listen, Steve, you don't understand everything—"

Steve raised the pan slowly. Artie backed against the wall and his fingers chewed at the plaster. "Get in here and pick up the telephone," Steve said roughly.

Artie began to sidle around the wall. He slid past Steve and clutched the chair by the telephone. "I can't, I can't!" he sobbed. "They'll—"

"Pick it up. Call Consolidated. They'll still be there, or they'll know where he is. *Pick up that phone, Artie!*"

Artie seemed to freeze, then thaw into hard sweat. He picked up the phone, almost dropped it, then began to dial. "This . . . is Artie Marsh," he managed to say. "Is that man . . . that Becker still there?" He looked up at Steve and shook his head desperately.

"Find out where he is. Get the number and call him," Steve said.

"The number. His number, please," Artie said. He hung up, looked haggardly at Steve as he swallowed, then lifted the phone again.

"Is Detective Becker there. This is Marsh. Artie Marsh, in the Briar Hotel. Number 408. I—" Again his eyes met Steve's. "I've got to tell you something. Steve Randall is making me call you. . . . Yes, 408. Waiting." He hung up and sagged into the chair. "You don't understand," he said again. "I didn't know how it was going to be, I swear. I just thought it was going to be money, and then Les got behind on his bets again and his bookie was sore at him, I guess, and the audit

was coming up, but he didn't tell me it was going to be what it was."

"And that makes you sweet as a rose?" Steve wondered curtly. "I would like to know one thing, Artie: Did Nancy play along on this?"

Artie shook his head. "It was mainly Les. Nancy didn't know. Les got the vouchers and sometimes we'd work on Sundays, fixing Nancy's books so they wouldn't show anything funny right away. But it was really Les, all the way. Les liked to bet on anything. He liked to go places, and it was hard to make ends meet sometimes."

Steve laughed without humor. The last remnants of sunlight glistened on a tall building to the west. Time had ceased to move, it seemed. Presently Becker would arrive. Artie would talk, and Les would be arrested, and it would be over. It had been very simple because of Artie. Les had been a fool not to foresee it.

Artie swallowed. The sound was hollow and dry. He lit a cigarette and stared at the wall. Then the knock came at the door. Artie jerked and trembled. Steve crossed the room and turned the knob. The corridor was dim. For one moment he scarcely realized, and then it was too late.

The gleaming butt of a revolver flashed into his eyes. For an instant he saw Les's heavy handsome face, stained with anger. The blow blinded him. He reeled backward, trying to cry out, and another blow whipped down on his skull and he fell, unconscious.

HIS FIRST sensation of returning consciousness was of fur and coolness and a gentle song in his ears. He opened his eyes and stared into the amber eyes of a kitten. The kitten's red tongue came out and touched his burning cheek. It flirted across his chest and its tail played across his face. It whined restlessly and the odor of thick half-sweetness struck Steve's nostrils.

He could remember nothing for several moments; then the memory of Les's gun flashed back across his mind. He struggled to sit up, and the odor swelled into his head like a blow delivered from inside. He fell backward. The kitten whined restlessly again and licked at his forehead.



He pushed himself up slowly and stared around him.

This was Artie's kitchen. And then he saw Artie. Artie and the small kitchen stove. It was overturned and Artie lay across it, blood on his temple. And then Steve saw the broken joint of the gas pipe and heard the incessant breath of the escaping gas. In that one instant he realized perfectly how it had been meant to end, and how Les had planned for it to seem: the fight in which he and Artie had overturned the stove; the gas which would have been their death. Only, he hadn't counted on the cool, moist tongue of Artie's kitten. . . .

Steve fought for breath and crawled along the wall to the stop-cock on the pipe. He pushed up the window and sagged across the still, sucking at the evening air. His heart was pounding and his head ached relentlessly. He crawled back to Artie. A flutter of pulse remained and Steve staggered frantically to the telephone. It took three calls to locate Becker—at Steve's own apartment.

"I'm at the Briar Hotel! 408. Hurry and tell somebody to send an ambulance with oxygen!" He threw the other windows open and pulled Artie out of the kitchen into the living room. He bathed his face in cold water.

Becker arrived with his gun and two cops. There was a patch of tape across his nose and a look of icy fury in his eyes. Steve talked fast and he talked hard. Becker listened without a word. He looked at Artie, and still he did not speak. The ambulance crew crowded in and went to work on Artie, and Becker kept listening, his jaw clamped in an unbelieving line.

"He didn't phone me," he said, speaking for the first time.

"I know. I see it now," Steve said. "He called Les Marshall and tipped Marshall that I was here. Marshall decided it was time to get rid of both of us. He planned it to look like we'd nailed each other in a fight, and after that the gas had gotten us."

"So you said twice before," Becker retorted. "I think, no. I think the whole mess with Nancy and the money was sloppy and careless from the beginning, and this is your bright idea to put a look of sense on it."

An interne straightened and spread his hands. "He's dead."

Steve could not believe he had heard correctly. His brain refused to believe that Artie would not live to tell the truth. He stood there, staring at the pale, still face, and he kept telling himself that the eyes would open in a moment. . . . Only another moment now, the lips would move to tell the truth.

The interne covered the lips and hid the face. Steve sobbed and turned to Becker desperately. "But you've got to believe me! You've got to!" he cried.

"You'd counted on that, hadn't you?"

"No, no! I swear! I just—" Steve stopped and stared at the body. "Wait! Marshall doesn't know Artie's dead! If he could be made to think that Artie wasn't dead, then—don't you see? Listen to me, for God's sake! Maybe Marshall stayed around this neighborhood to see what happened. He may be worrying now, afraid that this was discovered before Artie died or I died. He can see the ambulance parked outside. He's frightened, you see?"

## Does 3 jobs fast to relieve that **BACKACHE**



**Back plasters are the one product made for 3-way relief of muscular backache:**

- (1) The plaster stirs up circulation, brings the healing and warming blood to the sore spot. Tense muscles relax, pain eases.
- (2) It straps twitching muscles—cuts down jabs of pain.
- (3) The protective pad guards against chilling.

Tests by doctors show that Johnson's **BACK PLASTER** helps nearly 9 out of 10 sufferers. It's made by Johnson & Johnson—known for fine products for 61 years. At all drug stores.



"Yes? What else?" Becker wondered ironically.

"Keep it hushed that Artie's dead. Say that he's unconscious from the clip on the head. Fractured skull, concussion, anything! The point is, make Les try to kill him again. Les knows he'll have to, because he's tried once and Artie would be ready to talk. See? Take Artie to the hospital, but not under a dead-sheet. Take us both. You can put every cop in town under my bed. I couldn't get away, and Les will have to make a play for Artie. He—listen! Even better, cover me and carry me out. I'm dead, see? Drop the word as we go through the lobby. Les will be around to pick the gossip. I'm dead. Artie may pull through. Then, into the hospital. I know what will happen! Les will try to get in to kill Artie before morning." Steve stopped, his chest rising and falling to his hard breathing while he searched Becker's face for some softening line or expression. "Won't you gamble that much, when it won't be a gamble at all?" he begged. "You don't want to pin a murder on me just because it's me, do you?"

BECKER seemed to chew that one over. "It's crazy. I don't believe it and a kid wouldn't. I'd be laughed back to a beat." He glared at the cops. "You'd think it was funny as hell, wouldn't you?"

They said nothing for a moment. "Yes, sir," they said slowly.

"You're both lying," Becker snapped. He flushed. "All right, here goes for the screwiest ride I ever took. Get that one out. With the face *uncovered*. Handle him like a china doll," he said bitterly. "Bring up another bed for this . . . *this*." He glared at Steve. "And only once will I remind you: you are going to be very close to a lot of bullets all the way. Hurry. This makes me nervous."

Steve exhaled a shaky breath and found that his knees were trembling. The cops gave him a guarded grin, and he loved them.

The sheet felt cool over his face. He swayed with the footsteps of the internes. He stopped breathing when they reached the restless noise in the lobby. He felt himself lifted upward, then set down. He heard Becker settling beside him. A door

slammed. A motor roared. The stretcher bounced slightly and Steve knew they were moving. He began to breathe again.

At the end of the ride, Steve found himself in a small white room with one small window and two large cops. Becker went away. Steve sat down. He walked around. He tried to believe that it would happen just as he had said. He told himself it *had* to happen. Les would *have* to do it. But suppose Les didn't? Suppose Les simply played it with iron nerves and gambled that Artie would die without talking. Then . . . ?

At eleven that night Becker came into the room with a curious look on his face. "Know anybody named Ed Barton?" he asked.

Steve shook his head and Becker grinned slowly.

"I just wondered. The information desk got a call just now. Somebody said he was Ed Barton. Said he was a friend of Artie Marsh's and wanted to know how he was getting along. Then he just wondered if Artie was comfortable and was there anything he could do? Was it a private room or what kind of a room was it? The girl let him know enough to help him find his way—if he *isn't* Ed Barton and *wants* to find his way. We'll see. Things will close up pretty quiet around here after midnight."

"Tell me as soon as anything happens, please," Steve begged.

Becker grunted and went away. A cop gave Steve a cigarette. "Becker hates to get slugged, see? You pasting him made him feel mighty bad."

Steve said, "Yeah. Things happen so fast . . ."

At 1:15 Becker opened the door and his eyes were glistening. "Take off your shoes. The word just came up that a guy got in by the service door at the kitchen. Come on."

Steve tiptoed after him along a silent, dim corridor, up one flight of steps, and into a room. The room was totally dark.

"Keep quiet," Becker said softly. "Artie's in the next room and there's a committee making punch across the hall. Funny thing, but this is starting to look honest. If—" A tiny light flashed in the darkness and Steve heard something

(Continued on page 129)



# CALLING DR. DEATH

**T**HE OWL, swooping through the pines along the lake shore, sent its harsh cry whipping out through the darkness. The cry caved in the night silence and brought a backlash of echoes down from the black humps of the hills above the lake, and Dr. Paul Lanning shivered.

He stood motionless where he had parked his car well off of the narrow

*The haunting cry of the night owl, swooping through the pines along the lake shore, sent chills rippling down Dr. Paul Lanning's spine. Then he laughed. For, aside from Steve Thorne, what had he to fear? And even Thorne, Lanning told himself, his fingers around the knife handle, would not bother him long.*

**By C. WILLIAM  
HARRISON**



He looked at the third button down from the collar of Thorne's shirt and took the knife out of his pocket.



blacktop road, listening to that harsh sound bound off across the lake. It was only the nocturnal cry of an owl on the hunt—he knew that—but he couldn't stop the shiver that ran up his spine and into the short hairs on the back of his neck. He was a tall, slender man, city bred, and he couldn't rationalize the wildness of this resort lake high in the San Bernardino mountains. By day the lake offered beauty and sport and the comforts of a fashionable mountain resort. But by night unseen things moved among the pines and combed the air above the restless surface of the lake. He didn't like the utter darkness of night in the mountains; he hated it.

He stood there beside his car, almost crouching as he waited for the owl's cry to come back again. It didn't. But he shivered again, and it was like mice running up the bare skin of his back on icy feet. He reached into his coat pocket and gripped the handle of the butcher knife, and somehow that made him feel better.

"I've got to take it easy," he told himself. "There's nothing out here to be afraid of."

It was true. There was nothing in the wildness of this mountain resort to fear. The bears or mountain lions, if there were any in these peaks, would be on the Mojave Desert side of the range, away from this heavily populated resort section.

If Dr. Paul Lanning had anything at all to fear it was in the cabin showing its drapery-diffused lights through the pines a hundred paces back from the lake shore. In that small redwood cabin was Dr. Lanning's only danger—Steve Thorne. But that danger would not threaten much longer. Dr. Lanning smiled as he gripped the long-bladed knife. Thorne was going to die tonight.

He left the key in the ignition of the car, as he had planned. He had thought all this out with the precise care of a surgeon diagramming a delicate operation. There would be little likelihood of him having to make a quick flight after he murdered Steve Thorne, but he was not taking even that small chance. So he left the key in the ignition as he stepped away from his coupe.

He walked slowly, his footsteps silenced by the thick matting of pine needles

under the trees. He came to the clearing, paused and turned, carefully laying out the direction of his return route to the car. He might be frightened after he drove the knife into Thorne, confused or panicked by the shock of the murder he had committed, and he didn't want to become lost in the darkness. He laid out his route carefully, past the grey outcropping of granite and the pine whose top had been lopped off by lightning—a direct line that would return him to his hidden coupe.

He nodded his satisfaction and went on across the clearing to the cabin. He wasn't afraid, now that the time had finally come. He had imagined he would be, but he wasn't. He went up the steps and rapped on the door. Someone moved audibly inside, like a chair being shifted, and a voice called out.

"Who is it?"

Dr. Lanning didn't answer. He knocked again.

Inside the cabin, a voice grunted impatiently, and footsteps tramped across the floor. The door swung back, and there was Steve Thorne, just waiting to be murdered.

THORNE frowned irritably, a short, loose-fleshed man with sour eyes and a red Cupid's bow of a mouth. "You knew I'd be settled down for some reading, Doc. Why didn't you sing out your name and come on in?"

And perhaps let someone at another cabin overhear his name? No, Lanning thought. He smiled pleasantly. "You needed the exercise, Steve."

"I get all the exercise I want with a knife and fork," Thorne snapped. "Or depositing checks in my bank." His red mouth curved into a mocking smile as he pushed the door shut. "You bring your monthly payment with you, Doc?"

Dr. Lanning didn't answer at once. He watched the fat man pad his way back across the room to his easy chair. Thorne sat down, sighing audibly. The draperies were opaque across the windows, Lanning saw, and except for himself and Thorne, the cabin was empty.

Thorne's smile was malicious. "How about your monthly payment, Doc? You bring it with you?"

Lanning crossed the room and stood



beside the fat man's chair. He looked down, mildly surprised at his own calmness. But then he understood the reason for that. Plan a man's murder long enough and the actual act, when it is committed, is easy; you have conditioned your mind to the swift strike of your arm and the shocked agony of violent death.

He said, "This is going to be the last payment, Steve."

Thorne's smile shaped into a slow grin. "You've said that before, Doc, but you've



"Come on in, Doc," the deputy sheriff said. "You made good time."

never meant it. As long as I've got the evidence against you that you're selling dope to those female hop-heads in Beverly Hills, you'll never make your last payment to me. Too many movie and society gals pay you big money for morphine for me not to get a monthly cut. You get cute with me, and I might slip the police that dictagraph record I've got. Or maybe give them an idea who sold the sleeping pills to that actress who knocked herself off last year."

The fat man's voice flattened out. "Don't even try to get cute with me, Doc. Don't even think about stopping your payments. Now get your business over with and clear out of here."

"All right," Lanning said, and smiled. It was easy. There was nothing to it. He reached into his pocket and gripped the knife. He looked at the third button down from the collar of Thorne's shirt, took the knife out of his pocket and drove it home.

There was no outcry, not even much blood. He saw the shocked agony that contorted the muscles of the fat man's face, but he had witnessed death in too

many shapes and forms to be bothered by that. Thorne sagged in his chair, twisted around in a spasm of movement, as though trying to kneel, and slid to the floor.

The man was not yet dead. His eyes looked up from the floor, bright-glazed with pain, and his groping hand came away from his chest with blood on it. He whispered, "Doc . . . my God . . . Doc!"

Lanning's smile was steady, without pity or remorse. "Last payment, Steve. I told you this was it."

He turned away, and he knew where to look. Steven Thorne, wherever he went when he left Los Angeles, always carried the camera case with him. He was too lazy a man to ever interest himself with a camera, and money was his only hobby. So the dictograph record, Lanning knew, would be in the camera case.

He smiled as he lifted the cylindrical black tube out of the camera case, guarding against leaving fingerprints on the leather. He turned back, looked down at the man on the floor.

"The human mind can take some funny quirks, Steve. Money and feeling of power over me was your main pleasure in life. You got money from me, and you liked to keep this record near you for the feeling of power it gave you. That was a mistake, Steve. You know that now, don't you? I could have stolen this record a long time ago, but that wouldn't have kept you from talking."

He bent to the man on the floor, rubbed his handkerchief over the handle of the knife. He kept looking down into Thorne's fading eyes. "This way I have the record, and you can't talk."

He straightened, pleased with his own calmness. No dread or uncertainty; no sickness at what he had done. Consciousness was a feeble flickering in Thorne's dying eyes, and when that was gone, Steve Thorne would be gone. The police could not connect him with the dead man, and the cheap knife he had stolen from the hardware store in Los Angeles could not be traced. The dying man's eyes closed, then fluttered slowly open again. His fingers, red with his own blood, were trying to move on the floor in front of him. Dr. Lanning stood there at the cabin



door, watching the man and waiting for him to die. The eyes remained open, but the fever in them had become shallow, fading. The blood-reddened fingers stopped moving. . . .

**THE TELEPHONE** in Paul Lanning's room rang once, stopped, then rang again, insistently. He sat up in his bed, still drugged by sleep, and picked up the handset.

"That you, Doctor?"

"Yes." His voice was thick from the heavy sleep of the bromide he had taken late the night before after getting back to his room. "Yes."

The man's voice came leaping through the receiver, quick and urgent. "This is the deputy sheriff talking—Jim Keene. I need your help, Doctor. A man has been stabbed. Come over as fast as you can." The telephone clicked dead.

Paul Lanning's mind came awake. It jarred awake with fear slamming through it, with his heart pounding the walls of his chest and a cold wetness of sweat breaking on his face and hands.

So Steven Thorne had not died after all. He had remained alive—somehow—and was still alive. He had been found alive, with the knife driven into his chest, and now the sheriff was calling for medical assistance to keep life in him long enough for him to talk.

Panic went rushing through Paul Lanning. He leaped out of bed and grabbed for his clothes. He halted that movement, instantly realizing that trying to escape now would be proof of his guilt. It was an instinctive thought, rooted in guilt and desperation.

He stood there in his hotel room, rigid in his crouch, trying to settle the wild lunging of his mind. He thought, "They wouldn't have telephoned me if Thorne was conscious and able to talk."

The thought took some of the panic out of him. If Thorne was unconscious, then he offered no danger. The miracle was that he still lived. But he would die soon. A man couldn't live for long with a knife in his chest at the place where Lanning had driven that honed blade. Lanning thought with a sharp fingering of cunning, "All I have to do is stall getting there until after he dies."

But that thought wasn't so good. There was too much uncertainty in it, too much risk. The deputy sheriff would not have pinned all his hopes on one doctor. He had undoubtedly telephoned every hotel in the resort, asking for any doctor who might be vacationing at the lake, and giving the same request to each.

"If I don't answer his call," Lanning told himself, "they'll be suspicious. If I don't go out there, some other doctor will. I've got to be the first there. If I can be the first doctor there, I can give Thorne something that will keep him unconscious until he dies."

He tore off his pajamas and dressed, fumbling at the buttons with fear-stiffened fingers. He rammed his arms into the sleeves of his coat, ripping the lining without even knowing it. He grabbed up his black leather bag and went out of his room, running hard through the hotel corridor. Outside, the sun was already above the high spikes of the pines across the lake, and he was dimly surprised that he had slept so late. And that Steve Thorne could have lived so long with that knife in his chest.

The road followed the contours of the lake shore, pine-flanked and cool at this hour. He drove with desperate speed, topping the hills and plunging down into green-shaded valleys. The road forked, and the blacktop slanted in toward the north shore of the lake, along a white sand beach where small waves rolled in, flattened and retreated, leaving a thin lacy foam behind them.

Dr. Lanning braked his car in the driveway at the side of the Thorne cabin, and relief spilled through him as he saw only a sheriff's car ahead of him.

The sheriff's deputy opened the door for him. The man was tall and lank, with cool grey eyes and skin that was as dark as old leather. "Come on in, Doc. You made good time."

That was all he said. There was something behind his tone, though, a grimness and a satisfaction, and Lanning wondered about that. But the thought only scraped the surface of his mind, making no mark.

He was staring at Steve Thorne's body, at the dry brownness of blood on Thorne's

*(Continued on page 130)*



# YOU CAN'T GET AWAY WITH **MURDER!**

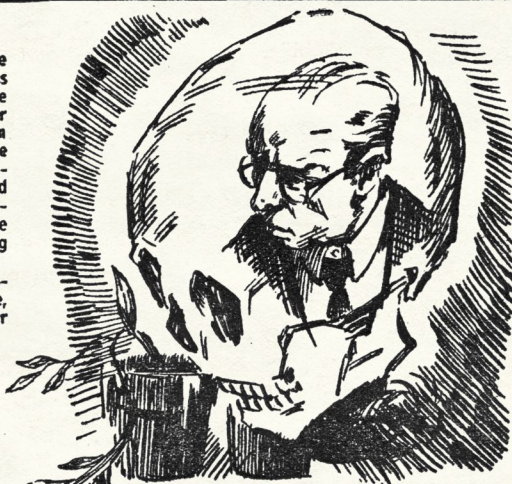


By NELSON and GEER

## CONCRETE EVIDENCE

Warren Lincoln, a mild, methodical, balding little man, made a thorough study of the florist business before opening a successful greenhouse behind the bungalow he occupied with his wife Lina and her brother Byron Shoup in Aurora, Ill. Later, Lincoln employed the same approach in an attempt to solve his marital difficulties by murder. Studying the technique of Henri Landru, the French Bluebeard who'd just lost his head to the guillotine through not properly disposing of the evidence of his homicides, the florist worked out an ingenious method of avoiding that pitfall.

On Jan. 10, 1923, he shot Lina and Byron, disposed of their bodies in the greenhouse furnace, mixed a concrete block in which he embedded their heads, removed a rotting support under the porch and replaced it with the block. In March, announcing Lina had left him, Lincoln filed a suit against her for divorce, and one against her brother for \$10,000, charging bodily injuries.

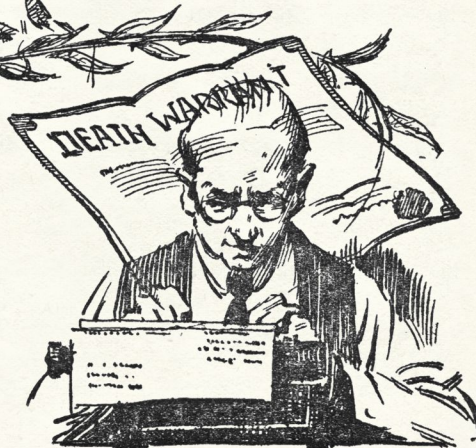


Ingenious? Wait! During the night of April 29th he practically tore the house apart, smearing chicken blood about until it was a shambles. Donning a pair of Lina's shoes, then two of Byron's, he walked through the soft earth to an old well, tossed in one of his own well-bloodied nightshirts and deposited nearby a gore-stained Indian club of Byron's and a glove belonging to Lina. Then he vanished. Police, finding the exhibits as he intended, broadcast an alarm for his wife and brother-in-law as wanted for murder. They could not be



found, naturally, but a few weeks later Lincoln staggered into a Chicago hotel, bruised and emaciated, claiming he had been kidnaped and had escaped.

When the search for them died down, it looked as though the mild little man had gotten away with it. But he couldn't let well enough alone. Soon he was bringing police cryptic Personalas signed "Lina L." he'd "found" in out-of-town newspapers. Attempts to trace their origin revealed only that they'd been typewritten with a green ribbon and received by mail. Still not satisfied, he carted the cement block to the city dump. On Jan. 13, 1924, Lincoln was arrested, not for murder but for attempting to extort money from his wife's family by means of letters written on a typewriter with a green ribbon. The machine also proved to be the one that had written the personals, and Lincoln confessed all. He got life.







In the doorway, she said, a bulky figure had been silhouetted against the street light. It was then that she had fired.

# HOT-SEAT ON THE AISLE

By

**JOHN D. MacDONALD**

**T**HE YOUNG WIDOW'S SMILE was thin and uncertain. "But, Mr. Luther, the investigation was closed, and if you have no official position . . . I don't understand. . . ." Her voice trailed off, was lost in the silence of the small house.

"I help the police. You could call it a hobby."

*When a woman has acting in her soul, crime expert Luther Crane knew, there is only one way to make her confess to murder: Set the stage, put a spotlight on her—and reserve a box seat in the execution chamber!*



She laughed, but the sound was wavering and shrill. "That certainly is a strange hobby, Mr. Luther."

He let silence enter for a moment. Silence was a weapon. Silence was a tool.

He could tell by the quick alarm in her eyes that she was wondering if he was quite mad. So many of them did.

They assumed that any inexplicable deviation from the norm was madness.

He was an enormously tall, shambling man, his flat body grotesque with its rigid planes, awkward joints, air of being poorly designed, carelessly assembled. Cheekbones, brow and jaw jutted sharply, the bones pushing against the blue-grey pallor of his long face. His grey hair was oddly Prussian in its bristled shortness.

In black he would have had a clerical look about him, combined with an air of death and mourning.

But he wore the most blatant of sports clothes, a bright hairy tweed jacket which sat awkwardly on his knobbed shoulders and exposed three inches of lean wrist, and pearl-grey gabardine slacks which flapped around his thin legs.

His thoughts of himself, of his body, when he thought at all, were very simple. The body given him was depressingly awkward. He liked color. He cared nothing for fit. So he clothed the body in colors. In other ways it was unsatisfactory. It was uncoordinated, clumsy.

But mind and emotions were something else.

Once, walking through a factory he had purchased, he had paused, fascinated by a machine. He knew little and cared less about its purpose. But the bright, oiled articulation of the ponderous yet delicate parts intrigued him. Ever after, he thought of his mind in those terms.

**I**N THE BEGINNING he had been poor. But the great, shining machine that was his mind had carefully devoured the minute clues to human behaviour patterns, and once he had digested his findings, applied them to the world, he was able to anticipate mass or individual behavior and thus became rich.

It was as simple as that. In his mind he related economic behavior patterns to poker playing, stock markets, industrial expansion, consumer desires—and

achieved a deadly efficiency in all four factors.

And one day, the day after his fortieth birthday, he realized that his few material wants could be fulfilled for the rest of his life a dozen times over with the money he had acquired. Lacking the incentive, the game became tasteless.

For a dozen hours he had sat and considered his future. His oddness, his coldness, made casual friendships impossible. There must be work for his mind, work for the brain that interpreted all human activity in terms of established habit patterns and the capacities of the individual. That was how he chose crime detection.

He found that rural violence was seldom subtle. So Kane Luther slowly made himself known to the police of many large cities. His wealth gave him the initial introduction. They found that he never interfered with police work, never made statements to the press, always took his findings to the man in charge of the specific case. And so gradually they had come to trust him, and within five years they had begun to seek him out.

He considered himself neither criminologist nor psychologist. He moved in constant fear that there would come a time when the sharp edge of his appetite would be sated, when the blunders would become all too evident, and then there would be nothing in life for him but emptiness and death. It was this fear, this preoccupation with death, which was felt by the sensitive.

This time he had been sought out by the deputy chief of police of a small city in upstate New York.

By the time he could make himself available, the case was two months old and had long since faded out of the daily newspapers.

The widow's story was that on the night of the twelfth of June, her husband, Roger Furnas, had been oddly insistent that she should accompany him on a walk down to a shopping center seven blocks away, claiming that he was out of cigarettes. She had had a slight headache and didn't feel like walking, but he had told her that the walk would clear up her headache and at last she had tired of argument and had gone with him.

She said that during the walk he



seemed nervous and was impatient about having to lag behind to match her slow pace. They had gone into a drugstore and had a soft drink at the counter. The clerk readily identified her afterward.

Thereupon they had returned home, and her husband had seemed to grow increasingly tense as they neared the house.

The front entrance had a double door with a small alcove separating the two. It was their practice to lock the inside door. The street lights were widely spaced and the nearest one, some ninety feet from their front door, cast a dim light into the alcove. She had left a light on in the living room, but there was no window in the locked door.

She said that though her husband had the key and she started to stand aside to permit him to go into the small alcove first, he roughly pushed her in. She stated that it was this roughness that saved her life, as she stumbled over the edge of a metal mat in front of the inner door and fell to her knees. As she did so, she fell against the legs of someone standing in the darkness.

The dim alcove was filled with the sharp crack of a shot, and somebody yelled with pain. As she tried to get to her feet, she was knocked down again, as there seemed to be two people struggling in the small space. The shot sounded again, but the second time it was muffled. Something fell heavily on top of her, smashing her to the floor. As she worked her way out from under the weight, she heard a heavy groan and the weight of a small heavy object fell painfully onto the back of her hand. In the open outer doorway, a bulky figure was silhouetted against the faint street light. It was not the figure of her husband. She was in great panic and hysterical fright. Her hand found the object which had fallen to the floor. It was a small automatic. She said that she shut her eyes, pointed it in the direction of the bulky stranger and pulled the trigger as fast as she could.

When she opened her eyes, he was an oddly flattened shape across the door sill. It was then that she ran screaming into the street. The small house was situated some three hundred feet from the nearest neighbor, and they had not heard the shots.

The widow, Mary Furnas, was in a state of shock for the two-days during which the police carried on their preliminary investigation.

When they arrived at the house they found Roger Furnas dead in the alcove. A .32-caliber slug had penetrated his throat, ranging upward, smashing his palate and lodging in the brain.

The second man was dying when they arrived. He was unable to speak. One slug, fired from an estimated six feet had punctured his right lung. Four other slugs had entered in the abdominal area, fired from a somewhat closer range, and angling upward. He was a stocky man in his early forties and carried papers which proved him to be Thomas Allerdeen, an insurance agent.

Laboratory tests of a leather glove on Roger Furnas' right hand showed that he had fired a gun recently. A similar wax test was performed on Mary Furnas' hand as she lay unconscious in the hospital under the influence of sedatives, and these tests showed that she had also fired a gun. No such evidence was found in the case of Thomas Allerdeen.

AFTER Mary Furnas was able to make a statement, it was carefully checked. The automatic proved to be the property of Allerdeen and, as he frequently made cash collections, he had a permit in good order. The clip had held eight bullets. Five were in Allerdeen, one was in Furnas' brain, one was lodged in the trunk of a tree thirty feet from the front door and at a height seventeen feet, four inches from the ground. The last slug, if indeed there was one, was not found.

Mary Furnas' knees bore the distinctive imprint of the metal mat on which she had fallen.

Roger Furnas had been the office manager of a textile company, receiving good wages. Three months prior to the double death, two insurance policies had been taken out, through Thomas Allerdeen—both for ten thousand, one on the life of Mary, with Roger as beneficiary, and one on the life of Roger, with Mary as beneficiary.

A tiny scrap of paper was found in the lower left vest pocket of Allerdeen. It said, "Ten-fifteen tomorrow night." The



paper was barely large enough for the writing. It was proven to have been written by Roger Furnas.

Mary Furnas was able to offer no explanation.

The most promising theory seemed to be that Roger Furnas and Thomas Allerdeen had conspired to murder Mary Furnas. Possibly Roger Furnas' plan was to kill both Mary and Allerdeen. Since he had borrowed Allerdeen's gun for this purpose, it would appear relatively easy to plant the weapon in Allerdeen's dead hand.

It was further assumed that when Mary fell, striking Allerdeen's knees, he stumbled forward, thus taking in the chest the slug that was intended to go into the back of Mary's head or neck, she being a rather short woman.

Allerdeen, feeling the impact of the slug, had suddenly felt fear for his own life and had grappled with Furnas, twisting the gun back, being a more powerful man, so that the second shot killed Furnas. It was likely that Allerdeen held the gun by the barrel as Furnas dropped. Then, weak from his own hurt, the gun had fallen from his hand. In panic, Mary had killed him.

The deadly grappling in that dark alcove caught the public fancy, and for a time many cars cruised slowly by so as to give the public a chance to look at what the papers called the "Doorway to Death."

The only flaw in the reconstruction of the case was the results of the investigation of Thomas Allerdeen. He proved to have been a highly successful salesman with an ample bank account, a man with a reputation for honesty, and also for brutality. His meek, cowed wife had long since lost any interest in the range and extent of his extramarital affairs. It seemed hardly feasible that he would become mixed up in so cold-blooded and hazardous an affair as the murder of a wife for a share of her insurance, particularly when he had sold the policy himself.

During the investigations Mary Furnas had been a shocked and pathetic figure, wide-eyed, and haggard, unable to talk for any length of time without breaking down. It was obvious that she had suffered a great loss.

Two material facts supported the reconstruction. It was proven that Roger

Furnas had purchased cigarettes at the drugstore. Two fresh packs were found on his body. On top of his bureau were found two fresh packs. On his bedside table was found a collection of factual stories of murder. It included the case of the Ragged Stranger, a story of a similar crime. A bookmark had slipped down between the pages at that place. The bookmark was a premium receipt on the two policies recently taken out.

The newspapers tried the case in banner headlines and pronounced Mary Furnas to be a singularly fortunate woman, married to the foulest of men whose machinations went awry and who met a just fate, though a shade too quick and painless.

To the admiration of her neighbors, Mary Furnas decided to remain on at the small house. She stated that it was her intention to "rest up" and then she would see about getting a job. She was a small, dark woman with tragic eyes and an air of brave suffering.

HAVING quickly absorbed all of these facts, Kane Luther sat in the midst of silence and watched Mary Furnas shift uncomfortably on her chair.

"What sort of a man was your husband, Mrs. Furnas?"

"I—I loved him. The war changed him, I think. He was all right at first when he came back, but then . . . I think he was restless. I think he had the idea that I tied him down to responsibility and to a job that was dull."

"Restless?"

"Oh, you know. Pacing through the house here like a caged animal. Being sharp with me. That sort of thing."

"I see. When, after being restless and sharp with you, he insured your life in his favor, did you have any suspicion?"

"But, Mr. Luther, his life was insured in my favor at the same time. He said it was a good investment. A good way to save money."

"Did he have any other insurance on himself?"

"Just a five-thousand-dollar policy that he had for years."

"No G.I. insurance?"

She frowned. "I really don't know. I think it lapsed, but I can't be sure. I must check into that. He handled the financial



details himself. His records weren't very complete."

He stood up slowly, towering over her for a moment, and then, as she stood up quickly, he turned toward the door.

She held it open. "Good-bye, Mr. Luther."

"I'll be back," he said.

Thirty feet up the sidewalk he paused, turned and looked back. A curtain fluttered back into place in the house he had left.

\* \* \*

The man in coveralls slid out from under the car, wiped his cheek with the back of his hand, leaving a smear of grease, and looked at Kane Luther with curiosity and amusement.

"What ya say, Doc?" he said cheerfully.

"You are Joseph Markowitz," Luther said.

Markowitz frowned. "Say, are you from that chiseling collection agency?"

"No. I want to talk about Roger Furnas. I am paying the service manager for your time."

"Okay, so you've hired me. Yeah, it was tough about Rog. You the police?"

"You knew him well?"

"Twenty-six crummy months in the same overseas outfit. Combat stuff. When we come home, me, Rog and three other guys were the only ones left out of our original company."

"How was he under fire?"

"Hell! Okay, I guess. He didn't get all upset until afterwards."

"Any night fighting?"

"Plenty, brother!"

\* \* \*

"Say, those clothes are pretty sharp, pops," the pert little blonde stenographer said. Kane Luther stared at her steadily

until finally she flushed, dropped her eyes and said, "Forget I said it, pops. You said there were questions."

"About Roger Furnas."

Her eyes widened and then narrowed. "That was a rough deal. So some cops even look like you! What's the angle?"

"How was he to work for?"

"The best. Regular. No passes at the lasses. Strictly home type, I'd call him."

"Good at his work?"

"An expert. Say, he could remember every little thing—and catch you up on it, too. A bug for routine and everything in its place."

"Interested?"

"In his work? You bet. And going places, too. All in all, a very quiet and determined guy. Some of the girls thought he was nice. I guess you can't ever figure the quiet type."

\* \* \*

Her name was Myra Goffert and she carried her age badly. She had a face like a petulant Pekinese. A dirty pink shoulder strap was visible at the neck of her dress.

Back in the apartment a radio blared the agonies of the soap actresses.

"Who'd you say?" she demanded.

"Mary Furnas. She used to be Mary Farnum. I'm an investigator."

Her smile eyes widened. "You shoulda said so before. Come on in. Sit down while I go turn off the radio."

The front room was cluttered and had a musty smell. She plumped herself down in a chair, smoothed wrinkled cotton over thick thighs and gave him a coy smile. "Now how in the world did you think to come to me?"

"In the library I found a copy of the high-school year book for the year of Mary Farnum's graduation. You and she appeared together in a group photograph

## — TO OUR READERS —

We are constantly experimenting in an effort to give you the very best reading surface obtainable. For this reason, there may be occasional slight fluctuations in the thickness of this magazine. Now, as in the past, every magazine bearing the Popular Publications seal of quality will continue to have the same number of pages, the same wordage, the same unparalleled value in top-flight reading entertainment that has been and will continue to be our Popular Fiction Group guarantee—the best reading value obtainable anywhere at any price!



of the dramatics club. Do you remember?"

"Say now, that's pretty smart! It certainly was a horrible thing to have nearly happen to a sweet girl like Mary, now wasn't it? We used to be swell friends, but you know how people drift apart when they get married, and I guess maybe she thought she married a little better than I did, though Al is as nice as they come. I do wish they'd take him off the long runs and put him on short stuff though so he'd be home oftener. I always—"

"Did Mary enjoy the dramatics club?"

"I'll say she did. She was a dreamy kid, but she could really lay it on when they give her a part she could get her teeth in. She was all the time talking about how she was going to travel all over the whole world in a tour as an actress some day. The kid was good. But like with most of us, those kid dreams don't work out. But I guess she got enough real life dramer to keep her hopping for a while." She giggled until her massive body shook.

**K**ANE LUTHER sat in the golden oak office of the deputy chief. The room smelled of varnish, cigar smoke and anti-septic. The deputy chief's name was Karl Beetle. He was a plump little man with a wide, empty-looking smile and a shrewd look in his tiny blue eyes.

"Yes, Kane," he said. "The thing that didn't fit was Thomas Allerdeen. I couldn't quite swallow him. That's when I remembered you. You've been on it six days. What do you think?"

Luther sat with his big white hands resting on his bony knees. He stared at the desk top. "Thomas Allerdeen does not fit, and neither did Roger Furnas. The reconstruction of the crime supposes too great an individual divergence from their behavior patterns.

"Take Roger Furnas. A neat, rather dull man, interested in his work, taking home and wife for granted. To him the war was a nightmare, but he got through it with quiet competence. He was trained in night fighting. No man in the darkness of a small hallway could have gotten close enough to him to turn the gun back on him if Furnas had wanted to kill him. Furnas had a mind for details. He would not have left the book out. He would not

have marked the place with the insurance premium receipt. He would have been cautious about those things."

"What did happen?" Karl Beetle asked eagerly.

"This is not all factual. I have filled in the blanks with what appears to me to be logical behavior. Mary Farnum was a girl with dramatic talent, a girl who dramatized herself. One day she found the life had cast her in a dull part, the part of Mrs. Roger Furnas.

"She found it necessary to play a more interesting part and thus she began to rewrite her own lines. Her husband was interested in his job. Her looks were fading. She began to think in terms of murder, as murder is the highest drama and the quickest release.

"Though her motive may have been adequate of itself, she added to it a motive of profit. At her urging, the insurance policies were taken out. Possibly her plan was formless at that time. Allerdeen came to the house. She met him. He had a lusty brutality that attracted her because it was in such contrast to her husband. Possibly he visited her at her small secluded house when Roger was working. His history indicates that he had many such affairs. Slowly the plot began to assume form and substance. Allerdeen knew the insurance had been taken out at her urging. After she had read of the Ragged Stranger, where a husband shot both a tramp and his wife, using two pistols, she began to plan more definitely.

"She waited until, out of some letter or note her husband had written, she could snip with shears a definite statement that would look like an appointment. She played her part with Allerdeen, stating that her husband was growing insanely jealous and that she feared for her life. She must have played that scene to its limit. Allerdeen lent her his gun.

"Maybe she told Allerdeen that she would be alone that evening. At any rate she made the appointment for ten-fifteen, with him to wait in the dark alcove until she returned to let him into the house. In some private place she had planted two packs of her husband's brand of cigarettes, a leather glove to fit his right hand, the book with the premium receipt marking the proper page.



"It was she who forced him to go on the walk at the proper time. It was she who was nervous. Possibly when they left the house she told him to wait a moment, ran back, put the book on the night table, the cigarettes on his bureau, the glove into her purse along with the gun. At the store she told him he was out of cigarettes, and he purchased some.

"They returned home. It would appear logical to assume that after they passed the last street light, she slipped her hand into her purse and into the glove which was too large for her. She grasped the gun. It was not quite dark enough for Allerdeen to slip away when he heard the two of them returning. Maybe he stood sweating in the darkness, thinking of some excuse he could give Roger Furnas.

"At the outer door, she may have tugged Roger close to her, pulling him half into the alcove, touching the muzzle under his chin, pulling the trigger, letting him fall, turning the weapon immediately on Allerdeen, firing one shot from a distance of six feet, holding the gun low, firing four more times from a closer distance.

"Allerdeen moved to the open outer door before he fell. Roger was dead inside the alcove. She pulled the glove off, dropped heavily on her knees on the metal mat, turned and fired two more shots into the darkness, one of which hit high on the tree near the sidewalk. Then she dropped the weapon, stripped off the glove, fitted it onto Roger's dead hand and ran screaming into the street.

"All of these actions are possible to a woman who dramatizes every waking moment, plans carefully and acts quickly and ruthlessly. The men were taken by complete surprise. She found freedom, ended an affair that might have had repercussions and made an attractive amount of money in the bargain. But, what was most important to her, she recast herself in life in a more demanding role. A double role—to the rest of the world a broken woman, to herself a murderer.

"I forgot one detail, Mr. Beetle. Pardon me. After she put the glove on her husband's hand, she poked the prepared slip of paper into the first of Allerdeen's pockets that she could find. It was

all planned so that even if the neighbors heard the shots, by the time they arrived her few simple actions would be accomplished and she would be clear."

The office was very still. Deputy Chief Karl Beetle sighed heavily and said, "It fits. When you hear the right explanation it rings like a bell. Yes, it fits. But there isn't a shade of proof. Not the least bit."

"We may not need proof," Kane Luther said.

Beetle frowned. "You mean to fake proof?"

"To do that would encourage her to play her part with all her skill. No I do not mean that. I feel that if we adjust circumstances to fit the nature of the criminal, we may not need proof. In every soul there is what I call a vibration point. Once that vibration point is achieved, the soul shatters. The vibration point is achieved by relating environment to the characteristics of the individual."

**T**HE LINE-UP ROOM was dark except for the temporary lighting along the front of the raised platform and a spotlight beam that was fixed on its center. A dark red curtain had been hung so as to cover the height scales painted on the back wall. The men who had been pulled in off their beats, the men who had been brought down out of the identification records room, out of the teletype room, shifted in the darkness and mumbled to each other in puzzled tones.

A door at the back of the room opened, letting in a shaft of daylight. The room was abruptly dark again as the door slammed shut.

Karl Beetle said loudly, "Okay, men. Talk it up. Make a lot of whispering and mumbling, and when she comes out, fade it off gradually and then make it dead quiet. Okay, talk it up!"

The sound of their mumbling voices filled the room. Kane Luther sat back in a corner, his arms folded, watching the platform which was like a brightly lighted miniature stage.

The door at the side opened, and Mary Furnas walked through. The door shut behind her. She was on the platform and she blinked into the lights, standing awkwardly.

Slowly her chin lifted, and, with sur-



prising grace, she walked directly to the middle of the platform, looked out over the improvised footlights. Slowly the mumbling voices faded off into absolute stillness.

She looked poised and competent, completely at ease.

Before she could speak, Kane Luther said, "Mary Furnas, at last we know that you killed your husband. We know how and we know why."

Someone coughed. Mary Furnas seemed to be trying to see out across the lights.

"That's absurd, you know!" she said, a hint of shrillness in her tone. "Is that you, Mr. Luther?"

He did not answer.

"Why am I here?" she demanded, and her voice lost some of its shrillness, became fuller and more resonant. "Why am I being persecuted like this?"

There was no answer. A distant sound of an auto horn found its way into the room. There was the thick silence, as made by many people. Her eyes grew dreamy, almost as though she were hypnotized, and she swayed slightly.

"You don't know what it's like," she said, almost in a whisper. "You don't know what it's like to go on, day after day, watching yourself get older and more tired." Her voice grew steadily louder. "You can't know what it's like to have nothing in your life but a dull house and a dull man and nothing ahead but a grave."

She paused and seemed to grow taller. "Of course I killed him!" she screamed. "I killed both of them. I planned it and I killed them and I was glad when they were both dead. Glad! Do you hear that?"

Suddenly the confident look on her face collapsed, disintegrated. As though suddenly realizing what she had said, she put both hands to her mouth in a gesture oddly childish.

Kane Luther rose slowly to his feet, clapped his big, bony hands together in applause.

"Excellent performance, Mrs. Furnas. An excellent performance all the way through."

The doors swung open and the lights clicked on. She looked shrunken as she stood on the platform, her shoulders slumped.

As Beetle stepped up to her, he heard her say, "Damn him! Damn him!" She spun on Beetle. "What proof did you have? How did you find out?"

"You told us, Mrs. Furnas," he said gently. "And now you'll give us a complete statement?"

She nodded, meek and broken. Suddenly she lifted her chin and said through bloodless lips, "Not with him there. Not with him watching me and gloating."

"Come along, Mrs. Furnas. There's no fear of that. He left five minutes ago. I won't see him again until—until we need him again."

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## WHEN CHAUNCEY MADE CHANGE

**F**OR INGENUITY and effrontery in his profession, Chauncey Johnson was tops. Suave, bearded, his unmistakable air of authority gained him admittance anywhere—to somebody else's sorrow.

One morning in the 1860's Chauncey, or his double, walked briskly into a downtown New York bank along with other employees, went directly to the cashier's cage, slipped on an alpaca jacket and started work.

"Who are you?" the dumbfounded cashier demanded a few minutes later.

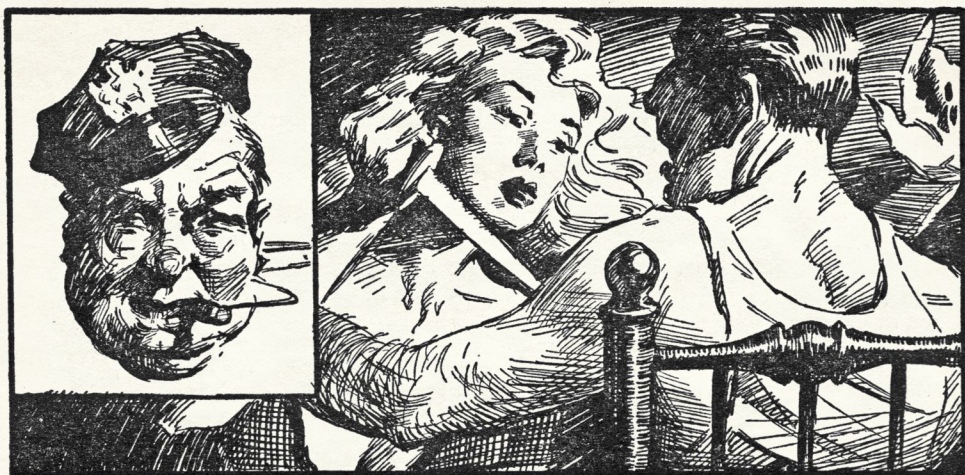
"I'm the new cashier," the man with the beard replied tartly. "You've been fired."

The cashier departed for the president's office. Shortly thereafter the newcomer departed also—with \$15,000.

Police failed to pin a rap on Chauncey for that or duplicate jobs netting close to \$500,000. But he was finally caught with his hand in a Fifth Avenue hotel safe under similar circumstances and given ten years to think up a new technique.

—John Lane





"Somebody had turned him into ten dollars' worth of chopped steak," O'Toole said.

# THE COP AND THE LADY

*"Me," O'Toole said, "I'm just a dumb cop. But when it comes to murder, I ain't dumb enough to believe a lady—just 'cause she's a lady!"*

**"M**E, I'M JUST a dumb cop, an' I been admittin' it for thirty years," O'Toole said. "Those other birds with their psychology and scientific crime-detectin' try to make it sound like a detective book. Imagination don't pay in this racket."

"I don't get you," I said. O'Toole and I were sitting in the dingy detective office. O'Toole was there on the late shift to answer the phone if it rang. That's what you do with a flatfoot who won't retire. I was there because I'd be the guy who'd go out and do the work if the phone did ring.

"Yeah, you're just like the rest of them guys," O'Toole said. "Nothin' makes sense unless they got it in college or high school and it's a big word. Minute they get on a case they begin thinkin' about thinkin'. Psychology and stuff. Character an' behavior patterns. They begin to

**By BOOTON  
HERNDON**

talk about manias an' them things an' can't tell when you're just plain nuts."

He squinted at me over his nose. It was a strain because his nose was shaped to match his belly. "Got a cigar?"

"No," I said. "And if I did, I'd keep it. If you think your theories on psychology are worth a cigar to me, you're suffering from dementia tremendous."

"Just like all the rest of the guys," O'Toole said grumpily. "Can't talk plain English. Well, I'll tell you what I mean about bein' nuts.

"This guy Folkes was found all slashed up in his bedroom. We walked in after



Mrs. Folkes called us, an' there he was, lookin' like ten dollars' worth of chopped steak. Mrs. Folkes was cool as the bottle of beer I'd like to be drinkin' right now." He looked up quizzically, but I shook my head. No beer. "Well," he said, sighing, "all the brainy boys said she was so cool because she was so well bred. They said she was a lady of quality an' wouldn't show emotion. As for cuttin' a guy into hash, they never dreamed of such a thing. So they went out lookin' for the murderer.

"They looked up the street an' down the street, but they didn't see no murderer. They read all their books over again, an' they fingerprinted everything in the house. They questioned the servants an' the gardener, an' spouted theories all over the place. But they couldn't find who done it."

"Let me get this straight," I butted in. "Not that I care, but if I have to listen to this stuff I'd better try to understand it. Why weren't there any fingerprints? What did the servants say?"

"Somebody wiped the knife off, and the servants were all asleep. That suit you? Mrs. Folkes said she didn't know anything about it; she slept in her own room, and she found him that way when she went in to say good-mornin'. She let out a yelp, refined an' lady-like, of course, an' told the maid to call the cops.

"That's all there was to it, except that the guy hated animals. That's why Mrs. Folkes slept in the other room—she had this little dog that looked like a rat, an' she always kept him in the room with her, 'cause Folkes didn't like the mutt.

"I told the Cap'n that she probably sliced him up herself an' he says for me not to act dumb. Any poor fool could see, he says, that no lady who loved animals as much as this dame could dump off a guy, especially like that. He says that psychology shows that a lady of such refinement and love for dumb animals couldn't bear to harm any living thing, much less chop her hubby to pieces. He went on like that for a couple of weeks, an' finally he gave up an' they put me on the case 'cause I'm so dumb I was in their way everywhere else."

"Come on," I said. "I know how dumb you are. Let's get to the point."

O'Toole looked up and sighed.

"Since there wasn't nobody else around that night that I could find out about, I figured Mrs. Folkes killed him. That's the easiest thing to do, ain't it?"

I sneered, but O'Toole went right on.

"So I figured that maybe he slapped her dog or somethin'. Y'see, I'd been talkin' to one of the maids, an' I found out that she washes this shaggy pooch of hers in all kinds of fancy shampoos, an' powders the thing up, an' sprays it with perfume, an' buys clothes for the fool dog, an' treats it like a baby, an' Folkes hates it, so what else could I think?"

"I'm beginning to think you can't think."

"I've known that for years," he said. "Any rate, I decide that, since I can't get no proof on her, I'll have to get her to confess. So I pay a little call on her an' her dog, an' ask her does she kill this guy. She gives me a stuck-up look an' picks up her dog an' begins to stalk outa the room. So I grabs the dog outa her arms an' I landed a kick on that mutt that shook a quart of perfume off its hide."

"I don't much see the point in that," I said. "Just because you're a disgruntled old flatfoot is no excuse to kick a little dog around."

"WELL, I kinda hated to do it myself," O'Toole said, "especially with my achin' feet, but it worked. This dame makes a dive for me and begins to claw my eyes out. Just about the time she tells me she's gonna kill me, too, the other cop waitin' outside the door comes in and we take her to the bughouse. Y'see, I'm dumb enough to call a dame what's nutty nutty. An' that's all there is to it. Psychology? Humph."

O'Toole took his feet down off the desk, groaning with every motion of his three hundred pounds, and reached down under his chair. He came up with some gruesome looking object, like a half-starved marmoset with a wig on.

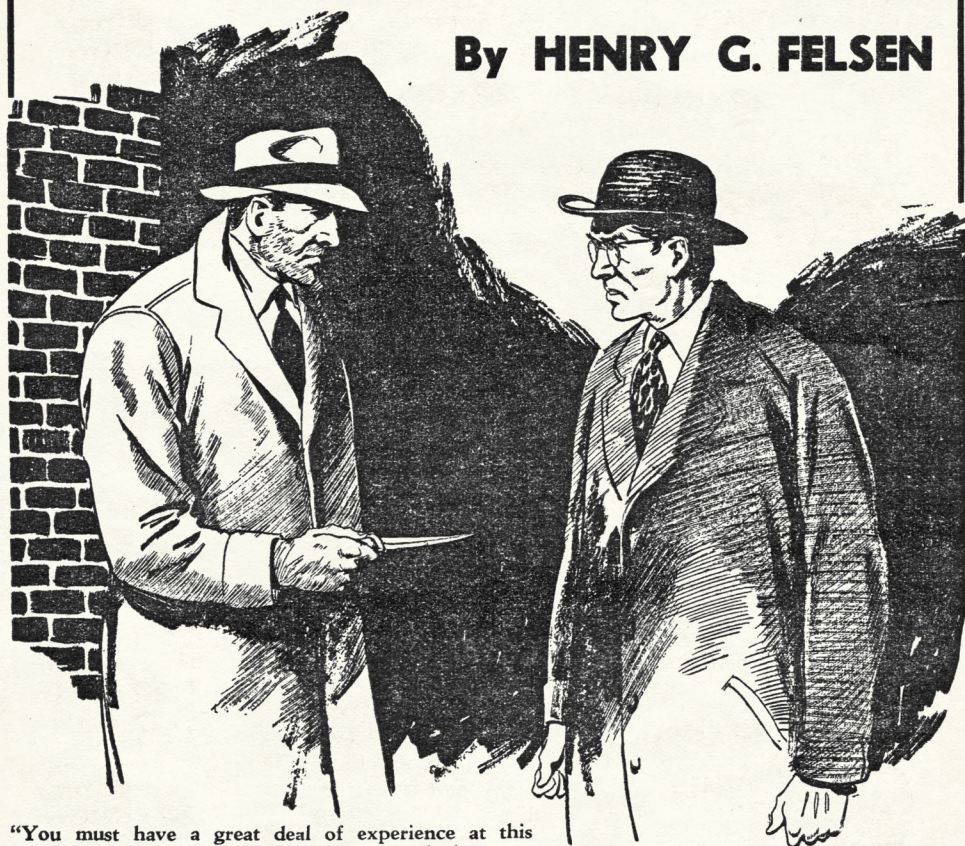
"My God, O'Toole," I said. "Is that...?"

"Yeah," O'Toole said sheepishly, chucking the mutt under the ear. "I'm just dumb enough to figure I oughta take care of it now."



# MR. GIDDING'S PRIVATE CRIME WAVE

By HENRY G. FELSEN



"You must have a great deal of experience at this sort of thing," Mr. Gidding remarked.

*No one—not the waitresses who gave him bad service, or the room clerks who gave him their worst rooms, and certainly not the man with the gleaming knife—suspected what a deadly trick that timid rabbit of a man, Mr. Gidding, carried up his well-pressed sleeve.*

MR. GIDEON GIDDING lifted his cup and saucer and smiled hopefully at the waitress, shyly indicating with his eyes that his cup was empty and he would like more coffee. The waitress expertly avoided getting him in focus as she rushed past, yelling a new order to the cook, and Mr. Gidding regretfully put down his cup and saucer to wait for another opportunity.

Mr. Gidding very much wanted a sec-



ond cup of coffee. It was one of the few things in life he was fussy about. It was his custom to drink the first cup with his dinner, and the second while he smoked a cigarette and read the evening newspaper. He would no more have smoked the cigarette and read the paper without his coffee on the table than he would have left his hotel room without putting on his pants.

Actually, Mr. Gidding would have preferred to smoke a cigar while he read and sipped his coffee, but he did not have the face for public cigar smoking. When he smoked a cigar he looked—he knew from seeing himself in the mirror—like a diminutive monkey trying unsuccessfully to swallow an over-large banana.

Mr. Gidding wished he had the bulk and commanding presence of the red-faced men with smooth jowls who smoked cigars after dinner with complete authority. They were the men who were served quickly, who complained about the food and the service audibly, who never had to ask for a second cup of coffee but got refills as soon as their cups were empty, and who smoked their cigars, leered at the waitress and left a ten-cent tip.

Mr. Gidding, on the other hand, was only five feet four inches tall and weighed but a little more than one hundred pounds. He was adrift somewhere between forty-five and fifty-five, his clothes were conservative, spotless and worn with a certain primness that marks aging bachelors of both sexes who would not share a closet or dresser drawer for all the rewards of matrimony.

Mr. Gidding's face was small, his expression was mild, his hair was thin, and his eyes needed the rimless bi-focals he always wore. He was not a man to inspire love or fear in the minds of those whose duty was to serve him. He was the kind of person whom porters bullied, bellhops treated with superiority and waitresses ignored, for they all knew at a glance that Mr. Gidding could be given the worst service in the house and he would still leave a good tip for fear he would be thought cheap or vengeful if he didn't.

UNFORTUNATELY, Mr. Gidding's profession made it necessary for him to travel, and he seldom returned to the

same restaurants and hotels after his business in a city was finished. By the time waitresses learned it was to their advantage to give Mr. Gidding his second cup of coffee when he wanted it, it was time for Mr. Gidding to leave for another city. He considered himself fortunate if he was able to have his second cup when he wanted it one time out of ten.

"Miss . . ." There was a note of quiet desperation in Mr. Gidding's voice as he held up his cup and saucer for the fifth or sixth time. He was eager to get at his newspaper and light his cigarette, but he had to have his coffee first. "Miss, I'd like more coffee, please."

The waitress took his cup brusquely, angry with herself for forgetting to act deaf as well as blind. When she brought it back it was too full, and slopping over into the saucer. Mr. Gidding was revolted, and decided he would eat elsewhere as long as he stayed in the city, but he gave the girl a polite smile of thanks. He put sugar and cream in his coffee, stirred it well, lit a cigarette and picked up the paper, unfolding it to look at the front page with a sigh of contentment.

Mr. Gidding's contentment was short lived. The international and national disasters didn't affect him, but he was extremely sensitive to the local news in whatever city he was staying. He relied on the local news to give him the feel of the strange community, and from long practice was able to grasp the temper of a new place after a thorough reading of one issue of its newspaper.

"Oh, dear," Mr. Gidding exclaimed softly as he saw the banner headline. It was local news and it was bad. CRIME WAVE CONTINUES. It distressed Mr. Gidding to be in a city that was having trouble with the criminal element. He loathed violence, and the idea of police and bandits exchanging shots in dark alleys made him feel a trifle sick. Glancing around to see if anyone might be watching, Mr. Gidding felt anxiously inside his suitcoat to reassure himself that his pockets hadn't been picked in a crowded elevator.

Mr. Gidding tasted his coffee, puffed on his cigarette and read on. It seemed that citizens were being held up by a powerful man in a dark overcoat and hat.



No one had seen his face, but most of the victims seemed to think he was young. His method in almost every case was the same. He appeared suddenly on a dark street, blocked the way with his body and asked for a match. At that moment he would whip out a long knife and describe in gory terms what he would do if he wasn't given money at once. He further informed his victims that if they went to the police he would cut their throats.

The activities of the knife-carrying bandit had been going on for almost a week, and as yet the police had made no arrests, although they reported a number of clues and confidently predicted they would have the man behind bars in a short time.

Meanwhile, extra policemen in plain clothes, working in pairs, were waiting on various dark streets for the bandit to ask them for a match and draw his knife. State agents were also investigating the robberies, and it was rumored that the F.B.I. had been asked to help.

There were several short human-interest items connected with the current reign of terror. A man asking for a match on a residential street had been shot through the leg by his next-door neighbor who failed to recognize him. Another man who had taken out a nail file at a bus stop had been severely beaten by others who thought he was pulling a knife. A woman heard someone trying to get into her house and cracked the man's skull with a frying pan before she realized it was her husband. And so on.

**M**R. GIDDING put down his paper without bothering to read further. Robbers with knives, aroused police, trigger-happy citizens. He felt like returning to his hotel, packing his bags and going on to the next city he was scheduled to visit. But there were no reservations available in any decent hotels for another five days where he was going next, and Mr. Gidding wasn't the kind who gambled on finding something. He reluctantly decided to stay and carry on as best he could and remain in his hotel room as much as possible. He felt so upset he knew his stomach would keep him awake most of the night.

Leaving a fifty-cent piece under his

plate, Mr. Gidding put on his coat and derby and drew on his gloves. A moment later he joined the crowd on the street a little man no one bothered to look at twice, who might have been any one of a thousand nondescript little men hurrying home to the large domineering wife his kind always married.

Once he was in the street, Mr. Gidding's trepidation slipped away. He forgot the grim stories in the newspapers as he looked upon the faces of the people who thronged the street. These were the same faces he saw in every city. The same women shopping, the same men going home from work, the same couples going to the movies, the same children playing in the same streets. The pace was as hurried and the expressions as vacant as in any other American city. The neon lights were the same, the window displays were the same, and the blare and crush of traffic was also reassuringly the same. Although it was the first time Mr. Gidding had been in this city, he knew it, and he knew the people. He felt safe, and the knife-carrying bandit ceased to worry him.

It was a cold, brisk evening, and Mr. Gidding walked along with a sprightly step. He didn't seem to notice that he gradually left the business district behind and was entering the quieter, darker residential streets. He looked at the houses as well as he could in the dark, for he was interested in the way people lived and in seeing how architectural styles were modified by various builders and contractors. On this particular trip Mr. Gidding had started in the East looking at old Colonial houses, and he had moved westward, noticing state by state how the original design was changed, with moldings dropped here, dormers added there, half-timbering and mansard roofs suddenly appearing like crows sitting on robin eggs.

Mr. Gidding was pleasantly occupied with his critical thoughts when he became aware that he was not alone on the street. Coming toward him in the darkness was the figure of a large man, walking slowly. Mr. Gidding hesitated, his mind going back to the newspaper stories, but he felt it would be undignified to turn and run from an imagined threat. He kept to his



original pace and direction, but his eyes were wary and his heart beat faster.

The bulky figure of the man approaching suddenly blocked Mr. Gidding's way.

"Got a match, mister?" a muffled voice asked.

"Why, yes," Mr. Gidding answered pleasantly, reaching inside his coat. "I have."

"Keep it," the man snarled. "Toss out your wallet. No monkey business, or I'll . . ." The man whipped out a long knife and held it low, the point toward Mr. Gidding.

It was the first time Mr. Gidding had ever been held up, and he tried to do the right thing and not make any suspicious moves that might startle the robber into violence. Mr. Gidding felt very awkward but not afraid.

"Aren't you afraid the police will catch you?" Mr. Gidding asked as he fumbled for his wallet. "They're looking for you."

The husky bandit laughed mirthlessly. "The police! Sure I know they're looking for me. So what? So tonight I go out and do better than before. Three hundred

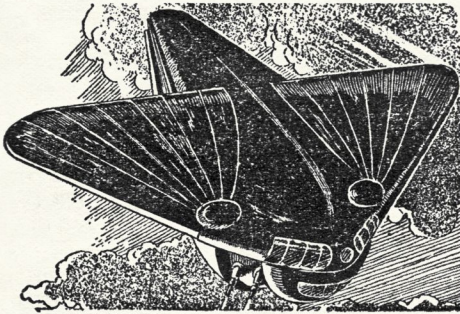
bucks I got tonight, plus what you'll kick in."

"Three hundred dollars," Mr. Gidding repeated. "That's not bad. Not bad, considering you take a chance when you go holding up strangers, not knowing in advance how much they might be carrying."

"I know how to pick my customers," the holdup man boasted. The street was still deserted except for the two of them, and Mr. Gidding's small size and quiet cooperation put the bandit at his ease. "Now how about your wallet, mister? I don't have all night."

"How do you pick your—ah—customers?" Mr. Gidding asked with some interest. "What made you decide to hold me up, for example?"

"Oh, I look for somebody well dressed. Not flashy, you understand. These flashy dressers usually got big pockets full of hands. I pick out people like you—kind of ordinary, but with that bank-account look. Then, you're small, and I can handle you if there's trouble. You look like a guy who has money in your pocket and wants to live to enjoy it. So you don't make any



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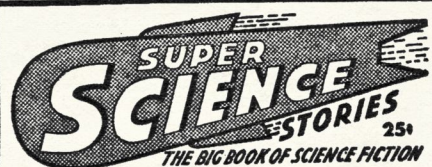
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fuss. I see all that in a second when I ask you for a match. If you don't look good, I take the match and go on."

"**YOU MUST** have a great deal of experience at this sort of thing," Mr. Gidding said. "To be able to choose so expertly."

"I've been at it a week. Never been arrested, either. They'll never get me."

"That's what they all say," Mr. Gidding said boldly. "Take my advice, young man, and leave this life of crime."

The holdup man laughed.

"Don't you have a mother? A wife, perhaps, and little ones who will ask where their dear daddy is after you are in the penitentiary? Think of them."

"I'm alone in the world," the bandit said, suddenly annoyed. "Now stop stalling and hand over that wallet, or do I have to get rough?"

"You don't have to get rough," Mr. Gidding said mildly, "and I don't have to hand over my wallet. In fact," Mr. Gidding added with sudden coldness, "you'll hand over yours." As he spoke, Mr. Gidding took a backward step, moving his right arm to release a spring inside his sleeve, and a small automatic slid into his hand. It was a theatrical little trick he had learned reading about frontier gamblers, and it amused him to carry on the idea. "Drop your knife."

There was no disobeying the automatic or the icy little man who held it. The bandit let the knife fall, and Mr. Gidding had the man stand about three feet from a wall and lean against it with his hands. In this position the man was helpless, and Mr. Gidding was able to frisk him in safety.

"And now," Mr. Gidding said crisply, after he had pocketed the man's money, "I repeat my advice. Stay out of crime." There was bitterness in Mr. Gidding's voice as he continued, "You're a bungling idiot, who thinks people have to be threatened with cut throats when you rob them. Your stupid tactics have aroused the community and the police until a decent professional doesn't dare practice his trade. You're a menace, young man, that's what you are. I had planned to work here for a week, but your stupid ac-

tions have made that impossible. I can't get reservations in my next town for five days, and I'll have to waste my time here. All because of you!"

Mr. Gidding adjusted his glasses and glared at the bandit who was still leaning against the wall. "I'll consider the money I've taken from you as some recompense for my wasted time, although I assure you I would have made much more than three hundred dollars without disturbing a single pinocle game at the police station. But I warn you, young man," Mr. Gidding said angrily, "I don't want you leaving this city, do you understand? I don't want to take the risk of having you arousing the police somewhere else. If I should happen to see you again elsewhere, I would feel it my duty to shoot you on sight. You . . . roughneck!"

Mr. Gidding kicked the fallen knife out of the way as he stepped back. "Knives, threats, bullying," Mr. Gidding muttered. "It's a shame." He hurried back toward his hotel, feeling slightly ashamed at having lost his temper, but still shaking with righteous indignation. If you made your living holding people up, the *least* you could do was be polite about it.

**THE NEXT EVENING** Mr. Gidding dined in a quiet, expensive little restaurant where the waitresses moved slowly and never shouted at the cook. He had an excellent dinner, admirably served, after which he unfolded his newspaper, took a cigarette from a plain gold case he had stolen in Cleveland, and looked about for his waitress so he could get his second cup of coffee. He wanted to smoke and he wanted to read about the crime wave, but first he had to have his coffee on the table.

Mr. Gidding lifted his empty cup and saucer and smiled shyly as the waitress approached. Apologetically he indicated he would like a second cup. The waitress walked by languidly, within two inches of his hand, her eyes fixed on infinity, her ears closed to the vulgar noises of the world. With unhurried step she passed Mr. Gidding and waited to take the order of a stout, red-faced man who insulted the food and the establishment as he read the menu, and blew clouds of cigar smoke into the waitress' face as he gave his order.



# PROFESSOR of POISONOLOGY

---

*Meet Professor Carnahan, the wife killer who  
tripped into the grave—over his own wagging,  
never-stop tongue!*

---

**P**ROFESSOR Carnahan shook his head sadly as he was led to the gallows. "My only error was in being an absent-minded professor," he muttered over and over. Scotland Yard contended that the professor's error was in thinking that he could commit the perfect crime.

George Carnahan was a professor of toxicology in an Edinburgh medical college. He had achieved some recognition in his field and had received several attractive offers from American universities. All of his associates regarded him as an up-and-coming scientist. Carnahan, however, was unhappy. Three years before, he had married a plain and little-educated farm girl. Now he felt she was in his way, socially and personally. To divorce her, of course, would mean scandal in the prim university town and set back his ambitious plans. So the industrious professor decided to remove her scientifically.

Several months before, Carnahan had discovered that two certain drugs, when administered together, produced symptoms similar to those resulting from uremia, a kidney ailment. If administered properly over a period of months the victim's death would appear natural.

The professor was well pleased with this solution. In one stroke he would be rid of his wife and achieve what would surely be a singular scientific success—the perfect crime. Craftily, Carnahan fed the two drugs to his wife. Three months later she died. The examining physician certified that Mrs. Carnahan had died of kidney disease.

The professor gave his wife a proper burial and grieved in the restrained manner that befitted a man in his position. Six months later he announced to his colleagues that he found it difficult to maintain his large house without a wife and so he was going to remarry.

**By WALTER  
EDWARDS**

The second Mrs. Carnahan was a pretty, twenty-two-year old student, the daughter of a wealthy manufacturer.

Despite his successful marriage, Carnahan continued to be melancholy. His friends thought that he had married a woman too young for him and found it difficult to keep pace with her. The professor's real trouble was his egotism. Here he had carried out a perfect crime and no one was the wiser. He should be famous for such a performance, he thought. When an expected promotion fell through, Carnahan really hit the skids. His only passion now were the two deadly poisons.

He must try them again. He did, during April, May and June of 1926. The local doctor, once again, certified that a Mrs. Carnahan had died of kidney trouble.

Carnahan now boasted openly of the two poisons. He gave long lectures in his classroom about the one poison that, "like atropine, dilates the pupil of the eye, and makes the eyeballs bulge. In larger doses, it causes dizziness and eventually death." The other, "a companion poison, counteracts the eye-bulging effects of the first and tends to contract the pupil of the eye. In larger doses, it too causes coma and eventually death. Used together, these two poisons neutralize each other's symptoms and produce a death that resembles kidney disease."

One of Carnahan's students remembered the causes of the professor's wives' deaths. He took his information to the police. The bodies of both women were exhumed. They could find no evidence of murder. The police, certain that Carnahan had been responsible for his wives' deaths,

*(Continued on page 128)*



# NO ESCAPE!

By

**BRUNO FISCHER**

---

*They came at night with guns in their hands . . . and they wanted Ralph, who wasn't there. But Helen was there . . . Helen, who had no bulwark, nothing, to put between their deadly bullets and her husband—but her own slim, fragile body!*

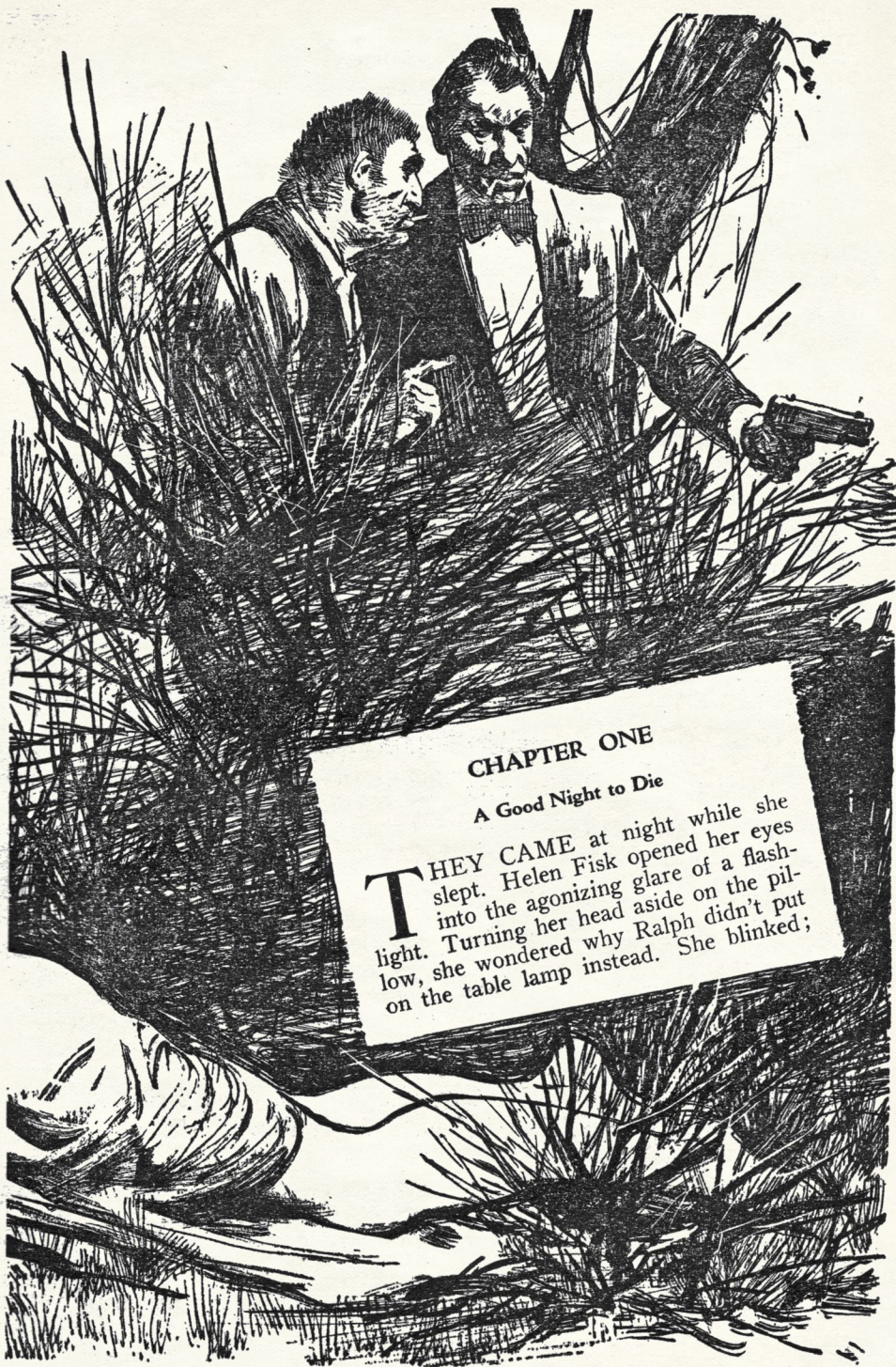
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*Dynamic Novel of Sudden Death*

"Maybe she's in these bushes somewhere," Helen heard Pocker say. "She can't have gone far."







## CHAPTER ONE

### A Good Night to Die

**T**HEY CAME at night while she slept. Helen Fisk opened her eyes into the agonizing glare of a flashlight. Turning her head aside on the pillow, she wondered why Ralph didn't put on the table lamp instead. She blinked;



Then suddenly, recalling that he wasn't supposed to return home tonight, she was wide awake. "Ralph, what happened?" she asked anxiously.

The beam was now traveling about the room. Behind it she saw nothing at all, as if it had an existence of its own.

Very close to her somebody giggled.

"Ralph!" she screamed in panic.

"Take it easy, lady," a voice said. It was high-pitched and almost feminine. "We won't hurt you."

Light went on in the living room and flowed through the open door, revealing the man who stood at the side of the bed. He was short and very wide; his florid face seemed to consist mostly of nose. He snapped off the flashlight.

A thief, Helen thought, and wondered why he had come here where there was so little to steal. Two thieves, in fact, for now she heard the other. Then she saw him in the bedroom, slender and younger than the other, a natty blond mustache emphasizing his sleek handsomeness.

His left hand held a big black gun.

"Hell!" he said. "Is this the way you case a place, Pocker?"

"Well, look, at eight o'clock I seen him here with her." The wide man named Pocker punctuated his sentences with nervous giggles. "It stood to reason a guy would spend the night with his wife." His little eyes looked down at her out of fatty sockets.

Helen pulled the blanket up to her chin, cringed under it. "Who are you?" she demanded.

The younger man replied, "Police. Where's your husband?"

Helen drew air into her lungs. They were not thieves because they had not stolen what they could and left. But policemen who came in the middle of the night could be even more dangerous.

"I don't know," she said.

Pocker giggled in a way that chilled her blood. "What d'you think of that, Georgie? Ralph's pretty young wife don't know when he'll be back." He glanced at his wristwatch. "Ten after two. We got plenty time, sister. We'll wait."

"He went to Chicago," she said desperately. "A job was waiting for him there. He won't be back for months."

It was almost the truth, except that it was Pittsburgh where he had driven to be interviewed for a job, and except that he would be back tomorrow night.

The younger man, named Georgie, snapped on the ceiling light. That too hurt her eyes; she closed them.

"He'll be back tonight," Georgie said, "and we'll wait for him. You come in the other room and wait with us."

**S**HE LAY flat on her back, trying to think why the police would come for Ralph at dead of night, but she knew so little about her husband. She said dully, "Give me a chance to get dressed."

Pocker pulled her polka-dotted housecoat off the chair and tossed it on the bed. "Put this on."

"If you'll leave the room."

He looked at the two open windows. "I bet you'd like us to. Put that thing on or I'll drag you out of bed like you are."

He grabbed one corner of the blanket and giggled.

Frantically she clutched the blanket to her throat. They couldn't be policemen, she thought, because policemen wouldn't be afraid that she would escape, and policemen would be polite to a woman who had never committed a crime.

"Give me a chance," she wailed.

The wide man stepped back. She sat up and reached for the garment, alternately keeping an arm across the bodice of her low-cut nightgown until she had struggled into the housecoat. Then she slipped out of the far side of the bed, her back to the men, and pushed the housecoat down past her hips and tied the cord. As she walked to the foot of the bed for her slippers, she felt their intense gaze on her slim figure, on her oval, elfin face.

She went to the door. Georgie stepped aside to let her pass. Then she was in the living room, with both men behind her.

There was the telephone within reach of her hand, but she would need much more than the possible second to dial the operator and yell for help. The door was ahead of her, the door she had locked before going to bed, but which perhaps was not locked now. She leaped toward it.

Hands were on her before she reached the doorknob. She started to scream, but a thick, sweaty hand clamped over her



mouth cut it off before it passed her throat. Her left wrist was caught in a powerful grip; her arm was twisted behind her back and pushed up between her shoulder blades.

Her body jerked and the hand clamped on her mouth choked back the scream of unendurable pain. As she writhed she heard a giggle in her ear, and that told her that it was Pocker, the wide man, who was inflicting the torture. She sagged. He held her up against him and exerted a little more pressure against her arm.

"Let her go," Georgie said quietly.

She almost collapsed when Pocker released her. She stumbled away from him, rubbing her burning arm. She heard herself whimper like a hurt kitten.

Pocker giggled. "I wasn't gonna break her arm," he explained to Georgie. "Just teach her not to try funny business."

"I'll do the teaching," Georgie said. He was lounging against the table and lighting a cigarette. He blew smoke toward her. "We don't want to hurt you, Mrs. Fiske. But if you try anything like that again, I'll take off your clothes and beat the skin off you with my belt."

He said this without emotion, and his pale eyes were expressionless, but she knew that he meant it. And she knew that this quiet, handsome young man was much more deadly than the inanely giggling man.

"Another thing," he went on. "If a stranger comes around and you yell or act up, we'll shoot you and him both."

Significantly he tapped his right armpit where he had put his gun. Then he went to the door, turned the key in the lock and dropped the key into his pocket. "Now how's about being a good girl and making us some coffee?"

"What do you want from me?" she whimpered.

"Right now, coffee. Make it."

She obeyed because she was afraid not to, and because in the tiny kitchen there would be a measure of privacy. But she was wrong. Pocker followed her, leaning against the doorjamb and watching her.

**I**N THE LIVING ROOM Georgie sat at the window beside the door. From there he could watch the hundred feet of driveway angling up to the cottage from the narrow dirt road on which not a dozen

cars passed during the day and almost none at night. He could see nothing in the night, but he would see the headlights of Ralph's car as soon as they appeared. They would know that Ralph was coming before he had any idea that they were here.

But Ralph wasn't due back until tomorrow.

Her arm continued to hurt, but she could use it to prepare the coffee. They drank in the living room, sitting at the table.

"What do you want with Ralph?" she burst out.

Pocker giggled. "That'll be between him and us."

"Shut up, Pocker," Georgie said without heat. He returned to the window.

Were they waiting for Ralph to kill him? They had come with guns in their hands. But why?

It occurred to her that she knew little about her husband. Only three months ago she had met Ralph Fiske in the restaurant in which she had worked as cashier. He was tall and broad-shouldered, not handsome at all, but his rugged face was sweet. She thought that she had fallen in love with him the first time he had lingered at the register desk to exchange small talk with her.

A month later they were married. He's been a hardware salesman, he'd told her, but had quit his job a short while before and was looking around for something else in the selling line. He'd had a few thousand dollars saved, so the fact that he was out of work hadn't interfered with their getting married, and she had been able to quit her job. Because city apartments were so hard to find, they had rented this cozy little cottage for the summer months.

Late this afternoon Ralph had received a long-distance phone call from Pittsburgh. A glassware manufacturer had on opening for a traveling salesman; there was a good chance that the job would be his if he got there at ten the following morning for an interview. It was a nine or ten-hour drive.

He had hated to leave her alone for a night or perhaps two. But she had laughed that off; after all, for two years before she'd married him she'd lived alone. He hadn't left until nine o'clock, cutting it close so that he could remain as long as



possible with her before his long drive.

And a few hours later these men had come here for him with guns in their hands.

Helen Fiske remained seated at the table where she had drunk coffee with them, and over and over she told herself that somehow she had to warn Ralph. But how, when they didn't let her out of their sight for a single instant?

Pocker, sitting opposite her, drained the dregs of the coffee pot into his cup. Then he leered at her. "What d'you see in a heel like Ralph? You and me, baby, we could get along."

"Cut it, Pocker," Georgie muttered from the window.

Pocker shrugged, finished his coffee, sauntered aimlessly across the room, picked up a newspaper and settled in the club chair with it.

She found no consolation in the fact that at least Georgie was protecting her from Pocker. Because far more than the wide, ugly man she feared the quiet, polite young man with the cold, blank eyes. He wanted no fuss, no violence that was not part of the purpose of his visit. She knew that he would never be diverted from his reason for being here by an attractive woman in a tight-fitting housecoat, or by anything else. He was as remorselessly single-minded as death.

It was very still in the cottage. Her face had dropped to her arms on the table. The arm Pocker had twisted continued to throb, but that was only physical pain. The agony of terror inside her was much harder to bear.

There was a tiny click. Raising her head, she saw that Pocker had snapped off the light because day had come. She must have dozed off, though she couldn't remember.

Pocker stood scratching his huge nose. "Ralph's a dirty stay-out," he told her genially, ending the sentence with his maddening giggle. "If I had a swell-looking wife like you, you wouldn't catch me spending a night away."

Georgie, watching the road from the window, always watching the road, lit a fresh cigarette and said nothing. Helen let her head drop back on her arms.

"Guess I'll grab some shut-eye," Pocker said.

She heard him go into the bedroom and then she heard him snore. A remote hope that Georgie would also doze off stirred in her. He sat very straight on the straight-backed chair at the window, and his handsome face and the rest of him might have been carved from stone except that every few seconds he drew on his cigarette.

Eventually it was she who slept.

Voices woke her. A hot sun streamed in through a window, bathing her in sweat. Pocker, yawning expansively, had come out of the bedroom.

"Could be he's gone for days," Pocker growled.

"We'll wait," Georgie said at the window.

"Suppose he ran out on her and won't be back at all?"

"We'll wait." Georgie turned his head. "Mind getting us breakfast, Mrs. Fiske?"

He was very polite about that request, but his voice and manner had been no different when he had threatened to beat her with his belt. Wearily she stood up.

"First I'd like to get dressed," she said. "Please. It'll only take me a minute."

Georgie crushed out a cigarette in the overflowing ashtray on the windowsill. "Sorry, Mrs. Fiske, but that's the way it has to be."

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Killers Wait

**T**IGHTENING her lips, Helen went into the tiny kitchen. There was hardly room to turn around in it, but Pocker followed her all the way in. He was always in the way; she was constantly brushing against him, but at least he didn't put his hands on her. Obviously he very much feared Georgie.

She served them in the living room and sat at the table with them, but she herself had only coffee. Her stomach was too jittery for anything solid.

The meal was almost over when a car came up the road and turned into the driveway. Pocker gripped the edge of the table and licked his upper lip. Without hurry, Georgie put down his fork, rose, and keeping his left hand under his right shoulder, he moved to the side of the front window.



"Milkman," he whispered. His gun was in his hand as he returned to the table. "Will he come in here, Mrs. Fiske?"

She shook her head. It was Wednesday and he collected his bill Fridays.

They heard the milkman mount the porch. Bottles rattled.

"If I have to kill you, I'll have to kill him, too," Georgie said softly.

She pressed the back of her hand against her mouth to keep from sobbing aloud. The milkman was going off the porch. There was a brief silence, then the sound of his truck driving away.

And nobody else would have reason to come here all day, she thought. Even if somebody did, it would mean death if in any way she appealed for help. The first one to arrive tonight would be Ralph, and there was no way she could keep him away.

Georgie had put up his gun. He stood at the closed door for a long minute, then unlocked it and brought in the two bottles of milk. He placed them on the table and placidly resumed eating his bacon and eggs.

"What if Ralph don't come today?" Pocker burst out.

"So he'll come tomorrow or the next day," Georgie said. "I've got plenty of time."

"Time and hate, eh?" Pocker giggled.

Georgie pushed aside his plate and picked up his coffee cup. All that changed in his static face was a tightening of the corners of his mouth, but that was enough.

Hate, Helen thought. That was the answer to their presence, but it was no answer. Why would anybody hate an easy-going, lovable man like Ralph—hate him enough to come with guns and make his wife a prisoner while waiting for his return?

"What did Ralph do?" she asked shrilly.

"Your husband, Mrs. Fiske, is a rat," Georgie said quietly. He put down his cup and went to the phone and dialed the operator. He gave her a number in the city twenty miles away.

"Marie?" he said. "Georgie. . . . No, not yet. Complications. I'll explain later. . . . Look. Take the car and come out here right away. . . . You'll find out when you get here. Bring a lot of food—meat, bread, groceries, you know. Could be we'll be

here for a while. . . . Know where it is? Teaneck Road off the highway. A dirt road. There's a mailbox with Fiske painted on it. A little white house with green trim. Don't waste time."

He hung up.

"Are you nuts?" Pocker protested. "Why bring a dame in on this?"

"We got one in already, whether we like it or not. We need a woman to guard a woman."

Pocker giggled. "I don't mind doing that little job."

Impassively Georgie looked at him. "I can use some sleep. Keep your eyes on the road and your hands off Mrs. Fiske. Understand?"

He went into the bedroom. He left the door open, and through it Helen saw him stretch out on her bed without removing even his shoes. Almost at once he was asleep, but he did not snore.

Now it was Pocker who sat at the window watching the road. And all at once she knew that she must force herself to make love to him. The thought made her skin crawl, but actually it would not have to go far. It would need only an ardent embrace, a kiss or two, during which she would try to slip the gun out from under his shoulder.

And then?

Not shoot him. No, she couldn't bring herself to kill a man, perhaps not even to save Ralph. But the gun in her hand would be an effective threat to keep him harmless while she escaped.

She opened her housecoat a bit at the bodice, tightened it more at the waist, and undulated across the room. His head turned from the window; his hungry little eyes followed her. Languidly she stretched out on the couch and made herself send him a smoldering smile.

Pocker grinned like a small boy offered candy.

"Why don't you sit here and be comfortable?" she said.

He licked his thick lips. He looked out of the window and then at her and then through the open bedroom door at Georgie asleep. Helen rose, softly closed that door, undulated to the side of Pocker's chair.

"I like big, strong men," she purred, putting a hand on his shoulder.



HE SAT very still. His eyes shifted in their fatty sockets to the closed bedroom door. Suddenly his arm slashed upward, knocking her hand off his shoulder. "A wise broad," he sneered. "What're you after—my gun?"

His blow had numbed her forearm. She held it tightly and shivered with defeat and shame. "You're afraid of Georgie," she taunted him.

"Who ain't?" he admitted. "That guy's always strictly business." Regretfully he took another look at her figure. "Beat it," he said, turning to the window.

She returned to the couch. She curled up on it like a sick child, her face buried in the cushion. They were too overwhelmingly powerful with their male strength and their guns, and they were also too clever for her. And every minute brought Ralph's homecoming closer.

Perhaps she slept. She was aware of nothing but the dreadful passing of time until she was startled by the single honk of a horn.

Abruptly she was wide awake, sitting up and trembling.

Pocker was standing at the side of the window so that he would not be observed by anybody outside the cottage. And through the window she saw a black sedan roll up the driveway.

Ralph's sedan! Dear God, he had returned earlier than expected!

She had to shout a warning to him. Whatever they did to her then, she had to keep him from coming in here.

Her mouth opened. She choked back sound as it occurred to her that a scream would have the opposite effect she intended. Ralph, hearing her cry out, would run into the cottage instead of away from it.

But she had to do something.

The bedroom door opened. Georgie came out with his gun in his hand.

"Marie," Pocker grunted.

Helen felt herself sink back against the arm of the couch. A woman dressed in a blue print dress got out of the car. Now that the moment of panic had subsided, Helen saw that the sedan, though similar in color and design, was a different model from Ralph's.

Georgie opened the door and closed it as soon as the woman stepped over the

threshold. She didn't greet the men. She looked at Helen huddled on the couch, and one side of her very red mouth twisted. She was on either side of thirty, overpainted, full-blown, slow-moving. Men who liked elaborately curved women would consider her attractive. To Helen she looked big and tough and hard.

"The groceries are in the car," she said, digging into her handbag for cigarettes.

"Bring 'em in, Pocker," Georgie ordered. "And park the car away from here."

That was so that Ralph wouldn't get suspicious when he saw a strange car in the driveway, Helen thought dully. Or perhaps Ralph could recognize that car. Somewhere in the past, before she had met him, he must have been very close to these terrible people.

Pocker went out. Languidly Marie put a lighter to her cigarette. "That Ralph's wife?" she asked.

"Yeah."

"Where's Ralph?"

"Pocker saw him in here at eight last night," Georgie told her. "We came in at two, figuring he was sure to be in bed then. But he wasn't. He hasn't shown up yet."

Marie's red mouth curled. "You botched it nice."

"I didn't botch it."

"No?" Marie said. "You put Ralph's wife wise, so you can't go away and come back another time. You got to see it all the way through now or forget about it."

"I'll see it through."

"If it takes how long?"

Georgie's chest rose with an indrawn breath, but his sleek face remained static. "As long as it takes," he said quietly and turned his head. "You want to get dressed, Mrs. Fiske? Marie will keep you company."

Wearily Helen shuffled into the bedroom. Marie sat on the bed and crossed her knees and watched Helen shed her housecoat.

"Ralph always had an eye for a pretty figure," Marie commented.

"What have you got against Ralph?" Helen demanded. Her voice was on the shrill edge of hysteria.

"He's a rat."

"What did Ralph do?"

Marie flicked cigarette ashes on the



floor. "You don't know much about him, do you?"

"No."

"He's a rat," Marie repeated, "and Georgie doesn't like rats. I told him to let it lay. But God, how he can hate! Most people hate and let it go at that, but not Georgie. Sometimes he scares even me."

So it would be murder, Helen thought. Georgie's hatred would be satisfied with nothing less. And this moment, with only another woman between herself and an open window, was the best chance she would get to flee and warn Ralph.

SHE WAS at her dresser, taking out underwear, and suddenly her hands were still. She was staring at a pair of scissors on the dresser. They were a weapon. She could snatch up the scissors and plunge them into the woman.

"Anything bothering you?" Marie asked.

Helen roused herself, took out panties and a brassiere, turned away from the dresser. The scissors were no good; no weapon short of a gun would do. Because the woman would at least be able to cry out, and a moment later the men would burst into the room. Georgie, quietly and politely, had threatened to beat her with his belt if she tried to escape. That would be nothing to what he would do to her if she attacked Marie with the scissors.

Stifling a sob of utter despair, she dressed in a skirt and blouse.

When she and Marie returned to the living room, Pocker was bringing in a large box of groceries. "I'm starved," he told Helen with his giggle. "Let's see what kind of cook Ralph married."

So she cooked for them, served them, washed their dishes—a dutiful hostess while they waited to kill her husband. And she had to wait with them, after the meal sitting with them in the small living room.

Georgie was at his eternal post at the front window. Marie was leafing through the pile of fashion magazines she had found on the table. Pocker sat beside the radio, listening to a football game.

Maybe at that moment Ralph was listening to the same game over his car radio as he drove home. His last game. The thought almost drove her mad.

And she was doing nothing to save him. She had had a chance in the bedroom but had not snatched up those scissors. She was a coward—afraid of being hurt by Georgie if she failed, afraid of an act of violence. She was doing nothing to save the man she loved, and time was running out.

"I'd like to take a bath," she said suddenly.

Marie looked up from a magazine. "What for?"

"I didn't have a chance to bathe today."

"So what?" Marie said. "You're not going anywhere."

Georgie turned his head from the window. "Let her do what she wants." It was obvious that he was anxious to keep his captive appeased on small matters, to make her feel as much at ease as possible so that he would not have an hysterical woman on his hands during what might be a very long wait.

Marie shrugged, said, "Come on," and went into the bathroom with Helen. As Helen drew the bath, Marie stood with her shoulders against the closed door, cigarette smoke weaving across her painted face.

Helen had planned precisely what to do. There was a full bottle of rubbing alcohol in the medicine chest. It was the nearest thing to a weapon at hand, and she had to risk that it would be heavy enough to knock Marie unconscious. The bathroom window was smaller than the others in the house, but she thought that she could squeeze through it.

But this was not yet the time to catch Marie off guard. Helen got into the tub.

The warm water didn't relax her. She lay with her eyes closed, her mind going over the details of what she would do. When she got out of the tub, there would be nothing suspicious in taking a bottle of alcohol out of the medicine chest. She would say that she was going to rub down the arm Pocker had twisted last night. In the cramped bathroom, she would naturally be very close to Marie as she held the bottle in one hand and rubbed the arm, and she would smash the bottle down on Marie's head.

The odds were that she would fail—that Marie would not be completely knocked out or that she would manage to cry out or that the men in the next room would



hear her fall. But whatever the chances of failure, she had no alternative.

Marie dropped the stub of her cigarette on the floor. "You going to stay in there all day?" she complained. "It's hot in here."

Now, in a matter of seconds! Suddenly Helen couldn't breathe, couldn't move. To give herself a little more time, she said, "What did Ralph do to Georgie?"

"Plenty." Marie passed a hand over her brow. "You coming out?"

"Ralph wouldn't injure anybody." Helen persisted.

"Think so?" One side of Marie's red mouth curled. "Bet you don't even know the guy you married is a crook."

No, no, Helen thought. But she believed it because there was no reason for Marie to lie, and in a way it explained why these gunmen had come for Ralph. But actually all that mattered at this moment was his safety.

"I'll die if I don't get a breath of air and a cigarette," Marie was saying.

She grasped the doorknob. Incredibly it appeared that she was going to make it simple for Helen by leaving her alone in here.

But not that simple. Marie turned from the door. I'll be back in a moment, but just to make sure you stay put—" She gathered up all of Helen's clothes, including her shoes and stockings, and carried them out with her. Because the door opened directly into the living room, she had the decency to close it after her.

In a flash Helen was out of the tub. Soundlessly she turned the lock, then snatched off the linen shelf the cotton housecoat which she had pressed only yesterday. She put it on over her dripping body.

"What's the idea?" she heard Georgie say in the other room.

"I got her clothes," Marie replied. "That kind of girl wouldn't go running around naked."

"Get back in there."

"Okay, okay, only first give me a cigarette."

By that time Helen had climbed on the basin under the high, small window. She pushed out the screen and went through feet first. Momentarily her hips stopped her. The hook at the bottom of the screen

raked her body as she squirmed through, then the swinging screen smacked her chin, but in her frenzy minor pain was meaningless.

She fell to the ground. Breathlessly she sat there, but only for a moment. The shaking of the locked bathroom door roused her. As she leaped to her feet, she heard Marie yell, "She's locked herself in!"

Then Helen was running on bare feet over the hard, stubbled ground.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Escape

THE WOODS were a hundred feet from the cottage. There was not much to them—a narrow strip of scrub oak and birch and brush, ending a quarter of a mile away at the highway curving on two sides of the woods and open meadows on the right.

Behind her somebody shouted. She glanced back. Pocker was rounding the corner of the cottage.

"I'll shoot!"

In that brief glimpse of him, she had not noticed the gun in his hand, but he would have it out. She had almost reached the trees. Her lungs burned, her legs wobbled, but desperation drove her on. Again she turned her head. Pocker was racing after her, cutting down the distance between them, and Georgie was behind him.

They didn't shoot. They thought they could catch her without the sound of gun fire. Or it was essential to them that they catch her alive and unharmed.

She entered the woods at the broad footpath that ran through to the highway. She hesitated, knowing that if she stuck to the path they would easily catch her. On her left, also toward the highway where it curved, the woods were open, and there too she'd be seen in a matter of moments. There was only one way left, the solid mass of blackberry bushes on her right.

She plunged. Sharp thorns tore at her robe, at her flesh. Throwing her hands in front of her face, she pushed on. Her bare toes struck something, a stone, a root, and she stumbled, but it was from sheer exhaustion that she fell.



There was no strength left in her to rise, and that was what saved her. She lay on a comparatively bare spot of ground, completely surrounded by the bushes, and the pursuit went past her.

Tiny darts of fire pitted her legs and arms and the backs of her hands where the thorns had ripped. But she had to move on and the only way was through the bushes. Bare-legged and bare-armed and wearing only that skimpy housecoat, it was madness to try, but she had to get to the police so that they would be at the cottage when Ralph returned.

She started to rise, and suddenly the voices of the two men were back. They stopped very close to her. She dug her teeth into her bare forearm to keep back moans of pain and panic.

"Damn Marie!" Georgie was saying. "I ought to break her neck for letting Mrs. Fiske get away."

"Look," Pocker said. "I was in these woods all day yesterday when I was casing Ralph's house. This path ends at the highway and so do these woods. I'd have seen her if she'd gone either way."

"Then where did she go?"

"Maybe through these bushes."

Helen hardly breathed.

"She'd be ripped to pieces," Georgie said.

"See this bush crushed like somebody went through it?"

Helen flexed her muscles to leap up and plunge on.

"What's on the other side?" Georgie asked.

"Fields. Wide fields it'll take her maybe ten minutes to get across. And she can't go fast through these bushes. Right near the house there's a little hill from where we can spot her."

"Any houses nearby?"

"Not near the fields. This is the last house on the road."

"We're wasting time," Georgie snapped. "You take the highway, I'll take the fields."

Helen did not hear them depart, but again it was silent. Probably she would be safe if she remained here, but her safety alone wasn't enough. She couldn't delay; Ralph might be back any minute.

She forced herself to wait several long minutes, then slowly stood erect. A grow-

ing sense of triumph swelled in her. She had succeeded in escaping them.

From the knoll, Georgie's range of vision would cover the fields, but she would not go that way. Pocker, and maybe Marie too, would watch the highway, but they would not dare do anything to her where cars passed in constant streams.

**K**EEPING her hands in front of her face, she made her way out of the blackberry bushes. The tormenting thorns were easier to bear now that escape was so close. She ducked across the path and ran parallel with it. She heard cars. A patch of cloudless sky ahead grey larger. And then she was on the top of a ten-foot embankment, with the two-lane, sun-baked highway below.

With the hem of her housecoat she wiped whatever blood was on her legs and arms and face. She leaned forward, searching the road. Both sides of it were visible up to the sharp curve two hundred feet to her left, and there was no man or woman in sight. Only the embankment itself afforded a hiding place, and she could reach the road as quickly as anybody else on the embankment. She climbed down.

A car was coming from the east. She found level ground under her bare feet and ran out on the steaming macadam. As she waved her arms, shouting, "Stop!" she was aware of the fantastic picture she made, bare-footed and skimpily clad and somewhat bloody; but that would be all the more reason for cars to stop for her.

The car she hailed braked, slid past her, stopped some fifty feet beyond where she stood in the middle of the road. She saw that another car had come up on the other lane and had stopped only a few feet from her. A man in the first car was looking back at her, evidently waiting for her to walk over. She hesitated because the second car was so much closer, and she turned to it and screamed.

The second car was a black sedan, and Pocker was already out of it. Past his wide, thick body leaping at her, she saw Marie behind the wheel.

Helen spun away to avoid Pocker's outstretched hand, but he was already on her. His powerful fingers closed over her arm.

Clawing at his face, she shrieked for



help. Other cars were stopping on either lane. She glimpsed two men leaping out of one, and she subsided a little. Certainly here on a crowded public highway she had no reason to fear Pocker.

Pocker smiled tightly. His fist moved only a few inches to her jaw.

Helen didn't feel herself fall, but all of a sudden she was lying on the road, and there was a strange lack of control over her muscles. She could see as through a grey veil and she could hear as from a distance, but she couldn't move.

Her shoulders were being raised from the ground. She tried to stand; one arm actually rose a few inches, then flapped limply. Vaguely she was aware of people standing about her.

"You shouldn't have hit her like that," a man was saying sadly.

Whoever held her shoulders was giggling, and she knew then that it was Pocker. He said, "Look at her. Dead drunk. Running around with practically nothing on. I gotta get her home."

A woman said indignantly, "Her mouth is bleeding. You hurt her."

"Naw," Pocker said. "I wouldn't hurt my own wife."

He had her under the armpits and was dragging her. Her bare heels burned as they scraped over the road. There was blood in her mouth and her jaw was numb and she could only moan. This was a nightmare in which she was aware of a terrible thing happening to her, but she could not make herself awake.

"Serves you right for marrying that tramp," a woman scolded. The voice was familiar, and sluggishly Helen decided that it belonged to Marie. "I told you from the first she was no good."

"Well, I married her and I'm responsible for her," Pocker said. "Help me get her in the car."

Hands grasped Helen's bare ankles. She felt herself being lifted off the ground, and then something solid was under her back.

No! In the car she would again be completely in their power. She had to find her voice, her strength.

"You're okay, baby," Pocker told her kindly. "I'm taking you home to bed."

Her voice burst out of her. "Save me!" she shrieked. "He—he—"

A brutal hand clamped over her mouth; a knee dug into her chest. She heard a car door slam. She was inside the car, on the floor, and the people outside couldn't see what he was doing to her, or wouldn't interfere if they did.

"Looks like she's getting the D.T.'s," Marie was explaining to the people. "I don't care what her husband says, I'm driving her straight to the hospital alcoholic ward."

Then the car was moving, taking her away from the people who could have saved her and Ralph. And now there was nothing left.

The pressure of Pocker's knee became an unendurable weight on her chest. His hand over her nose and mouth smothered her. Waves of blackness swept over her.

WHEN the waves receded, the car was no longer in motion. Through the open door she saw Pocker's broad hips.

Pocker was giggling. "I figured she was hiding in the woods and would head for the road as soon as she thought the coast was clear. Marie and I cruised along that short stretch and we seen her come out of the woods. I had to clip her in the jaw."

"Anybody see her?" Georgie asked.

"A slew of people, but nobody who knew her. I said she was cockeyed drunk and she sure looked it, wearing hardly nothing and barefoot and blood on her. Them saps believed me all right."

"Are you sure all of them did?"

Marie said, "The fact is nobody tried to stop us from taking her away in the car. People don't want the fuss and bother of horning in on what's none of their business."

Pocker twisted his head and yanked Helen's bare foot when he saw her eyes were open. "Come on, sister, you can walk."

"We'll carry her," Georgie said.

Helen lay limp as the two men carried her between them. When they entered the cottage, she started to whimper. She was back and there would be no second chance to escape before Ralph returned.

They dumped her on her bed. Pocker giggled. "Georgie, ain't you gonna whip her like you said?"

Georgie didn't answer that. He said,



"Marie, clean her up," and strode out of the room.

Pocker and Marie followed him, and Helen was alone in the room, but they had left the bedroom door open so that they could keep their eyes on her. The numbness was leaving her jaw and throbbing pain came instead and again she felt sharp dots of fire where the blackberry thorns had ripped flesh.

What else would they do to her? There was the threat Georgie had made last night, and again Pocker was reminding him of it with his maddening giggle.

Through the open door she heard Pocker say, "You said you'd whip her if she acted up."

Irritability touched Georgie's voice. "I'm running this show."

"But look," Pocker persisted. "When they find her all marked up, the cops will figure she stuck a knife in her husband because he beat her."

"They'll find she was hit in the jaw," Georgie said. "That'll be good enough."

She tried to understand what Georgie meant, but it sounded all mixed up.

Marie entered the bedroom with a basin of water and a washcloth. She closed the door, opened Helen's housecoat, proceeded to wash the blood off her face and body.

So that she would make a clean corpse, Helen thought. From the first she had more or less known that they would kill her as well as Ralph; they would have to because she knew their faces and even their names. But why were they keeping her alive? It would have been simpler for them to have killed her at once so that they would not have her on their hands while they waited for Ralph.

They kept her alive to stick a knife into Ralph. That was what Pocker had said. But how could they make her murder her husband? They couldn't. No matter what they did to her, they couldn't.

"You want to get dressed?" Marie asked.

Helen started to reply, but her voice was a croak in her throat. She got out of bed and dragged herself to the closet and put on grey slacks and a white jersey sweater. That was as good an outfit as any in which to die.

During the next hour she recovered a measure of her strength lying on the liv-

ing-room couch. The scene was exactly the same as when she had planned her flight from the bathroom. Georgie sat at the window, Marie read a magazine, Pocker listened to the football game.

Incredibly that game was still on, though a nightmare eternity had passed since its beginning.

"How about some food?" Georgie said.

Dutifully Helen rose. Her body seemed to have too much weight and it was an effort to move her arms, but she could prepare a meal and serve it. They ate, heartily, but she herself couldn't touch a thing, and it was not only because her jaw hurt.

Night fell while she was in the kitchen washing the dishes. She and Ralph would not see daylight again.

Suddenly she became immobile, both hands buried deep in the soapy water. Her fingers were closed over one of the steak knives in the basin. Perhaps it was with a knife like this that they intended to somehow make her kill Ralph. Its blade was thin and sharp; it was the kind of weapon a woman in a murderous rage would use on her husband.

If that knife could kill Ralph, why couldn't it kill one of them?

She would get a chance to use it only once, and there were three. Georgie was the important one, the leader, the man who had brought the others here through his hate of Ralph. With him dead . . .

Pocker was leaning against the door-jamb—her guard. She continued to wash the dishes.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Knife

HER CHANCE came when she was drying the dishes. She held one of the steak knives under the towel as she carried plates to the cupboard. Her back was to Pocker. She put the plates on the shelf and before turning slipped the knife under the waistband of her slacks. She pulled her jersey sweater over the wooden handle and returned to the sink.

A few hours before she had been horrified at the thought of plunging a pair of scissors into Marie. Much had happened since then; she had become a different



woman. Almost calmly, as she continued to dry dishes, she planned how to take a human life.

There was a defective table lamp in the bedroom. Two days ago she had plugged it in and blown out the fuse that controlled the bedroom and living room lights. Ralph had told her that there was a short in the wire and that he would fix it, but he hadn't got around to it. Now that frayed wire became tremendously important.

She went out to the living room. Pocker settled himself at the radio.

"You fools!" Helen burst out. "Ralph will never come back."

Nobody paid attention to her.

"I can't stand this," she said. "I never harmed any of you. It's Ralph you want." Her voice broke. "Why don't you let me alone?" she sobbed.

Georgie glanced at her from the window and said nothing. Marie didn't raise her head from the magazine. Pocker turned the radio up louder.

"Listen," Helen wailed. "Will you promise to let me alone if I tell you where Ralph is?"

That focused their attention on her. Georgie's facial muscles tightened.

"Sure," Georgie said. "Tell me."

"I won't tell them," Helen said. "Pocker twisted my arm and hit me and wants you to whip me. I don't trust Marie. But you're a gentleman, Georgie. You've treated me well."

Georgie said, "Don't worry about them. If I make a deal with you, they'll stick to it too."

"No," Helen said wildly. "I don't trust them. I'll tell you in confidence if you'll promise to let me go."

She stood swaying, hugging herself, and her eyes were not quite sane. Georgie smiled a little, as if telling himself that fear had driven her into hysteria and that he had nothing to lose and maybe a lot to gain by humoring her.

"It's a deal, Mrs. Fiske," he drawled.

She led him into the bedroom and closed the door.

"You promise you'll let me go?" she demanded.

"Better than that, Mrs. Fiske. Tell me where Ralph is and we'll get out of here and you'll never see us again."

He lied, of course. His handsome face

was impassive, but it was a liar's face. In a moment it would be a dead face.

She moved closer to him, lowered her voice. "He's in New York. I don't know why he went, but he said he'd stay a week. He left his address in case I needed him."

Skin tightened over Georgie's cheekbones. "What's the address?"

There was only a foot of space between them. He was watching her face and didn't notice her right hand under her sweater. Her fingers curled about the wooden handle of the steak knife. "You won't break your word?" she insisted, intolerable tension making her voice shrill and quivering.

"My word of honor," he said soothingly. "As soon as you tell me the address—"

That was when she struck. The knife, never seen by him, came up between them, and she pushed it into his heart. The point struck bone, slid by; the blade went in up to the handle.

He uttered a horrible gurgling sound. His hand moved toward her, then fell away. All of him was falling away from her. For an instant bulging eyes in which the pupils seemed to have vanished stared at her, and she saw blood spurt past the knife and spray her white jersey. Then his shoulders struck the bed. He rolled off it to the floor and came to rest at her feet, and then she heard Pocker's voice.

"Georgie?" Pocker called above radio music. He had heard that dying gurgle but evidently did not understand what it was. "Hey, Georgie?"

There were two windows, but she could not open the screen and climb through before Pocker would be on her. And there was no lock on the door.

The lamp! It stood on the bedside table on the other side of the bed. She ran around to the foot of the bed and snatched up the defective electric cord.

"Georgie, why don't you answer?" Pocker was saying.

The outlet was in the baseboard. She knelt, shoved the plug in. The overcharged current crackled, and abruptly she was in darkness.

"What the hell!" Pocker said. "The lights went out."

The door opened. She could not see it open because the blown fuse had cut off the living room lights also, but she could



hear the hinges creak and the doorknob slowly turn.

"Georgie!" Pocker said.

SHE KNEW that in another moment he would strike a match. Too late she told herself she would have been better off going through a window at once. On hands and knees she crouched behind the bed. And suddenly there was a glow in the room.

"My God!" Pocker said. "Marie, look!"

Marie must have followed him into the bedroom in darkness, for her voice was right there. "Is he dead?" she said brokenly.

"Yeah." The glow died. Pocker didn't strike another match. "She must've gone through the window."

Helen heard him run out of the room, across the living room. She heard the front door slam. He had decided that there was more chance to intercept her by going that way than by following her through the window.

It was quiet then. Marie was still in the room, and Marie was bigger than she, stronger, and could hold her for the few seconds it would take Pocker to return. But perhaps in the darkness she could slip past.

Helen rose at the side of the bed, soundlessly stepped out of her shoes. Somebody walked in the room. Marie was going out, perhaps for a match. Helen waited for the space of two heart-beats, then on stockinged feet she moved around the foot of the bed.

She knelt. Her groping hands touched a leg. She felt past the hip to the chest and she touched the horrible stickiness of blood. Digging her teeth into her lower lip, she forced herself to fumble under the dead man's shoulder. The right shoulder because he was left-handed. She pulled the heavy gun clumsily out of its armpit holster.

Dim light flowed through the open bedroom doorway. Helen spun on her knees, holding the gun awkwardly.

The doorway remained empty. She realized then that the light came from the kitchen or bathroom; both those rooms were on a different circuit from the bedroom and living room. So Marie would

see her if she tried to get out through the door.

But she had a gun now. She had never before fired one, never even held one in her hand, but she knew that guns had safety catches. Her thumb felt something protrude slightly, high on the stock. She exerted pressure and it moved.

She was about to straighten up when light appeared at the window on the opposite side of the bed. She cowered lower beside the man she had killed.

It was not much light, only a thin stream filtered through the screen. Probably a fountain pen flashlight, and that would be Pocker holding it.

"Marie!" Pocker shouted. "Both screens are locked on the inside. Where are you, Marie?"

"I'm at the front door."

"Did she get out that way?"

"No. I think she's still in the bedroom."

Helen raised the gun and shot at the light on the other side of the screen.

Shockingly, the gun leaped violently in her grip. She felt a searing blast on her face. Almost the recoil had put the bullet into her own head.

The light at the window had vanished when she looked again.

"She's got Georgie's gun!" Pocker yelled.

Then it was so quiet that she could hear her heart thump. Pocker could not guess how far she had come from hitting him; he knew only that she had a gun and he was wary of it.

Gripping the gun with both hands, she strained to hear them, but she heard only her own labored breathing. If she tried to get out through the window, Pocker might still be outside or he might come up behind her through the bedroom door. If she tried to get out through the front door, he might be there. She was trapped. There was no way out.

Light knifed into the room.

It started from the door and slid off a wall and shifted slowly toward her. Helen couldn't see who held it; there was only an arm holding the flashlight past the door-jamb. She thought that it must be the flashlight that had been on the pantry shelf, which meant Marie who had gone into the kitchen.



Then the beam was fully on her, and in panic she rose from her knees an instant before Pocker, who was still outside the window, shot through the screen. Perhaps the abrupt movement saved her; at any rate, he missed. There was no escape from the light and from bullets except out of the bedroom, and terror drove her straight toward the core of the beam.

The light vanished. Momentum carried Helen into the living room.

Light flowed in from the kitchen, but she didn't see Marie. Afraid of Helen's gun, she was probably cowering behind furniture, but Marie didn't matter. Helen knew that her one chance to live depended on getting through the front door before Pocker reached it from the outside.

As her hand gripped the doorknob, she became aware of a glow in the front window—brighter than could be made by a flashlight. She had no time to think about it. She tore open the door, and stared at the harsh glare of headlights.

Ralph had come home.

He had heard the shots. He was running toward the cottage in the radiance of the headlights.

Pocker had rounded the corner of the cottage.

"Ralph!" she shrieked.

Ralph stopped running. He didn't see Pocker swing toward him; he didn't know that death was in Pocker's hand. He said, "What's wrong, Helen?" and hurried toward her.

The gun was jumping in Helen's hands. She seemed to be acting without volition as she held the gun with both hands and ran toward Pocker. The gun kept jumping and roaring.

Pocker did a weird dance. He took a step to his right and a step backward, and then he was facing her and his gun lifted. She was hardly more than ten feet from him now, but her gun had stopped jumping and roaring though she kept squeezing the trigger. It didn't occur to her that she had exhausted its bullets.

Pocker's gun exploded in his unsteady hand. She felt something like a fist slam her right hip and she felt herself slowly crumple.

Everything was getting farther away. Somebody had joined Pocker at the edge of the headlights, and they appeared to

embrace. Ralph struggling with him, she thought, and then she blacked out.

THE POLICE had come and gone, but there was one who remained. He was as solid and stolid as any policeman, and the others had called him lieutenant. He was at the phone.

Helen lay on the couch, and Ralph sat at her side. A doctor had bandaged her hip and told her that the bullet had only cut a groove in the flesh.

The detective-lieutenant hung up the phone. "Marie was picked up in the city," he told them. "She cut and ran when she saw that Pocker was too badly wounded to have a chance against you. As for Pocker, he'll probably die from the two slugs you pumped into him, Mrs. Fiske. You did a good job."

Helen shuddered. One dead and one dying and she had done that to both of them.

"I still don't understand," she said. "Darling, why did Georgie hate you so?"

The detective looked away as if embarrassed. But Ralph met her gaze; the lines of strain dug deeper into his rugged face.

"I should've told you before you married me," Ralph said, "but I was afraid of losing you. I used to work with Georgie and Georgie was a crook. So was I."

Helen smiled wanly. "Marie told me that and I believed her, but it didn't matter."

The lieutenant said, "Your husband's okay, Mrs. Fiske. Five years ago he made a mistake—saw a chance to make a quick buck and joined a confidence gang. When he found himself getting in deeper and deeper, he tried to pull out, but Georgie Gridley was the leader, and you don't walk out on Georgie, especially if you know too much. So your husband went to the D.A. and spread it out. Georgie went up for eight years, and others in the gang got lesser terms. I can assure you your husband's been straight as an arrow since then."

"And Georgie never got over his hate," she said.

"Not Georgie," Ralph said, "and he had four years in jail to build up his hate still more. He pulled wires and got out on parole in half the time he was supposed to. I hadn't any idea it would be so soon."



His hand, holding hers, tightened. "He made you go through hell because of me."

She lay back, thinking of the night and day with the quiet, handsome man. "It would have been much worse if he hadn't protected me from Pocker," she muttered. "In a way Georgie was a gentleman."

Ralph laughed bitterly. "Sure, he would've begged your pardon before he murdered you."

"Cold as an iceberg for all his hate," the lieutenant said. "Figured every step of the way. He couldn't just burn Ralph down. We'd find out that Ralph was the man who'd sent him up, and that Georgie had got out of jail only two days ago, and we'd have him. He had to play it smart. His idea was to stick a kitchen knife into Ralph and then choke you to death with his hands and leave you both on the floor here with Ralph's blood on you. When the cops barged in, it would look like a domestic quarrel that had ended with the wife knifing the husband and the husband living long enough to strangle the wife. Maybe we cops wouldn't have liked it, but we'd

never have been able to prove it hadn't been that way. The only flaw in Georgie's scheme was that he had to have both of you die at about the same time or the medical examiner would get wise. That's why he had to keep you alive here until Ralph showed up."

"Georgie made another mistake," Ralph told the lieutenant. "He didn't take into account the kind of guts Helen had." He grinned down at her with a kind of awe.

The lieutenant took his hat off the table and twirled it. "That's quite a wife you have there. A squad of cops couldn't have done a better job on those two."

"They gave me no choice," Helen said, not quite understanding why they were so surprised at a woman fighting for the man she loved. Abruptly her mind shifted to something else. "Darling, did you get the job?"

"I sure did, sweetheart, and with a fat drawing account."

She pulled his head down to her and kissed him. Neither of them heard the lieutenant depart.

THE END

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## DETECTIVE TALES

(Continued from page 38)

influence, and he had to hunch over the wheel to better his vision.

What he saw set his teeth on edge. The black coupe was parked at the curb. So was the station wagon. The four men of Max's goon squad stood on the sidewalk chewing the fat with the redhead. Evidently the group was waiting for the blonde to come out of the alley.

The gayly decorated sedan stood out like a sore thumb. There was a concerted rush for the two cars. Clore made the turn into River Drive on two wheels. The sedan was fast. In six blocks he crashed five red lights. Luckily the sedan could be seen a mile away and the drivers who had the green light were able to stand on their brakes. Screeching tires left black skid marks on the concrete.

A police whistle shrilled. Clore ventured a quick glance into the rear-view mirror. Through the star-studded rear window he saw the cop dash to a call box to phone headquarters. The station wagon was a block behind. The coupe was right behind it.

Clore had outmaneuvered himself. He was in the center of the drive overhauling traffic to his right. There was no chance to turn right or left into the seclusion of a side street. He jammed the accelerator flat with the floor boards. The sedan surged forward and passed a long line of cars trailing a slow-moving furniture van.

The straightaway was clear. The heavy sedan began to build up speed. The speedometer wavered around 80. Clore's forehead was inches from the windshield as he stared tensely through the star-clustered glass.

In the far distance a winking red light appeared. The cops! The park police, radioed from town, were coming out on the causeway to intercept the sedan.

Clore took his big foot off the accelerator and poised it above the brake pedal. He suffered a hell of indecision, didn't see the station wagon close the gap to a scant fifteen feet.

At that precise moment Anita Van Wyker regained consciousness. She discovered that she was handcuffed to a corpse. Her red lips parted and she let out a blood-curdling scream that would



## HOW CRAZY CAN YOU GET?

have shamed the high note of a fire siren.

Clore stomped on the brake pedal. The wheels locked. Tires smoked and squealed. Hoke in the station wagon lost his head. His foot hit the floor boards instead of the brake.

The collision was mighty. It sounded like two locomotives in a head-on encounter. The sedan skidded right. Clore fought the wheel. The blonde renewed her screaming. A telephone pole appeared like a huge baseball bat swinging at the radiator of the car. There was a thunderous crack. The hood came up like a lid and draped the windshield. The sedan toppled right and rolled down the rocky embankment. It rolled over six times and came to rest upside down with the smoking tires spinning like crazy.

Clore had been thrown through an open window. He was face down in a pile of cinders. The blonde's hysterical screams knifed the air. Cars were squealing to a stop on the road and the rush of feet down the embankment started small rock slides.

Clore staggered to his feet and brushed imaginary cobwebs from his eyes.

The redhead faced him! Clore uttered a bull-like bellow of rage and jerked up his fists. The redhead's left hook scored. Clore's head rocked as he churned the air with his fists. The redhead stepped forward and uncorked his sizzling right uppercut. It connected. Clore's head whipped back. He staggered backward off balance and the base of his skull struck a spinning hub cap of the sedan. He fell into total darkness.

**Y**OUNG Assistant District Attorney Ames had hankered for a stage career. "The best-laid schemes of mice and men..." he began.

"A refrigerator," said John Van Wyker proudly.

Ames glared. Clore and Van Wyker sat side by side on a wooden bench.

Ames said, "For want of a nail, the shoe was lost..."

"With a seventy-pound freezer compartment," said Van Wyker.

"What about it?" Clore asked.

"I gave it to the wife of the detective you hit."



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## DETECTIVE TALES

"Oh," Clore said.

"Shut up!" Ames cried. The two men  
obliged. The assistant D. A. waved his  
arms dramatically. "Your wife has con-  
fessed!" he said. "The ordeal of being  
handcuffed to the woman she had mur-  
dered was a psychological shock of the first  
magnitude. She is temporarily insane.  
The pictures of your misconduct were  
only a red herring. It gave you ample  
motive to murder the maid who was in a  
position to give false but damaging testi-  
mony of your moral misconduct. You  
would have been put away as criminally  
insane."

"The light goes on when you open the  
door," Van Wyker said.

Ames' eyes began to glaze. "With you  
committed to a sanitarium, your wife  
would have gotten complete control of the  
money. You may wonder why she didn't  
seek your life. The answer is simple.  
At your death, your estate will go to char-  
ity. It was a precaution your grandmother  
took to protect your life. Because of your  
—ah—peculiarities, you do not possess the  
legal stature, unfortunately, to execute a  
bona fide will."

Van Wyker nodded agreement. "It  
makes a hundred and eighty ice cubes,  
too," he said. "The detective's wife liked  
it."

Clore glowered fiercely. "Wait till I get  
that scurvy redhead," he growled. "I'll  
murder the louse."

"You better not," Van Wyker said.  
"You can't win now."

"Why not?"

"Well, if you do beat him up, he's still  
got you two out of three," explained Van  
Wyker. "So you better come along with  
me and help me string beads."

"We in there again?" Hank Clore  
asked sadly.

The fat man nodded. "Just for a vaca-  
tion. Let's go string beads."

The two men got up, joined hands and  
walked out of the room like two kids  
bound for kindergarten. They backed the  
door closed. Ames blinked, took a deep  
breath, shook his head sadly. He put on  
his hat and went to the door. It was  
locked. He rattled the knob, then beat the  
thick wood.

"Let me out!" he cried. "Let me out!"



## TOO BEAUTIFUL TO LIVE!

(Continued from page 60)

back. She staggered toward them, as though thrust into their arms by invisible hands. An expression of blank surprise crossed her face, then her features twisted into a mask of agony and she fell. Martha screamed terribly.

"Lights off!" Eddie shouted. The lights were jerked off.

"Court behind here," Herb raged. Martha heard them running, blundering against furniture in the blackness. The door slammed and slammed again, and a strangely brittle silence closed over the dark room.

Katie moaned. Martha trembled and her teeth chattered. Herb and Eddie were shouting to each other in the rear court:

"Toward Seventh Avenue! He's not in here!"

Katie moaned again. Martha knelt down and her shaking fingers felt their way across the rug until they touched Katie's leg. "Katie? Katie, can you hear? It's Martha, can you hear me?"

"Hurts. . . Gosh awful it hurts," Katie gasped.

"Who was it, Katie? You've got to tell me, you've got to!"

"Was Monty. . . Always nice. . . Don't know how he could do this to me. . . Monty, always nice. . ." She breathed sharply in the darkness. "Hurts when I breathe."

"I know. I'm sorry. I don't know what . . ." Martha listened. Herb's and Eddie's voices had gone far away. Martha trembled again. "Lie still, Katie, and I'll phone a hospital. They'll do something and you'll be all right." She rose and felt her way along the wall toward the front door; the light switch would surely be there somewhere.

As her fingers slid across the door, she felt it starting to open. She halted. "Eddie?" she whispered sharply. For a moment the pressure on the door stopped. There was no answer, and then the door began to open more widely and Martha was terrified. She tried to back away. She bumped into a chair or table and it overturned. She screamed.

The light came on blindingly. Montgomery was standing there with a gun in his hand, his dark hair tumbled across his

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## DETECTIVE TALES

forehead and his black eyes blazing. For an instant he too was blinded by the sudden light. He was blinking straight at Martha, yet he seemed not to see her. It was that instant that saved her. She seized one of the broad cushions of the couch and flung it at the light. Just as the globe smashed, Montgomery fired. Plaster splattered and stung Martha's cheek. Darkness flooded the room. She fell to her knees and crawled along the wall. She heard Montgomery plunging after her in desperate fury, upsetting chairs, kicking tables. The gun roared again. Kate moaned. Montgomery halted. Bleak silence gathered. He was trying to locate the moan, Martha knew. And if he did, Katie would be killed.

Martha crept along the wall with agonized caution. Her fingers touched Katie again. She pulled, trying to drag Katie back behind the couch. Katie moaned again in pain, and Montgomery came threshing toward them. Something struck Martha's nose and sharp pain sliced into her nerves. She crumpled across Katie and screamed wildly. Footsteps were pounding nearer on the pavement. Martha kept screaming. A rough hand closed over her shoulder and jerked. She twisted her head. Her teeth sank into flesh and bone, and Montgomery roared. The door burst open.

Montgomery ripped his hand from Martha's teeth. She heard him running. The shattered glass of the rear window spilled as he leaped through, and then a gun began to blaze at the front door. Montgomery cried out thickly, but his cry was lost in the methodical roaring of the gun. Herb knew a good routine when he found it.

The gun became quiet. Several moments passed, then a sliver of glass dropped from the window and made a bell-like sound as it fell.

"Eddie?" Martha breathed. "Is that you, Eddie?"

"Where are you?"

"Down here. I'm scared, Eddie."

Herb struck a match and stalked briskly to the rear window. Eddie struck a match and knelt over Martha. Herb gave a contented grunt from the rear window.

"Are you all right, funny face? Look



## TOO BEAUTIFUL TO LIVE!

at me, baby," Eddie was begging. "That guy didn't—"

"He kicked me on the nose. Then I bit him."

"And then you yelled," Eddie said gently. Herb turned on the light in the kitchenette and stole a globe from the bedroom. People were crowding in from the outer corridor.

"Just take it easy. I'm taking care of this," Herb announced firmly. "Back away, there. Somebody call an ambulance." He knelt over Katie and looked. "It's not where it's going to hurt anything important. All right, cut out the shoving. Yep, yep," he informed Eddie, "the way I see it, he didn't figure the steal would be discovered so fast, and he'd just drop in and put Katie away. Only we got here first. Yep. Well, I guess Herb showed him. . . ."

Eddie wasn't paying any attention. He was staring straight at Martha, and there was a very queer look on his face. Then he began to grin.

"What's the matter with you?" she demanded. "I don't like you when you look like this."

"Get up and walk over to that mirror, honey," he said pleasantly.

Martha did. She gasped. Her nose—her lovely, beautiful nose—was not only blood-stained; it was definitely crooked.

"Broke, I'd say," Eddie observed with a note of satisfaction.

She spun around. She felt terrible. "What's so funny? Look at it! Nobody will ever want me to model anything now!"

"Nope. Guess they won't," he agreed. "In fact, I'd guess your chances are mighty bad. No more rich old boys, polo ponies, yachts, fancy stuff. Nothing but a mighty funny-looking nose, honey, and—"

She hit him. "I hate you," she said. Eddie kept right on smiling.

"But you take me, for instance, I always loved you for your brain, anyway."

"Oh, I hate you so much, Eddie Daniels! I wouldn't—" She looked at him uncertainly. "Do you honestly love me for my brain, Eddie?"

"Honest, honey," he said softly.

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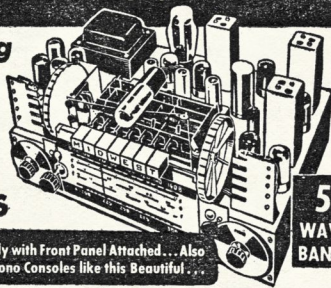
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## DETECTIVE TALES

(Continued from page 71)

fastened to the ground he made his way to the foot of the gallows.

When Wakeman raised his head and saw Arthur Rettman standing beside him he thought for an instant that he was was deep in some grisly nightmare.

"You!" he cried. "Get out . . ." And then, with a shock, he noticed the man, his shaved head, the open collar, his arms bound behind his back. Rettman was no longer the would-be executioner, but the man bound for the other end of the rope, the man who had committed murder.

"That's why you wanted this job!" Wakeman cried. "You would have enjoyed it! You didn't want to execute justice—you wanted a permit to murder!"

Wakeman hanged Rettman without flinching and said that after that, although he never performed any more hangings, his conscience was clear about his experiences.

"The job of hangman," he said, "should always be filled by someone who hates the job!"

(Continued from page 105)

searched his home. In the bottom of an old trunk they found a letter from the second Mrs. Carnahan to her sister.

It had never been mailed. The professor had probably intercepted it and instead of destroying it, he absent-mindedly hid it. Its contents were damning. "I wonder if I only imagine it," Mrs. Carnahan had written, "but sometimes after I take the medicine George gives me, the pupils of my eyes widen. Other times, they become mere pinpoints. Whenever it happens, George gives me more medicine. I feel very strange inside."

Carnahan broke when presented with this letter. He gave the police a complete account of his two poisons. The professor was tried and convicted of murder. In June, 1928, as he was being prepared for his execution, he sent a note to a former colleague at the University. "Professors must avoid absent-mindedness—it's a killing disease."



## THAT DEADLY DAILY DOUBLE

(Continued from page 84)

click. "Yes?" Becker said. Steve heard a metallic voice replying:

"Second floor on stairs B."

"Okay." Something clicked again, then Becker tapped on the wall. "Nurse," he explained to Steve. "He'll spot her leaving."

Then Steve heard the adjoining door close, and footsteps faded in the hall. Steve began to listen. He could hear the rhythm of his own pulse-throb. He felt perspiration on his lips. He tried to imagine where Les was this moment, what he was thinking, what he would do.

Becker's fingers tightened on his arm, and Steve heard the soft release of the latch of the next door. The almost soundless sound of footsteps came through the wall. Steve held his breath and his mind was a panorama of images: What was Les doing? How would he try to kill again? Would he make a sound, a shot?

There was no sound save one muffled gasp, then Steve perceived: Les had touched Artie and realized he was dead, that it was a trap.

The footsteps pounded to the door. It slammed open and the footsteps drummed into the corridor. Then everything boiled into fury at the next moment. One shot, two, then a third blasted the corridor. A scream, high and raw and tortured, split through the shots. Then came a bumping sound that seemed to descend.

"Down the stairs," Becker exclaimed. "He's falling, hurt!" He threw the door open. The corridor was full of fumes, and two detectives were just reaching the stairs. There they stopped. Becker stopped and Steve skidded to a halt behind him. He looked down.

Les Marshall was crumpled on the landing. His eyes were open and he was staring up at them glassily. His fingers were open, the knife that he had been clutching lying by his side. The fingers twitched on emptiness and his throat labored helplessly and he kept starting at them as if they had played some grotesque joke on him and he didn't understand. Then his fingers twitched again and stiffened, and the stare in his eyes lost its life. The joke was over.

THE END

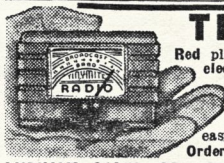
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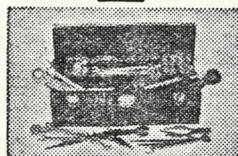
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## DETECTIVE TALES

(Continued from page 88)

hand and at the cryptic lines the man had managed to trace on the bare floor. D-o-c. Thorne had tried to leave a message behind him, naming his murderer, and he had managed to trace out only those three letters before consciousness had left him.

Lanning bent, jerking open his medical bag. He picked up Steve Thorne's hand, and instantly dropped it. There was no pulse in that hand. The flesh was cold to his touch, with rigor mortis already beginning to set in.

Lanning pushed to his feet, staring down at the body on the floor. "Why—" His voice was slow, hoarse. "Why, this man has been dead for hours."

"That's right," the deputy said. "That's right, Doc."

**PAUL LANNING** was slow to absorb that. His mind was a sponge soaked through with fear and dread. It was slow to register what the deputy sheriff had said. And then understanding finally built its implacable pattern in his mind, and he shuddered. He turned and looked at the deputy dully.

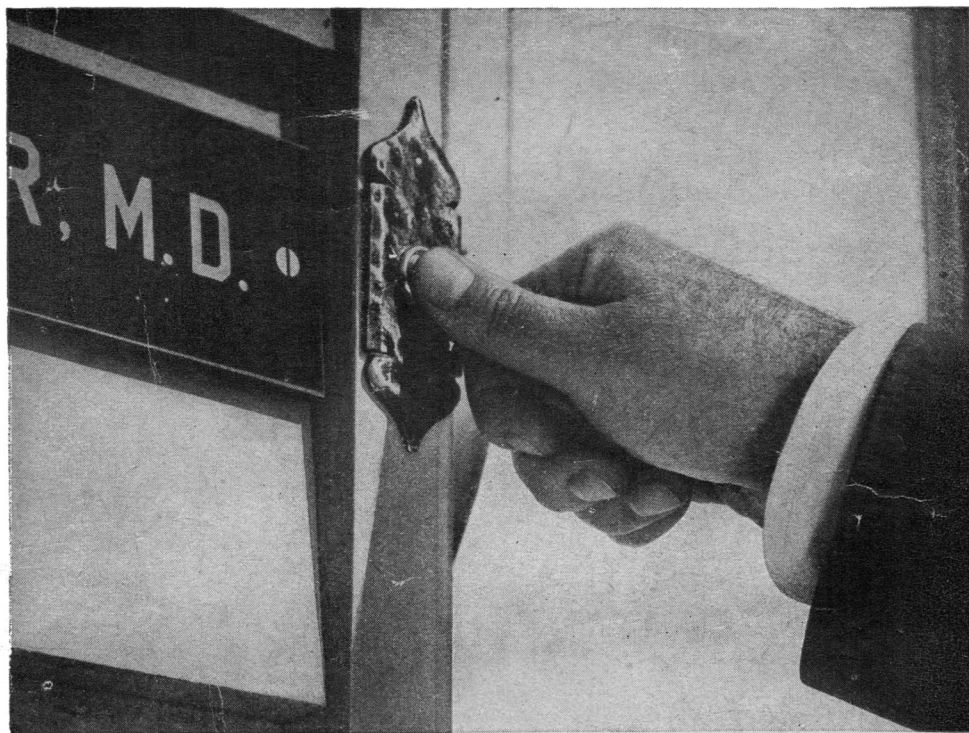
The officer was smiling, but his hand was on his gun. "I guess you know how this is, don't you?"

Lanning only stared at the man, stupidly. Yes, he knew. He could look into the black hell he had created and see the horror of his own future staring back at him. He knew.

"I telephoned every doctor on the lake that I could locate," the deputy was saying. "I telephoned them all when I saw what Thorne had tried to write on the floor, and I told them the same thing I told you—to get over here as soon as they could. *But I didn't tell them where to come!* You're the only one who knew where to come, Lanning. So you can see how this is for you. It's not good, is it? And it'll be worse for you later."

Paul Lanning closed his eyes. It didn't help. He could still see his own fate on the screen of his mind, like something etched by acid, implacable in its black promise. Even with his eyes tightly closed, he could see it, and there was no escape.





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2. A painless lump or thickening, especially in the breast, lip or tongue.
3. Progressive change in the color or size of a wart, mole or birthmark.
4. Persistent indigestion.
5. Persistent hoarseness, unexplained cough, or difficulty in swallowing.
6. Bloody discharge from the nipple or irregular bleeding from any of the natural body openings.
7. Any change in the normal bowel habits.



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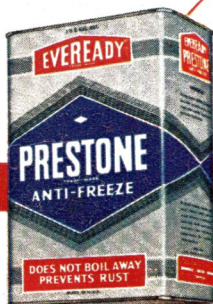
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