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by **G. T. FLEMING-
ROBERTS**



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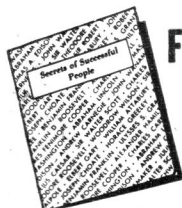


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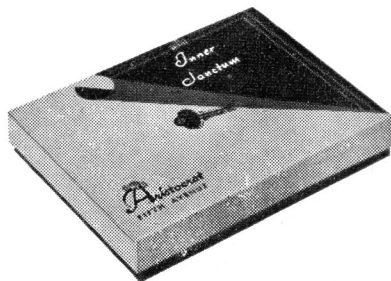
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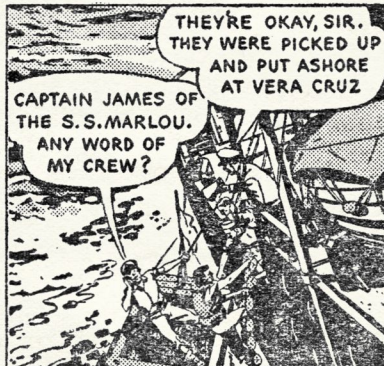
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DETECTIVE

15
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TALES

25
CENTS

VOL. FORTY-THREE

August, 1949

NUMBER ONE

Three Suspense-Packed Murder Novels

1. **CLARA'S PRIVATE CORPSE!**.....*G. T. Fleming-Roberts* 8
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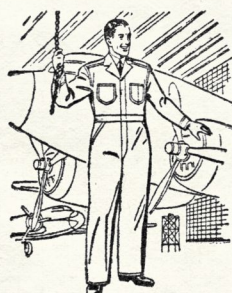
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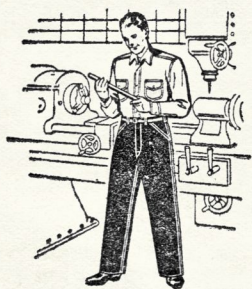
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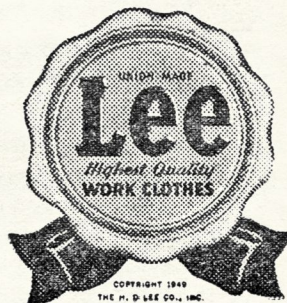
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POPULAR FILMS

Good Movie-Going For Fiction Fans

Ted Palmer Picks:

For Comedy-Romance: "The Beautiful Blonde from Bashful Bend" with Betty Grable, Cesar Romero, Rudy Vallee and Olga San Juan (20th Century-Fox). Technicolor.



Beautiful, blonde, gun-happy Freddie Jones (Betty Grable) gets out of town fast after accidentally shooting the Honorable Judge Alfalfa O'Toole in the seat of his pants. Fleeing on a train, she is mistaken by the conductor for "little Hilda Swandumper from Bashful Bend" on her way to teach at Snake City. This is good enough for Freddie—only she knows nothing about school teaching. Charlie Hingelman (Rudy Vallee), under her charms, gives her a few lessons in teaching at night. Freddie's past, however, in the form of Blackie (Cesar Romero), catches up with her. Through a succession of hilarious events, the town is set afeudin', and Freddie gets taken back for trial. She almost goes free when Blackie offers to marry her, but Freddie finishes that by shooting at the judge again. Where and when? Why, in the end, of course. *Good spoofing with lots of broad laughs.*

• • •

For Adventure—"Illegal Entry" with Howard Duff, Marta Toren and George Brent (Universal).



To assist Immigration Inspector Dan Collins (George Brent) break up a gang that smuggles aliens across the Mexican border by plane, Burt Powers (Howard Duff) gets hired by the gang as a pilot. Lucky for him that Anna Duvak (Marta Toren)—an unwilling gang member—tips him off on a trap to test his loyalty. Otherwise, he wouldn't be able to break the gang up and get the girl. *A semi-documentary with good, fast action.*

For Murder Mystery—"Manhandled" with



Dorothy Lamour, Sterling Hayden, and Dan Duryea (Paramount).

A hard-pressed author, worried about a recurrent nightmare in which he kills his wife for her jewelry, visits a psychiatrist to get things off his chest. The psychiatrist's secretary, Merl Kramer (Dorothy Lamour), mentions this dream to Karl Benson (Dan Duryea), a private investigator, and a chain of events are set off which lead to murder of the wife, theft of the jewels and some of the dirtiest double-dealing you've seen in some time. Sterling Hayden is the insurance investigator who works on the case. *A film, well-played for suspense, with a neat, ironical wind-up.*

• • •

For Sports—"The Stratton Story" with James Stewart and June Allyson (MGM).



One of the pluckiest stories in sports is retold in this film version of the life of Monty

Stratton—brilliant young Chicago White Sox pitcher who lost his leg in a hunting accident after the 1938 major league season. Overcoming this handicap, Stratton learned to use an artificial leg, and in 1946 pitching in the East Texas League, he won 18 games. Although Hollywood over-sentimentalizes the story, this remains a good baseball picture. Jimmy Stewart plays Stratton, June Allyson, his wife, while Gene Bearden, Jimmy Dykes, Bill Dickey and Mervyn Shea lend authenticity to baseball sequences. *It makes a pleasant evening.*

• • •

For A Western—"The Younger Brothers" with Wayne Morris and Janis Page (Warners). Technicolor.



The four Younger brothers, who were once the "Dead End" kids of the West, along with Jesse James and his gang, find it's tough to go straight herein. A vindictive police officer, leading a misguided posse, and a beautiful, female outlaw leader both try to get the boys in trouble. Some good straight-shooting, hard riding and quick thinking save the day. *It has all you want in a Western.*

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Dynamic
Crime-Detective Novel

CLARA'S

CHAPTER ONE

Lady With a Past

THEY finally found a place in a two-story, red-brick apartment house in Broad Ripple. A couple of stiff little trees in the otherwise barren front lawn tried to account for the legend *The Maples* deeply incised in the limestone lintel. Close to transportation, close to stores and a movie . . . Close to

By G. T. FLEMING-ROBERTS



PRIVATE CORPSE!

Out of her nightmare past came Gaynor . . . to turn into living hell the life of a girl who could hide everything from her husband—but the corpse across the hall!



In the beam of the flashlight he glimpsed the gun in her hand. Her eyes were dark and hard.

murder, for that matter, though the ad hadn't mentioned that.

A furniture company delivered as many French provincial pieces as you can possibly use in a Murphy-bed living room, and there they were—Mr. and Mrs. Hugh F. Scott, at home after June 5th.

A door to shut out the past, she had thought. The past could never find her here. A new name, a new address in a

big city, and Gaynor would never find her.

"Oh, Hugh, it's so wonderful!" she'd said with a kind of a sob.

He had grinned with embarrassment. Nobody else seemed to think he was wonderful. A swatch of tan gabardine, a snap-brim straw hat, a brown leather briefcase that went forth each weekday morning at eight and showed up again around six in the evening—that was about all he was without her. She was the one. Clara. A little thing, trim and quick, a kind of a lilt in her walk, her brown hair fluffed back from her fresh, eager face, her large brown eyes bright with promise.

But there was something bothering her. He didn't know what it was, and that bothered *him*. He'd noticed it first one evening when they dropped in at Meegs' Drugstore for a coke. They sat in one of the booths, on the same side of the table. They could hold hands better that way. They could share their secret better. With the world they could share it, as though they had a patent on love that defied imitation. Then one of her glances missed his—he had his nose in his glass at the time, going after the crushed ice—and her hand in his was suddenly unresponsive. Startled, he put the glass down and looked at her sharply. Her face was . . . different. Strained. Her rouge edged with pallor. Her eyes wide and still.

"What is it? What's the matter?" he asked.

She rediscovered him then—for an instant he had felt like a stranger—and her hand closed fiercely upon his for a moment.

"Nothing . . ." she began, but he thought there *was* something and looked for it across the big room, cold in fluorescent light. Islands of canned baby food, sun-tan lotion, small electrical appliances. People milling about. Old Mr. Meegs with his shiny eyeglasses, his mouth withered and dour. A middle-aged man buying cigars. A sickly old woman with a prescription blank in her palsied fingers. A kid sneak-reading comic books. A tall, full-breasted brunette standing back of a counter.

Inez. Clara didn't actually speak the

name but felt the shape of it on her lips. Inez back of the counter. It couldn't be anyone else. The same sullen mouth. The same jaded eyes. The same sultry voluptuousness.

Inez and a glimpse through the door of the past. The flare and thunder of gunfire along the mean little street. The girl who crouched there, the boy bleeding to death in her arms. The grim police faces. The matron with fingers like steel. And Gaynor. And the judge with the cast in his right eye. Clairmont and monotony. And after all that, after Clara had paid whatever it was that she owed to whomever she owed it, there was still Gaynor, hounding her, hating her, her stinger deep in his pride. He'd never forget her.

IT ALL came back to her like that, swirling and hideous, there in Meegs Drugstore.

Hugh turned to her, wondering. Her smile struggled.

"The air conditioning gets me sometimes."

"How—gets you?"

"Makes me feel stifled."

"Stifled?"

"Sort of . . . clammy."

Her hand was clammy, all right. He said, "Well, let's get out of here if that's the case."

She nodded quickly. He picked up the soda check, carried it to the counter where he gave his dime to the tall, sultry brunette in the red sweater. By that time Clara was waiting for him on the sidewalk, flirting with him through the plate-glass doors.

He went out laughing, but his mind was busy. There had been something there, at Meegs. It was like a speck in his drink, elusive and half submerged, and he left it there. It would come to the surface some time.

Some time. Specifically, September 15th, the date of the murder. Their fourth anniversary—fourth month, that is. Clara savored time in small morsels, making it last. Hugh came into the kitchenette that morning, eyes still heavy with sleep. Clara moved around in a filmy cloud of a negligee. She filled his cup for him, then sat on the opposite side of the table,

her hands resting in her lap, fingers tightly laced.

She'd decided to tell him what she ought to have told him in the beginning, shortly after they'd met early that year at Lake Winona. His folks had a cottage there, and Clara had been a waitress at the lodge. She'd just been released from Clairmont, was on parole and subject to Gaynor, and Hugh noticed her and started taking his meals at the lodge for pretty obvious reasons. Never presumptuous, yet he knew what he wanted and was straightforward about it. His mother and father had come up from Indianapolis to meet her—fine, substantial people, they were, devoted to Hugh, more kind to the girl Hugh intended to marry than anyone Clara had ever known. She loved them. She loved Hugh. She admitted as much to Hugh, that night on the wharf when the moonlight speckled the water with silver.

"Then theres nothing to stand in the way," Hugh had said. "You're going with me back to Rockford. Tomorrow. I know a judge over there who'll give us a special dispensation so we can marry at once."

"Rockford?" she'd breathed. That was in Illinois, over the state line. She'd be jumping parole.

"Sure. What's wrong with Rockford? I'm in the office of Mid-Continent Mutual there."

"I—I can't," she'd stammered, thinking at the same time that it was a chance to escape. From the past. From Gaynor. From the whole sordid mess. "I—I—you don't know anything about me, Hugh." She'd tried to tell him. She actually had. "I'm nobody—an orphan. I was brought up in a Home. I—"

"Is that a crime?" He'd laughed. "Come on, honey. I love you. We love each other, and nothing else matters. We won't wait for tomorrow. We'll elope. Leave a note for the folks."

Escape from the past. That was first in her mind. Love was second. It would have been easier to tell him then than it was now, for now love was first. Had she known then that Hugh would shortly be transferred to Indianapolis, within the long reach of Gaynor, she might have hesitated. Now that didn't matter so

much because love came first and security second.

But then she'd seen Inez. Now Hugh had to be told. Suppose he were to go into Meegs' Drugstore—perhaps this very morning—and Inez were to wait on him. Suppose Inez were to say, "I know that little wife of yours, Mr. Scott. We were pals. Sort of schoolmates, in a way . . ." with just the proper inflection so that he'd wonder what sort of a school and start asking questions. . . .

I've got to tell him, she thought. *I'm* the one. It's *got* to be me.

"Hugh . . ."

"Huh?" Not looking at her, his cup to his mouth.

She got up from the table. She moved to his side, stood there with eyes cast down.

"You—you think we'll make it?" That wasn't at all what she wanted to say. But it was something. It was a beginning, anyway.

"Make what?" He put the cup down empty.

"The first year. The hard one."

"Want to bet on it?" He filled his cup from the Silex with one hand, put his left arm about her, just above the curve of her hips.

"Darling, there's something I've got to tell you." Her voice very small. "About . . . me. And about a girl named Inez . . ."

He broke in with one of his early-morning monosyllables. The coffee had got in its work. He remembered what day it was. Swanson was picking him up on the corner. They were going out of town on a claim—some farmer suspected of arson.

He struggled up from the table. "I forgot. Swanson is picking me up. Look, sweet, will it keep?"

The answer to that was all over her upturned face. Anxiety there. It had kept over long. But he couldn't read, or didn't want to just then. He was too pre-occupied.

"I'll be late," he was saying. "Probably won't get away from the office tonight until after seven." He held her close for a moment, stooped for her warm, searching kiss, broke that off, felt immediately guilty that he had broken it off—but Swanson was waiting and he was

the boss. Hugh would have to be punctual.

She followed him into the other room. She held his tan gabardine coat for him, gave him his briefcase and hat. Then his funny half-smile from the doorway, the kiss blown from the tips of his fingers. His tow-colored hair that grew in a kind of drake's tail at the nape of his neck—she noticed that last of all, and then he was gone.

Clara sank into a chair, her happiness dissolving into thin, brittle sweetness.

THAT afternoon the heat poured down. A brassy haze hung over the city, the air still and ominous. Clara intentionally kept behind schedule. She always built her day toward the climax represented by Hugh's homecoming and, since he would be delayed tonight, she did her waiting early.

She was later than usual about dropping in on Miss Adams, the arthritic old maid in the flat at the end of the hall. They chatted a while in the kitchen where Miss Adams was preparing calve's liver for her dinner, and Clara said that was one dish Hugh simply detested, thus forestalling Miss Adams' offer to share the liver with the Scotts. There was a letter Miss Adams wanted Clara to mail on her way to the stores, and she was late about that. Late at the grocery where Willie, the lanky red-haired clerk and delivery man, promised to bring the bulk of her order on his way home. And black clouds that piled up in the western sky gave out rumbling thunder that hurried her back to the Maples.

The rain came at seven. Clara, in her own kitchenette, glanced up from the mixing bowl at the window over the sink. The heavy drops spattered the glass, coasting down the cheeks of her pallid image like tears. Prophetic? She shook that off. She dragged out a trembling smile. Everything was going to be all right. She'd tell Hugh tonight. After dinner. They'd have some of that brandy Miss Adams had given them, and she'd tell him the whole thing. And he'd say, "Why, you poor silly girl, is that what's been eating you?" Or he'd say . . .

Something brushed Clara's ankles. She took a startled backward step, and a shadowy grey shape bounded noiselessly

from beneath her feet and toward the refrigerator. The landlady's big tomcat, and it stood with its back arched and tail flirting.

Clara caught her breath. "You!" She stooped, extended coaxing fingers, and Thomas stopped being coy, came cautiously forward to see what there was in this for him. Clara lunged, caught Thomas, and straightened. Thomas, frightened, clutched at the front of her gay yellow apron with saberlike claws.

She carried the cat into the other room, to the hall door which she had left slightly ajar for cross-ventilation. She toed the door all the way open while trying to separate herself from Thomas.

"You're going home. Don't think you're not."

Thomas thought not. He liked it here. He liked the smell of pot roast from the oven. He clung with his claws and his tail waved in protest.

"Oh, nuts!" Clara got down on her knees on the threshold and disengaged first one and then the other of Thomas' clinging forepaws. As she did this she was dimly aware of somebody watching her from the door of the flat directly opposite. That would be Mr. Brown, she supposed. She'd never met Mr. Brown, but she'd heard that was his name. Right now Mr. Brown was standing in his open door—Clara, in her present position, glimpsed only polished brown oxfords and grey trouser cuffs—and he was laughing, probably at her efforts to get Thomas headed in the right direction.

Clara, her cheeks warm, gave the cat a not too gentle pat that sent him streaking toward the stairs. Her gaze climbed the thick, grey-clad columns of Mr. Brown's legs, lingered on a huge hand hooked to a grey belt, the fingers beating a soundless tattoo.

Her lips parted. Her wide eyes sprang to the round, seemingly jovial face between the stooped and hulking shoulders.

Not Brown. Gaynor.

She stood slowly, her mind numb, her hand clinging to the edge of the door. First Inez. Now Gaynor. A kind of nightmare where screaming was no good. Where flight was no good.

"Small world, isn't it?" Gaynor said.

He was coming toward her, eyes peer-

ing. Narrow, twinkling eyes peering at her through round, steel-rimmed glasses. Her impulse to slam the door in his face came too late, or he divined it. He had his foot wedged in the threshold, a shoulder against the door, and she knew better than to try to pit her strength against his. She knew his strength. Once, coming upon her suddenly in a dark corridor at Clairmont, Gaynor had caught her in his arms and tried to kiss her. She'd been a kid then—seventeen—and Gaynor somewhere in his thirties. She'd hit him with everything that she had, and it wasn't enough. Enough to sting his pride, to make him hate her. Some of the other girls had told Clara she was a fool, that Gaynor was a man to play up to because, if he felt like it, he could give you a bad time. He'd felt like it with Clara. After her release he'd used his official position as parole officer to hound her with unwelcome attentions. He'd bargained, cajoled and threatened, and he had more arms than an octopus. . . .

GAYNOR closed the door quietly behind him. Clara backed away as far as you can in a Murphy-bed living room, to that section of wall between bath and kitchenette doors. Gaynor filled the room with his bigness. His shadow reached her.

"Get—get out of here."

"Oh, come now." Gaynor shook his round, nearly bald head, his smile coldly twinkling. "I'm not connected with the Juvenile Court any more."

Which meant they'd found out what a filthy beast Gaynor was. She watched him savor the odor of pot roast.

"Too bad I've eaten," he said. "Won't you sit down, little lady?"

She didn't sit down. Her eyes loathed him as he eased his bulk into a chair. "What are you doing in Mr. Brown's flat?"

"Brown's?" He shook his head. "Mine. I moved in a week ago—didn't you know?" He chuckled. "Simply forgot to remove Brown's card from the mailbox. An oversight on my part."

Then he'd been spying on her for a week. He'd know all about Hugh—what a fine man Hugh was, the kind of people his mother and father were. A week, in

which Gaynor had strengthened his position, had coiled himself for this, the opportune moment to strike.

"I happened to drop in at Meegs' Drugstore last month, as I frequently do—" he began.

"Inez," Clara said. "She told you."

Gaynor nodded. He lighted a cigarette, his movements deliberate. "I drop in on Inez every once in a while. Like to keep track of my girls. Like to know what they're doing, how they're getting along." He cocked his head shrewdly. "Particularly I like to know if they're making any money."

She got it then. She knew what he was doing. He must have kept a finger on a lot of the girls who had done time at the correction school. Now his business was blackmail. A little bit here, a little bit there. Sometimes quite a little, if a girl had a good job or had made a fortunate marriage. He'd been collecting from Inez, threatening to expose her past to her employer unless she paid up. And Inez would have scarcely revealed Clara's whereabouts unless she'd struck some kind of a bargain with Gaynor. Perhaps she'd thought to buy immunity for herself by selling out Clara.

He said, "I've been wondering . . ."

She thought, Here it comes.

". . . if your husband knows about Johnny Archer? About the tavern stickup he tried to pull the night he got killed? You were in on it—remember?"

"I was not." Her three words were dry and distinct, sure of themselves. That was the only thing she was sure of—that she hadn't known what Johnny was up to, or just what kind of a boy he really was. They'd had a date that night—dinner and dancing at a place out of town. He'd picked her up in his car. He'd told her he had to stop for a minute at a tavern. "To see a guy about something," Johnny had said. "We're late, kid, so just keep the motor running and be ready to shove off." Then Johnny had come running out. There were bursts of gunfire, and Johnny was staggering, falling there in the mean little street. And she'd sprung from the car to go to his assistance, frightened, bewildered, not knowing that Johnny Archer had got exactly what he'd had coming to him. . . .

Gaynor's smile widened. "I'll admit we were rough on you, baby. With your looks you ought to be able to get away with murder."

It was a thought.

She said, "I won't do you any good to tell all that to Hugh. It won't make any difference. Not to Hugh."

"No?" he said softly. "Think it would make any difference to his folks? Le'ssee, his dad is quite a boy—Civic Betterment League, Federation of Churches. Wonder how *they'd* feel if their daughter-in-law had to go to the woman's prison. That's where you'd go this time—not Clairmont. For jumping parole, remember?"

She took a slow, tremulous breath. "What is it you want?" she asked tonelessly.

He considered her carefully. "About all the traffic will bear. About twenty-five bucks a week. You can afford that much. You're putting away money for a house, aren't you?" He laughed. "You see, I've been getting around to your neighbors and asking questions discreetly. I figure twenty-five skins a week wouldn't be missed. Not too much. It's a bargain. It guarantees safety. You see, nobody else knows about your skipping across the state line to marry young Scott. I didn't want to report it."

"You always were generous!" she managed acidly.

He shrugged. "We might drink to that. To my generosity."

"We might." She peeled herself away from the wall, her moist palms last of all. She turned through the door into the kitchenette. I'll give him a drink, she thought. I'll keep him here until Hugh gets home. Then I'll tell Hugh. I'll blurt it out with Gaynor right here. Break clean, and that'll be that. One way or the other, that will be that.

She stepped to the cupboard, took down a glass and the brandy Miss Adams had given them. Her hands had seven thumbs when it came to removing the cork. She opened a drawer, groped for a tool, and came up with . . .

She stared at the thing in her hand. A bradawl, its strong, stocky blade tapered to a needle-sharp point.

She took a shivering breath. . . .

CHAPTER TWO

Drink and Die

IT WAS still raining, though the storm had passed on to the east where it rumbled and flaunted lightning against the black sky. The street was a river that didn't go anywhere, its shores deserted except for Hugh Scott walking home from the bus. He was soaked. He was late—three minutes after eight when he'd passed the last street lamp. Not that Clara would say anything. Not that she would actually care if dinner were spoiled—not after she heard what Swanson had said.

Swanson had said, "Scott, you're all right." Just that. It was a lot for Swanson to say. It was, Scott supposed, as big a compliment as Swanson ever paid anybody. And with Swanson on his way up—he was slated to go to the home office next month—it might mean that Scott was the boy who'd step into the job of chief claims investigator.

Scott's footsteps were buoyant, though squishing, as he entered the vestibule at the Maples and climbed up the stairs. The second floor was quiet, too much static for radios, he presumed. He stepped to the door of his flat, found it locked. He knocked and listened for Clara's footsteps but didn't hear anything.

Maybe she'd stepped out for a moment. To borrow a telephone. Checking on him, maybe. Scott grinned. He thought, Baby, you don't have anything to worry about. When I say I'll be late at the office, that's where I'll be. At the office.

He unlocked the door and went into the living room. The place was hot as an oven, the windows closed because of the storm. Stale cigarette smoke mingled with the aroma of roast meat.

Out in the kitchenette, the table was set. The oven was turned out, the pot roast pretty well browned. On the cabinet top was a cardboard carton of groceries not yet unpacked. There was a glass mixing bowl with an egg in it unbeaten. A recipe book lay open at a chapter on muffins. There was a glass and the bottle of brandy that the old maid down the hall had given them. The bottle was open.

Clara had stepped out for a second, Scott assured himself. She'd be right

back, no doubt. No sense worrying yet.

His attention returned to the brandy bottle. Whenever they had any liquor in the house, they apportioned it—one for you, one for me. It looked as if Clara was one up on him, and he couldn't have that. He poured brandy liberally into the glass, had the glass in his hand when he heard the hall door open and Clara's footsteps approaching. Scott lifted the glass. He'd look at her over it and say, "Been tipping, I see," or something like that.

He looked over the glass at her when she came through the door, but he didn't say anything. Something was wrong. It showed in her face—that white, drawn look that she had, her dark eyes like the well-known cigarette burns in a sheet.

"Hugh, don't!" It was almost a scream. She rushed him, the hood of her raincoat falling back from her head. She dashed the glass from his hand, and almost before it had struck the floor, she'd picked up the bottle and up-ended it over the sink.

"Hey!" he protested. Was she loopy or something?

"Poison." She got that out, gasping. She'd turned on both of the water taps to wash the brandy down the drain. Now she stuck the neck of the bottle under the faucet and they both got spattered—not that it mattered, as wet as they were.

He stared dazedly at her. "Some temperance lecture got into you, but good."

She was shaking her head. She jammed the faucets off. She turned to him, her eyes wild.

"Ask Willie."

"Willie?" He didn't know any Willie. He watched her trembling hand go to the box of groceries. The paper sack on top rattled crisply under her touch.

"Willie—he brings the groceries. He was here."

"And you gave some brandy to Willie, and it made him sick?" Trying to make something out of all this. But he'd made it all wrong; she was shaking her head.

"Gaynor. In the flat across the hall."

"You mean Brown."

"Gaynor. He's—I knew him. I gave him a drink. And he—it did something to him. A kind of convulsion. Then Willie came in with the groceries, and Gaynor

was . . . awful." Her shoulders twisted. Scott took her into his arms, held her while she sobbed. When it looked as though she'd be able to control herself, he got out his hanky and gave it to her.

"How—awful?" he asked.

"Like he was crazy drunk."

"When was all this?"

"Just now. Ten—I don't know, maybe twenty minutes ago. I—I've been out for a while. I *had* to get out. I thought maybe I'd meet you. I—I was so scared. Gaynor said I poisoned him, don't you see? He kept saying that, with Willie standing right there. Willie thought he was drunk, I guess, and patted him. Knocked him out on his feet."

Scott said grimly, "That's fine." He jerked his head to indicate the other side of the building. "He's over there now? This Gaynor?"

When she nodded, he turned, got through the kitchenette door and halfway across the other room before Clara caught up with him.

"What are you going to do?"

"Paste him some more. He'll stick to the ceiling."

"No!" She clutched at his arm. "Hugh, don't you see—it killed him. The brandy. He's . . . dead."

HE LOOKED at her for quite a while, breathing slow. She was sick with fear, on the verge of hysteria. He took hold of her arms and steered her backwards into a chair. He let her sit there for a while and chew the corner of his handkerchief.

"Now," he said quietly. "He's over there"—he thooked his thumb—"dead?"

She swallowed and nodded. "After Willie hit him, we got him over there, put him on the sofa. Then we found out he was dead."

"No doctor? Nothing like that?"

She pinched the handkerchief to her nose and spoke through it. "What was the use?" Her mind dropped helplessly into her lap. "Hugh, Gaynor said I poisoned him, don't you see?"

He stared at her. He pushed compressed lips around over his front teeth. Then he turned, crossed to the door, and opened it.

"Going over to look at him," he said.

Not that she'd asked what he was going to do. Not that she even appeared interested. She looked beaten down. Finished.

Scott closed the door softly. He glanced up and down the hall before he stepped to the door of the flat opposite. It wasn't locked. He went in, closed the door, stood in the dark until he'd found the light switch.

The man lay on a blue mohair upholstered davenport. He was huge. Steel-rimmed glasses rode crookedly on the bridge of a rather small nose. Black eyes stared at the ceiling. His left arm dangled over the edge of the cushions, crimped slightly at the wrist, the back of his hand against the carpet.

Scott pushed away from the door, moved to the davenport and looked down through Gaynor's glasses. The eyes were blue, not black, but so dilated that they appeared black. He looked very dead.

Scott moved warily across to the door of the kitchenette, pushed it open, flipped on the light. The sink was full of dirty dishes and utensils. On one of the drainboards there was a clean china bowl in some pink floral pattern that looked vaguely familiar. He examined it. Not really clean—smeary clean. And there was a thin strip of brown fried onion clinging to the edge and also a number of fine grey hairs.

He turned out the light and went back. He toed the door of the bath open, glanced in, then crossed to the hall door. This time he covered his hand with the tail of his shirt before taking hold of the knob, listened for a moment before opening the door. There was no one in the hall. He set the night latch, closed the door behind him, gave the knob a quick wipe.

As he entered his own flat he said, "Well, he's—" and broke that off. "Where are you, Clara?"

She didn't answer. He looked in on the kitchenette, turned, opened the door of the bath.

Sudden cold emptiness in his belly, he swung around to the hall door and out. He hurried down the stairs, through the vestibule, and out into the pattering rain.

"Clara!"

He thought that was she, half a block to the north, in her hooded raincoat silhouetted against the glow from the corner

street lamp. He started to sprint, and she kept right on. He didn't call her name again—in the kind of a mess they were in it might be just as well not to call names. He caught up with her a hundred feet beyond the lamp. He almost, but not quite, took hold of her arm, for she gave him a startled glance over her shoulder.

It wasn't Clara.

Scott mumbled something and hurried on by.

CLARA ran south along College Avenue toward Fifty-ninth, and the wind of her haste tore the hood back from her head and bellied her coat like a sail. Late that afternoon on her way to the grocery she had mailed a letter for Miss Adams. "A greeting card and a handkerchief for my old sweetheart," Miss Adams had said wistfully. "We always remember each other on birthdays and Christmases."

Miss Adams had given Clara the bottle of brandy, then unopened. Miss Adams had said, "Oliver sent that to me last Christmas." The old sweetheart again. Weeks ago, with a faint gleam in her pain-dulled eyes like a thread of light beneath a permanently closed door, Miss Adams had told Clara the lavender-and-lace story of a romance that had endured even as long as the obstacles that had prevented its culmination. So gnarled and crippled that she could scarcely move about, Miss Adams still spoke of her Oliver as Clara spoke of her Hugh. Clara had told Hugh all about it; she thought it was lovely, and he said it was silly. "Miss Adams is just a bit tetchy, if you ask me," he'd said.

The brandy had come to the Scotts from Miss Adams. It had come to Miss Adams from Oliver. The brandy was poisoned. It didn't add up, nor had it occurred to Clara in just that way until a moment after Hugh had left their flat to go into the one across the hall, where Gaynor was. Clara had got up from the chair, had gone out into the hall and directly to Miss Adams' door. She had knocked without getting any answer. She had tried the knob. The door was locked. Miss Adams, who practically never went out, apparently had gone somewhere.

Then Clara had remembered the letter she'd mailed. She could picture it in her

mind—the nearly square, puffy envelope, Miss Adams' painful scrawl that had addressed it to Mr. Oliver somebody. She couldn't remember the last name. Some local address, but she couldn't think of the name. She didn't know that she'd ever heard Miss Adams' old sweetheart called anything except Oliver.

But if she could reach the drop box before the eight-twenty collection was made she might ask the postman. There had been no time at all to formulate any sort of a plan beyond that. No time to wait for Hugh. Clara had whirled in the hall, had run to the stairway and down . . .

Now she came within sight of the drop box in front of Meegs' Drugstore, and one of Uncle Sam's olive-green trucks had just stopped at the corner. She was in time. She was going to make it. As she raced toward the corner she saw the postman get down from the truck, lugging a mail-sack.

"Wait, Mr. Postman!" Clara screamed at him.

He saw her. He didn't shorten his stride. He was in front of the box now. She saw the glint of his keys, heard the brass padlock rattle. He had the front of the box open, crouched there in front of it, the mouth of the mailsack spread wide.

"Wait!" she sobbed and came up to him. "Wait, there's a letter . . ." No more breath, and so much to say.

The postman was waiting, looking up at her from a crouch, a thin-faced man, middle-aged, tired looking.

"Well, where's your letter, lady. I'll see that it gets in." But she was shaking her head, holding out empty hands wet with rain.

"I . . . mailed it late this afternoon," she gasped. "I—I think I didn't put a stamp on it."

The postman turned back to the box, began to rake letters into the sack. "It'll go through postage due."

"It mustn't . . ." And then she saw it, there in the heap, that squarish, puffy envelope. She swooped, caught it up, held it so that the light from the drugstore window fell across its face. Mr. Oliver Feraday. North Pennsylvania Street. She got that far—far enough—when the postman jerked the letter from her hand.

"You can't do that, young woman," he said severely. "Don't you know it's a Federal offense? If you want to reclaim a letter you've got to fill—"

But she was gone. Oliver Feraday. North Pennsylvania Street. Oliver Feraday. She had it now, engraved on her mind, and she opened the door of Meegs' Drugstore. She didn't see Inez, which was perfectly all right with her. She saw grouchy old Mr. Meegs, five or six customers, a foursome of noisy teen-agers in one of the booths. She went back to the phone booth, stepped into it and closed the door. The light didn't come on, but that was all right. There was enough light through the glass of the door for her to see the phone directory. She held up the book and riffled through to the *F*'s. Faber . . . Fassler . . . Fenwick . . . Feraday. Lots of Feradays. She'd find Oliver Feraday's address, then go back to the Maples for Hugh. . . .

CHAPTER THREE

Murderess Wanted

ACROSS College Avenue, directly opposite Meegs' Drugstore, Hugh Scott paused in front of the Irwin Grocery. He'd given up chasing the phantom of Clara through the rain; he'd never find her that way. Now he was using his head. He'd locate this guy Willie who'd brought Clara the groceries, who'd been there when Gaynor was yelling about being poisoned. Clara might have gone out looking for Willie. It seemed the logical thing to do. Talk to Willie. Find out just where he stood in this thing, what he intended to do.

There was a light at the back of the store, the shadow of somebody moving across a frosted-glass half-partition that defined the office. Scott tried the doorknob and then knocked loudly.

The shadow moved again, developed a cigar, came out from behind the partition and toward the front of the store. A man in shirt sleeves and suspenders who shouted at Scott from the other side of the door.

"We're closed for the night."

"I'd like to talk to you a second, Mr. Irwin. The name is Scott. My wife is one of your customers."

That rang a bell. Irwin smiled around his cigar as he twitched off the lock. He got the door open.

Scott said, "I'm looking for a man who works here, name of Willie."

Mr. Irwin was nodding. "We mostly call him Red, I guess you know why. He's not here now. Left an hour and a half—no, more like two hours ago. He was supposed to drop off an order at your place. Why?" He was suddenly concerned. "Anything wrong? Didn't he show up?"

"No-no, everything's fine." Oh sure, fine and dandy! "I just wanted to know where I could get hold of Willie. It's a— a personal matter." He guessed it was. Personal, like life and death and love. Your wife gets involved in something that looks like murder, and naturally you've got to ring in the grocery boy.

Mr. Irwin came out in the slackening rain. He pointed north with his cigar. "On Broad Ripple Avenue. That's old Sixty-third. You know how it is in Indianapolis—two names for each street, it simplifies everything." Mr. Irwin laughed at his joke. "I don't know just where, but not very far out. You can't miss Willie's place, because our truck will be standing out in front. Irwin's Grocery in chrome letters against blue panels."

"Thanks," Scott said and turned. Was it logical? Would Clara go to Willie? Scott would—to find out just where he stood. But would Clara? You never knew precisely what Clara would do, which was one of the reasons she was such fun to live with. He kept trying to figure her out on the five blocks to Broad Ripple Avenue, and he didn't get anywhere. What he really ought to have done, he decided, was to have gone up the hall for a talk with Miss Adams. It was her brandy, after all. And if Miss Adams had poisoned it . . .

He stopped at the corner, brows crimped in a tight frown. That was an idea. Suppose Miss Adams was, as he'd often said to Clara, a bit "tetched." Suppose she'd become embittered by the way her own romance hadn't panned out and so got a certain perverse satisfaction out of passing out poisoned brandy to happy young married people. It was an idea, but it didn't seem to be a very good idea. Miss Adams was, in his opinion, a silly,

sentimental old maid, but he'd never discovered a trace of bitterness in her makeup in spite of her painful illness. In fact, Scott had about decided he was fresh out of good ideas when he glanced to the east and saw Irwin's Grocery in big chrome letters on the side of a blue-paneled truck parked in front of a tavern.

Scott went to the tavern, shaded his eyes from the neon glare and peered into the dimly lighted interior. Seated on a stool near the front end of the bar was somebody who might well be Willie—a tall, thin young man wearing a cap with a crumpled bill far enough back on his head to expose a dark red forelock.

Scott opened the door and stepped into a smoke-filled room that was noisy with laughter and jukebox jazz. He stepped to the red-haired beer-drinker, touched the sleeve of a blue workshirt.

"Willie?"

The young man put down his glass and turned his head. He nodded slightly.

"Scott. I'd like to talk to you."

"Go right ahead," Willie said, not smiling.

"You know what I mean."

Willie turned back to his beer, hoisted the glass and polished off what was left of it. He slid off the stool and stood taller than Scott's six-one by a couple of inches. Scott took hold of Willie's arm and piloted him to the front door and out onto the sidewalk.

Willie said, "Rained some, didn't it?"

It was not raining now, but Scott wouldn't have noticed if Willie hadn't reminded him. Scott's mind was too full. Full and mixed up. They stood alongside of Willie's truck, and Willie provided cigarettes. There was something barefoot about Willie—the way he talked, the way he stood with his hands in his pockets, the way he kept kicking at the match he'd dropped to the wet sidewalk. His face was thin, big-boned and serious. He had freckles to go with his hair.

Scott said, "I want to thank you for what you did at our place this evening." A hell of a start, he thought, and apparently Willie was in full agreement. He didn't say anything—just stood on one foot and scraped at the match with the toe of his other shoe.

"Willie," Scott tried again, "the man

said something before you pasted him, didn't he? Made certain accusations against Mrs. Scott?"

Willie looked up. His smile was fleeting. "I didn't hear a damned thing."

"He said he'd been poisoned, didn't he?"

"I didn't hear a damned thing," Willie said slowly.

"Look." Scott took out his billfold and flipped it open. "I am Mr. Scott."

Willie looked to make sure. That smile again. "He was stinkin' drunk and I pasted him. After we got him across the hall he looked sort of"—Willie glanced around—"dead. But I didn't hear him say a damned thing, in case you're worried, Mr. Scott."

"Willie, you're all right," Scott said and realized that he'd sounded exactly like Mr. Swanson. "Got any ideas? Any suggestions as to what we should do?"

Willie went back to match-kicking. "Way I look at it"—he took a drag on his cigarette—"I don't want to get mixed up in anything. Miz Scott don't want to neither. And I guess you don't." Sudden shrewdness peaked out from beneath shaggy red brows. "So—I don't aim to do anything. Let somebody else fall over the guy. How's that sound?"

IT PROBABLY sounded fine to Willie who didn't have to sleep across the hall from what the Scotts would have to sleep across the hall from—if the Scotts did any sleeping.

Scott said, "Wel-l-l . . ."

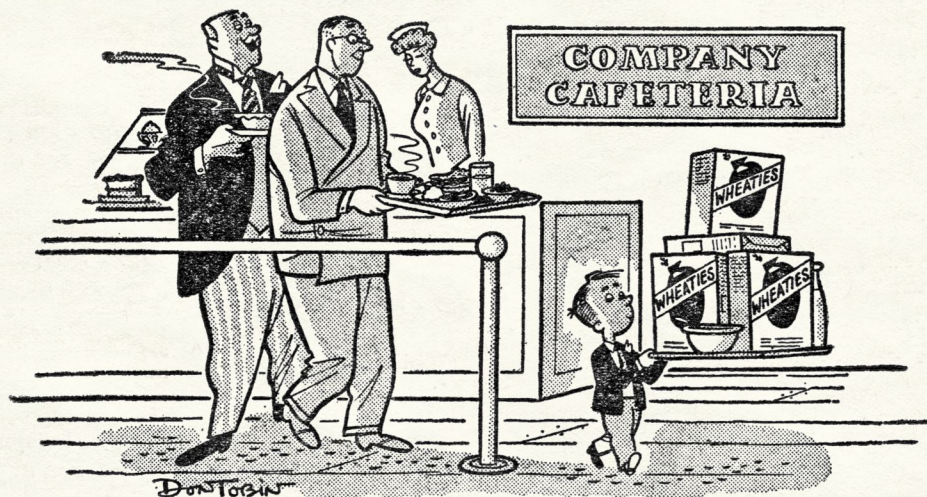
"I don't stick my neck out, and you two don't stick yours out. I don't say anything, and you don't. For all I know, the guy lumped off with heart failure when I pasted him."

Scott nodded. "I see what you mean. We're both pretty vulnerable."

"That's about the size of it." Willie edged over to the door of the truck. When he opened it, he reached in and shoved a paper carton back a little way to provide foot room. Red neon from the taproom sign reached into the truck, into the carton. There was something in the box—something small and grey and still. A cat. Not doing anything. Dead.

Willie glanced around, his smile quick and sad. "Run over a cat," he said. "Some kid's pet, maybe. Thought I'd take it home and bury it. Might be better that way. What they don't know don't hurt 'em so much. Like this other thing, huh?"

Scott nodded, his mind made up. "What they don't know won't hurt them. Incidentally, you haven't seen Mrs. Scott



"There's a man who's going places in this company."

ANOTHER up-and-coming young man is Boston Braves' Al Dark. Wheaties eater for over 10 years, he was voted "Rookie of the Year" in '48! Famous training dish—

these 100% whole wheat flakes, milk and fruit. Real "he-man" nourishment plus second-helping flavor. Had your Wheaties today? "Breakfast of Champions"!

since—since then?" He waited, anxiously.

Willie paused in the act of getting into the truck. "Isn't she home?"

"Uh—no." It was awkward, Scott thought, asking another man where your wife was.

Willie slid in under the wheel. "If anything turns up and you want to get hold of me or Inez, we live up that-a-way, just the other side of the Monon. Little white house up there."

"Let you know," Scott promised.

The truck started. Willie and somebody's dead cat drove off, leaving Scott at the curb with a new name kicking around in his mind. Inez. That morning, at breakfast, Clara had tried to tell him something about herself and a girl named Inez. He wished he'd listened. He'd never break in on anything she was trying to tell him again, and that was for sure. If he ever found her. Which he would, of course—what an asinine thought! She was probably at home right now, wondering where he was. At home and scared, with that dead guy Gaynor beyond the locked door on the opposite side of the hall.

She'd better be, he thought as he walked hurriedly back. If she wasn't, he was going to go off his nut.

If he hadn't been so concerned about Clara he probably would have noticed that some of the cars parked in front of the Maples were cop cars. As it was, he came striding blind-eyed into the vestibule and practically ran into a police paunch complete with pistol belt and brass buttons.

"Wait a minute, mister. You live here?" The cop was half smiling, probably amused by the expression on Scott's face, that mouth-ajar look he had at the moment.

"Uh—yes," Scott got out before his tongue turned into a piece of flannel. "Scott in B-2. Why? What's the matter? What's happened?"

"Scott, Hugh F." The cop methodically checked on his list. "Okay, Mr. Scott. You can go up. Take it easy. Some old woman just got tired of it all."

MISS ADAMS' door was open at the end of the hall. Another policeman was posted there. Scott glanced at the door of the flat across the hall from his own. It was shut. They hadn't found

Gaynor. They didn't know about that.

He stepped to his own door and tapped on the panel. No answer. His keys telegraphed nervousness as he got them out and fitted the right one to the lock.

Inside, everything was the same—that empty look the place had without Clara. Her picture smiled at him from the top of the radio-phonograph, and he usually got quite a wham out of that. Not tonight. Tonight the thought struck him: Suppose that was all he ever had of Clara—her face in a silver frame?

He jerked around to the door, went out into the hall and headed for Miss Adams' flat where he was stopped by the uniformed cop.

Scott said, "I understand Miss Adams killed herself."

The cop grinned. "Now that you understand that, you can go back to your flat."

"Yeah, but she just took out one of our life insurance policies," Scott explained. If Miss Adams had, it would be highly coincidental, but he thought a story like that would give him an opening wedge. He got out his wallet. "Claims department of Mid-Continent Mutual. If she's killed herself it'll void the policy. I've got a right to the details."

The cop sighed. He leaned into the room and called, "Sergeant Davis."

Through the open door Scott could see a couple of men, one obviously a doctor, down on their knees on Miss Adams' Oriental rug. He couldn't see anything of Miss Adams, which was all right with him. A man in his thirties, dark haired, blue eyed, sharply dressed in deep green wool crash, came out of the kitchenette and toward the door. The phone rang, and he turned to answer it.

"Put Meegs on," the man said after a moment. He fished a cigarette out of a pocket, put it into his mouth while he waited. Then, "Hello, Mr. Meegs. This is Sergeant Davis. Will you repeat that prescription, please?"

After a moment he said thanks and hung up. He stepped to the extreme right of the door where the doctor was kneeling.

"The druggist says half a grain of bella donna. She had some internal inflammation, she told him when she got the prescription filled. How's that?"

"That's plenty, if she took all the pills at once," the doctor replied. "But that prescription was filled four months ago."

"Maybe she took only one or two pills in the interval. Maybe she didn't take any until this evening."

"That's your problem. But that's what it is. The convulsions, the bruises she got kicking around, the pupil dilation—it's written all over her."

Pupil dilation. Scott suddenly remembered Gaynor's eyes. And Clara had said that Gaynor acted as though he were crazy drunk. Willie had thought Gaynor drunk. Scott wondered if there hadn't been enough belladonna to go around—both Gaynor and Miss Adams. Maybe it wasn't the brandy at all. Maybe . . .

Davis started back toward the kitchen, but the cop at the door called to him. The sergeant snapped his fingers, turned, and came to the door with a smile on his smooth-shaven face.

"This is Mr. Scott from down the hall," the cop explained. "He's with her insurance company. Wants to talk to you."

Davis' handshake was pillowy, yet he managed to draw Scott over the threshold. He touched Scott's arm and piloted him into the kitchenette.

"Maybe you can do us some good, Mr. Scott."

"Maybe. I hope so." Scott's voice was steady, all of his nervousness wrapped up inside, under his taut belly muscles. There was another detective out there in the kitchenette, but Scott scarcely noticed the man. The sink was the thing, the unwashed dishes. He knew immediately why the bowl in the sink in the Gaynor flat had looked familiar. All of Miss Adams' chinaware was of that same pink floral pattern. She'd passed a portion of her dinner to Neighbor Gaynor—liver and onions, judging by what remained in Miss Adams' frying pan. Both Miss Adams and Gaynor had eaten liver and onions. Both were dead. But he couldn't very well tell that to Davis, didn't dare mention Gaynor at all.

"Now, what is it, Mr. Scott?" Davis urged. He'd finally got his cigarette lighted.

Scott said, "It's my understanding that Miss Adams took out a life insurance policy with Mid-Continent about a month

ago. At least, that was her intention." They could not check on Miss Adams' intention. Not now. "Our policy carries a six-month suicide clause, so naturally I'm interested."

Davis could understand that. "You'd probably feel better if she'd left a suicide note. I know I would. However, she apparently did take a super dose of medicine that she must have known could kill her." He leaned back against the sink and drew on his cigarette.

"A lonely old woman," he said sadly. "Tired. Sick. Doesn't seem to have any relatives or any close friends. Who'd she name beneficiary on that policy, Mr. Scott?"

SCOTT shook his head. "That'd be out of my line. All I know is that Miss Adams said she intended to get one of our policies."

"Oh." Davis' eyes were no longer friendly. "All you know is that Miss Adams was going to get a policy—maybe. That's not quite the same story you told a while ago. That's not—"

Davis broke off as the door of the kitchenette was elbowed open by a short, rotund man with snowy-white hair showing beneath the brim of his tan straw hat.

"Here, Sergeant," he said excitedly. "Found this under the sofa in there."

"This" was a bradawl resting in the middle of the detective's white handkerchief. Just any bradawl except that the price, 35¢, was marked in wax pencil on the varnished handle. Like the bradawl Scott had bought at the neighborhood hardware store about two weeks ago. He'd charged it, of course. Now anybody who wanted to could check with the store records, for while the stuff on the blade of it might have been paint, you couldn't tell from this angle but what it was blood.

Scott got his eyes away from the thing, glanced about at the three police faces. Nobody was looking at him. That was fine. He felt sick and he probably looked it.

"We must have some unfinished business around here," the white-haired detective was saying, still popeyed with discovery.

Now they'd start looking for corpse number two. Number two on *their* books,

but on Scott's—number three. They didn't know about Gaynor yet.

"My God!" Scott breathed. Now his mind was off the liver angle and back to the brandy. Suppose Miss Adams had tried to poison Clara with the brandy. But Gaynor got the brandy. Suppose Clara had gone to Miss Adams about that, and Miss Adams had . . . used the bradawl!

"That in there," the white-haired man said, "the old lady, could be remorse after murder. Though I don't see—"

"All right," Davis cut in dryly. He took the bradawl and the handkerchief, passed it to the third detective. "Try it for prints. Frosty, take Mr. Scott to his flat. You start there. Gilbson'll work on the other side of the hall. McReedy downstairs. You know what you're looking for."

The white-haired man nodded, glanced at Scott. "You want to show me your place?"

Frosty, Davis had called him. Not old, not over forty-five, but white-haired as though he'd got that way overnight. A plump, slow-moving, soft-spoken man. He went into the Scott kitchenette, came out, peered into the bath, then the closet. Then he went out into the kitchenette again.

Scott stood in the middle of the small living room and tried to divide his attention between what Frosty did in the kitchenette and what was going on outside in the hall. Big police feet were tramping tirelessly out there. They'd find Gaynor. The door was locked, but they'd find him anyway. They always did. Maybe they'd gone down to Mrs. Merritt to get an extra key to the place. And out in the kitchenette—Scott tried to picture how it looked out there. An egg in a mixing bowl, an empty brandy bottle—not only empty but washed, and that wasn't good—pot roast in the oven, a carton of groceries . . .

Frosty's round figure showed up in the doorway.

"You live here alone, Mr. Scott?"

"Yes," Scott said. "My wife and I do."

Frosty plodded out into the living room and sat down. He pushed his hat onto the back of his head. He waved his hand toward a chair.

"Take a load off your feet. Where's

Mrs. Scott, by the way? She around?"

Scott sat down. "She's out." He was aware that Frosty was waiting. When a cop asks you where your wife is you just don't say "out" and let it go at that. Scott moistened his lips with his tongue. "She went to a movie." That somehow seemed better than "I don't know where she is," because if he said that it might look as though Clara had run away from something.

"She didn't eat any dinner?"

"I don't know," Scott said. "I know I haven't had any. I was late getting home from the office. Maybe she thought she'd take in an early show and get back about the same time I did."

"All right," Frosty said in a manner that suggested Scott was a damned liar but they'd get back to that later on. "About this Miss Adams now. What struck us as queer is that she didn't seem to belong to anybody, even remotely. She ever say anything to you about her friends or relatives?"

SCOTT shook his head. "Not to me. But my wife drops in on Miss Adams nearly every day. They were fairly intimate. Miss Adams had a gentleman friend, I know that much."

Frosty raised cottony eyebrows. "She did now? Came to see her, you mean?"

"No, not that. I gather he's an invalid now just as she was. Old sweethearts . . ." Scott smiled stiffly. "You ought to get the story from my wife. She can wring your heart with it."

"I'll take it from you. Without the heart-wringing."

"Well, Miss Adams and this man were engaged in their youth. Then something happened. I think his father died—I *think* that's the way it was—and he had to take care of a sister who was crippled and sickly. Anyway, the man and Miss Adams had to postpone their marriage indefinitely while he made a home for the sickly sister. He had quite a struggle, I understand. Financial success came to him late in life, and he still had this helpless sister around his neck. She wasn't a sweet-tempered person at all, nobody he'd want to pan off on Miss Adams through marriage. And by the time the sister died it was too late to marry Miss

Adams. She had arthritis, as you know, and he had a bad heart or something like that. But they still kept the old fires glowing with letters and presents at birthdays and Christmases . . ."

Scott broke off, thinking of the brandy. That had been one of Miss Adams' Christmas presents from this old sweetheart of hers. Had he tried to poison Miss Adams? Wasn't there something about a will—but no, that didn't fit. *He* was the one with the money.

"What's his name?" Frosty asked. "The old sweetheart."

Scott didn't know. "I've heard it, too. But undoubtedly there are some letters from him in her flat."

Frosty was shaking his head. "That's what I mean—she didn't seem to belong to anybody. There's no mail of a personal nature anywhere in her flat. A few bills—nothing else. Try to dig up his name, will you, Scott?"

Scott was trying, but he wasn't getting anywhere. He couldn't concentrate. He could hear a rumble of voices in the hall outside the door of the flat opposite, too.

One of the voices was that of Mrs. Merritt. He caught the tinkle of keys.

Now they'll find Gaynor, he thought. It's only a matter of seconds . . .

Frosty's voice reached him as though from a distance.

"What's your wife's name, Mr. Scott?"

"Clara," he said faintly. His heart was up in his throat, choking him.

"Before she was married, I mean."

"Clara Osgood."

"That's what I thought. This her on the radio?"

Scott looked over at Frosty relaxed in the chair, hat pushed back, thumb hooked toward the radio-phonograph. Scott nodded.

"I thought that's who it was."

"Who?"

"Clara Osgood. Your wife. When I saw the picture, I thought that's who it was."

Scott stared at the detective. "What are you talking about?"

"Clara Osgood," Frosty said evenly. "She got into some trouble once, five, six years ago. Didn't she tell you?"

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Scott sat up straight with his mouth ajar, all wound up inside. "Trouble? What sort?" he finally asked.

"Attempted robbery. She and a young hellion named Johnny Archer. He tried to stick up a tavern. The barkeep had a gun, though, and he got Johnnie. The girl, your Clara, was there. She stuck to Johnnie."

"I . . ." Scott closed his eyes for a second. "I don't believe it."

Frosty shrugged. "I always did say she just went along for the ride. But she was there. She was holding Johnnie in her arms when we found him. She could have just as well run away, but she stuck, which is one of the reasons I think she deserved a better break than she got."

She'd stick, Scott was thinking. She wouldn't desert anything hurt.

"She had no parents and no money," Frosty went on. "The case went to Juvenile Court, naturally. At that time the court had a stinker for a special investigator. Man named Gaynor—"

"Who?" That got past Scott's lips. He came forward in his chair. He'd have cut out his tongue if he'd had a knife. But the detective apparently took no special notice of the outburst, for at that moment the hall door was opened by Sergeant Davis.

"Got it," Davis announced. "Could be remorse after murder, like you said."

Frosty stood up. "Where?"

"Just across the hall. Fellah on the sofa over there has a place where a bradawl would fit. Right in his back."

Scott struggled out of his chair. "You mean . . . stabbed?"

Davis gave him a glance, nodded. Of Frosty he asked, "Remember a fellah named Gaynor who used to be connected with Juvenile Court?"

Frosty rubbed his jaw. "Yah. The stinker." He followed Davis out of the flat. He closed the door quietly behind him.

Scott stared blankly at the door for a moment, turned aimlessly, moved out into the kitchenette, a man in a dream. He picked up the empty brandy bottle, put it down again. He moved the carton of groceries, and the paper bags it contained rattled crisply. He paced to the refrigerator and back—all without purpose.

"She didn't do it. She didn't." He kept saying that. But now he could understand why she might have run off, why she might have presumed the police would suspect her.

But where was she? Where could she have gone?

CHAPTER FOUR

Willie's Back Yard

WHERE could you go on sixty-five cents? That was all Clara had in her purse. She'd counted it three times already to make sure, and it always came out the same—just sixty-five cents.

She was downtown. At the bus terminal. She was sitting on one of the benches, her change clutched in her hand. She was trying to nerve herself up to approaching the ticket counter to ask, "How far will sixty-five cents take me in any direction?" To get away. Anywhere. Where they'd never find her.

That was all she'd been able to think of from the moment she'd realized that the murder of Gaynor was out. She'd left the drugstore after finding Oliver Feraday's address in the phone booth. She'd walked back toward the Maples to arrive simultaneously with the police. She'd glimpsed a detective—a man with white hair whom she would have recognized anywhere. *He* was the one. Frosty, they called him. His was the first police face she'd seen the night they closed in around her where she knelt with Johnny Archer bleeding to death in her arms.

She'd seen Frosty, and a cold wave of panic had washed over her. Suppose she went into the Maples. They'd question her. They'd find the bradawl where she'd dropped it in the Scotts' living room, her fingerprints on it. That showed murderous intent, didn't it? Suppose Gaynor *did* die of poison, she'd had the bradawl handy in case the drug didn't work. They'd arrest her for murder—who had a better motive?—and that would kill Hugh. And think of Hugh's parents, those fine, good, kind people who'd done so much for her—how would they feel?

So she'd boarded a street car for downtown. Now she was here in the bus station . . . with sixty-five cents.

There was a uniformed cop at the ticket counter. Just standing there talking. If she went up there now, Clara thought, and asked how far sixty-five cents would take her, she'd be picked up right now. On suspicion. It wouldn't work. She *couldn't* get out of town. She had to stay here and dodge the police and try to see a way out for herself—but mostly for Hugh. She'd been through it, she'd known what it was. If she'd been alone in the world, as before, she'd have given herself up. But there was Hugh. There was the disgrace to Hugh's family . . .

Her mind worried frantically over the situation. The brandy bottle. Oliver Feraday to Miss Adams to the Scotts to Gaynor. Like four-cornered catch, and Gaynor was the one who finally caught it, right where he lived. But Feraday was the one. He'd tried to kill Miss Adams. That must be it. Hadn't Miss Adams said something about having a will made out in Feraday's favor—or was it the other way around?

But Feraday was the one. She'd have to get to Feraday somehow. He was guilty. And if he could confront him with his guilt, then let the police come.

She stood on trembling legs and moved to the Market Street entrance of the bus depot. There were three cabs lined up at the curb, and she got into the first one, gave the driver Feraday's address. Twenty minutes later she poured all of her change into the driver's hand. Just sixty-five cents, the amount of her fare. She got out, went through a gate in a tall hedge that boarded the sidewalk, and followed flagstone laid in an artistic curve toward the door of a Georgian Colonial house well back from the street . . . Just get in the house—that was the thing. Just say she was a friend of Miss Adams'. Not mention brandy or murder. Ask Mr. Feraday if she could use his phone and call Mrs. Merritt at the Maples. Have Mrs. Merritt get Hugh . . .

She faced the door. She found the huge knocker, used it once sedately, then frantically.

"Coming, coming." A thin voice reached her from behind the closed door. She heard faltering steps. The entry light came on. The door opened.

She looked up and into a thin, pale face, the pallor relieved by two feverish spots of color on either cheekbone. An old man with a ghost of handsomeness clinging to him, kindly blue eyes, lips that were thin and yet not too hard.

"Sorry to keep you waiting so long," he said as he unlatched the screen, "but it's my man's night off and I'm a bit slow moving."

She said, "You—you're not Mr. Feraday?" What she meant was, you're not a murderer. You *couldn't* be. You wouldn't send poisoned brandy to nice old ladies.

"Why, yes." His eyes quizzical.

"I'm a friend of Miss Adams'. May I come in?"

He smiled and held open the screen. "Any friend of Gwen Adams is always welcome here. What was the name?"

"Mrs. Scott." She stepped across the threshold. He closed the screen and the door. It took him a long time to do that. Then he looked down at her, and it occurred to her that she must be a fright. Her hand went up nervously to her hair. She worked up a smile.

"Miss Adams told me if I were ever in this neighborhood I should pay you a call."

"Of course," he said, pleased. "Come into the library. It seems less damp in there for some reason."

She noticed as he led the way slowly that he was wearing a maroon wool smoking jacket in spite of the heat.

"And if I may use your phone . . ."

Speaking of phones, Mr. Feraday's startled to jangle. "Coming," he said, "coming," though he didn't get off that slow shuffle of his. "Everyone is always in such a hurry," he said, smiling at Clara. "Except me. And I used to be, too. I think I hurried too much."

Clara recalled what Miss Adams had frequently mentioned about the serious heart ailment that Oliver Feraday had.

She said, "We all hurry too much."

They stepped through tall doors into a room lined with bookshelves except the south wall where there was a large window. The phone on the walnut desk was still ringing.

"Sit down, please, Mrs. Scott," Feraday invited. He'd reached the desk and

now picked up the handset. "This is Mr. Feraday."

The voice on the other end of the line was so loud, so boisterous, that Clara could hear every word that came from the receiver.

"Hi there, Unc. I just called to tell you that your gal friend Miss Adams bumped herself off. She took a big slug of poison—"

Clara sprang from the chair, the back of her hand crushed to her mouth Cruel! her mind hammered. Deliberately trying to shock him!

The phone had fallen from Mr. Feraday's trembling hand, had crashed onto its standard. The old man's ashen face held an expression of agony. He tottered.

"Mr. Feraday!" Clara caught hold of him.

"Help . . . me. The couch." His breath rasped. His bony fingers sank deep into her flesh. "Get . . . Bradwyn . . . attorney. Hurry!"

He collapsed, dead weight in her arms. She couldn't get him to the couch. She could only let him down easily onto the floor. Then she got down beside him, her hand pressed over his heart. There was still a flutter of pulse, still a breath of life in him.

Clara scrambled to her feet. She stepped around to the couch, got a cushion, carried it back, knelt beside the old man.

"Mr. Feraday . . . Mr. Feraday!"

He was gone.

Clara stood, her eyes fixed on his face. She stumbled over the cushion she'd brought, caught the edge of the desk. She *knew* that voice she'd heard on the phone. This was murder cold and deliberate. And she knew the murderer.

She lurched to the cased opening onto the hall, paused, one hand on the wood trim, lips parted, listening. There was a quick scuff of shoe leather on the flags beyond the front door. She saw the brass knob turn

HUGH SCOTT came down the stairs at the Maples. The police were still there and it was inconceivable that they didn't know he was leaving. But nobody stopped him. He went out the front door, his sweaty right hand in his pocket closed tightly on the barrel of a flashlight.

Mrs. Merritt, the landlady, was standing under one of the little trees. She was calling her cat. She interrupted a stream of kitty-kitty-kitties to say wasn't it all perfectly awful? Scott agreed that it was.

"Have you seen Thomas, my cat?" Mrs. Merritt called after him as he strode out to the sidewalk.

"No," he replied, but he thought possibly he had. Thomas and Gaynor and Miss Adams—they all had something in common. They all had eaten fried liver and onions. And they were all dead. Suppose Gaynor *had* been stabbed by a bradawl. Suppose that was what had actually killed him. And if he'd been stabbed in the dark that might explain why his pupils were dilated.

Still, Gaynor had eaten liver that Miss Adams had brought him.

Suppose Thomas *had* been hit by a truck and that was the ultimate cause of his death.

Still, Thomas had slipped into the Gaynor flat and had cleaned up on what was left of the liver, for the hairs on the dish were Thomas' cat hairs.

Suppose Miss Adams *had* taken a pill that contained belladonna.

Still, Miss Adams had prepared, and presumably eaten, liver for dinner.

But Scott had to find Thomas. After he'd done that, then he'd be reasonably sure he was right. He'd give what he knew to the cops. With the thing added up—even halfway added up—they'd see that Clara couldn't possibly have had anything to do with the killings. They could find her—she was probably hiding with some friend—and with the poor frightened kid back in his arms, Scott didn't give a damn about how the rest of it turned out.

He came to Broad Ripple Avenue and turned east, walked on to the railroad tracks. He spotted the small white house on the corner. No grocery truck out in front, no light in the house at all, but that was all right. All the better, in fact, to play ghoul at a cat's grave—provided Willie had actually buried the cat.

He skirted the edge of the house in the darkness, came to the little plot at the back. There was a small vegetable garden back there; he could see in the night glow the stakes for tomatoes and pole-

beans. He brought out his flashlight, got the switch on. The beam played across the vegetable patch, moved on to a small mound of freshly turned earth near the tomatoes. He stepped over the rank-grown rows of chard and dropped to a crouch.

Damn it, he thought, he had to have something to dig with. He ought to . . .

A slight sound from the back of the house. Scott thumbed off the light. He didn't move and he didn't breathe. Somebody was coming into the garden. He heard the faint rustle of garments. A woman.

"I've got a gun," she said firmly. "Stand up. I see you. Get up and put your hands up."

He straightened slowly, his heart in his mouth. He flipped the beam of his light at her suddenly, hoping to blind her. He glimpsed the gun in her hand, the long scarlet robe she was wearing. He glimpsed her face, her full lower lips caught in her teeth, her eyes dark and hard, her blue-black hair tumbling down over her shoulders. The girl who clerked at Meegs'.

She fired the gun. Scott heard the whine of the slug scant inches from his ear. He flung the flashlight, still on, to the right. Her second shot followed it as he sprang at her. Then somebody came pelting around the side of the house, and he and the girl were caught in the spot of somebody's torch.

The somebody said, "Hold it, you two. What goes on?"

The girl started to scream for help, though Scott hadn't actually touched her. "Get the police!" she cried. "A prowler! I've caught a prowler."

"You've got the police, lady." The short plump man came through a row of swiss chard. He had a gun in one hand, a light in the other.

"Frosty!" Scott said.

"What's the idea, Mr. Scott?"

"She"—Scott pointed at the woman—"that is, her husband Willie buried a cat . . ." He pointed down at what he thought was the cat grave. "Mrs. Merritt's cat, Thomas. I'll bet anything it was poisoned by the same thing that killed Miss Adams. They all three ate the liver—Miss Adams, Gaynor and Thomas."

Inez was sneering at him. "The cat was hit by a truck. So Willie buried it. I suppose that's a crime, huh?"

Frosty said, "It is. You can't bury livestock in the city limits. What's your name, ma'am?"

Inez looked Frosty up and down. "Well, of all the lousy things I ever heard of! No wonder there's robbery on the front page every day in the week! What the hell kind of a police force we got in this town? I catch a Peeping Tom, and what do you do? You start griping about a cat buried in the back yard."

FROSTY was not perturbed. "What's your name, ma'am?"

"Mrs. Feraday," she said.

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Scott snapped his fingers. "Frosty, that's it! It's been on the tip of my tongue. Feraday. Oliver Feraday. That's the name of Miss Adams' old sweetheart, the guy I was telling you about."

Frosty rubbed the side of his jaw. He looked from Scott to Inez. "Well, let's go inside the house, folks. Let's see what's what."

They went in through the kitchen door, Inez and Scott ahead of the detective. Frosty switched on a light. "Right here, you two," he said and paused at the telephone. His eyes and his gun on the pair, he dialed a number—a phone at the Maples, it must have been, because he was talking to Davis. "A couple men and a car," he ordered. "Remember the cat hairs on the dish in the Gaynor kitchen? I maybe got what goes with cat hairs." He hung up. He motioned at Scott with the gun. "Talk, Mr. Scott. Make it snappy."

Scott moistened his lips. He glanced at Inez. She dropped into the one chair in the kitchen and she was staring at him with a smile on her lips. The wrong kind of a smile.

"Yes, you talk," she said. "Then I'll tell one. I'll tell a dandy about that little ramp you've got for a wife."

Frosty said, "You shut up. Go ahead, Mr. Scott."

Scott said, "I think the liver was poisoned. They all three—including the cat—ate it, and they're all three dead. She"—nodding at Inez—"works in a drug-store. She could get the belladonna. And she'd be in a position to know that something with belladonna in it had been prescribed for Miss Adams. And Willie, that's her husband, was in a position to know what Miss Adams frequently ordered at the grocery. Liver. It was maybe part of her diet. If they could get some liver and pump it full of belladonna, then deliver that along with Miss Adams' groceries, and she ate some and it killed her, then you'd think she took an overdose of her medicine. But Miss Adams was given to sharing her food with the neighbors. She gave some of the liver to Gaynor, and he was poisoned too. And the cat cleaned up on what was left of it."

"That cat was hit by a truck!" Inez insisted.

"Sure, and Gaynor was stabbed with a bradawl," Scott said. "Because if the cops ever got the idea it was all done with poisoned liver, they'd head straight for Willie."

Two police showed up at the back door of the house at that moment. Frosty said, "Gilcrist, come and keep an eye on this pair. Hansen, you go out in the garden and dig me up a cat that's buried back there. I want to know if its pupils are dilated." And with Gilcrist to watch Inez and Scott, Frosty plodded out of the kitchen into some other part of the house. He reappeared a moment later, his cottony eyebrows scowling, a large metal syringe in his hand. Inez gasped.

"That—that's to cure hams with," she said. "Willie was going to get some fresh hams from a farmer and cure them. You use that to pump the cure into them."

"You could pump belladonna into liver with it, couldn't you?" Frosty said mildly. He nodded at Scott. "Got any more talking to do, son?"

Scott swallowed and nodded. "My wife—"

"His wife's done a stretch for armed robbery!" Inez shrieked.

Frosty said, "Will you shut up, lady? I know all about that. Go ahead, Scott. What did your wife do? Tonight, that is."

Scott said, "After he'd eaten, Gaynor came over to talk to my wife. She gave him a drink of brandy—some that Miss Adams had given us. Gaynor started to act as though he was crazy drunk. That would be the belladonna, wouldn't it? He thought Clara had poisoned him with the brandy. Clara thought she had too. Then Willie came in with the groceries. He must have recognized Gaynor's symptoms, and he didn't want Gaynor to die of the same thing that killed Miss Adams. So he slugged Gaynor. He moved Gaynor back across the hall, put him on the couch over there, and told my wife Gaynor was dead. Clara got scared, went out to walk it off. But Willie used a bradawl he'd picked up in our flat to polish off Gaynor before the poison could complete its work."

"What made me suspicious of Willie was the fact that the groceries he delivered to our place hadn't been touched

by the rain. The sacks were all crisp. That meant he'd been in the apartment house before seven o'clock. What was he doing all that time? When you told me you couldn't find any personal mail in Miss Adams' flat, I began to wonder if Willie wasn't the boy who destroyed her letters from Feraday. Maybe that's what he was doing—that, and getting rid of her belladonna pills to set the stage for a suicide. Why he'd want to conceal the fact that Miss Adams had a gentleman friend named Feraday—"

Scott broke off as Frosty, with a half-stifled oath sprang toward the telephone and picked up the directory. He was leafing through to the F's when Hansen stuck his head in the back door.

"One dead cat, eyes dilated," Hansen announced.

"The hell with the cat!" Frosty slapped down the directory. "Come on, Scott. We may still be in time."

CLARA couldn't move from the door of Mr. Feraday's library. Terror rooted her to the spot as she saw the knob of the front door turn, saw the



"You—you killed him,"
Clara stammered

door open. Willie stepped over the sill, stopped, stared at her from beneath the crumpled bill of his cap.

"What are you doing here, Mrs. Scott?"

She didn't answer. She watched him coming toward her, one hand in his trousers pocket—his hand and something else in the pocket. A gun. He must have phoned Feraday from somewhere close by. That filling station on the corner. And now he'd come to see if his trick had worked, if he'd actually shocked poor old

Mr. Feraday to death. If he'd failed, then there was another way—the gun in his pocket.

"You—you killed him," she stammered. "Just now. When you phoned. You deliberately killed him."

Willie's smile twisted. He took hold of Clara's shoulder with one hand and pushed her back into the library. He glanced down at the old man.

"Seems to be dead," Willie said and shook his head sadly. "Always did have a bad ticker, Uncle Oliver did."

"And you must have killed Miss Adams, too," Clara accused. "If she's dead, then you killed her. She'd never have killed herself. *Never.*"

Willie's eyes moved slowly over her face. "You and the damned cat and the guy across the hall from you. Everything goes haywire with me. You're gonna keep your trap shut, aren't you? On account of if they get me I can right quick remember what the guy across the hall was saying before he kicked off—that you poisoned him. See how it is? We all keep our traps shut and nobody gets hurt."

She didn't say anything.

He said, "It'll pay you, Mrs. Scott. I'll be pretty rich one of these days when I collect on *his* dough"—nodding at the old man on the floor. "It's got to come to me now that Miss Adams died before he did. I'm the only Feraday left. His nephew. He never did have any use for me, I don't know why."

No, I can't imagine why! she thought. But she didn't say anything.

"He was going to leave all his dough to that old maid. His old sweetheart," Willie said. "Now we'll be rich—me and Inez. It don't hurt to have a few rich friends, does it, Mrs. Scott?" He suddenly caught hold of her arm. The strength of him hurt her. His eyes wondered about her. Frightening thoughts about her, she saw in his eyes.

He said, "You'd maybe be dumb enough to open your yap. You maybe would, Mrs. Scott. I think I'm gonna have to take steps to see you don't open your yap. You and the damn cat . . ."

There was a knock at the front door. Willie's eyes jerked away from Clara's face, but he kept holding onto her. They

waited, neither moving nor breathing. And then Clara screamed.

The front door swung open. There were plunging footsteps in the hall. Willie's right hand whipped out the gun as he stepped behind Clara. He rammed the muzzle of it into her back. And there in the library door stood—Hugh Scott. "Hugh," Clara breathed. "Darling." Not moving toward him. Not taking him into her arms as she wanted to, but standing there stiffly with Willie's gun in her back.

Scott got the picture—the dead man on the floor, the way Clara was standing the way you couldn't see Willie's right hand. Scott's eyes met Willie's over Clara's head. Scott worked up a smile.

"What they don't know won't hurt 'em, Willie," he said.

"You alone?" Willie asked.

Scott nodded, lying. Because Frosty was outside. Frosty was out in the dark beyond the big window. Willie's back was to that window, and if Frosty shot Willie, Willie's reflexes would be enough to send a bullet through Clara's back.

Scott said, "I figured Clara would be here. She thought it was the brandy. I figured she'd trace the brandy to Mr. Feraday. Isn't that it, Clara?"

She nodded, too frightened to speak.

WILLIE moistened his lips. "I got to know where I stand."

Scott said, "I told you. What they don't know won't hurt 'em. You keep your mouth shut, and we keep ours shut. Now let's sit down and make a deal." He sank down onto the corner of the couch, not as relaxed as he looked. An expression of relief spread across Willie's face.

"Set, Mrs. Scott." Willie gave Clara a little push. She took three stumbling steps to the right, and then it happened. Frosty fired through the big south win-

dow. It was good. It took Willie in the right forearm, and he suddenly didn't have a gun. Scott came to his feet, stepped to the door as Willie charged, head down. That wasn't any way to get out of a room. Maybe in Pumpkin Center it was an approved way, but not here. It must have looked all right to Clara, for she let out a scream. But Scott had his right forearm up under Willie's windpipe, left hand on Willie's right shoulder, right hand on his own left forearm with Willie's head in the pit of Scott's stomach. Scott simply sat down on the floor and took Willie with him. With that kind of a hold on Willie, it would have been all right if Frosty had entered the Feraday library by way of Chicago; Willie would have still been there, behaving himself. But Frosty knocked out window glass and came over the sill. He caught Willie's arms up behind Willie's back, linked the wrists with handcuffs.

And then it was over except for what Clara had to impart—about Willie's motive and how he'd induced old Mr. Feraday's heart attack. Frosty telephoned headquarters; then he told the Scotts to go home and be good. You could tell by the way he said it that so far as the Scotts were concerned it was over.

But there was still something bothering Clara. It bobbed to the surface on the way home in a taxi.

"Hugh, there's something I've got to tell you. About . . . me. About Inez . . ."

Hugh drew her head down onto his shoulder. "About Clairmont, you mean? That old stuff? I know all about that. I've known all along. Had you looked up before I married you. I'm not so dumb."

He thought it was better that way. Better that she should think he'd known and that it hadn't made any difference. Because it wouldn't have made any difference. Not then, or now, or ever.

THE END

Like money . . .



in the bank . . .



By
**ALAN
RITNER
ANDERSON**

"Drink the wine, Pop,"
she told the old man.
"You'll need it."

SCENE OF THE CRIME

Normally, Cy Harper charged ten cents admission to go over the farm and see where the railroad guards and train robbers had fought it out. But to one strange trio, it was free. For old Cy was throwing a party—the biggest, bloodiest celebration since the St. Valentine's Day Massacre!

THEY called Cyrus Harper a stubborn old fool. He refused to listen to reason. They all tried. His daughter, his granddaughter, the village burgess, the sheriff, state troopers, even the clever young men from the insurance

companies. Inch by inch the old man continued to search his twenty-acre farm. It became an obsession. Crops went to hell and weeds choked the fields. He sold the two cows and kept just enough chickens to keep him in eggs. The guinea

hens, of course, foraged for themselves and in the dark of night were better watch dogs than a pack of hounds.

Not that he neglected his unexpected source of income. The day after the tragedy he'd installed a store-bought gate, storming mightily at the price of it, and thereafter no one got on the property without paying the dime admission the sign called for. There'd been trouble with the law, but the police had discovered that it was simpler to pay the ten cents than suffer the embarrassment of an irate and profane Cyrus Harper who considered public servants the archenemies of taxpayers—and said so in a voice that echoed the length of the valley.

The old man had amazed everyone by a cunning display of showmanship. He bought the picture magazines and the out-of-town newspapers featuring the multiple slayings, clipped and posted the accounts on the sheltered wall of the chicken house. He painted black circles around the bullet holes in the spring house walls, white-washed big X's on the brick floor where two criminals had died. Five white crosses in the orchard indicated where the guards had been shot down, a black cross nearby where another criminal had perished. Between spring house and corn crib he posted a neatly lettered sign: \$50,000 DIAMOND NECKLACE FOUND HERE.

By mid-afternoon of the fourteenth day after the tragedy the one-man search had progressed to the weed-choked garden. Cyrus Harper labored in the hot autumn sun poking a sharp-pointed steel rod into the hard crust of the earth. The garden had been cultivated the day before the catastrophe, and he reasoned that the robbers would have had ample opportunity to bury the million-dollar treasure there. The corn offered an especially promising area since the towering stalks would have provided excellent concealment in the dark of night.

HHE'D STARTED into the corn when he heard the phone ring. Hurrying to the back door of the white cottage, he wiped his shoes on the coco mat there. It had taken Nancy a long, long time to teach him that and now, in some strange way, to do so was to honor her memory as effectively as placing flowers on her grave.

He hurried into the parlor and answered the phone. It was Sue Blair, his sixteen-year-old grand-daughter. Her voice was edged with hysteria. "Gramp!" she wailed. "I'm calling from the drug-store."

"Steady!" he warned testily. "Folks can see you from the soda fountain. What's wrong, Sue child?"

"It—it's you."

"Me?"

"Yes. I heard the burgess talk to mother. They're going to arrest you."

Cyrus Harper was incredulous. "Hell's bells!" he cried. "There ain't a more law-abidin' man in the county. Of course, I'll admit that law an' justice ain't always the same. Lots of times real justice ain't lawful an'—"

"Gramp!" she interrupted, knowing he was wound up on his favorite subject. "They're going to arrest you for selling watermelon wine to those newspaper people."

The old man came down to earth. "Didn't think nobody knowed," he admitted sheepishly, then went belligerent. "They took a fancy to it. Was I supposed to give it away free?"

Sue began to cry. "That isn't all, Gramp. The burgess says you should be put away until you get over the foolish idea that the jewels are hidden on the farm. Three of the gang escaped. The insurance men say two of the rings were pawned a thousand miles from here."

"What if folks think me mad as a hatter?" he asked angrily. "I ain't botherin' nobody. I own this farm free an' clear, an' if I want to poke around for them jewels that's my business."

Because he was starting in on his constitutional rights, which would progress to a blast about the squandering of taxpayers' money, Sue Blair decided that candor would serve more effectively than tact.

"The burgess," she interrupted him, "says you're likely to get a heart attack. He said you're a penny-pinching, money-hungry old skinflint."

That stopped him cold. He shook with rage, and his face went hot. He constrained himself with difficulty and tried to make his voice conversational. "When they arrestin' me?"

"I don't know," Sue admitted. "But don't do anything foolish!"

"Don't fret none!" he growled. "My eyes ain't none too good. If I was to shoot at the burgess, I'd likely to miss the fat fool. I'll hide out in the hay loft when they come."

He hung up quickly and went out to the kitchen. As he began to wash his hands in the sink, he glanced at his reflection in the mirror. He was startled. He'd been a hale and hearty seventy-three before the train robbery. He now looked a hundred. His leathery face was seamed and his pale blue eyes were red-rimmed and glassy. He hadn't shaved in two weeks, and his cheeks and chin bristled greyness. Even his mop of snow-white hair was dull and lifeless.

"Penny-pinching!" he snorted as he put the tea kettle on the electric hot plate. "Money-hungry! Old skinflint!"

He shaved with great care, pausing now and then to strop the razor. That he could use a straight-edge at his age made him feel better. "Hope them guinea hens let me sleep tonight," he mused. "That gun-shootin' made 'em jittery. After dark they chatter like fools every time a leaf falls."

Through shaving, he went down to the cool, white washed cellar. The preserve closet caught his eye and he opened it. Fruits, jellies, jams and vegetables stood in pint and quart glass containers. Even after Nancy's death, ten years before, he'd gone ahead and put up the garden produce the same as always. He had a horror of going hungry again, and he was plagued by the bitter childhood remembrance of skimpy meals too far apart. He still couldn't abide corn-meal mush and boiled

potatoes. The preserves were better.

He reached into the closet and took out the third quart of tomatoes in the middle row. They weren't tomatoes at all but an empty jar with the inside painted a camouflaging yellowish-red. He removed the top and looked at the fat roll of bank notes. Nodding, he replaced the jar. A letter explaining the whereabouts of the five thousand dollars was in his frozen food locker in the village together with his will and personal papers. His daughter had been told to open the combined food locker and safety deposit box as soon as he died.

PUZZLED, Cyrus Harper looked around the cellar. "What'd I come down here for?" he asked himself. The answer circled the cold-sweating water tank of the pressure system. The five jugs of watermelon wine were usually kept in the cool spring house, but since that building had become public domain (at ten cents a person) he'd prudently hid the wine in the cellar.

"Arrestin' me'll cost the taxpayers a pretty penny," he fumed, took a deep drink direct from a jug. "If more folks paid their taxes like me, they'd soon take note how the public funds is squandered." Much to his daughter's mortification, he elected the rural option of working off his taxes on an hourly basis. In winter he shoveled cinders off the highway truck at bus stops and in summer operated the drag scraper.

The blare of an automobile horn at the gate snapped him out of his dark reverie. He scurried upstairs with surprising speed and got his double-barreled shotgun out

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of the shadowy corner of the kitchen. Thumb across both hammers, he peeked out the front window. The shabby sedan was ten years old and bore out-of-state plates. He put the shotgun away as a woman and two men got out of the car. "Jest thirty cents," he groused, then brightened. "Maybe I can sell them a glass of wine. Fifteen cents a glass is fair. Of course, I don't pay them outlandish likker taxes. But watermelons is high this season."

He hurried down to the gate. The blonde woman wore black. She was thin and reedlike, her narrow shoulders were hunched, and she pressed a tiny handkerchief to her mouth. Void of makeup, her blue eyes were large and soft beneath a veneer of tears. The black hat had a veil, but it was folded up.

The driver was short and stout with a beefy red face and a rosebud mouth. His sad and morose aspect seemed unnatural because he reminded Cyrus Harper of the beaming, affable, fun-loving salesmen who talked loud, long and interestingly at the village bar. The other man was a male edition of the woman but taller and thinner. His expression was sorrowful and grim and angry-hot all at the same time.

The stout man handed over three dimes. "This lady is Gloria Mavis, the wife of a guard who got shot here. This is Dave Willard, her brother, and I'm Bud Sharpe."

Dave Willard growled, "Widow—not wife." He looked at his sister. "You okay, Sis?" She nodded dumbly.

The old man glanced at the three dimes in his palm. He suddenly felt ashamed and mean, and he handed the money back to Bud Sharpe. "I got a reputation of being the stingiest man in the county," he admitted morosely. "It ain't rightly true. I give generous to the Lord an' the needy, only secret. I don't profit by nobody's sorrow. But I knowed folks'd trample my crops an' keep me from work, so I figured—"

The thin man said bitterly, "Too bad sis can't cash in on it. She hasn't got a cent. Not a lousy cent. The funeral took all the insurance money."

The woman's voice was strained. "Please, Dave!"

Cyrus Harper opened the gate. He be-

gan to sweat. The crosses, the marked bullet holes, the sign and news clippings all seemed cheap, gruesome and un-Christianlike. The three visitors stepped into the lane.

The old man pointed south. "The road crosses the railroad down yonder. Suppose you know about the diamonds."

Bud Sharpe nodded. "Over a million dollars worth on the way to a jeweler's convention on the West Coast. So that's where they stopped the train?"

"Yep! Auto was waitin'. They run into that boulder on the edge of the road. A couple o' crooks got hurt. Some guards come up to my spring house. To see how bad them crooks was hurt, I guess."

"Logical," Bud Sharpe agreed. "The crooks thought they'd taken care of the guards on the train. They didn't know there were extra guards riding in the smoker."

"They must have seen a light in the spring house," said Cyrus Harper. "They surrounded the place mighty quick an' them crooks had to shoot their way out. Only two got kilt in the spring house."

Dave Willard asked, "What'd you do, Pop?"

AT THAT point in the narration, Cyrus Harper had usually permitted himself poetic license under the rationalization that paying visitors were entitled to an eye-witness account of the gun battle. So he'd made himself a modest participant, dodging from tree to tree ducking bullets while, unarmed, he took it all in.

Now, suddenly humble and ashamed of the fabrication, he rubbed the back of his neck, confessed, "Tell the truth, I was asleep. One of the wounded guards had to shoot the pane out of my bedroom window to wake me up. The poor lad was dead by the time I lit my gasoline lantern and got out there."

Gloria Mavis' blue eyes were eloquent. She didn't have to say that had the old man been alert and quicker, a life might have been saved—her husband's perhaps. Cyrus Harper blinked. He was surprised when two tears squeezed from his eyes and raced each other down his leathery cheeks.

"Take us out to the spring house," Dave Willard ordered.

The old man led the way, plucking nervously at a button on his overall jacket and wondering what their emotional reaction would be. Halfway there, they came in sight of the five white crosses in the orchard. He heard the blonde woman gasp, then begin to sob.

"Hold it, Pop!" It was Dave Willard's thin voice.

Cyrus Harper stopped and turned around. Gloria Mavis had her face buried in her hands while she wept bitterly. The two men were trying to comfort her by stroking her thin shoulders.

"Easy Sis," Dave Willard soothed. "You've gone through hell."

Bud Sharpe looked around. "We alone?" he asked. "Sorrow's a private thing."

The old man nodded. His throat was choked up and his heart pumped fitfully.

"I can't bear to see where he died," Gloria Mavis wailed.

"We'll leave," Dave said.

"No!" she said. "No! You two go look. You can tell me later. I feel faint. I'd like to sit down."

Cyrus Harper stepped up eagerly. "I'll take you in the house, ma'am," he said. "I'll fetch you a glass of wine. It'll make you perk up."

Hands still covering her face, she nodded.

The old man grabbed her right elbow, turned her around and headed her toward the kitchen door. "Them three that got away will pay the piper," he promised darkly. "Justice moves in strange ways, ma'am. God's justice ain't always the same as man's."

She didn't reply. He helped her up the one step into the kitchen, automatically wiping his shoes on the coco mat, and steered her into the wooden armchair opposite the cellar door. She took the purse from under her right arm and laid it on her lap. Her pale face was shiny with sweat.

Cyrus snatched a goblet of the china cabinet. "Be up in a jiffy," he promised. "It'll perk you up good, ma'am."

He went down to the cellar and stood at the bottom of the stairs accustoming his eyes to the gloom. As his vision improved, he found himself looking at the preserve closet. He went to the door of it and laid

his hand on the latch. Then he turned abruptly and walked to the tank where he picked up a jug and filled the goblet.

He walked up the stairs cautiously with his eyes on the wine so he wouldn't spill any. In the kitchen, he kicked the cellar door closed and smilingly extended the goblet.

Gloria Mavis sat in the chair. But with a difference. The hem of her skirt was above her crossed knee. A cigarette dangled from the right corner of her mouth, and through the curtain of smoke her blue eyes were shadowy hard. The butt plate of the .45 in her right hand rested atop her knee. The hammer of the automatic was cocked. The blue-black muzzle covered the old man's chest.

She nodded tightly at the goblet. "You drink it!" she ordered, voice edged. "You'll need it, Pop."

THE WINE was half gone before he realized that he was drinking it. There was a roaring in his ears. Suddenly dizzy, he backed against the cellar door. The watermelon wine ironed some of the kinks out of his stomach. He looked at the empty goblet as if it were something strange and wondrous.

"I didn't mean no harm puttin' up them crosses," he said.

Her laughter was shrill and her eyes blazed with triumph. "Wise up!" she said. "We're the three that got away. How you made us sweat it out, poking around. We were up on the ridge with a telescope. A state cop had an eye on the place until yesterday. We tried once at night. Something in a tree scared hell out of us."

"Guinea hens," he said morosely. "They make an awful racket. They sure do make an awful racket."

"I had the jewels when we broke out of the spring house," she said. "I cut through the orchard. The guards had it surrounded. I climbed a tree. Way up until the trunk began to bend. The jewels were in a leather sack. I took out the necklace and two big rings, stuck them in the pocket of my slacks. I took off my belt and tied the bag to the tree, and good. I climbed down near the ground. When the two boys gave me the all-clear, it was too risky to go back up for the bag. I lost the necklace when we started for the

ridge where we had a hideout all ready, just in case. Fat-stuff sneaked down to the village two days later and mailed the rings to Saint Louis. A dame out there hocked them to take the heat off your place."

The old man groaned. "Folks thought I was mad as a hatter. They aim to arrest me an' throw me in the nut house. In fact, wouldn't be surprised if the constable was to show up any minute now."

Smiling, she shook her head in gentle negation. "We don't overlook angles with a million at stake," she said. "There's a truck stalled on that one-way bridge. A big truck."

The old man bent over and parked the goblet on the floor. The kitchen darkened in the fading light of dusk. They hadn't overlooked any angles? He knew it when she said, "It's time you usually come in and start supper. Turn on the light."

He walked woodenly to the switch beside the sink and turned on the light. The muzzle of the automatic followed him as he returned to the cellar door and backed against it. His knees trembled.

"Reckon you aim to kill me, the way you talked so much," he said.

The blonde yawned. "Not me. Fat-stuff. It's his turn," she said, added irrelevantly, "I feel naked without my makeup. I started using warpaint when I was thirteen."

The old man looked at his hands. They were big, red hands with swollen knuckles, and palms and fingertips were callused from years of manual labor. He studied his hands raptly. He didn't know what to do with them. Finally he tucked them under his armpits so she couldn't see how badly they were shaking.

The blonde got up suddenly and side-stepped to the open door where she straddled the threshold and snuggled back against the frame. She swung her left wrist around in front of her face and looked at her watch. He saw her throat work.

"Time drags in tight pinches," she said. "This is it. We pick up the chips and cash them in. Then South America. It's the high life from here on in. It's six big cars and ten mink coats and a house loaded with servants."

There was a long, strained silence.

The explosion was mighty. It blossomed

out of the orchard, orange-yellow sheets of flame billowing blue-white smoke that spanned out and shrouded the tree tops. The cottage rocked on its foundation. Shattered window panes danced and cavorted across the floor. The tall weeds flattened against the earth, then sprang erect shaking themselves angrily. The report was deafening: an ear-splitting, reverberating BOOM. The ground trembled and a vase toppled from the china cabinet.

The blonde lurched into the kitchen and fell against the cold wood stove. The .45 fell from her shocked fingers and skidded across the floor. The old man scooped it up. Hands gripping the stove edge, the blonde began to scream and shake her head. The veiled hat fell off and butter-yellow hair whirled around her shoulders.

IN THE VILLAGE the fire siren wailed, and in the parlor the phone rang like crazy. The woman went on screaming and shaking her head. Then she let go the stove and twisted around to sit down hard on the floor with her legs straight out and her back against the oven door. Her skirt went up well above her knees.

Shocked, Cyrus Harper said disapprovingly, "Put down your dress!"

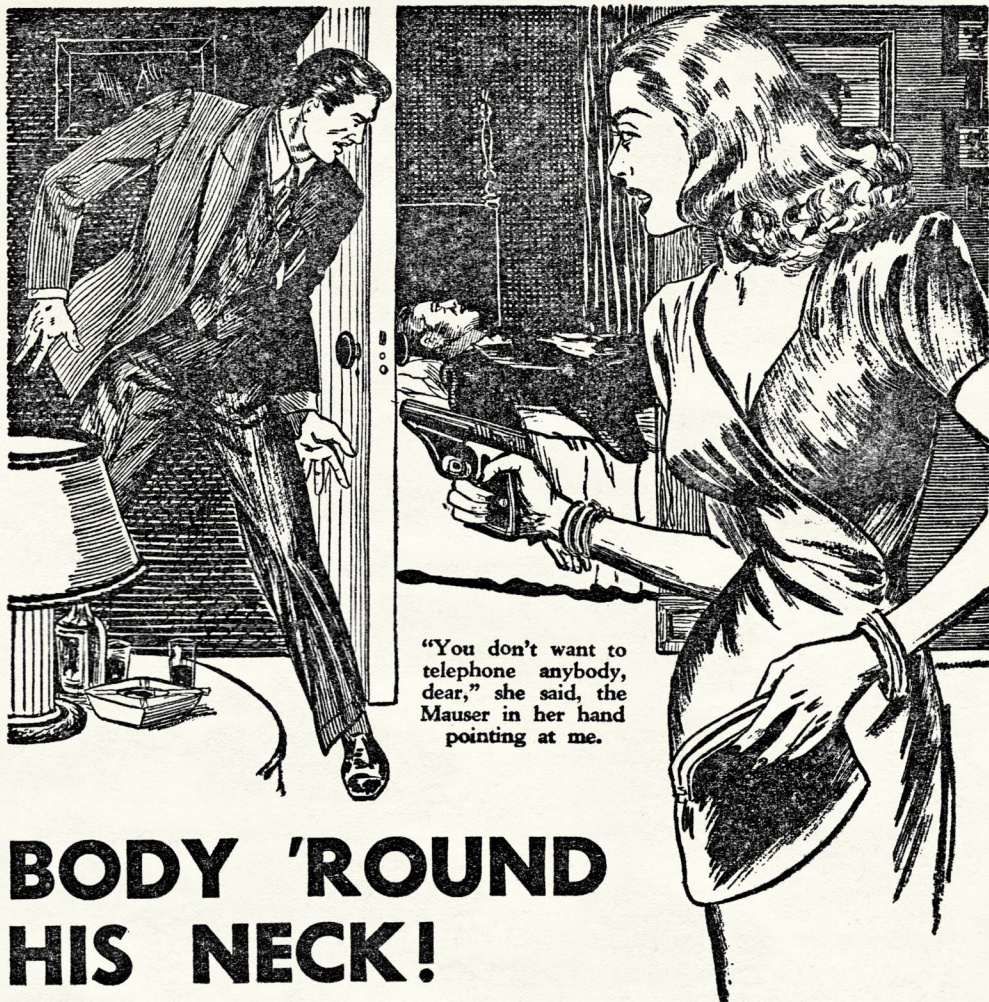
She did so mechanically. Face the color of putty, eyes glassy bright, she sat with mouth agape and sobbed for breath. Bitter tears began to drip from her lashes.

"I got them jewels the next day," said the old man succinctly. "Put 'em in my food locker. Didn't dare turn 'em in. The news would have got out an' you killers wouldn't have come back an' got the justice you deserved. I knowed you'd watch the place. So I begun to look to bring you back quick. I'm an old man an' I didn't dare wait too long for fear them jewels'd be found after I was dead an' folks'd think me dishonest. I rigged one of them booby traps up in the tree. Hell an' hardtack, I cleared stumps off land years ago. I can handle dynamite good."

He scarcely heard her defeated voice. "How'd you know?" she whispered.

"Birds. Birds is curious. Lots of them flew around that tree top talkin' it over the next mornin'. A couple o' crows was right

(Continued on page 128)



BODY 'ROUND HIS NECK!

By B. J. BENSON

She was strictly out of Happy Walker's dreams. She had golden hair with tints of sunlight in it. She had the softest lips a man ever tasted. And the note in her voice told Happy it was all his—if he'd, please, darling, get rid of just one teensy-weensy body for her!

IT WAS three o'clock in the afternoon and I was having a glass of beer at the bar. I had Nooker's order in my book, and Nooker himself was standing behind the glass-brick bar asking me questions about tea. He wanted to know the difference between English breakfast and English gunpowder tea and why Jap green tea was so high now and whatever hap-

pened to the big demand for Formosa Oolong.

I told him frankly I didn't know. I sold it. I didn't plant it or pick it or blend it. Sometimes I drank it. But that was all.

"Happy," he said to me, "you're an aitch of a salesman."

Nooker didn't use profanity. He thought it indelicate for an ex-pug to swear. He

said it wasn't genteel. Not when he owned a cocktail lounge in one of the better sections of town.

"Mr. Nooker," I said loftily, "I happen to be the best dee salesman in the North-eastern Division."

I didn't swear either when I was in Nooker's.

"You mean *tea* salesman," he said. He had a squashed-in face, and his nose pointed in the general direction of his right ear. His ears looked like a couple of leftover pieces of Danish pastry, and when he smiled you thought you were looking into the gold deposit at Fort Knox.

I sighed. I wasn't sighing at Nooker. I had just finished my beer and I had been looking down at the end of the bar while he had been talking. I had seen something standing there.

She was tall. She was slim, long-legged. Her clothes were the best money could buy. Her hair was golden yellow, the color of ripe bantam corn. Her profile was as good as any in Hollywood. And while I was gaping at her Nooker was poking at me with a gnarled finger.

"Married," he said, "to some big-shot. Lay off."

"A man," I said stiffly, "can admire a beautiful sunset or a beautiful picture in an art gallery. He can even admire a beautiful woman."

"This ain't no art gallery, bub. You're a good-looking kid and she's a good-looking kid. She's married to a guy lots older than herself and they don't get along. The husband is a very tough hombre. See what I mean?"

I saw what he meant.

It was an effort but I started to tear my eyes away from her. Then suddenly she began to sway. Before anybody could reach her she had crumpled to the floor. I was the first one to her. I kneeled down and cradled the lovely head in my lap. Nooker vaulted over the bar with a bottle of spirits of ammonia. When he got there he pulled her skirt down over a silk-clad dimpled knee and glared at me. I was chafing her soft wrists.

He waved the bottle under her saucy little nose.

"Nix," he said to me.

She stirred and opened a pair of big blue

eyes. Then she smiled shakily at Nooker. There was a red welt on the translucent skin near her left eye.

"I'm sorry," she whispered. "I must have had a dizzy spell. Would you help me up, please? I'm quite all right now."

I put my hands under her armpits and helped her up. Her shoulders quivered delicately. She turned to look at me for the first time, and she smiled again.

"Thanks ever so much," she said.

"Nix," said Nooker worriedly at me.

"I think I can go home now," she said.

"I only live in the next block."

"My car's out front," I said. "I'll be glad to drive you home."

"Nix," Nooker said. "I can get her a cab."

"The gentleman is so kind, Nooker," she said. "Let's not be rude to him. You hurt his feelings."

"You can't hurt his feelings, Mrs. Liggett. He's a salesman. He's the kind of salesman who doesn't know what the word *no* means. Get it?"

"I get it," she smiled. "He sounds very fascinating. What's his name?"

"Walker," I said. "Hapgood Walker. But my friends call me Happy."

"I'm your friend, Happy," she said.

"And my friends call me Janice."

"Trouble," Nooker mumbled. "My name is trouble."

I picked up her purse and she leaned on my arm. We went outside to my car. She looked at the seal on the door panel and she giggled.

"Tea," she said. "Imagine that. A big husky man like you selling tea."

"Fascinating," I said, "the different kinds of people you meet."

HER ADDRESS was a huge pile of modernistic glass and steel. There was a canopy at the entrance and a white-haired doorman.

I pulled up in front. The doorman opened the door and tipped his cap.

"Afternoon, Mrs. Liggett," he said.

She smiled at him briefly, then turned to me.

"Happy, I owe you a drink. I'd be grateful if you came up and got paid."

"That's me," I grinned. "The best little debt collector in the world." I hopped out of the car and came around the sidewalk.

I looked at the doorman, but he was staring stonily in the general direction of South America.

We went in through the lobby and up the elevator to the tenth floor. We went down the hallway and she got a key out and handed it to me.

I opened the door. The living room was carpeted in rich, thick, Burgundy broadloom and was as big as a city block. I sank down into a down-filled, silk-brocade chair and wiggled my toes. She went off somewhere. I got up and started to look around. There were some good oil paintings on the wall. I looked at them. The signatures were familiar and they must have cost a great deal of money. I walked around a little and noticed the collection of Chinese porcelain figurines. Then I noticed something else. Off to the left there was an opened door. Through it I saw a large high bed covered with a pale green satin spread.

Square in the middle of it lay a man fully dressed. I looked again. I shook my head and blinked my eyes.

He was still there.

She came into the living room with some glasses and a silver bucket filled with ice cubes.

"Maid's day off," she said. "Look around. I'll be back in a minute."

"Pardon me," I said. "But there happens to be a man in the bedroom. Isn't that rather unusual?"

"Unusual? Why should it be unusual? It's my husband. He's asleep, so please don't wake him."

I started to say something, but I couldn't find my tongue. By the time I regained the use of my vocal cords she

had disappeared from the room again.

I tiptoed over to the bedroom door and peeked in. The man was big. He had a big, tough, flabby face with a stubble of a beard. His temples were grey and his hair was thin. He looked about fifty. He was wearing an expensive gabardine suit and the coat was open, showing a spotless white silk shirt. He was lying stiffly on his back and his face was waxen. If he was asleep then there must have been a trick to it.

Because his eyes were wide open and staring at the ceiling.

I went over to him and touched his wrist. His skin was ice cold. Then I saw the dried blood on his neck and the four or five tiny holes punched in his throat. I got out of there fast and back to the living room. She was waiting for me with a bottle of Scotch in her hand.

"You didn't wake him?" she asked.

"Nobody could wake him," I said. "Not in a million years. Your husband is as dead as he can possibly be."

"Oh," she said. She picked up one of the glasses and started to pour.

"Look," I said. "Maybe you didn't hear me, but your husband is dead."

"I heard you."

"You told me he was asleep."

"What's the difference? Come here, dear, and have your drink."

"I don't want a drink. I want a telephone. There is a slight difference, you know. Just enough to hang somebody."

"You don't want the telephone, dear," she said softly.

"No?"

"No." There was something in her hand and it was pointing at me. A .25

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caliber German Mauser. She snapped the safety off with her thumb.

"Is that loaded?" I asked. My voice sounded a little weak.

"A full clip," she said.

"That does make a difference," I said, sitting down. "There's no hurry, anyway. Your husband's been dead for hours."

"You know?"

"Certainly, I know. I saw a lot of corpses during the war. But I never thought the knowledge would be of any use to me again."

She looked at me steadily for a long moment.

"I didn't kill him," she said.

"No? You don't seem to care much whether he's alive or not."

"I didn't kill him. I detested him. I'm glad he's dead. But I didn't do it."

"You seem happy about it. Maybe I'd better hear more."

"I'll tell you all of it," she said. "It's not very pleasant. Perhaps you'd better have a drink first."

"Thanks. Make it a stiff one."

"Pour it yourself, dear. I'm all thumbs when I have a gun in my hand."

I WENT over to the table. She edged away a little, the gun swinging around to me. I popped two ice cubes into a glass and poured some Scotch in. I added some water from a cut-glass carafe. I took the glass and went back to my chair.

"Go ahead," I said. "Make it good."

"It happened this morning at about nine o'clock," she said. "I was in my bedroom. I heard the door buzz. It's our maid's day off, if you'll remember. I got up and reached for my negligee. But my husband called out from his bedroom that he'd take it. He said he was expecting somebody."

"Oh, two bedrooms. Which one is yours?"

"That one is his, where he is now. Mine's back there."

"Separate bedrooms" I said. "Very, very modern."

"Yes, very modern," she said. "Anyway, Roger let the person in and they went into his bedroom to talk. I heard their voices. There was some kind of an argument. The voices got angrier. I couldn't hear what they were saying but the voices got so loud that I became

frightened. Suddenly there was a shriek and then a piercing scream. I threw my robe on and came out of my bedroom. The visitor was just closing the front door. I went after him, flung the door open. He was running down the hall. I called to him but he didn't look back. He ran down the stairway. I went back and into Roger's bedroom. I saw him on the bed. There was an icepick in his throat."

"Dead?"

"Not yet. I ran to him and instinctively pulled the icepick out. He motioned to me. He was trying to say something. I leaned my head close to him and he whispered a name. It was Fred something."

"Fred what?"

"I'm not sure. His whisper died away just then. Toy or Toyle, it sounded like."

"You never heard of this Fred Toy before?"

"No."

"What did you do then?"

"I was dazed. I went to the telephone. Then I stopped. I knew it was too late for a doctor."

"It wasn't too late for the police."

"The police, too."

"Why?"

She laughed. Shortly. Bitterly.

"Why?" she asked. "Because I've had some violent quarrels with my husband. Everybody knew we didn't get along."

"So?"

"So it was our icepick. Roger had a peculiar habit. He drank very early in the morning. He chopped his ice very fine."

"So you had violent quarrels and the icepick belonged in the house and it had your fingerprints on it. You didn't like the way it added up."

"How would it look to you, if you had a badge in your pocket?"

"I don't know. I haven't got a badge. By the way, what business was Roger in?" I asked.

She got up and went over to the table. She picked up her purse. Very casually she put the Mauser in and snapped the clasp.

"You're not afraid of me any more?" I asked.

"I never was afraid of you, Happy," she said. Her eyes were lidded. "I didn't want you to do anything before I told you the story."

"I was asking you what business Roger was in."

"He was a professional gambler. Horses, cards, dice, numbers, everything."

"Lots of money?"

"Up and down. Rich one minute, poor the next. I hated it."

"You're still here."

"Am I? Perhaps I felt sorry for him. He drank too much. He needed somebody to look after him."

"Florence Nightingale," I said. "No love? Not even in the beginning?"

"No. And please don't sneer at me. Perhaps I would have left him if I wasn't so afraid of him. He had an uncontrollable temper. He was vengeful and cunning."

"You're cute, too," I said. "That was a beautiful act you put on in Nooker's."

"I was so desperate. Can't you see, Happy? I had nobody to turn to. Nobody. Then I saw you in there and you looked so big and strong—and so capable."

"And so gullible," I said. "And now that you've snagged your fish, what do we do?"

"I—I don't know."

"You don't know. I don't even know how I get mixed up in these things. And don't tell me it's fate."

"But you'll help me?"

"Do I have any choice? You know darn well I'll help you. You're the kind of girl a man would do almost anything for. You know it, too. That's the funny part of it."

"You're sweet. You're so sweet, Happy."

"That's me," I said. "Remind me to polish up my medals."

She came over and stood before me, her knees touching mine. Her lips were slightly parted. Soft, expectant.

"Get your coat," I said. "We might as well start looking for this Fred Toy."

Her eyes scanned my face and she hesitated. Then she turned and went out of the living room. I watched her go. I looked over to the table and to her purse on there. I went over and opened it. I picked the Mauser up. I unlocked the magazine and slid it out of the butt. It was fully loaded.

WE WERE driving down Pine Street. She slid over on the seat and snuggled up to me. I kept my hands on the wheel.

"By the way," I said. "What did you do with the icepick?"

She stiffened and slid back to her position.

"Don't remind me," she said.

"Well?"

"I put it away in his room."

"Did you touch anything else? Did you disturb him?"

"No. I left him the way I found him. Do you *have* to bring those things up?"

"I have to get the picture," I said. "Did Roger have anything cooking?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean did he have any big bets out or did he lose on something and refuse to pay off?"

"Not Roger. He had a code, I suppose. He always paid off."

"Did anybody owe him anything? Did he place any big bets recently?"

"Wait a minute," she said. "You've reminded me of something. I know now, Happy." Her face was intent, thinking. "He put a hundred dollars on a number."

"On the number pool? When?"

"Yesterday morning. A three-number play. The number was—let me think—four thirty-two. That's it, four three two."

We were at the corner of Pine and State. I pulled over to the curb in front of a green front drugstore.

"Wait here," I said. "I'm going to check something."

I hopped out of the car and went into the store. I got into a phone booth and called Bill Huxley at the *News-Tribune*.

"Bill," I said. "This is Happy Walker."

"Hi, Happy," he said. "When are you coming down to the club so I can beat the pants off you in handball?"

"Tomorrow, if I'm still around. Tell me, what was the number last night?"

"Wait. I'll find out."

I waited. I looked through the glass and saw a soda dispenser dishing out a hot marshmallow fudge sundae with a twist and a flourish. A rosy-cheeked girl in bobby socks and moccasins had her legs curled around the stool and was reaching for it eagerly. Near me a wizened old man was thumbing through some magazines.

The phone rasped again.

"Happy? The number was four three two seven."

"How about this, Bill? A guy's got a

hundred riding on the first three. How does that pay?"

"A hundred bucks straight on four three two? That's big money, Happy. The payoff is five hundred to one."

"You mean he'd collect fifty thousand bucks?"

"That's right."

"But would a bookie pay off that much? That's a lot of dough."

"Sure it is. But no bookie would be crazy enough to take the whole play. He'd be afraid to. He'd split it at least ten ways with other bookies. Each taking ten dollars of it."

"But supposing he took the chance, Bill?"

"Are you supposing, or is there something to all this?"

"Just supposing. Skip it. What I called for is to find a bookie named Fred Toy or Toyle."

"There's Fred Troy. You mean him?"

"That's it. Where do I find him?"

"Is there a story in it for me?"

"Maybe. I'll know later."

"If there is, I want first crack," he said. "Troy hangs out at the Handy Billiard Parlors over on West Carlton Street. Anybody can tell you where it is. Don't fool around with him. He's a tough baby."

"You're telling me," I said. "Thanks, Bill. I'll send you a tea bag."

"Don't strain yourself. I'll see you, Happy."

I hung up and opened the booth. The girl at the counter had moved half off the stool and was lapping up the end of her sundae. The old man had moved over to the detective magazines. I moved out to my car.

"Let's go," I said as I got in. "I've found Fred."

"Fred Toy?" she asked.

"Something like that."

"How did you ever do it, dear?"

"A friend of mine owns a crystal ball."

"You're really wonderful, Happy. You know, if we'd only met sooner things would have been different for both of us."

"You're not kidding," I said.

I HEADED the coupe down Western Avenue and over to West Carlton Street. I drove through the dirt-littered street until I came to a store with a dan-

gling, peeling sign. The sign said Handy Billiard Parlors. I stopped. A street car clanged impatiently behind me. I jockeyed the car in between two huge parked trucks and turned off the ignition. I helped Janice out and went down three stone steps and into the poolroom.

The place was long and narrow with green-shaded lamps over the tables. Although it was late afternoon and the sun was still strong it made no difference inside. They had all the lights on and the place was filled with chatter and cigarette smoke.

Behind the counter at the entrance was a sallow old man with lank grey hair. He was rolling an unlit cigar in his mouth.

"Fred around?" I asked.

He looked past me at Janice. His old eyes ran up and down her figure. He grunted.

"Fred who, kid?"

"Fred Troy."

"Oh, Troy. Yeah, he's over there." He pointed to a stocky hammered-down man in shirtsleeves. The man looked over to us. He was chalking a cue and there was a toothpick in his mouth. The light glinted on his bald pate. He had a thick barrel chest and long gorilla-like arms.

"Oh, Happy," Janice breathed beside me. "That's him. That's the man."

"Okay," I said. "That's all I wanted to know. Let's get out of here."

That was when I sensed something odd in the air, and at first I couldn't figure what it was. Then I knew. When we had come in, the room was buzzing with voices. Now the place was as quiet as a library. There were two dozen men of assorted ages and sizes, and every one of them had his eyes glued to Janice.

One of them had come up and had gotten between us and the door. He was only a kid. He was as slim as an eel and as hard as granite. He was wearing a grey felt hat with a very wide brim. His shoulders were overpadded and his pants overpegged. He leaned against the door frame and swung a long key chain back and forth.

"Asking questions, pal?" he asked. His voice was low and husky.

"Yeah," I said, feeling my scalp prickle. "I was going to place a little bet. I changed my mind. Any objection?"

He leered at Janice. His mouth had a nasty twist.

"We got no objection to the broad, pal."

I reached out and grabbed him by the collar. I yanked him to me and twirled my wrist hard. He gagged. His eyes bulged out. I could see him fumbling for something with one of his hands. He came up with a woven leather blackjack and tried to bring his arm around. I held him up a little higher and smashed my fist into his nose. The blood spouted out and ran down over his mouth and onto my hand at his collar.

I took the blackjack away and pushed him down to the floor.

"As long as the lady's with me," I said "she's no broad."

"Wait a minute," somebody said. "Don't go away mad."

I turned around. It was Fred Troy. He was standing near me with a big grin on his face.

"Well, what is it?" I asked. My scalp was tingling again. The slim kid was picking himself up off the floor. His face was smeared with gore and his eyes were tiny pinpoints. He was fishing for something in his pocket.

"All right, Tony," Troy said tiredly to him. "Never mind the show. The guy's got your number, so breeze off."

"Give me a whack at him," Tony panted.

"Blow," Troy said tersely. "You're about as tough as a chocolate eclair." He turned back to me. "You say you wanted to place a bet, mister?"

"I changed my mind."

He laughed. A hoarse, bullish roar.

"You've got it," he said. "There's no mistake about that. Take care of him, miss.

Hold onto him—he's one in a million."

"I know it," she said sweetly. "I've been watching him."

"So I seen all along," he said. "You can take your hand out of your pocket-book now. Nobody's going to bother nobody."

"So-long," I said to Troy. "I'll be seeing you around."

"So-long," he said.

I OPENED the door to her apartment and stood aside to let her in. Then I went over to the bedroom and opened the door. It was no optical illusion. The corpse was still there. The setting sun was throwing long red fingers across his face. I shivered a little and went back to the living room. Janice was sitting at the table with a telephone book open.

"I've got Troy's home address," she said. "The whole thing is comparatively simple now."

"How simple?"

"We'll wait until it's dark, and then we'll put the body in the dumbwaiter and get it into your car."

"Then?"

"Then we bring it over to Troy's and dump it. We'll leave the icepick there. I've wiped off my fingerprints."

"And then?"

"Then we phone the police. Anonymously, of course. We'll tell them where they can find Roger Liggett. That's the end of it."

The end of it. I was suddenly very tired. All the sap had gone out of me.

"No," I said. "The end of it is right here. I'm phoning the police."

"But, darling. You've got to give me a



WOT'CHA LOOKIN' FOR
THIS TIME, CUNN'L-TIGERS?



TIGERS PIFFLE, SAM, THERE'S MA' GAME!

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chance to cover myself. "It's not as if—"

"You're a liar," I said.

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"You know what I'm talking about. You killed your husband. You had a fight with him this morning and he hit you. You've still got that red mark I first noticed in Nooker's. See, your hand is moving up to it. You grabbed the icepick and let him have it. Then it was done. It was the end. Unless, of course, you could plant it onto some sap—like me."

"You're so sure," she whispered.

"Sure I'm sure. You claim you didn't touch him. All right, where's the blood? Or doesn't he bleed like everybody else? Or is it because you dressed him afterward and made the bed up?"

"Yes. I made the bed and changed his clothes. I was panic-stricken. I didn't realize what I was doing."

"You were about as panic-stricken as an iceberg. Your husband called out to you from the bedroom, but when there was a violent quarrel you couldn't hear a thing. You could describe a man perfectly when all you saw of him was his back running down the hall. Now don't tell me Troy was running around in shirt sleeves this morning."

"It wasn't very good, was it?" she said. Her voice was almost inarticulate. She sat there rigidly with both hands tight on her purse.

"No. Neither was that fantastic story about the numbers pool."

"I guess I overdid it," she said slowly.

"You waited too long."

"I waited too long for everything. Can't you see, Happy—I never belonged here to all this. If I had only met somebody like you earlier. I never did. I met Roger and he turned my head. I never had a chance. He showered me with everything. A girl always dreams of those things, of this."

"You'd never have married a guy like me, Janice. Marriage to you was strictly business. A commodity. This is the life you wanted."

"Not now, Happy. Not after meeting you."

"Sure," I said. "Love at first sight. Sounds great. Only it wasn't that at all. You were going to throw me to the wolves. I was going to get the sucker punch."

"What are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about the first way you had it planned. This afternoon. Me here. My alleged fatal fight with your husband and you defending yourself with the Mauser. It was going to be me with slugs in my belly and you sobbing out my brutality and lust to the cops."

"You're so wrong, Happy."

"Oh, no. The only thing that stopped you was the time element. You didn't know until I told you how long he was dead."

"But that's all over with. It's you and me now. It isn't too late. We can go away somewhere."

"Not me," I said. "I don't want to wake up in the morning with an icepick in me. You'd frame me in a minute when the going got rough. You were willing to do it to Troy."

"It was self-preservation."

"Which reminds me. There's the phone. I'll want some police here now. I need a little preserving myself."

"I wouldn't try it, Happy," she said.

THE MAUSER was in her hand again. She had the safety catch off.

"Not now," I said. "It wouldn't buy you a thing now."

"Don't be a hero, Happy."

"I'm no hero," I said. I went over and picked up the phone. I dialed the operator.

"Happy!" she screamed.

She pulled the trigger. The hammer clicked. She squeezed again. It clicked.

"We were talking about self-preservation," I said. I took the small cartridges out of my pocket and opened my hand. "Were these what you were looking for?"

She turned her head and I spoke into the phone.

"You once told me," she said bitterly, "that you'd do almost anything for me. This proves it."

"I said *almost* anything, Janice. This isn't one of them."

I spoke into the phone. "Homicide, please."

I turned my head again and looked over to her. She was staring at the bedroom door with clenched hands.

"Go ahead," I said to her. "Go in and take a look at him. Take a good look."

WHAT MAKES SAMMY LAUGH?



The five-pound rock came up and smashed down, again and again, a needless number of times.

Little Sammy Rufus laughed and laughed when his new-found traveling companion murdered the harmless stranger. But what would you do with a gun in your back and a cold voice whispering in your ear, "Laugh, Sammy—it's funny!"

By JOHN D. MacDONALD

THE HIGHWAY was steel-blue, shimmering with heat and as straight as a rifle shot. Sammy Rufus plodded along, his heels making a faint sticky sound on the asphalt. Whenever he heard the growing hum of a car behind him he stepped off onto the shoulder, turned, beamed the Rufus special

smile, gave a full arm sweep with a thumb at the end of it, pointing east.

Each car burst toward him, the hum rising to a roar, the roar to a scream and then to a dispiriting subdued note, leaving nothing but dust devils whirling along the shoulder and a hot blast of air.

He was a small dark man with pointed

features, an air of massive confidence, and clothes carefully accentuating the bold look. He was sorry about the bold look shoes. "Like iron, yet," he muttered under his breath.

He could not quite understand how this thing had happened to him. "Me, an angle expert!"

How was this Texas so big?

It was a complicated situation, beginning with a short-term employment in New York placing some fat bets for Gorringer, who had detected a nice spread in odds on a Garden bout. Sammy Rufus' percentage had been big enough so that, when Gorringer gave him a tip on a California track, Sammy had hopped the Super-Chief. On the way out he'd picked up a few more bills playing Oklahoma with a producer. The track had turned out fine and with a fat wad of bills he'd gone to Reno.

He guessed that maybe it happened because for the first time in his life he was knocking a game that wasn't bust-out for the clientele.

It had gone to his head.

After five hours of play the only thing he had left was a dazed smile. Being a man of ingenuity he had sold wristwatch, extra clothes and luggage for enough money for a ticket to New York. He fell asleep in the station and woke up with his hip pocket neatly sliced with a razor, the wallet gone.

This was the most awful thing that had happened to Sammy Rufus since the day, fourteen years before, when he had decided that work was for the workers.

His massive confidence was sagging a bit and some of the sawdust was running out of the seams. He stared at the scorched Texas landscape and yearned for Times Square. His sharp nose was peeling and his eyes ached from the impact of the white-hot light. The heavy shoes had rubbed blisters on his feet. He muttered to himself as he walked, marveling at the way the highway ahead seemed covered with water—water which somehow always stayed ahead of him.

His shirt clung to him, but he didn't want to take off his jacket because that might be the deciding factor in whether or not one of the cars stopped.

He squinted ahead and saw, through the

waver of heat waves, a man sitting on a rock about a quarter-mile ahead. Sammy quickened his pace. He desperately wanted to talk to somebody, to explain to somebody that he, Sammy Rufus, wasn't the type guy to be bumming through this frightening alien landscape. Sammy was a gregarious sort and, in his extremity, he was even willing to think of Texans as kindred spirits.

WHEN Sammy was within a hundred feet the man sitting on the rock turned a brown face toward him and stared. The intensity of the stare made Sammy feel uncomfortable.

Sammy put on his most friendly smile, walked directly up to the man and said, "Boy, how hot!"

After a studied pause the man said, "Yeah." He was a youngish man, brown hair bleached to yellow-white where the sun hit it, face a deep red-brown.

Sammy gained confidence as he saw the expression in the pale blue eyes. The expression was dull and vacant, and there was a sulky, stupid look about the loose, wide-lipped mouth. Sammy mentally assayed him as "a low voltage punk who found the fourth grade too tough for him."

The man wore grey cotton pants and a grey cotton shirt, heavy black shoes. His hands were large and roughened, with huge knuckles and a large amount of sun-whitened hair, tightly curled, on the backs of them.

Sammy, unaccountably, wondered how those hands would feel tightening around his throat.

Sammy said, "Somebody took all my dough while I was sleeping in a railroad station and now, imagine it, Sammy Rufus has got to bum rides like a tramp!"

"No money," the young man said heavily.

"No, I told you—hey!" The young man came up off his rock with a motion so fast that it blurred in front of Sammy's startled eyes. Sammy was suddenly on his stomach with a heavy pressure in the small of his back. White dust sifted into his mouth. Then the pressure was gone. Sammy sat up, indignant, spitting dust. The young man was back on the rock. He was lighting one of Sammy's cigarettes with Sammy's imitation-gold lighter.

"You want a cigarette, you ask for one, see!" Sammy said shrilly.

The young man grinned. It did something odd to his face. It put it out of focus. It was like a midnight movie on Hallowe'en. Though the young man did not stir from the rock, the brown face seemed to move much too close to Sammy Rufus.

"Give me back my lighter," Sammy said weakly.

The lighter thumped off Sammy's chest. Sammy picked it out of the dust and stood up, moved back five respectful feet. This kid was nuts, clearly. Better move off down the road.

"Well, good-bye," Sammy said with forced cheer.

The smile went off the young man's face. "Stick around."

"Well, you see I got to get to—"

"Stick around!"

"Oh, you mean stay here? Sure. Glad to. I just . . ."

A truck roared toward them, the tires making a wet tearing sound on the asphalt, whined off into the distance. Sammy wished with all his heart that he was in that truck.

The young man gave him a long look. "Jones. Shake hands."

Sammy rubbed his thin hand on his pants, gingerly extended it. His knuckles crunched ominously and he dropped to his knees with a shrill yelp of pain. He crouched, massaging his hand, looked up and saw that out-of-focus face again. The young man was smiling.

"That's a dandy joke," Sammy said.

"Then laugh."

"Well, my hand hurts and—"

"Laugh!"

"Oh, sure. Heh, heh, heh."

The young man looked at him and then laughed himself. It was a resonant, throaty braying, a brass obscenity. He wasn't young when he laughed. He was ageless, and evil. Sammy felt the evil. It tightened his throat and he was suddenly cold in spite of the brutal weight of the sun.

Sammy stood up again, shifted uncomfortably from one foot to another. "Look, Mr. Jones, I really got to get going and—"

"We'll ride in a nice car. You and me, Sammy. Pals. In a nice new car."

"Oh? Oh, sure. What'll we do? Build one?"

The young man moved again. Sammy put up both hands, palm outward, but a fist like a rock slid between his hands.

Sammy stirred and he was flat on his face. He opened his eyes and smelled the tar under his nose. He heard the hum of an approaching car. The realization that he was out in the road made him struggle with horrid panic. Tires screamed and so did Sammy. He was on his knees. A big car swayed toward him, horn blaring, tires yelling. Sammy closed his eyes, felt the wind of the car, felt no smashing impact.

He got up weakly. A big car was slewed halfway across the road and a sweating man in a white linen suit, red face indignant, was marching toward him, saying, "Are you drunk or crazy?"

Jones moved in quickly from the side. The big man's eyes widened and he tried to scuttle back to his car. There was a sound like a wet mop being slapped against a tile floor. The big man was dragged behind the rampart of stones.

This situation calls for

**WILDROOT
CREAM
OIL**

NON-ALCOHOLIC
Contains
LANOLIN



Sammy Rufus walked weakly over to protest, saw the grin on Jones' face, saw the five-pound rock lifted up, smashed down, again and again and again, a needless number of times.

Sammy lifted his bold-look shoes and ran down the highway. He didn't look back. He ran with his mouth open, his eyes bulging.

A car hummed up behind him, slowed, crawled along even with him.

"Get in," Jones said.

Sammy panted, "You killed that guy and I—"

"Get in!"

SAMMY sat in the car, huddled against the door. Jones' big brown hands held the wheel. The speedometer climbed rapidly up. Sixty, seventy, eighty, ninety. Finally the needle wavered at a hundred. The big car pranced lightly on the road and Sammy wondered how soon he was going to be sick. He looked at Jones' right hand, saw a spray of blood across the back of it and decided that it was going to be sooner than he thought.

Jones steered with one hand, reached across Sammy and opened the glove compartment. There was a holstered gun in the glove compartment. Jones pulled it out, dropped it in his lap and said, "This we can use, pal."

"You could let me out in the next town," Sammy said thinly.

"You're a great kidder, Sammy."

Sammy subsided into silence. He gave Jones a sidelong look, suddenly remembering that when Jones had bent over the man in the white suit, he had seen a number printed across Jones' back.

"You—you busted out o' some place?"

The young man said in a hoarse, dreamy voice, "They had me burning brush. Cedar brush. The smoke made my eyes water. I tore the guard in half with his own shotgun."

Sammy shuddered.

Jones slowed for the town, drove sedately through, once again pushed it up to one hundred.

Sammy tried to tell himself that at least he was making good time.

"You can let me out any place."

"They'll be looking for just one guy, pal. I need you."

"Where—where are we going?"

"I think we'll cut down to Eagle Pass and I think I'll swim the river. That'll be tonight. And I don't think you'll swim so good. I don't think you'll even float so good, Sammy."

"You . . . I . . . but . . ."

"Now let's hear you laugh again, pal. Show me how happy you are. Come on. Laugh for daddy."

"Heh, heh, heh," Sammy croaked.

Jones' great bray roared inside the car. Sammy wondered who would believe him when he told the story. And then he remembered that he wasn't going to get a chance to tell the story.

How did it go in the movies? You snatch the gun and drill him. Or you grab the wheel and the car rolls over and over and he gets killed but you walk away from it. Or you punch him in the jaw. Sammy clenched his fist, looked down at its pale frailty, then glanced at the red rock jaw of Jones. About like throwing feathers at him.

The little guys are supposed to out-smart the big ones.

He worked on that line of thought for a time. Then he made his voice as strong as he could and said, "Look here, Jones! Gimme a gambler's chance. Let's get a deck of cards and we'll play a hand of showdown. I win and you let me go."

With a deck of cards Sammy could deal himself four aces all day long.

Jones said, "Or maybe you got a coin with two heads and we'll match. Tails and you don't make it across the river."

Sammy slumped back in despair.

If only Jones would get hungry, or the car would run out of gas.

Another town appeared in the distance. A few gas stations and some drab sun-scorched buildings. Jones cut back the speed.

As they entered the town Sammy glanced ahead, saw a big brown dog chasing a small white dog, slashing at the small white dog. Sammy was a dog lover from way back.

He gloomily identified himself with the small white dog, with Jones as the big brown one. The little white dog had just as much chance as did Samuel Rufus.

The white dog, kiya screams resounding, tail tucked under his legs, cut diagonally

across the path of the big grey sedan.

The brown dog saw the car, turned back. Sammy said, "Hey! Look out!"

Jones swerved. But not away from the dog. Toward it. There was a small muffled thud and the kiwi sounds ceased as though cut by a knife.

Sammy yelled in fury and in anguish, turned and launched himself at Jones, thin white fists pounding feebly.

Jones was in the same sort of trouble as a man driving a car when a chicken flies in the side window. Sammy yawned with rage while Jones steered with one hand, tried to bat Sammy down with the other. But Sammy was too close to him. Jones reached into his lap for the gun, but it had been jarred down onto the floor.

With one wild flail, Sammy accidentally stuck his thumb in Jones' eye. Jones roared, lost hold of the wheel, backhanded Sammy, grabbed at the wheel and tried to yank the car back out of the trouble.

Another wild swing by Sammy struck the thick brown wrist of the hand that held the wheel. A small stream ran through the town. There was no water in it, but the bridge was there. The car hit the abutment solidly, slowly canted over onto its side.

Jones, his face set in lines of fury, snatched the gun, forced the door open, climbed out, turned back and aimed the gun at Sammy's head.

Sammy saw a hard brown hand catch Jones' arm and spin him around, heard a rough voice say, "Mister, I seen you aim to hit that dawg back there and—"

The gun cracked with a flat, bitter, empty sound, and a man coughed. Sammy climbed up out the door on Jones' side. Jones stood with his back to the car. One man on hands and knees coughed blood into the dust. Two other men stood thirty feet away, their eyes wide.

Sammy launched himself into the air and landed on Jones' back, skinny arms around Jones' throat. Jones bent suddenly and Sammy flew through the air, tumbling hard against the wounded man.

Sammy sat up just as a shot sounded, a shot with a heavier, more authoritative voice. Jones, slammed back by the heavy shot, bounced off the grey sedan, fell to

his hands and knees. He lifted the gun again, that wild, crooked, out-of-focus smile on his face. The second shot caught Jones flush in the mouth and broke his neck with the impact.

Sammy crawled on his hands and knees to the creek bed and gagged hollowly.

Hearty hands pulled him to his feet and he was half marched, half carried into the cool interior of a small general store. They put him in a leather chair and suddenly there was a glass in his hand, propelled up to his mouth.

A wave of pure fire went down Sammy's throat, exploded in his stomach. He took a deep, tortured breath and, with a voice like broken glass, said, "Smooth. Smooth as silk."

BY THE TIME the police arrived he had told his story four times. Each time it improved a bit.

When he told it to the police he said, "So I thought I'd better wait until we were in a town in case I had trouble handling him."

The police nodded sagely, took notes.

The man who had used the rifle from the porch of the store, the one who had killed Jones, acted as spokesman. He said, "Now A. J. ain't goin' to die, the doc says, but he sure as hell would if that character had a-put another slug in him. And maybe he'd a-got J. B. or L. P. too if you hadn't a jumped him from the back. There weren't no reward for this Jones, so we boys thought we might take up a little purse and kind of help you on your way."

Sammy Rufus remembered how Gary Cooper had acted in the scene right after he'd knocked off the opposition. Sammy Rufus inflated his chest, pulled down the corners of his mouth. "Wal," he said, "I only done what any man'd do."

"We'd like to do something for you."

"Then suppose you put me up for a couple of nights here. Just food and lodging. I don't want any money." He sighed. "Just a little relaxation, you know. Maybe tonight we could get a little card game organized."

"We'd be right proud to show you our brand of draw poker, mister."

"Table stakes," said Sammy Rufus, his fingertips tingling.

Gripping Hollywood Murder Novel



For once in her sweet life, Bonnie had nothing to say as the glass in the French door exploded and the black muzzle of a .45 came in.

ACTION! CAMERA!

CHAPTER ONE

Shakedown

"MAL," Dave Smith told his client, Malcolm Storme, "I hate to say this, but I'm afraid Baby has us faded!"

Dave shifted his weight, and the springs in his swivel chair wailed. They ex-

pressed better than Dave could how he felt about shelling out a hundred grand—even of somebody else's money. Dave tilted the high-backed, leather chair as far as it would go, squinted at his client.

Malcolm Storme was lean, dark, in-

By **DONN MULLALLY**



One minute Bonnie was there, and the next minute she was gone. . . . One minute Dave had a million-dollar contract in his pocket, and the next minute that was gone. . . . And one minute Dave was looking down toward the distant lights of Hollywood—and the next he had a hard foot in his back and a long, long drop before him. . . .

MURDER!

tense. He was a guy with everything, and nothing. The show business journal, *Variety*, summed it up this way: *Storme Pix B. O. Poison*. They weren't picking on Dave Smith's client, they were simply reporting what theater managers from coast to coast knew. Storme was poison at the box office. He could drop dead tomorrow and not a dozen bobby-soxers

would drape their pudgy ankles in mourning.

It was a strange thing, a mysterious thing. Here was an actor who had in two successive years dragged down an Oscar for the best performance of the year. But he was an actors' actor, they said—cold halibut.

Mal slumped lower in his chair. He

sighed, looked out the window without particularly seeing the Royal Californian Hotel across the street from Dave's office. It was there, an ugly grey cube. It had always been there—like, it seemed to Mal, the barbs his ex-wife Bonnie kept sinking in his back.

"Grim, isn't it, Dave?" he muttered. "Five years ago when we got our divorce I gave Bonnie every dime I had in the world, a mortgage-free house in Westchester, a car. I even paid up all her charge accounts around New York. It was hail and farewell—farewell, sucker, that is."

"It's rough," agreed Dave. "I wish I was smart enough to think of some way we could tell her to go . . ."

MAL flipped a brown hand indifferently. "I don't expect miracles, Dave. I'm a realist. I know the score. When that grand jury back in New York began investigating divorces, I had a hunch I'd be hearing from Bonnie."

Dave felt inadequate, trapped. He liked Mal personally, quite apart from the very decent commission Storme paid him. "If it was just the legality of your divorce, I'd say nuts to her," Dave rumbled. "You gave her a fair shake. If the State of New York wants to consider your marriage still in force, that's their worry. Frankly, I don't think the jury will go that far. Hell, there're too many people in your spot who have to live in New York. They'll recommend some changes in the law and that will be that. But the publicity, the field day the reporters would have with your name . . ."

The actor nodded. "Twenty million people can do the same thing Bonnie and I did—arrange a phony love nest and have a private eye break in and take some pictures; and all that proves is that the state needs to overhaul its divorce machinery. But if Malcolm Storme does it—that's immoral. That's a crime. Maybe he's even a bigamist and ought to go to jail!"

Dave sat up straight, leaned his several chins on his hand. "It won't come to that," he assured Storme. "But Roy Royall *would* love to abrogate your contract. He's an independent producer and the two million bucks he has to pay you

over the next three years comes out of his own pocket. If the New York Grand Jury serves you with a subpoena, Roy will exercise the morality clause in your contract the next day."

Dave Smith took a deep breath, added, "That's as bad a light as I can put on it, Mal."

"All right," sighed Mal listlessly. "So we pay Bonnie off. How do we know she won't ask for another hundred thousand next week? You make my tax returns, Dave. You know how much I have left when Uncle takes his. I can't go on doing this sort of thing indefinitely."

Dave flattened his thin hair, agreeing, "Right. I'll draw up settlement papers for her."

"Are you kidding, Dave?" snorted Storme. "They wouldn't mean any more to Bonnie than the papers she signed when we got our divorce."

"I know," Dave said, "but it's the best we can do. In the meantime, maybe the grand jury will be dismissed. I'm afraid you're on the hook until that happens."

"Okay," sighed the actor, "let's do it."

"When and where can I see this female?"

"Tonight, my house."

"Your house? You mean . . . Bonnie . . .?"

"Oh, definitely!" declared Storme. "You didn't think she would pass up a chance to be obnoxious, did you, Dave?"

Storme got up and paced to the window. "The darling arrived by plane yesterday. The first Jane and I knew of it, a taxi deposited her on our doorstep. Try to tie this, Dave—Bonnie is our house guest!"

Dave closed his mouth. He shook his head sympathetically. "Brother, you've really got trouble."

"Yeah," Mal agreed. He picked up his Homburg, threw his topcoat over his arm. At the door he stopped, managed a weak smile. "Bring the loot and whatever you want Bonnie to sign," he said. "We'll set a place for you at dinner. I hope you have a strong stomach."

Dave saluted with a wave of his hand. "I'll be there—and I know where you can get a hell of a buy in arsenic."

The actor set his hat carefully, the right rakish angle. "Don't lose the address,"

he cracked. "I might be in the market for a good fast poison—for myself!"

AS DAVE SMITH drove his beige Packard convertible up the winding, poplar-lined driveway to his client's Norman castle, the sun was dunking itself in the nearby Pacific. The Bel Air hills stood out in blushing Technicolor. The air was sweet with the smell of gumwood smoke from fireplace chimneys. Storme's kidney-shaped swimming pool lapped sullenly at its black marble rim.

Dave parked behind a low-slung British sport car, got out lugging a fat briefcase he'd had on the seat beside him. Bonnie had specified cash, and a hundred grand is a bundle.

Mal met him at the door. The actor had a tall drink in one hand, urged it on Dave. They were standing in the high-domed entranceway. Dave's voice echoed as he said, "Thanks, Mal, I can use a drink."

"If you think you need it now," snorted the actor, "wait until you've met my charming ex-wife!"

A toothsome, calendar-art brunette appeared suddenly in the living-room arch. She was wearing a big pout and mandarin red-and-black silk dinner pajamas. "Well, don't keep the gentleman waiting, Mal," she said, smiling. "After your *darling* build-up, I'm sure he's simply wild to meet me."

"Just wild," muttered Dave, nipping at his drink.

Mal said, "Dave, this is Bonnie; Bonnie, Dave Smith, my manager. I hope you two will never get along."

"Your manager!" cried Bonnie, making an act of being disappointed. "And I thought he might be that nice little man . . . the one who always plays Santa Claus in pictures!"

She brushed Dave's arm with her body. Dave held his ground, but barely, as she peered at him insisting, "Are you positive you're not that little man, Santa Claus? You have the figure for the part, you know."

Dave recoiled, felt foolish, juvenile. "If you say so . . ."

Bonnie was after him, more precisely, after his brief case. "And you always carry your bag of goodies with you, don't you, Santa? What did you bring me?"

Her former husband spun her away from Dave. "After dinner," he snapped. "You'll get your money after dinner—if I . . ."

"If you what?" Bonnie asked, rubbing her arm where Storme's hand had been. "If you don't change your mind?" she mocked. "You're kidding, Mal. You know Bonnie could have asked for two hundred thousand just as easily as one hundred. So you'd better be nice."

Dave Smith watched his client's hands opening and closing. Bonnie began to laugh.

"Get him!" she brayed. "One hundred per cent choice Smithfield!"

Dave tugged at Storme's arm. "Come on, Mal," he said. "Let's find Jane before this dame queers me on women."

Storme allowed himself to be dragged into the living room. Bonnie made no immediate effort to follow him. She didn't have to. She'd registered.

Jane, Mal's present wife, was a relief after Bonnie. She wore a dinner dress of powder-blue jersey with a fitted bodice and long, flaring skirt, a high and simple neckline, sleeves that all but covered her tiny hands. She was curled on one corner of a massive davenport before the fireplace when Dave and her husband entered the room.

It was plenty corny, Dave realized, to think of Jane as a Dresden doll. But she *was*. Fragile. Which, just to keep his metaphors straight, made Bonnie a Parisian doll. The long, loose-legged kind with over-rouged cheeks and mouth, mascaraed eyes.

Jane's eyes were blue, innocent of make-up. Innocent, period. The first time Dave met Jane he had wondered if anyone could be *that* pure. She looked up at the two men and smiled. "Dave, how nice that you could come."

The agent took her small hand clumsily. It was cold. Cold as death. He said, "I'm sorry the occasion isn't a happier one, Jane."

That deep, rasping laugh—Bonnie was in again. "If it's a celebration you're looking for, darling," she said to Dave Smith, "see me after dinner. I'm sure we'll think of something then to be gay about."

Jane froze. She seemed on the verge of

tears. Mal sat down beside her. Bonnie passed between them and the fire, her body outlined momentarily. It was a deliberate gesture, Dave was certain. Like a strip-tease dancer's final bump before she disappears.

Bonnie drew one corner of her full mouth down as she smirked at Dave. "There it is, Mr. Smith," she said, waving at her ex-husband and her successor. "Virtue Triumphant, or, A Good Gal Always Gets Her Guy!"

Dave had retreated to a heavy over-stuffed chair. He sank back in it with the briefcase on his lap. His face felt hot. "And a bad girl always gets the money," he muttered.

Bonnie tossed her black hair. "You are so right, honey," she brayed. "So right!"

DAVE could remember better dinners at Barney's Beanery. There was nothing wrong with the Storme table: standing rib roast and Yorkshire pudding—Dave's favorite dish, but no one seemed to care for food. No one except Bonnie. She flaunted her appetite. "Don't you think I'm brave, Mr. Smith?" she asked, buttering a baked potato.

"What do you mean, brave?" Dave countered, trying to keep his eyes off the bosoms she was training at him across the table.

"It would be so simple for Mal to slip some ground glass into my broccoli," she pouted, stuffing her mouth with rare roast beef.

"And don't think the idea doesn't have its charm," popped Storme from his end of the table.

Dave intercepted the silent signal Jane was flashing to her husband. Dave noticed her fingers, white through the clear lacquer on her nails. The message translated: "*No, Mal, please!*"

The muscles in Storme's jaw ridged beneath the skin. His mouth locked. He sat there, wooden, staring at the food on his plate. Dave thought the Yorkshire pudding tasted like cardboard.

After dinner Bonnie snuffed out the carmined butt of a cigarette in the dregs of her demi-tasse. "Well, gentlemen," she said, "shall we stop stalling?"

Mal seemed to shudder, his mouth compressing to a hard, bloodless line. He

rose stiffly. "Yes. By all means—let's."

He led Dave and Bonnie to his study. Mal locked the study door, checked the French doors opening on a terrace. They, too, were secure. Bonnie watched him, a crooked smile on her lips.

"I promise I shan't try to escape, Mal," she told him. "At least, until *after* I have my money."

Dave Smith laid his briefcase on the library table, motioned Bonnie to a deep leather chair in front of the cold fireplace. He was in no hurry, saw to starting a fire before he turned to the woman. "Bonnie," he said, toying with his gold cigarette lighter, "I think you should know—it is largely on my advice that Mal is agreeing to this."

"Why tell me?" The lady crossed her long legs. "Or am I supposed to pay you a commission?"

Dave shook his head. "No, my dear—and I use the term loosely. However, since I recommended paying you off, I have certain responsibilities—to Mal . . ."

He watched Bonnie languidly tap a cigarette on a crimson thumbnail. He held his Dunhill for her, and she smiled with her eyes through a sudden cloud of blue smoke. "I understand," she purred, "and I know you won't mind if I don't give a good damn!"

Dave carried on as though she hadn't spoken. "I have to be certain this is not simply the first of a series of shakedowns." He took an unsealed envelope out of his coat pocket. "I want you to sign something to that effect, Bonnie."

She sprang to her feet, snatched the envelope out of Dave's hand. With no waste motion at all, she pitched it into the fireplace. "Burns well, doesn't it," she remarked as the flames curled back the edges of the envelope, split it open.

"It's your hundred grand," said Dave. "Enjoy it."

"Oh, no, Mr. Smith. I'm still going to have that before I leave. At least, it would be much better for all concerned if I did."

"Go on, Bonnie," Dave replied quietly, "you interest me. Tell me why you think Mal should pay you a hundred thousand dollars with no assurance that—"

"Assurance?" She laughed. "You funny little man, you! I'll give Mal all the

assurance he needs. Unless we stop sparring around, I'm going to be on the next plane to New York. That grand jury will love me!"

Dave Smith saw that Storme had gone into a dark sulk behind his Louis XVI desk. "Pay her," the actor mumbled. "Pay the damn blood money and get her out of here!"

"Spoken like a gentleman!" Bonnie jeered.

"Just a minute, Mal, I . . ." Dave began.

Storme was pounding the desk top with his fists. "Pay the harpy and let her go!" he shouted, the veins standing out on his forehead. "If I have to look at her any more, so help me God, I'll kill her!"

"Okay, son, it's your money," Dave said. "Frankly, I think you're being hasty . . ."

"Give it to her!" Mal shrieked. "Every damned cent!"

Dave unbuckled his briefcase and began counting packets of bills. He glanced from his client's bowed head to Bonnie. Her eyes were hot, eager. "There's five thousand in each of these packages," Dave explained. "Twenty packages—you'll want to count them, of course."

"But nat—"

For once in her sweet life, Bonnie fumbled a wisecrack. She had it knocked right back in her teeth. The glass in the French door to the terrace shattered, exploded into the room. Dave saw the black muzzle of a .45 covering them from the broken door. "None of you folks want to make any sudden moves," a heavy voice drawled slowly from the darkness outside.

CHAPTER TWO

Million-Dollar Deal

THE MAN with the gun was dead right. The three in the room were doing a better than fair imitation of a still life. A gloved hand appeared beside the gun, fumbled with the door knob, got it open. Two characters swaggered into the study. They were wearing Levis, high-heeled boots. Big men. And their disguise was strictly out of a Western movie. Red bandannas, tight across their faces.

Dave's open briefcase, the money, was the attraction. The first guy strode over to Dave. His accent went with the rest of the Wild West act: "All right— Ah'll save you countin' this stuff, Shorty."

He scooped the bills back into the briefcase, waved his gun at Bonnie. "Suppose yo'all come along with us, Miss?"

She didn't buy the idea right away. She had to be urged. The other gunsels grabbed her arm, pushed her toward the broken door. Bonnie made an unladylike comment on his ancestry—fighting words, but she didn't get a fight. She just got shoved outside.

Gabby went on: "We'll take this li'l ol' gal along so if you gents decide to foller us, yo'al'll know it ain't healthy fer the gal. Savvy?"

He tucked the loot under his wing and backed out through the door, still covering Dave and Mal. It was quiet in the room. Very quiet, indeed.

Dave cleared his throat and the sound startled him. "Mal," he grinned, "are yo'all thinkin' what I am, podner?"

The actor's mouth moved uncertainly before words came. "You mean . . ." he

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stammered, "you mean we might get Bonnie off my neck permanently by following them?"

Dave Smith winked. "Can you imagine a better way?"

Mal shook his head slowly. He was tempted, but—"I have to live with myself, Dave."

"A few minutes ago you were going to kill her if I didn't get her out of your sight."

"That was just talk, Dave. I didn't mean . . ."

Dave shrugged. "Forget it. But let's not lose sight of the fact that those movie-town cow waddies lammed out of here with a pile of your cash. How about calling the cops?"

"The cops," Mal echoed. "Yes, I suppose we . . ."

He started to reach for the phone on the desk in front of him, stopped. "Dave—do you think those men will harm Bonnie?"

Dave snorted. "Harm Bonnie! They're probably wondering how much you'd want to take her off their hands!"

The actor studied Dave's smirk. The grin began to dry on Dave's face. He muttered, "The phone, Mal—remember, you were going to call the police."

Storme's head moved absently. He picked up the instrument, dialed Operator. "Give me the police department, please," he said.

Someone was tapping apologetically on the study door. Dave answered it. Jane came in, saw the broken glass from the French door—no Bonnie. Her little-girl face wrinkled in perplexity. She asked, "Where's Bonnie?"

"Kidnaped," answered Dave Smith, matter-of-factly.

"Kidna . . .?"

Smith nodded gravely, his chins pleating, unpleating. He watched Jane's mouth become slack as she listened to her husband tell the police all about it. The moment he put the phone down, Jane was in his lap, crying, "Oh, Mal!"

She was honestly terrified, Dave concluded. Or giving the performance of the year. Either way, Dave wondered why. Was he supposed to believe she cared what happened to Bonnie?

Dave witnessed as much damp domesti-

city as he could take. Then he coughed discreetly. "Pardon me, kids," he said, "but don't you think we could all do with a slight change of scene? How about moving into the living room and getting acquainted with a highball again? It seems like it has been a long time."

Jane bounced off her husband's knee with a small, well-modulated shriek. "Oh!" she cried. "I forgot! I forgot why I came in here."

Mal arched an eyebrow. "What was it, dear?"

"Mr. Royall—I left him in the living room. He came by and said he had to see you immediately," Jane went on, making helpless little gestures toward the door and herself. "That's why I—I—"

"I did hear you correctly, Jane?" Mal interrupted. "You're telling me Roy Royall, my esteemed employer, is waiting in the living room?"

She nodded, biting her lip. "I'm sorry, Mal, I—"

"Forget it, honey," Dave said, patting her shoulder. "It's good for jokers like Royall to wait. Besides, you got quite a jolt when you—"

"Dave," Mal cut in, "I'm sure Jane knows I'm not angry. What do you suppose is on Roy's mind?"

"There's one foolproof way to find out," Dave said, shepherding the Stormes toward the study door.

"One thing, kids," he counseled while they were walking toward the other wing of the house, "this is for both of you: So far as Royall is concerned, Bonnie doesn't exist."

He threw his heavy arms around them, smiling. "So you can stop acting like I just gave you the word on next year's income tax."

He hugged his client's shoulder. "Who knows," he chirped optimistically, "Roy might even have a picture for you!"

"That," declared Mal Storme, giving the line a curtain-speech reading, "I will have to see."

MALCOLM STORME was first a performer. Maybe his screen personality kept people away from theaters, but he could troupe. The big hello he had for his boss when the three of them wheeled into the living room was all Dave might've

asked. Jane did very well, too. Showed her teeth nicely.

Dave said, "Roy, you caught Mal and me on the phone to New York. Hope you didn't mind waiting."

The producer acknowledged the explanation with a curt nod. As if he believed it. Roy Royall was a Hollywood legend and looked the part. He was big and rough and partial to tweeds. Without a pipe in his square jaw he'd look naked. The Royall legend had him making his stake in the gambling halls of Reno and Vegas. He'd drifted into the picture game with nothing but money to recommend him. He had made more money. His crew-cut and black eye-patch were fixtures in the town. Like the footprints in the cement of Grauman's Chinese Theater forecourt.

He took the pipe out of his mouth long enough to greet the Stormes. "Dave," he said, "I'm glad you're here. Perhaps we can close this matter on the spot."

"What matter is that, Roy?" asked Dave.

He and the two Stormes were lined up on the davenport. Royall had the floor. All of it. For several minutes, he seemed uncertain just what to do with it. He paced in front of the fireplace, the bowl of his pipe bobbing as he chewed the stem.

He stopped, pointed the bowl at Mal. "It's like this, sweetheart," he said. "We're in a jam with that contract of yours. It's costing me dough, and it's not doing you any good. Sure, I could peddle you to some other producer for a lousy picture about unmarried mothers, or something. Or I can let you sit out your contract, and you're not any younger when it's over. A bum deal, Mal, any way you cut it."

Storme's eyes smoldered and he started to open his mouth, but Dave Smith silenced him with a look.

"What do you suggest we do about it, Roy?" Dave asked innocently.

Royall jammed the pipe back in his mouth, took a couple more turns before the fire. "There's only one thing to do, Smith," he snapped finally. "Make a settlement of the contract."

"For how much?" grinned Dave.

"I'll go a million—that's half what it'll cost me to keep him on."

"You can—" began Storme.

"Let me handle this, Mal," winked Dave. "A million—will you put that in writing, Roy?"

"I have," said Royall. He whipped a long envelope out of his coat pocket, handed it to the agent.

Dave put on tortoise-shell reading glasses, scanned the letter. He nodded, unclipped his pen and flourished it at Storme. "Go ahead, sign it. I'll witness your signature."

"But, Dave," Mal groaned, "I'm giving up a million dollars if I do."

"No you're not." Dave smiled owlishly. "We can write this million settlement off as a capital gain—save enough on taxes to make up the difference. A good deal, kid. Sign."

Dave's confident grin had a hypnotic effect on Storme. The actor began scratching his name on the agreement, both originals and carbons. He was on the last copy when the Storme butler spooked into the room.

Karsey was a small, dry Irishman who moved like paper ash in a high wind. He eddied. After much embarrassed shuffling, he managed to get Storme's ear. Storme rose immediately.

"Excuse me. I have a phone call."

Karsey made it official. As he followed Storme out of the room he paused long enough to pull a sad face. "Pardon us," he said.

Dave witnessed his client's signature, remarking to Roy Royall, "I'm a notary, you know. I'll put my seal on this in the morning. Bring your copy out when I pick up the check."

He beamed at Royall. "The check *will* be ready in the morning?"

The producer nodded. He tapped out the bowl of his pipe, reloaded it from a worn tobacco pouch. He'd lit it again before he spoke. "You're smart, Smith."

"Thanks, Roy, I—"

He was being paged. Karsey. "Mr. Storme would like to see you in the other room," he explained.

Dave lumbered after the charm-sized butler to a kind of powder room and glorified telephone booth just off the hall. Storme was there, staring at the phone as though it were a king cobra. He turned slowly to face Dave.

"Bonnie." His voice sounded like a bad tape recording. "It was Bonnie calling."

"Good!" Dave boomed. "She's all right then. Those hoods let her go."

Storme's head moved as if it were on a string. "She was calling from a drug-store," he went on. "They put her out of their car nearby. Dave, she said she thought I planned what happened. She's going to the police . . . the grand jury."

"Let her," laughed Dave. "She can't prove anything. Royall has already settled your contract, so she can sing to that grand jury in any key she wants. She can't hurt you now."

Storme's head was moving slowly, still on strings. "I'm not thinking about myself, Dave," he said. "Jane's a sensitive girl. I can't have Bonnie dragging her name through that kind of a scandal."

Dave studied the wall over his client's head, the knock-kneed flamingo in the pattern of the wallpaper. "I see your point," he said. "I don't suppose Bonnie told you where this drugstore she was calling from might be located?"

"Out by the ocean," hazarded Mal. "She said she'd had to walk up from the beach road—"

"That'd put her in Santa Monica, probably the north end, the Palisades," Dave mumbled to himself. "Well," he added for Storme's benefit, "I guess we got nothing to lose. Come on."

"Wait a minute, Dave," Mal protested. "Where are we going?"

"I don't know," shrugged Dave Smith. "But there can't be too many drugstores open in that neighborhood this time of night. Maybe we can catch up with Bonnie before she has a chance to spill her guts."

He propelled Mal toward the door. "Go in and make your apologies to Royall and your wife. Tell 'em anything—tell 'em you just got word about a yacht broker having a one-cent sale!"

CHAPTER THREE

Dave Smith—Grave Digger

THEIR tour of Santa Monica drugstores was without incident. Also, without Bonnie. She wasn't in any of

them; no one remembered seeing her. And she wasn't a girl a counterman would forget immediately—not in those slinky evening pajamas and that frantic mop of black hair.

"Well, kid," Dave admitted as he turned his Packard toward Storme's place, "we struck out. I'm not surprised. It was a wild shot, anyway."

"What do we do now, Dave?" Mal asked.

Dave tried to smile at their dim reflection in the dark windshield. They looked like ghosts riding tandem on the long hood of his convertible. The grin didn't quite come off. "Go home and wait for Bonnie's snatch charge to develop—then deny everything," he answered.

The rest of the way to Bel Air was very short on dialogue. Dave had said all there was to say until they pulled up in front of Mal's house and spotted the police car.

Mal was startled. "My God, Dave—"

"Relax, son," Dave advised with a lot of no-confidence in his voice. "You called the cops, remember? They probably got here right after we left. Now let me do the talking. All of it."

Mal said he would promise that, and they went in.

Two young gentlemen from the police department were waiting with Jane. Plain-clothes dicks—high-school cops in dark business suits. Diplomats. They'd had Jane alone long enough, Dave realized, to know almost as much about this caper as he did. Almost.

He introduced himself, trying to force a little heartiness he didn't feel. "Gentlemen, this is a mess!"

One of the inspectors had hair the color of platinum mink, and contrasting, copper-dark skin. He asked the questions.

"Just for the record, Mr. Smith, where were you and Mr. Storme?"

Dave told about Bonnie's telephone call, their mission to the beach. "You see," he went on, "the former Mrs. Storme is under the impression that the kidnapping was some sort of a gag her ex-husband arranged. She was very bitter about it, said she was going to the police and swear out a warrant."

The two detectives scowled while Dave kept talking: "Of course it wasn't a gag.

A real hundred thousand dollars has been stolen. So to save an embarrassing situation, we took a chance on finding the lady."

He shrugged. "We missed her. Frankly, I suspect we can dispose of the kidnapping with a telephone call to Santa Monica. We'll probably find Bonnie down there telling her troubles to some police magistrate."

The silent cop got the signal from his chief. He pried himself out of a deep chair. He said to Jane, "May I use your phone, Mrs. Storme?"

She got to her feet to show him where to find it. His partner continued the inquisition. "About this hundred thousand, Mr. Storme—isn't that a large sum to have around the house?"

Dave cleared his throat. "I can explain that. I—"

"I'll bet you can," said the inspector. "But I asked Mr. Storme, if it's all the same to you."

Mal looked trapped. His coloring faded. "Why . . . I . . . the money . . . you see," he stammered, "it was a kind of settlement I was making on Bonnie. She—"

The inspector nodded. "I see."

He lit a cigarette, appeared to weigh Storme's reply. "A settlement. Didn't your present wife tell me you and she had been married several years? I think she said five?"

"Four," said Mal. "Four years."

The inspector smiled, correcting himself. "Four years. You were divorced from this other woman five years ago, then. It's a little late for a settlement, isn't it?"

"Why . . . I . . . ah . . ."

Mal was saved by the return of the other detective. But Dave Smith was back on the hook.

"I have news for you, Mr. Smith," reported the young cop. "The Santa Monica police never heard of Bonnie Storme. They don't have anything on her. How about that?"

"Yeah," gulped Dave, "how about that?"

The party was over. There was no threatening talk, nobody got slapped around. The two detectives remembered their Sunday manners, but they gave Dave and Mal a very bad hour. Later, when

Dave was home in his own bed trying to reason some sense into what had happened, it seemed the inspectors hadn't quite believed half of what he and Mal told them.

This hurt. Because half of their story was absolutely true. Dave was certain the inspectors had figured what the hundred-thousand-dollar payoff was all about. They knew it was a blackmail racket. And from their line of questioning, Dave gathered that they were somewhat less than convinced there had been a robbery at all.

The one with the blue-grey hair had said to Mal, "Look, Mr. Storme, I have to make a report on this call. Routine. But I can see it's buried in the files if you say the word."

Storme had risen, his face flushed. "Just what are you implying?"

"Look, Mr. Storme," the inspector said, "we're all big boys here—except Mrs. Storme, of course. We know the facts of life, and in my book a hundred grand is a lot of scratch. Even to a party in your income bracket. So your ex-wife has something on you and you have to pay to keep her quiet."

"That's a lie!" blustered Mal, looking to Dave for support. Dave had been tracing a pink line in the design of the Oriental rug.

The detective said, "I'm trying to save myself a lot of stupid running around, Mr. Storme. If you and your manager did frame the stickup to get your money back from Bonnie, it's nothing to me. If she shows up at headquarters I'll even enjoy booting her the hell out. But I'm too busy to waste my time on a robbery that didn't happen!"

"Why . . . I . . . I'll report you to the Chief of Pol—"

The two detectives rose together. "Don't blow your cap, Mr. Storme. Think it over. If you want to drop the case, give me a call in the morning. Remember, my name's Benson. If I'm not in, leave word with Farrell here. There'll be no hard feelings."

DAVE was having trouble going to sleep. He was sweating, cold. Every word the cops had said played back in his brain.

"There's an element of contrivance in this whole robbery thing, Mr. Storme," Benson had explained as they were leaving. "The timing is too sharp. It has the feel of an inside job. I'm sorry, but that's the way I'm going to work if I handle the investigation. I thought you ought to know."

Storme had been highly offended. Almost too highly, Dave thought. In fact, that was what kept him awake, staring at the dark walls of his bedroom. The cops had almost converted him to their idea. It *had* been a convenient stickup. The timing *was* too sharp. And something else . . .

Dave remembered he'd had to push Mal Storme into calling the police. Put him on a kind of spot about it. Suddenly Mal had seemed more concerned about Bonnie's safety than his hundred grand. Then, that large, damp-eyed double-take of Jane's when she *learned* Bonnie had been kidnaped. Was that for-real? Dave decided he'd better have a talk with Mal in the morning. . . .

The clock on Dave Smith's bedside table said it was three A. M. It should know. Dave didn't. His eyes had opened stickily and he'd thrashed about in bed fumbling for the switch on his reading lamp. Some joker was making with the be-bop on his front-door chimes. Dave groaned and pulled himself together. It was an effort, but he located his robe and slippers, padded to the door.

Two men—cops. One of them flashed his buzzer. Dave looked again, squinting in the dome light over the door. No, they weren't Benson and Farrell, the detectives he'd met at Storme's.

"Inspector Balante, Homicide Detail," drawled the taller of the two. "You Dave Smith?"

The word *homicide* registered with Dave. He stepped out of their way. "What can I do for you men?"

"Get dressed."

"Dressed?"

"Yeah, we're going for a ride, Pops."

"Ride—what's happened?"

"We've found Bonnie Storme," growled Balante.

"W-where was she?" Dave faltered.

The cops exchanged a look. It was loaded. Balante snorted, "Where was she, he says. You're a funny man, Pops."

But they didn't laugh. Balante said, "Come on, let's get some clothes on you."

He followed Dave into the bedroom. Smoked a cigarette while Dave put on his underwear, shirt and pants. Dave was taking the sport coat he'd worn to the Storme's off a chair back before Balante had anything further to say. Then he came up with a sharp, surprising: "Just a second, Smith! Let me see that coat."

He turned the coat inside out, patted it, found the envelope containing the Royall letter abrogating Mal Storme's contract. Dave couldn't stop him—the cop read it, whistled.

"A million bucks! Is there that much dough?"

Dave watched him put the letter back in its envelope, drop it into his own pocket. He started to burn—this was being shoved around. "Look," Dave snapped, "what's with you, Balante? Am I under arrest?" "Technically, no," said the cop. "But you're working up to it. Come on."

He took Dave outside, told his boy, "Smith and I will drive out in his car. You follow in our bus."

Dave balked. "Why my car?"

"Check tire prints," replied the detective laconically, adding, "Didn't I tell you? We're going to visit the scene of the crime!"

DAVE drove while Balante called the turns. It seemed to Dave that his Packard was entirely too eager. Just this once it could've done him a favor—thrown a rod, at least. Balante directed him out Beverly Glen Drive up to Mulholland Road, where they turned off.

This was the badlands, the waste land, the void between Greater Los Angeles and San Fernando Valley. In spots it is several miles through—several miles of rugged foothills with a population running heavily to rattlesnakes and jackrabbits. At night it is an eerie place sinister and—under circumstances radically different from Dave Smith's—romantic.

Dave didn't think Balante had guided him up there for romantic purposes. Dave's hands were wet on the wheel as he tooled the big car around the curves in the mountain road. His shoulders ached and the night air was cold, damp. His clothes felt clammy, sticking to his body.

"How much farther?" he demanded.

"We're just about there, Shorty," drawled Balante, switching characters. "Yo'all don't wanta be so impatient."

That voice, that phony Oakie accent. It went with another tall guy Dave had met recently. That night. The voice and a face behind a red bandanna. Those ersatz cowboy hoods who broke into Storme's place.

Dave jerked his eyes away from the road. He was right. He was looking down the bore of the same .45 revolver.

"Mind your drivin', Shorty," warned Balante. "This here's a dangerous road."

"That," gulped Dave, "I believe."

He watched the headlights sweep around a bend, pick out another car parked beside the road. Balante said, "End of the line. Pull in behind that job."

Dave cut the engine, the headlights. The car following did the same. He sat there listening to his heart pound, the chirp of the engine cooling off. Someone was coming back from the car ahead. Dave could hear them scuffing through loose gravel. His eyes hadn't accommodated to the dark yet.

A voice growled through the open window beside Dave, "You took your time getting here, Frank."

"Keep your wig on, boss," drawled Balante. "The guy had to dress."

Dave was prodded out of the car. His night vision came on like a slow movie fade-in. Things crept into focus: first the outline of the hills, darker purple than the sky; the shape of three cars parked beside a grey strip of road. Three men—the two phony cops, and a third man it took a moment for Dave to identify. A quarter of his face was blacked out by an eyepatch; the rest was frosted grey like the others. Roy Royall—Dave thought he should have recognized the voice!

"Who's responsible for this script, Roy?" Dave griped. "It stinks!"

The producer grunted. "Who said you were a critic?"

Dave watched that million-dollar settlement of Mal Storme's contract change hands again. From Balante to Roy Royall. Then Dave was shoved forward to the producer's big foreign-made sedan. Roy opened the door to the back seat. It was too dark to be sure, but Dave could feel

that Royall must be grinning at him.

"There's a friend of yours inside, Smith," he said. "Better help her out."

He meant, *lift her out*. That's what Dave had to do—lift Bonnie's dead, rubbery body out of the car.

They showed him where he was to drag her—about twenty feet through the scrub growth at the side of the road. Then he was marched back to Royall's car and presented with a shovel.

"We borrowed this from a pal of yours, Smith," Royall said. "Mal Storme. We didn't think he'd mind."

They returned to where Dave had dropped the body. He was told to dig, the suggestion underlined with Balante's gun. Dave dug.

The ground was hard, rocky and Smith's hands were soft. His muscles were mostly lard that lathered through his pores. The boys didn't give him time for any heavy thinking: why he was there digging a grave for Bonnie, what interest Royall would have in the sudden death of Mal Storme's former wife.

Sure, those things occurred to him. But they seemed unimportant. He didn't want to answer anything. He wanted a drink of water, a chance to catch up with the breath wheezing through his mouth. It tasted hot, sulphurous, hurt his chest. But Balante thought he was digging too slowly, whipped him with the barrel of his .45.

Still he was a long time scratching a hole big enough. A lifetime. The sky was a pale lime-yellow before Royall was satisfied. He said, "All right, roll her in there."

The body was stiff now, drawn. As cold as the fog whipping against Dave's face. But the thing was done. Dave began covering her, rocks and dirt drumming on taut, dead flesh. He was sick, but they kept him at it until the grave was level.

There was dirt left over, displaced by Bonnie. Royall told Dave to take it to the cliff and throw it over. About ten yards through the manzanitas and scrub, Dave could see where the hill dropped off. He loaded the shovel, beat his way there. Balante followed him. Dave heaved the dirt out, heard it rain on the ground far below.

He heard Balante growl, "Good-bye, Shorty!"

And he was airborne. Balante had

tripped him and shoved. Light flashed before Dave's eyes, grey rock, a bush clinging to the bare granite. He held out his hands instinctively; it was like thrusting them into the jaws of a wild animal. He spun around, was falling again, but feet first, to the bottom.

CHAPTER FOUR

Meet Me in Death Alley!

FOR longer than he thought possible Dave couldn't breathe. He was going to die. He knew that, and panic settled on him. His throat—something was blocking it, like a cork. His tongue! Dave realized it was his tongue. He gagged it up. Tears ran down his fat cheeks. There was that one delicious lungful of air, and then he blacked out.

Five minutes . . . ten. It couldn't have been longer because the light was the same when he opened his eyes. The valleys were still semi-dark pockets in the hills. Dave heard an automobile engine far away. Two cars passed below him on a curve in the mountain road. Royall's sedan and the car his hoods had been driving. Dave waited. His convertible wasn't in the caravan. They'd left it.

They'd left it? Dave thought about that. He'd bet they hadn't done so for his convenience. One of Royall's boys was still up there—Dave could hear him moving around.

Dave scrambled. Down the mountain at first—careful about the noise he made, not showing himself. Then he got an outcropping of rock between himself and Royall's man. He dropped panting in the scrub growth.

For just a few seconds he felt secure—cold and beat, but secure. The sun was tinting a patch of sky he could see through the gnarled branches over him. His body felt wooden. Intellectually he knew better, but right then he couldn't wriggle a pinkie.

Why had Royall made him bury Bonnie Storme? Why had he been left for dead? What was Royall's next move?

Dave groaned, covered his eyes with his arm. The questions answered each other, in a punchy sort of way. Royall would be reporting a shallow grave to the police. They'd dig up Bonnie. Dave's car would

be on the scene, a shovel with his fingerprints on the handle. The picture would reconstruct easily. Focus sharp.

The cops would figure Dave had killed Bonnie, buried her—then, while trying to dispose of excess dirt which might betray the grave, he had slipped and fallen. They'd expect to find him or his body at the foot of the cliff.

Dave was certain of only one thing: he'd be gone, long gone. He ground his teeth together and clawed his way to his knees, began fighting through the loose granite and undergrowth. But up the hill now. Up, because when the cops began beating the brush for him, they'd expect him to go down—toward Beverly Hills.

So Dave climbed to the top and then took the long, hard way to San Fernando Valley. It was an all-day effort—hiding from kids and dogs and fat ladies on riding-academy nags, being scared and hungry. His lips were cracked and sore, his tongue fuzzy and swollen—it was about the longest day in Dave's life.

The last couple of hours he huddled in a thorn bush waiting for a little protective darkness. He was so close to Ventura Boulevard he could hear the cars, smell gasoline fumes. He'd never thought of gasoline as Chanel No. 5 before. He'd never spent so much time in the company of rattlesnakes before, either. Not the creeping kind.

As night fell he came out. There was a gas station where he managed to slip into the men's room without being seen. He repaired some of the damage to his clothes. Washed his hands and face. When he made his appearance, the station attendant paid him no more mind than any other bum availing himself of the firm's comfort facilities.

Encouraged, Dave decided to press his good luck, have something to eat, a drink. He found a saloon on the boulevard where his beat-up condition wouldn't excite comment. With his torn suit, the scratches and the grime that was ground into him, he looked like a working stiff's stiff.

Dave boarded a stool at the end of the bar, the dim end near the radio and sandwich grill, ordered a ham on rye and a beer. No one bothered to look at him twice. He had his sandwich and the radio to himself. He was taking his second

round of nourishment when the music on the radio gave way to a newscast. Dave was just as happy to be the only one in the joint listening to it.

Bonnie's murder was reported—with details of how Roy Royall had *accidentally* found her shallow grave. He'd gone for an early morning drive, noticed Dave's empty car beside the road, investigated. Mal Storme was in custody. And the police had a dragnet out for one Dave Smith.

All of which gave Dave plenty of pause. He'd expected to be hot. That figured. But how come Mal was also suspect? Royall must've come up with a frame for him, too. A clever guy, Royall. He probably made certain the police remembered that Mal and Dave had been gone for a very crucial hour after Bonnie was kidnaped from Mal's house. Then, Dave recalled, Royall had bragged about getting that shovel from Mal's place. It gave meaning to Bonnie's death. Yeah, clever. . . .

Royall had certainly timed everything—the robbery, his own arrival at Storme's house, his offer to Storme, Bonnie's telephone call to Mal—right down the line.

How smooth can one guy get? In fact, how could one guy be so damn smooth?

Dave finished his beer thoughtfully. He didn't feel smart enough to cross wits with Royall. Just desperate.

He closed himself in a phone booth at the back of the bar, put in a call to Jane Storme. Mal's wife gasped, sounded frightened when he told her who was on the line.

"Where are you, Dave?" she cried.

"Never mind," he snapped. "I—"

"Oh, Dave," she sobbed. "Dave, Mal is—is—they've arrested him."

"I know, honey," Dave grunted. "And I've got more bad news for you. That million-dollar settlement Royall offered us last night is kaput."

"Ka-put?" she faltered in her little-girl voice.

"Over, finished, washed up," Dave elaborated. "He got it away from me."

"How, Dave . . . I . . . ?"

"Listen to me, sweetheart. I can't talk much longer," Dave broke in. "Get Royall to take you down to Alvera Street tonight at nine o'clock."

"Dave, how—"

"I don't know. That's your problem,

baby. You'll think of something. Get on it. Nine o'clock, remember."

Dave hung up. He went out and caught a bus, transferred to a trolley on Hollywood Boulevard. He saw a harness cop and two radio cars, while waiting to make the transfer. But they gave him no tumble. Which didn't hurt his feelings even a little.

AT EIGHT-FORTY-FIVE, he was sharing a bench with a brace of winos in the little park across the plaza from Alvera Street. He could see everyone who entered the old Spanish market street. He spotted Royall's two hood pals when they came along. Balante sent his stooge on into Alvera Street while he took up the watch himself from the darkened entranceway of the old church.

Alvera Street is an alley one block long, most of the authentic *hidalgo* color being about as thick as the paint job on the false fronts. Strictly a Chamber of Commerce pitch. But it was perfect for what Dave had in mind. This time of night it was jammed with wide-eyed tourists milling around. And Dave knew he could count on a smart operator like Royall recognizing the street's potentials as a trap.

Balante and chum had confirmed that. The stage was set. All Dave had to do was show and they'd have him. Royall would be a hero again—capturing a fugitive. He'd never pass that up.

Dave saw Royall and Jane Storme drive past. A few minutes later they came back on foot, entered the fiesta-decked street. It was then nine-five. Dave found he was having trouble with his breathing again. There wasn't enough air in Los Angeles County. His hands were trembling, wet.

He waited for a crowd of tourists to form, then slipped into Alvera Street with them. Balante saw him but couldn't stop him. Dave elbowed through the mob, walked up to Jane and Royall. They were trying to appear interested in a display of Mexican pottery.

Dave forced a hearty hello: "I hope I haven't kept you waiting."

He laced his arms through Royall's and Jane's, guided them to a café. Dave took a chair which put his back to the wall, his guests around a small, circular table. He ordered tequila for three.

Royall's boys had pushed into the place, were seated near the door waiting for the sign from their boss.

"I ought to call a cop," Royall growled.

"Why don't you?" Dave said.

The waiter brought their drinks. Dave sipped his—distilled cactus, spikes and all.

He smiled at Royall. "I had Jane bring you down here so you could tell her why you took that agreement last night, Roy."

Royall acted surprised. "What're you talking about?"

"A million bucks. The idea couldn't be that you're going to welch on that offer?"

"I don't answer to you, Smith . . ."

"Okay," said Dave. "Answer to Jane. She's an interested party. At least half of that million is hers—all of it if Mal gets the chair."

"If you're on the level," Dave went on, "let Jane hold the agreement her husband signed last night. She'll keep it safe, Roy."

Dave glanced away from Royall. Jane was sitting on her side of the table, her tiny hands locked on the leather handbag in her lap.

Dave purred on: "After all, Roy, a million bucks, to coin a phrase, ain't hay. It'd be better if she had that paper in her purse right now, wouldn't it, Jane?"

He smiled at her, noticed her fingers tensing on the handbag. "I think you ought to give it to her, Roy," he added.

"I do my own thinking, Smith," the producer snarled.

"With a bullet hole in your belly?" Dave asked. "It's only fair to tell you that Jane has a gun under the table . . ."

Jane froze, her baby-soft face strained. Dave watched her lips tremble, try to form words. They never had a chance.

A shot blasted the tight silence. Dave Smith went into action, tumbled the table over on Royall. Dave grabbed Jane and wrestled her to the floor. Two more shots were fired before he had possession of the gun and stood up. Royall stayed on the floor, holding his middle. Red dripped out between his fingers, spread over the front of his fancy tweeds.

Balante and the other hood were on their feet, starting to ease out through the crowd that had formed. Dave waved the little heater at them. "You boys come over here and sit down with your boss.

On the floor. Keep your hands in sight—on your knees. That's it. That's right!"

LATER, much later, Dave Smith was having a drink with his client. Mal was setting them up at his home bar. The actor was a little drunk and rated it. A big hunk of the world had just blown up in his face. He leaned heavily on the bar while Dave squashed the soft leather cushion on a stool.

"Dave," hiccuped Mal, wiping his dark hair out of his eyes, "Dave, I love ya. I know what you did for me and I love ya. But there's something I don't get."

Smith grinned into his drink modestly. "You mean—why Jane teamed up with Royall to frame us?"

Storme's classic head wobbled loosely. "No. I get that. A million bucks. Royall waved a million bucks at her. They'd let me take the rap for Bonnie's murder and Jane'd get the million."

"That's okay, but I still can't figure where Jane got the guts to shoot Royall. You know how petrified she was of guns—even a prop gun I had around here gave her hysterics."

Smith finished his highball, slid off the bar stool. "It just goes to show," he said. "You can't figure women. Well, pal, so-long. I gotta get home. I'm dead."

As he drove along Sunset Boulevard, Dave Smith felt pretty good. Good to be driving—alive. A guy has to be cute to stay alive these days, remember things. Like Jane's phobia about guns. Another dame might have spoiled his play in that Alvera Street dive. When he let her see the gun he was holding under the table—a lot of gals would've screamed. Not Jane. She sat there like a frozen custard until he let Royall have it. She didn't even put up much of a fight when he'd pressed the gun into her hand and fired it so she'd show powder traces when the police tested her hands with paraffin.

Dave chuckled to himself. "Very dirty pool, Mr. Smith. And what if the cops trace that heater to the hock shop, the wino you got to buy it for you?"

He swung into his driveway and cut the engine. "Don't be stupid," he growled at Mr. Smith. "How can they trace a nightmare?"

THE END

"It's been a long time,
baby," Eddie Webb said.
"A long time."

KILLER'S KISS



By **LARRY HOLDEN**

Susie was in bed in the hospital, and soon, they figured, gangster Eddie Webb would come calling on her, with a bouquet of blackjacks!

THE SILENCE in that tiny hospital room seemed to hum like a steel cable that was slowly being drawn too tight. Detective Lieutenant James J. Quinn stood beside the window, holding back the drape with his forefinger, his eyes tight and questing as he stared down into the darkening street. Across the room, Jerry MacNeil sat hunched forward on the lone chair, his forearms on his

spread knees, a forgotten cigarette smoldering between his fingers. When he looked up it was only to scowl blackly at Quinn's back.

Susan Tully lay on the bed, fully dressed except for her shoes. Her picture smiled out at her from the front page of the afternoon paper that she held critically at arms length. Over the photograph, the caption asked, "Who Is She?" Beneath,

it said, "Amnesia victim still unidentified at City Hospital. Do you know her?"

Susan looked up at the two men. "You know," she said thoughtfully, "I think that picture was a mistake. Amnesia victims don't smile. They usually look baffled, don't they?"

There was a pause, then Jerry's head jerked around and he said, "Huh?" Quinn didn't answer at all. Susan looked from one to the other, then suddenly giggled.

"You two!" she laughed. "There you are, Lieutenant, afraid that he *won't* turn up, and there you are, Jerry, afraid that he *will*. Me, I'm sure he will—but that's just my vanity."

Jerry said sulkily, "All right, but I don't like any part of it. I said that in the beginning and I'll say it again."

"Go ahead," Susan teased, "say it again."

She was immediately contrite, for he looked so unhappy. And he was unhappy. He was hating every minute of it. He blamed it all on her headache, her migraine. That was two nights ago.

It had ruined the evening for them. He had tickets for *Fun While It Lasted*, and her migraine had struck her like a sword of fire. There was no question of going to the theatre; she was haggard with pain. She took one of her prescription pills and went to bed, while Jerry stayed in the living room, dismally leafing through a copy of *Vogue*.

IN AN hour and a half it was all over and she felt wonderful. Migraine was like that. An hour and a half of wrenching, searing agony, then that feeling of wonderful relief and well-being. Susan came smiling out of the dark bedroom. He jumped up, grinning back into her smile.

"Now don't start mumbling about being sorry," he said quickly. "Tell you what. Let's go down to Luigi's. He has a five-piece band there tonight, and they have a dog that can sing *Chloë*. We can drink chianti and later on have a couple of sausage pies. What say?"

"Marvelous. But let's stop at Zabriski's on the way and have my prescription refilled. I just ate my last pill."

Zabriski's Pharmacy was closed, and Luigi's was crowded, obviously with music lovers who wanted to hear the Airedale

sing *Chloë*. They had to share a booth with a dour-faced man who was glumly eating ravioli.

Susan was a blonde and very lovely. The man rapidly became less dour, and his glumness disappeared entirely. He was, he told them, Detective Lieutenant James J. Quinn.

"I should have guessed you were a detective," Susan said, smiling. "You looked so grim and forbidding, just like Humphrey Bogart. Do all detectives look like that?"

"Just me, Susie." Detective Lieutenant James J. Quinn had become chummy very quickly, almost as if he had been looking for someone just like them to come along. "And I ain't like Humphrey Bogart. I really got something to worry about."

"Murder?" asked Susan eagerly.

"Something like that."

"Oh, fun!"

"With me, murder ain't fun," Quinn said. "I've never seen a funny murder in my life. Take this guy we're after, for instance—Eddie Webb. Maybe you'd call him a real comedian, but not me. A month ago he held up the City National Bank. Just clowning, but he got away with fifty thousand bucks and filled the guard with machine gun bullets—for the laughs, I guess. We've been looking for him ever since. No dice."

Susan said faintly, "Oh, I didn't mean—"

"That's okay. I didn't mean to jump on you either, Susie. Eddie Webb's got me going, I guess. We know he's in the city. We know that, because three days ago we knocked off Abe Zann, and Eddie never goes any place without Abe. He calls Abe his 'luck.' And it was just *our* luck that Abe was too full of lead to do us any good."

Susan gulped. She looked quickly at Jerry, then back at Quinn. "D-did you say Eddie Webb?" she asked.

"Yeah." Quinn cocked his head. "Do you know him?"

"We-ll, not exactly," she started. Jerry was frowning and she squeezed his hand beneath the edge of the table. "You see, I'm a professional model. Advertising. Until about a month ago a man who signed himself Eddie Webb was sending me notes and flowers, and even phoned several

times trying to make a date. He had seen my picture on the back cover of some magazines, and according to him it turned him inside out. Why, I even got a wrist watch from Tiffany's and a fur jacket from Milgrim's, but I sent these right back. Jerry and I laughed about it. We thought he was a character."

"He is," said Quinn. "Full of fun." His eyes had a speculative shine as he looked at Susan across the table. "This is the first time I ever heard of Eddie Webb going for a dame. Not that I blame him," he added.

Susan pretended to shiver. "Am I glad I didn't take him up on any of those offers!" She looked sidelong at Jerry. "And I almost did, too."

"You did not!" he said indignantly.

She laughed teasingly. "Well, you must admit he was very persuasive—and insistent. I thought I'd never get rid of him, Lieutenant. He said he'd keep after me till I *did* give him a date, and he said he *always* got what he wanted."

Jerry didn't like the look on Quinn's face as he sat there reflectively eyeing Susan. There was something almost predatory about Quinn's long, thin mouth, and Jerry suddenly realized that Quinn's grey eyes could be very cold and very hard. Quinn lit a cigarette and blew a plume of smoke at her, and it had the effect of a pointing finger.

"Eddie Webb won't give up if he's really after you," he said. "That's the way he is. He's smart, tough and tenacious. That's a big word, and in this case it means something big. Listen to me for a minute." He spread his forearms on the table and dropped his voice. "You can help us out, Susie. We want this monkey, and we want him bad. We're grabbing at straws right now. He's a killer. It's up to you. You can say yes or no. But just listen till I finish."

Jerry had said, "No!" explosively. It hadn't changed destiny, but at least he had said it. He had that much satisfaction, chilly comfort though it was. Within an hour, Susan was in the hospital, bait for a killer.

"He's no gentleman, see?" Quinn had said shrewdly. "He's just the kind of guy who'd take advantage of a dame who's suffering from amnesia. But you'll have

nothing to worry about, Susie. We'll have the place covered front and back, and I'll be in the room with you."

"You and me both," Jerry had growled at him.

And, on top of that, they had never gotten to hear the dog sing *Chloë*.

SUSAN sat up in bed, held out her hand to a mirror and tucked her hair back in place. "Maybe he won't come, Lieutenant," she said. "It's two days now."

"He'll come." Quinn turned away from the window. "Visiting hours are the danger periods. He'd feel safer in a crowd. We'll grab him the minute he walks in the front door."

A husky nurse came into the room with the food cart. "Three special dinners," she said cheerfully. "I swear you three are the most pampered patients in the whole hospital."

"I'm waiting," Quinn said grinning, "for one of the nurses to give me a bath."

She grinned back at him. "Don't go without your bath while you're waiting," she said. "It's liable to be quite a little time."

"These nurses," said Quinn, lifting the domed metal cover from one of the dishes. "They got an answer for everything. What's so special about boiled fish?"

It was soggy, the potato was nothing but hot, pressed sawdust, and the peas were green, but that was all that could be said for them. This was followed by a cup of acrid coffee and a baked apple.

"The big Friday night dinner," said Quinn. "The blue plate special."

It subdued them. In the next room, a radio was playing Guy Lombardo. It seemed to make them sleepy. Susan yawned, then laughed, for both Jerry and Quinn were yawning, too. Within fifteen minutes, all three were fast asleep.

And fifteen minutes after that, the husky nurse came briskly back into the room followed by an orderly wheeling a stretcher. They loaded Susan on the stretcher in a very business-like manner and pushed her from the room. At the emergency entrance an ambulance was waiting. A black-jack put the doorman to sleep.

It had taken Eddie Webb less than two days to case the hospital and take what he wanted.

Susan was not fully conscious when she opened her eyes. She was lying in bed in a dingy, shade-darkened room. At a table near the window an enormous, shaggy man with the face of an amiable orang-utan was playing cards with the husky nurse, now dressed in a more revealing blouse and skirt, and with a thin, balding man who looked a little like James Gleason in the movies. Before she could gather her wits, Susan screamed. The three at the table jerked around and looked at her.

The enormous man got up, grinning, and walked toward the bed. "What have they been doing to you, baby?" he asked soothingly. "Come on, give Eddie that big smile." He sat on the edge of the bed.

She shrank away from him, her eyes huge. Eddie turned to the other two at the table.

"She don't know me." He sounded hurt. He looked down at Susan again. "Say, maybe that amnesia stuff was on the up-and-up. You don't know me, baby?"

Susan opened her mouth, but the words wouldn't come. She shook her head.

"Well, whattaya know," said Eddie wonderingly. "And me thinking it was just a stunt. I'm Eddie, honey. Eddie Webb. We were married in Terre Haute in '47. Don't tell me you've forgot us getting married. Aw, sweetheart!" There was a laughing, wicked light behind his icy blue eyes. "This amnesia must be funny stuff if it makes you forget your own husband. Just a minute, honey, I'll prove it."

He jumped up and lumbered across the room to a rickety old chest of drawers. The skinny man was grinning, but the husky pseudo nurse had her lips clamped tightly together and there was a spot of anger high on each cheekbone.

"This is lousy," she blurted.

Without turning Eddie said amiably, "Shut up, sweetheart. I know a guy that caught a bad cold opening his mouth that wide. He died."

He came back to the bed, carrying a folded piece of paper. He handed it over to Susan.

"See?" he said. "All legal and everything."

He beamed.

THE INITIAL SHOCK and fright was leaving Susan now. Her fear had dwindled to a tiny point. She knew where she was, generally speaking—in the hide-out of Eddie Webb. Somehow Eddie had managed to get her away from Lieutenant Quinn, but she was certain that Quinn would come for her. All she had to do was play along with Eddie and keep him from becoming suspicious.

She looked at the paper he had given her. It was a marriage license, and it certified that Edward Webb and Cora Anders had, on the twenty-third day of August, 1947, been joined in holy matrimony.

"I thought you run out on me," Eddie tried to sound reproachful, but he couldn't keep the gloating note out of his voice. "But I guess it was this amnesia. Don't you remember nothing, baby?"

She shook her head. She was sure that if she tried to talk, she would squeak.

"Damn, that's too bad," said Eddie with satisfaction.

"It's nice having you back with us, Cora," the thin man said gleefully, playing up to Eddie.

The fake nurse gave him a baleful glance and said sharply, "You keep out of it, Sweeney."

Eddie turned his head. The muscles bunched at the ends of his jaws. "Who's your friend, Sweeney?" he demanded. It wasn't a question. It was repudiation and a threat.

Sweeney swallowed hard and mumbled, "Aw, why don't you keep your trap shut, Leah?" He was wheedling, obviously ground between his fear of Eddie Webb and whatever it was he felt toward Leah.

Leah's hand closed angrily on the cards she was holding, and she flung them contemptuously in Sweeney's face. She jumped up.

"Nuts to both of you!" she said, and strode into the next room, slamming the door after her.

Eddie glared, and for a moment Susan caught sight of the insane, killing fury that was in him. Violence was growing and within seconds it would explode. Susan gasped. At the sound, Eddie turned back to her. The ferocity faded slowly from his face. He flooded it with a grin again—but somehow, he didn't look so

amiable any more. His mouth was grim. "That crackpot," he said easily, tilting his chin at the closed door. "I don't know what's eating her. Maybe she's off her feed or something. Better take a look and see if she's suffering, Sweeney." That last came out very smoothly, but it was an order.

Sweeney went reluctantly, as if he knew what was waiting for him at the other side of that door.

Eddie winked at Susan. "You'd never think they was happy married, just like us," he said.

Susan stared at him. The tiny point of fear had begun to grow again. He wasn't just an amiable orang-utan who could be stalled along. He was dangerous, feral and violent.

"It's been a long time, baby." He winked suggestively, then stood and stretched his enormous arms in a yawn. "It's getting a little late, too." He pulled off his tie.

"B-but I . . . I don't know you . . . yet," she stammered.

"Hell," he said genially, "I'm easy to know. I'm as friendly as a pup begging for a bone. Don't let that worry you, sweetheart. Getting acquainted is one of the easiest things I do."

Unexpectedly, she was furious—so furious that it stung her eyes with hot tears. So he thought it was as easy as that. Eddie Webb, the Great! Everything was easy for Eddie Webb. She jumped out of the bed. A handbag—her's—was hanging over the end of the headboard and she snatched it up by the strap. With this puny weapon, she faced him.

"Go ahead, hit me, knock me out!" she blazed at him. "You say you're my husband. All right, I believe you." She hadn't lost her head entirely. "But don't expect a girl to jump into your arms the minute you roll your eyes at her. I said I have to get used to you. It's going to be hard, so don't make it harder, you—you big ape!"

His mouth hung open, then he burst into a roar of laughter.

"I'm repulsive?" he grinned.

So he had his vanity, too! That rang a bell in Susan's mind.

"No-o-o," she said. "You're not repulsive. In fact, I think you can be very

attractive to women. They probably chase after you." He was eating it up. "But to me, you're a total stranger. What would you do if someone you didn't know came up to you and said, 'Lend me a thousand dollars, Eddie.' What would you do?"

That was something he could understand. "Yeah," he said, "I see what you mean."

But it was only because of his monumental vanity that he agreed so readily. Give her a little time, and she'd come to him. And time? He had plenty of time—and Eddie Webb always got what he wanted.

"Sure, baby," he said magnanimously. "Go to bed and sleep on it. I'm a nice guy when you get to know me."

Miserably she crawled back into the bed, shaking so hard that she hardly made it. How had she ever dared to defy him so recklessly? Now that it was over she was more frightened than ever. Where was Quinn and why didn't he come?

QUINN was in her apartment. He looked at Jerry's white face, then looked quickly away.

Jerry said woodenly, "If she gets hurt, I'll kill you, Quinn." He said that twenty—or was it fifty?—times before, but it had still not lost its intensity.

Quinn said automatically, "Take it easy. We're doing everything. I want some pictures. Where does she keep her pictures? A model always has a slew of pictures of herself. Somewhere, some place, somebody saw them take her through the street. I want pictures of her from all angles, so they can't miss."

"A month," said Jerry, as if he had not heard him. "A month you've been looking for Eddie Webb, and you're no closer today than you were then. Now you're trying to tell me you can pick him up overnight, just because he's got Susan now. If she gets hurt, Quinn, I'll kill you." That sentence came into everything he said.

Quinn said patiently, "Just tell me where the pictures are and stop torturing yourself."

"Torture!" Jerry gave his head a shake. "What do you know about it. You're aren't in love with her."

"Damn it, maybe I *am* in love with her,"

Quinn roared. "Now pull yourself together and help me."

Jerry said angrily. "All right, but I'm telling you—"

"If she gets hurt, you'll kill me—and if she *does* get hurt, I'll let you. Does that satisfy you? Now tell me where she keeps her pictures."

Jerry pointed to the Governor Winthrop desk. "Bottom drawer," he said.

Quinn dived for it. Jerry walked slowly through the apartment. He wanted to look at everything that reminded him of Susan. In the bedroom, he picked up her comb and brush set and ran his fingers over the smooth lucite. Then, without quite knowing how he had gotten there, he was in the kitchen, staring at the frying pan and coffee pot that stood on the gas range. She'd had an omelette for dinner, he remembered. She had sat at that porcelain-topped table. Her napkin lay there, rolled neatly into the silver ring that had her initials on it. He opened the closets and looked into them. He wanted to see everything that she used or touched. On the shelf was an empty pill bottle, and he remembered her migraine.

That was something that really hit him. That damned migraine! He hated it doubly. He hated it because it gave her pain, and he hated it because it had gotten her into this mess.

If it hadn't struck that night, they'd have gone to the theater. Or if Zabriskie's Pharmacy had been open, they might have been too late to get into Luigi's and they'd never have met Quinn. He seized the empty bottle and threw it across the room furiously as if it were a symbol of all the things that could hurt her.

Quinn called from the other room, "Ready, Jerry? I'd like to get these pictures to the newspapers as fast as possible."

Jerry plodded out of the kitchen.

Quinn said sympathetically, "I'm sorry, kid. Honest I am."

Jerry gave him a feeble grin. "It's not your fault. You did everything you could. Still are."

"Almost everything. I slipped up."

"It's my fault. I could have stopped her. I could have talked her out of it. That's what I should have done. I was against it, but not hard enough."

"Come on, none of that now, fellah. And we'll get her back. All we need is a lead. You'd be surprised what the police can do with a lead no bigger than a whisper. That's all we need—just one little crack to get a knife in!"

SUSAN watched the dawn lighten the room, watched the sun glow gold against the drawn shades. Her face had a strained pallor and there were rings under her eyes. She had not slept at all during the night. Leah came in from the other room, yawning and buttoning her blouse. She looked surprised to find Susan alone; then her eyes darkened with sympathy.

"You look like hell," she said. "How about a cup of coffee?"

"Please."

Leah took an electric hot plate from the top drawer of the rickety chest, and a coffee pot and coffee from the next drawer. She went back into the other room, and Susan heard water splash into the pot. Leah came back and set it on the hot plate.

"Buck up, honey," she said cheerfully. "We're not as bad as we sounded last night. And Eddie's a right guy, too. A free spender. When we get out of this, you'll live like a queen—Palm Beach, Miami, Chi., L.A.—any place you want to go. The guy's nuts about you. You name it, and it's your's. You don't remember a thing about yourself or Eddie, do you?"

Susan shook her head. "I get headaches. Migraine."

Leah nodded. "That's how it is with amnesia. I know. I used to be a real nurse. Registered, too. That's why I knew just how to get you out of that hospital last night. The cops were looking for Eddie himself. They never suspected a nurse and an orderly, especially that we had a real ambulance there, too. And let me tell you, honey, you're in good hands. The best. Eddie's tops."

She picked up the handbag from the floor, where Susan had dropped it. "I brought your bag, too." She rehung the bag over the headboard. "It takes a woman to think of those things." Then, cautiously, "What happened to Eddie?"

"Nothing happened to Eddie." A sec-

ond door opened and Eddie came into the room. He was in high spirits. "I'm a genuine Boy Scout, that's what. I slept in the bathtub. Right, sweetheart?" He winked at Susan.

"If you'd take a bath in the bathtub," said Leah, "maybe you wouldn't have to sleep in it. Sweeney slept on the floor," she added with satisfaction.

Eddie guffawed. "Us married men!"

Susan watched him tensely, but he crossed the room and sniffed at the coffee pot. He was shaved and his hair was combed and he had on a clean shirt. His vanity was working hard.

"All dressed up and no place to go," Leah said dryly. "Or are we having company, Eddie?"

"When your wife's got class, baby, you have to live up to it. Tell Sweeney not to forget to put on his pants for breakfast."

Sweeney came in grumbling, "I got my pants on. I slept in them."

Breakfast, also, came out of the chest of drawers. Susan had her's in bed—and then couldn't eat it.

Eddie took Leah over to a corner of the room and whispered, "What's the matter with her? She sick? She looks sick."

"She's scared to death," Leah said tartly. "Leave her alone for a while and she'll probably be okay."

"You're making it awful tough for me, Leah."

"Not as tough as you'd make it for her. Forget her for a while, why don't you?"

He shrugged.

After breakfast they went back to their interminable card game. There was nothing else to do. They played as if the stakes were a thousand dollars a card, and they quarreled frequently and noisily. They had been there a month, and it didn't take much to inflame their tempers.

They played through lunch and into the afternoon, drearily, doggedly. Susan lay on the bed and watched the door, the door through which Jerry and Quinn would have to come. Fear, horror, desperation—everything had frozen inside her. Her mind kept clicking, "Jerry, Jerry, Jerry, Jerry . . ." as if by repeating his name over and over she could call him to her. She knew he would never give up, and that was her only bulwark against despair.

Several times Eddie came to the bed, and each time she said faintly, "My head hurts." The first time she had said it, Leah had called, "Leave her alone. She gets migraine." She kept him off with that, but each time he looked more disgruntled.

The climax came after a particularly stormy fight over the game. With a sweep of his arm Eddie cleared the table of

A CORPSE ON THE HOUSE

By Lee E. Wells



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cards, chips, cigarettes, ashtrays, everything.

"The hell with this!" he bellowed.

Susan felt herself go cold. She knew he would turn now to her. This was his peak, the pitch of fury at which he killed, made love or gambled recklessly. That wasn't something she reasoned; that was something she knew—just as she knew she had to do something to deflect him . . . and she screamed. She screamed again and again, her voice skirling up and up in a crescendo of hysteria.

She clasped her hands to her face and shrieked, "My head . . . oh my head, my head, my head!" Violence. He could understand violence. She screamed, bit at the pillow and tore it. She flung it from her and writhed. She shrieked again—and it wasn't all acting.

It stopped him halfway out of his chair. He looked at Leah and snarled, "Now what?"

Susan beat the back of her head and shrieked again, "Oh, myheadmyheadmy head . . ."

"What's the matter, honey," she asked swiftly.

"Oh, my head, my head . . . bag . . . in my bag . . . pills . . ."

SUSAN waited desperately. Leah had to be the one to be convinced. Leah had been a nurse.

Leah's voice came briskly, professionally, "Migraine. Give me her bag. She's got pills for it."

"Migraine?" Eddie sounded sore. "What the hell's migraine?"

"It's the worst pain in the head you can get, stupid. If you had it, you'd howl like a wounded wolf. Honey," she gently touched Susan's shoulder, "there's a pill bottle here, but it's empty."

Susan whimpered, "Give me my pills. Oh please give me my pills."

Eddie snapped, "Shut her up, will you, Leah? How long does that go on?"

"Hours, I've seen it."

"Well, shut her up, will you? She'll drive us nuts."

"She had pills, but they're gone."

"Damn it, get her some more pills then. Get her some pills, Sweeney."

Leah hurried Sweeney to the door, thrusting the bottle into his hand. "It's a

prescription," she said. "The number of it's right here on the bottle. See it? Now make it snappy!"

He was grumbling, "I don't see why I have to be the one . . ." when she thrust him out of the room and closed the door.

Susan kept her eyes tightly closed and prayed. Leah came back with a cold, wet cloth and held it to her head.

Susan screamed as the cloth touched her head. Eddie grimaced and stamped out of the room. Susan went back to plain moaning. It was easier than shrieking—and, furthermore, they were all convinced.

Leah kept talking soothingly to her, and every now and again she dipped the cloth in a pot of water beside the bed. Susan kept her eyes shut and tried not to think how slowly time was passing.

Eddie's door flung open. "Damn it," he said, "how long does it take to fill a prescription? The drugstore's only around the corner, and Sweeney's been gone over three-quarters of an hour."

Leah said shortly, "They couldn't fill it for him. He'd have to go back to the one that filled it in the first place."

Susan did not open her eyes to look at Eddie, but she knew he was standing there, huge and glowering. His special kind of fury and violence was something you could feel.

He said slowly, "She stopped yelling all of a sudden."

"I'm taking care of her."

"Yeah?" Then, heavily, "If with this amnesia you're not supposed to remember nothing about nothing, how come she knew she had pills in her pocketbook?" He started toward the bed.

Leah jumped up and faced him. "Leave her alone, Eddie!"

"Get out of my way! If she's trying to put something over, I'll damn soon find out."

"Use your head, Eddie. It takes time to fill a prescription. You don't pour it out of a bottle, like whiskey."

He snarled, swung at her, and she ducked. She threw herself on him, clinging to him, pleading.

"Just wait a few minutes more, Eddie. Sweeney'll be here any minute. Give the girl a few more minutes. . . ."

(Continued on page 129)

From above, Callao Johnson's voice came down: "You have find him yet, sir?"

ANCHOR THE STIFF!

By
DAN GORDON

THE BAY was alive with pleasure craft. They crossed Lew Guyon's bow, sent clouds of warm spray flying over his tiny runabout, and in general threatened his life and health and played hell with his temper.

He cut the engine scant feet before he ran the schooner down. The *Sea Maid* was at anchor, and Sammy Sultan, her owner and skipper, was waiting at the rail when Lew slammed the speedboat into her side and swung himself aboard.

Sammy Sultan's dark face split in a welcoming grin. He said, "Hello, baby. Glad you could come."

"Troubles?" Lew Guyon said.

"Not yet. Very soon now, I think. Come. Let's go back to my cabin." Sammy's head moved significantly in the

Marine Investigator Lew Guyon could have told the sheriff where to find Cipelli's corpse, but Lew wasn't talking. And that left only one other set of witnesses: the fish at the bottom of Millionaire's Cove!

direction of the sailor who was making Lew's boat fast.

"New man?" Lew asked.

"Most of the crew. All new. The old gang tried it for a while with me when I married Sue and went legit. I do not think they liked it. A couple stayed. The others went back south."

Lew nodded, remembering the southern waters and the years when he and Sammy Sultan had spun the wild wheel of fortune, gambling, with little regard for the odds, on quick death or sudden wealth. It was strange to think of Sammy as married and settled down. Lew watched him pour rum into a cup, top it off with coffee. "Hey, Sammy," Lew said, "you joined the yacht club yet?"

"Not yet." Sammy's tone was sheepish. "Sue, she wants me to."

"Ducky," Lew said. "You can get you a new white hat, put a teak-wood deck on the schooner..." He paused and looked at Sammy. Sammy was trying to smile, but his heart wasn't in it. "I got your wire," Lew said in a different tone. "We were coming up the coast with the tug, and when they radioed your message I changed course and put in here."

"Yes. You remember Cipelli? You know he had a brother?"

"No," Lew said. "I didn't know." He remembered Cipelli, having blasted the retired gangster into permanent retirement less than a year before. Killing Cipelli had been legitimate enough. Lew Guyon, marine investigator, had been working on a case involving a series of holdups on the yachts here in Millionaire's Cove. Cipelli, having exhausted his retirement fund by purchasing one of the fabulous estates in this exclusive hideaway, had planned to regain firm financial footing. He had imported Sammy Sultan with his schooner and crew, and it had been Cipelli's intention to loot every luxury craft in the harbor, send the booty south on the schooner. Lew Guyon had stopped Cipelli with a tommy gun. Sue Brandon had stopped Sammy Sultan, had brought him to the side of law and order, using no weapon but her eyes.

NOW, watching Sammy, Lew reflected that married life agreed with the little pirate. He had gained a little weight and

looked very well except for the tiny worry wrinkles at the corners of his eyes. "What about the brother?" Lew asked. "He out to get you?"

"Worse than that. He's missing."

Lew's brows went up. "That's bad? Who cares if he never turns up?"

"I do. We had a mild beef when he first came here to live in his brother's house. A mean boy, but small-time. You know them, Louie. Guys like that, they'll kick dogs and play hell with women. But me, he would not mess with. This Gilbert Cipelli has not his brother's moxie. I could tell. He knew it, too, after we met just once."

"How's the local law?" Lew asked.

"Good. It is a man named Pryor. He has a deputy who is not much force, but Pryor is a good man. I think he knows about me and was willing to let it go. As you know, my record is clean in the States. Now, with Cipelli missing, this Pryor is looking at me."

"At you—or for you?"

"At me—now. He hasn't said anything, but I do not like his eyes. I am very happy here with Sue, and I say to myself, my friend is a big detective. He will know what should be done."

"Not so big," Lew said. "But I'll talk to Pryor. It shouldn't be too much trouble."

Lew was still feeling that way when, having left Sammy, he found the sheriff. He liked the man instantly. Pryor had the seasoned look, the calm face and alert eyes of an efficient peace officer. Formerly F.B.I., Lew decided. Lured to this quiet post by the glittering salary doubtless paid by the residents of the Cove.

Pryor was willing to concede that Sammy Sultan had become, to all outward appearances, a useful, substantial citizen.

"Then why not let him alone?" Lew pleaded. "You've got him worried to death."

"He has nothing to worry about," said Pryor, "as long as Cipelli's missing. The time for Sultan to worry is when Cipelli turns up dead."

"Would that make Sammy his killer?"

"Who else? Cipelli wasn't accepted in local society. He hung around in the cheap bars, drank with oyster dredgers and their women. Those boatmen are

plenty tough, but inherently they have a lot of respect for the law. I doubt if Sultan has."

"Sammy's quit all that—"

"Surely. I know. I know. But his reformation is—recent, shall we say? Always, a man who has lived lawlessly, who has killed, has a different attitude. Mind you, I don't say your friend is guilty of anything. I say only that if Cipelli is dead, and I believe he is, I'll be sure to question Sultan."

"And bring up his former misdemeanors?"

"Naturally. They'd be pertinent."

Lew admired Pryor's calm, impersonal manner, and felt sorry for his friend. He left the little building with its carefully tended lawn, crossed the street when he saw Sammy Sultan in the car on the other side.

"Well?" Sammy said as Lew climbed in.

"Not good. If it comes up Cipelli's dead, Pryor puts his dough on you. He said Cipelli hung around with the oyster fishermen, but apparently that gang hasn't given him much trouble. He likes you best, Sammy boy."

"I love him too," said Sammy grimly. "Where do you want to go?"

"Let's look at those oyster boats. They don't work in the summer, do they?"

"Crabs. In the summer they fish for crabs. But some will be in, that's for sure."

They rode to the water's edge, left the car and walked out on a rickety pier. Several boats were tied up there, and Lew and Sammy stopped to talk with the owners who were working on deck. The only thing they learned about the missing Cipelli was that he had apparently had no friends.

"Imagine," said Sammy as they were climbing off one of the boats, "a louse like that, and he disappears, and it has to happen to me."

"You were always lucky," Lew answered. He was glad Sammy was taking it easy. Married life and quiet living had done a lot for the boy. Made him foresighted, careful. Sammy wasn't waiting for the law to grab him by the arm. He knew how things worked. Once the law made a grab, it had trouble relaxing its

grip. Especially on the Sammy Sultans of the world. Lew brought his gaze back from the far horizon and focused his eyes on the girl.

SHE was poised on the top of a piling, and the soft breeze from off the water was fanning the hem of her brief white shorts. She was young, very young, and straight and slender. When she saw them watching her, something like panic crossed her childish face. She took off, went into an excellent dive, entered the water cleanly and swam away from the pier.

"Pretty," Lew said admiringly. "She'll be a doll, Sammy, give her a year or two."

"Somebody wouldn't give her a year."

Lew looked at him questioningly.

"The old story," Sammy said with a shrug. "She played around with the other kids. Only she's prettier than the others. Some monkey took her to town, doped her or got her drunk, left her lying beside the road, all battered up and scared to death. For a little while she was off her rocker."

"Looked all right to me," Lew said.

"She's coming around okay. But afraid of people. She knows me, and I know her father, but you see how she ran away." Sammy spread his hand, palm downward, and said in a lower tone, "Name's Jane Hartlett. This is her father's boat."

Lew eyed the trim ship approvingly. She was well kept, her bottom was clean, and from her lines and the height of her masts Lew judged she was plenty fast. He followed Sammy over the inclined board that served as a gangway.

Earl Hartlett, father of the girl they'd seen, met them at the rail and invited them below for a drink. He was a pleasant man with a peaceful face. His whiskey was excellent.

He said, in answer to Lew's question, "Y'might say I knew Cipelli by sight. Didn't know him personally. He hung out with some of the boys in the bars, but I do my drinking at home."

"You agree with the rest of the Cove—that he was a fourteen-karat heel?" Lew asked the question mechanically. He knew the answer by now.

The fisherman's head turned toward Sammy, noting Sammy's empty glass. "In

the galley," Earl Hartlett said. "You know your way around here. Mix another one." Sammy passed through the small door out of sight, and Lew sat, hearing the sounds of cracking ice, waiting for Hartlett's answer.

Hartlett swung to face Lew. "Yes," he said. "I agree that he was useless . . . and evil. That's why I can't imagine you two caring whether he's missing or not."

"We don't," Lew said easily. "When Pryor, the sheriff, found out we were coming down this way, he told us to ask around."

Sammy came out of the galley, carrying a glass which contained some ice, a great deal of whiskey and very little water. Saluting his host with the glass, he said, "We'd better be going, Louie. I don't want my wife to worry."

"Any time," Lew answered. He watched Sammy toss off the drink, then tried to remember if he had ever before seen his friend take such a healthy slug of the stuff so early in the morning.

The alcohol seemed to have an immediate effect, for Sammy moved about uneasily until they left the schooner. He was preoccupied and somewhat irritable as Lew rode with him to his home.

"Lew," he said at last, "I don't want to hold you up. I know you were headed for another job when I sent that wire, and I'm sorry I brought you here for nothing. But—thanks for coming, Lew. I feel better about this thing now."

"Yeah," Lew said. "You look wonderful." He recognized the turn-off to Sammy's house and said, "Well, if you've got nothing to tell me, why not drop me at the boat landing? I'll go back to the tug."

Sammy opened his mouth, then closed it again. Several times, on the way to the boat landing, it seemed that he would speak. Lew sat, watching him quietly from the corner of his eye.

At the landing he got out and said, "So-long, Sammy. Sing out if you need me again."

"Sure. Sure, Lew. And—thanks." Sammy waved, gunned the motor and departed.

Lew Guyon went back to his tug.

Callao Johnson, his Panamanian mate, welcomed him aboard. "You are soon, sir," Callao said.

"Too soon," Lew answered. "So soon I don't even know what we're doing here. But, Callao, you remember that rig we used off Race Point?"

"To tow you under the ship?" Callao asked. And when Lew nodded, Callao shook his head emphatically. "Too dangerous," he said.

"Yeah, it's loony," Lew agreed. "But fast. We can cover a big slice of the harbor in a few days. Maybe find it this afternoon, if it's where I think I would put it."

Callao said with infinite patience, "Sir, what are we looking for?"

"Scenery," Lew said. "The water's clear and the sun's shining. It's a wonderful day for a ride."

"You get killed, sir," said Callao morosely, "that is your affair. But me, I am out of a job." He waved one huge hand at the crew members forward. Although he had not spoken to them, the men manned the anchor windlass, and the chain began clanking in.

THIRTY MINUTES later the salvage tug was moving slowly over the calm surface of the bay.

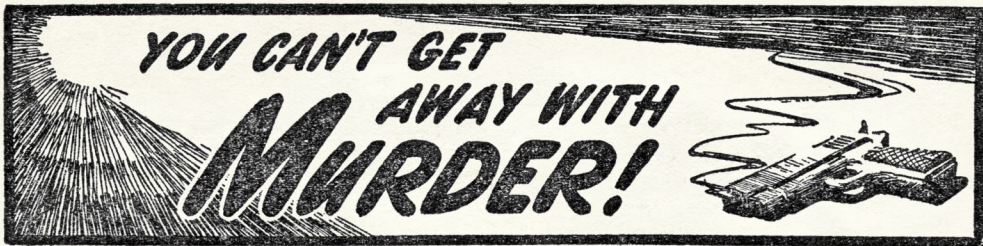
Lew Guyon, in diving dress, was dangling at the end of a rope—eighty feet below the tug's keel. He was well aware of the danger inherent in this business of being towed beneath the bottom of a vessel under way. But the use of the method would enable him to search an enormous section of the bay's bottom. Walking or crawling, he might never locate Cipelli's body, or at best, the search would take days.

Now, as Lew rode along just above the bottom, the afternoon sun was striking the surface above him, sending green shafts of light through the clean water, illuminating the scene.

Lew's feet, in the lead-soled shoes, were riding six feet above the bottom. He had no sensation of motion, but the marine growth went sliding by beneath him. A man could build a house down there, if he could learn to breathe water. Over there, by that stretch of shining pebbles. That would be a nice spot. Very nice, and—"Up!" Lew shouted suddenly.

Ahead of him, looming black through the light green water, he saw the boulder,

(Continued on page 126)

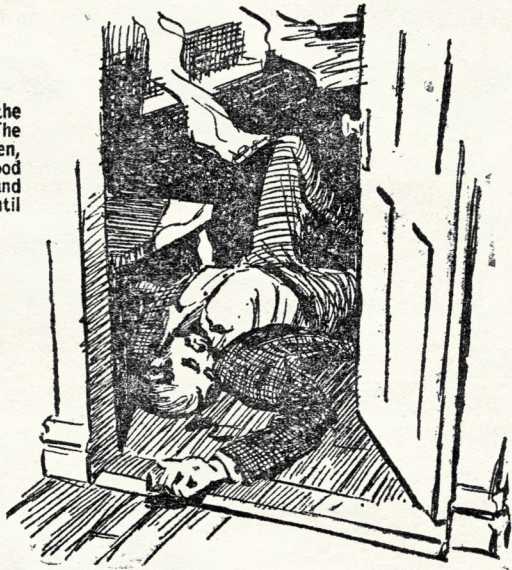


By NELSON and GEER

CASE OF THE CUSSSED CURMUDGEON

Cussed old Grandpa Pullen lay dead on the kitchen floor of the cottage in Bath, England. The oven door of the gas range beside him was open, a coat draped carefully over it. A trickle of blood had seeped from a bruise on his forehead and dried there like a ghastly exclamation point. Until that evening, Dec. 1, 1933, the 85-year-old former tailor had lived with his daughter and her husband Reginald Hinks and made their lives miserable with his senile didoes—running away like a petulant child, falling down and hurting his head, threatening suicide in gruesome ways. To all accounts he was well off dead.

But if anyone had hurried the process it was up to the Bath police to discover and prove it. So detectives looked the scene over, noted the bruise and blood on the old tartar's forehead, listened to young Reginald Hinks' story of finding his father-in-law with his head



on the oven, the coat spread over him and the gas going full blast. He said Pullen's head fell forward and struck the floor as he pulled him out. All of which appeared quite reasonable.

But a police pathologist went to work with test tubes and reagents—and as a result Reginald Hinks went on trial for murder. The de-



fense contended Grandpa's death had happened as claimed. The Crown admitted he'd died of carbon monoxide poisoning; his blood was full of it. But the pathologist testified there was none in the blood that had seeped from the wound in his forehead, proving it had been made before his head went into the oven. Therefore Hinks had knocked Grandpa unconscious, held his head in the fumes till he was dead, then rigged the scene to look like suicide. Actually he'd cleverly murdered Grandpa for his meager fortune, the Crown claimed.

If Hinks had murdered the old curmudgeon, he hadn't gotten away with it, for the jury found him guilty and sent him, protesting his innocence, to the gallows.



EX-WISE GUY

By

FRANCIS K. ALLAN

CHAPTER ONE

The Time Is Now . . .

THE HEADWAITER leaned over the table and whispered to Joe, "Telephone for you, Mr. Carroll."

The orchestra was playing a tango, and Marlena, the soft-voiced singer, was humming. Ketti was smiling at Joe, perhaps because she loved him or because it was

midnight and Joe had taken her to a first night and just bought her a drink. Or perhaps because it was smart to smile at Joe Carroll. It made no difference, except that Joe would remember that moment as long as he lived. It was the moment of the end. And it was the last time, the very

"When your time comes," Dulcie had told him, "you can run, maybe, and hide, maybe, but it's no good. Best of all is to turn on the hose."



"Joe," Dulcie told him, "I want you should go back to your apartment and have a good drink. And then, Joe, when I pick up the evening paper tomorrow, I want to read that Joe Carroll, a lawyer, committed suicide."

Suspenseful Crime Novelette

last moment on earth, when it was smart to smile at Joe.

"Back in a minute, Lovely," he murmured, and went out to the lobby of the Fifty-second Street Lantern Club.

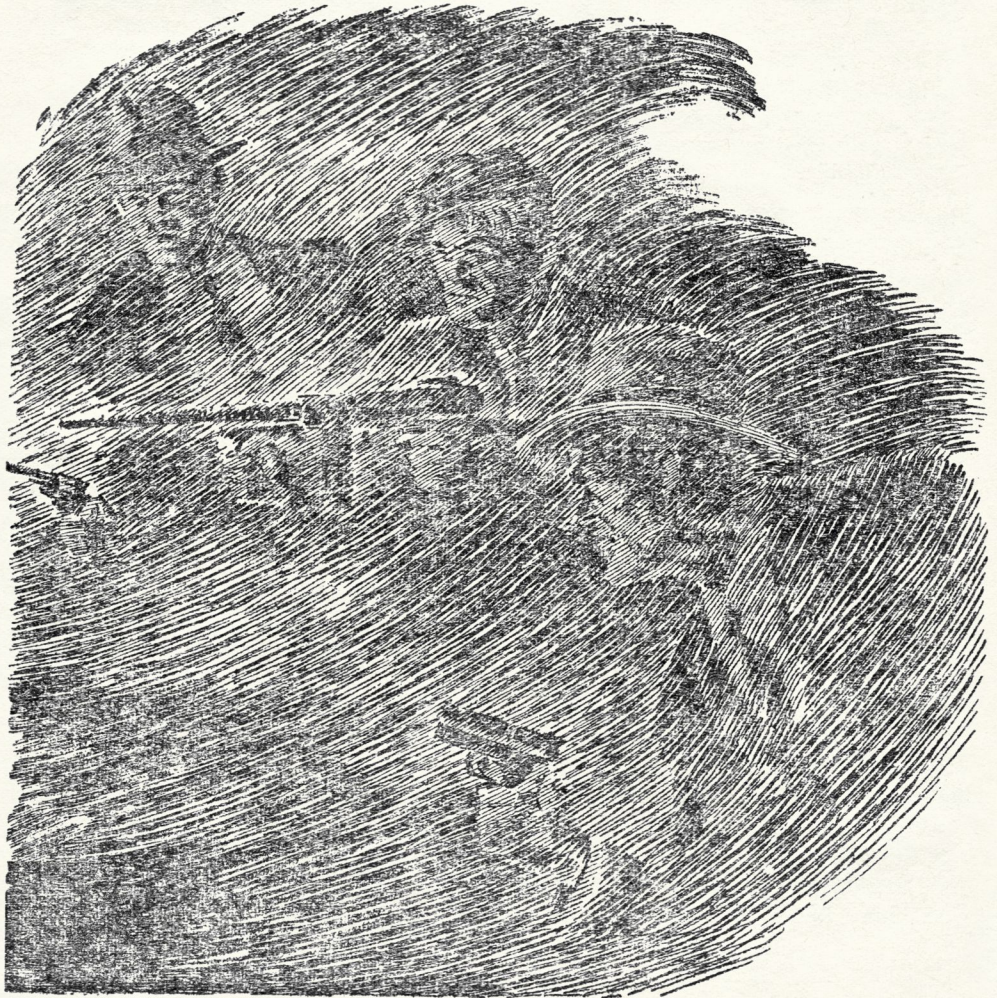
"Hello?" he said. "This is Carroll."

"Joe, this is Abie. Abie, Joe." The

voice was low and hushed. "They just had a meeting, Joe, and what I'm saying is something I've gotta say, but fast, Joe, because always you've done things for me. You listening?"

"Listening, Abie," Joe said quietly.

"The police got the lame guy what



worked the Washington Square territory, and they musta broke him open, because the word is that the D.A. is going to pick you up. That's what the meeting was for, sudden tonight, and Dulcie, he gave the word hisself. There's supposed to be a car for you, waiting to ride you from home tonight. You know the rest of how it'd be, Joe. And I guess that's all I can tell you. I only want to say for you, Joe, good luck."

"That's nice. Thanks, Abie." Joe said faintly, but Abie had hung up. Joe looked out the phone-booth window into the lobby of murals and blondes and tobacco mist, and the queer cool taste of horror touched his lips. He was no fool. He was a smart man, smarter than his years, and perhaps smarter than he should have been. But it didn't matter now, and Joe knew it; for beyond all else, Joe Carroll was a realist. Probably that was the gift and curse, he thought wryly. A guy should be dumb and learn to die in bed. . . .

"For my check," he said to a waiter, and passed a twenty-dollar bill. "Tell Miss Wayne I'm sorry. Something came up." He got his coat and hat and spoke to Nino, the proprietor. But certainly, and why not, Nino agreed. So Joe borrowed a waiter and gave the waiter his car keys. He told him to take the coupe to the address—Joe's address—on East Seventy-eighth Street; he told him to leave the car at the entrance and put the keys in the glove compartment.

And then Joe followed his own coupe in a taxi.

He left the taxi at the corner of Madison Avenue. He saw the waiter climb out and slam the door. Joe was standing in the darkness against a wall when he saw the waiter start to turn. He saw two shadows merge into men and close in on the waiter. He heard a muffled cry and he saw the shadows bending over the fallen waiter. He heard the remnants of a curse; then the shadows ran across the street and a sedan roared away.

Joe slowly lit a cigarette and sighed. He had never kidded himself. He remembered what Dulcie had told him, almost nine years ago: "All of us go along until our time comes, and those are the big days. But after that you can run, maybe, or hide, maybe, but best of all is just to

take a last good drink and turn on the hose." Joe laughed softly, thinking how funny it was that Dulcie had told him that when he was only a kid—twenty years old. Now he was thirty and his time had come. Dulcie must be laughing, too, with his wise brown eyes softly glowing and his fingers moist with sweat.

Joe took a long time. He smoked several cigarettes, and the sharp March wind dug into his lean body. His dark eyes were thoughtful, almost sleepy. He was a thin man with a thin and handsome face, with dark, short hair and long, smooth fingers. There was nothing cheap about Joe, nothing gaudy or loud. He had watched and learned, long ago, and he was a gentleman now.

Finally he counted his cash. It was just over a hundred dollars. He flipped away his cigarette and walked idly down Madison Avenue until he found the right place, the Brantley Hotel. It was neither large nor small, neither extravagant nor too plain. It was, perhaps, the most average mid-town hotel in New York. He registered as Carl Joseph and paid for three days. He had one Manhattan in the bar and then he went to bed. And slept.

H HE WOKE at ten and ordered breakfast. Rain was sliding down the window, and he smoked and thought of many places, of many things that were happening this hour. With a touch of irony he thought of the swiftness of things. All things were in a hurry; maybe that was why you drank so fast, spent so fast, tried to make so fast. And, he added, sometimes died so fast.

At four-thirty he ordered the early-afternoon editions. An item on the third page caught his attention: It told that Abraham 'Abie' Wentz, one-time boxer and in recent years frequently mentioned in connection with the Manhattan and Brooklyn narcotics traffic, had been found dead in Central Park, a hundred feet within the Seventy-second Street entry on the West Side. Wentz had been shot to death. Prior to his murder, however, he had been beaten and his fingers and toes burned. Police, while making no official statement, implied that Wentz' murder might be only a prelude to further violence. It was well known that authorities had lately taken

into custody an underworld character known as Lame Nick, a beggar in the Washington Square area, and reputed to have been an active 'gate' for narcotic sales. It was likewise rumored that the police were seeking for questioning Joe Carroll, Broadway first-nighter and lawyer with an interesting roster of clients—names not for publication.

Slowly Joe pushed the paper aside and closed his eyes for a moment. In that moment, it seemed to him, he still could hear Abie's hushed voice warning him: ". . . *because always you've done things for me. . .*" Joe sighed. Far better if those little things had never been done—at least for Abie.

He sat there thinking. Because he had known Dulcie so long and so well, he could practically predict what Dulcie had thought an hour ago, and what he would think tomorrow. So Joe tried to make a list: There was Ketti Wayne; she wasn't actually important. She might have gotten to be, if there had been time enough, drinks enough, kisses enough. But Dulcie wouldn't be sure. So there was Ketti, a nice kid, pretty, just dumb and smart enough. . . .

Next? Next there was no one, Joe realized. Oh, Ellie and Margo. But they were last month, last year, and Dulcie always knew the calendar on everything, blondes or brunettes. So next?

For a long minute Joe's mind halted on his mother; then he flexed his fingers and smiled faintly. That was the card that proved he *had* been smart all along. To Dulcie he had always been just the kid from brooklyn, smart and dirty at first, and smart and smooth later. But the real name, the old street address, the other street address. . . Nothing. He was glad.

He stood up and began to dress swiftly. If he hurried he'd get Ketti before she left the model agency. He realized he needed a shave, but it could wait. He called the Cosmopolitan Agency from the drugstore at the corner. But Miss Wayne wouldn't be back in from her assignment, they said. Where was she? Oh, they were sorry, but they weren't permitted to give that information. If he would care to leave his name . . . Joe didn't care to.

The next hour Joe spent in a bar, watching the clock restlessly and calling

every ten minutes. Sometimes Ketti went home, sometimes she didn't. How would he know? He wouldn't. It had been dumb not to think of this before. It just proved that smart guys were the dumbest of all.

Then, at six-fifteen, Ketti answered. Her voice was just the same—warm and low and curious. "This is Ketti. Who is it?"

"This is Joe, Ketti."

"Oh. Well, it wasn't very nice, leaving me just sitting there last—"

"No, Lovely. It wasn't nice, but neither were a lot of other things. But listen to me. I'm being very serious, Ketti. Has anything funny—odd or suspicious—happened around you today?"

"Odd or suspicious? Certainly not. What do you think would—"

"Don't interrupt, Lovely, just give the answers. As I said, this is serious." He hesitated, thinking hard and warily. "Ketti, I've got to see you immediately. I want you to listen very carefully and do exactly what I say. Don't laugh or get ideas of your own or play hard to handle. Now, listen: Go downstairs and take a cab to Times Square. Pick yourself a big crowded place and hop out and straight into the subway. Take any train, then take some more. In other words, get lost one hundred percent from anybody behind you. When that's done, get another cab and go to the Blue Jay Grill on Lexington and wait for me to call you. Now, what did I tell you to do?"

After at least ten seconds of silence she began to repeat in a halting and faintly frightened voice. Joe felt sorry for her. Ketti didn't know. To Ketti he was just a lawyer with handsome face and a bank-roll; neither of them had gotten around to the future. Maybe Ketti was different; maybe she thought he was different. There hadn't been time to find out.

HE FOUND an open barber shop on Third Avenue and got a quick shave, then walked over to Lexington and took a place in a darkened doorway across the street from the Blue Jay Grill. It was almost seven o'clock. It was nearly eight when he saw Ketti leave a cab and hurry into the Grill.

He waited and watched. The traffic was

heavy and it was hard to know, but finally he decided. He crossed the street and went in. She was standing at the bar alone—Ketti was the sort who could do that. Her hair was pale gold. Her head was bare and the smooth curve of her hair ended at her shoulders. Her eyes were grey and her shoulders were square. She was tall and beautiful and she talked softly. That was the thing Joe had liked from the beginning. When Ketti talked she looked straight at you and she talked softly, slowly, as if she meant the things she said, and hoped you would believe them, too.

"Come along," he said quietly, and pushed a dollar across the bar. He took her arm and she came without a word. The street was still crowded. He hurried her down to the subway, then out again at Eighty-sixth. At last, in a cab, he relaxed and smiled. "You've been just fine so far. It won't be long now." They returned to midtown and the faintly tea-roomish cocktail lounge of the Brantley Hotel.

Over the amber gold of two glasses of Manhattan, her eyes met his. "What is the matter, Joe? What kind of trouble?"

"Nothing of great moment, except I want you to take a vacation for a couple of weeks at least. I'll get the money in the morning, but I don't want you to go home tonight."

She held her cigarette for the match, and through the veil of smoke her eyes continued to search his. "No, that isn't enough. Tell me the rest of it," she said softly.

"Why?"

"Because I want to know."

"You're a curious Ketti," he teased, but she didn't smile. Suddenly a feeling of loneliness and forgottenness came over Joe, making him yearn to talk to Ketti, almost convincing him that Ketti would be the one who was different, the one who would care. And yet, as he hunted for words, a sense of clumsiness gripped him, and he tried to make it a joke as he talked:

"It is a laugh. Or a delayed hot-foot, you could call it," he said. "It is strictly a rags-to-quick-champagne story. Stop me when you want to yawn. But once upon a time there was a sharp little apple in Brooklyn. His Poppa sometimes brought home a buck, but usually not. His Momma

was a very nice egg who hadn't had many gardenias, real or phony. Anyway, Little Apple looked across the East River and saw M-O-N-E-Y. So he came across and did this and that, getting smarter than hell every tenth second, until he was cuter than a pair of crooked dice. And always ambitious—that is very important to remember.

"Well, comes a day, let us say, and Apple runs into a certain Gentleman of influence and cash. He is approximately twenty at this point. He is ripe and the Gentleman sees as much, even in the dark, and thereby begins the second part of our story, known as the Education Of A Lawyer. By hard work and at the expense of the Gentleman, Apple becomes a lawyer. By now he is smarter than ever. He understands the rules that govern silence and loss of memory and amnesia concerning dates, names and places. At no time does Apple hear of such a thing as perjury. So he is immensely valuable. Gentleman has a business that needs a lawyer from time to time. So we can see how our Little Apple became prosperous, putting money in the bank and buying good suits and seldom missing a meal except to sleep. In general, a success story. Then we arrive at a time we may call Last Night. Are you still listening?"

"You don't have to make it funny, Joe," Ketti said very softly.

"No. It has a corny echo, doesn't it?" He drained his drink and nodded to the waiter. When the new Manhattans came, Joe leaned back and stared at his thoughtfully. The double-talk was lost. He was tired and he felt tired. "That's about all," he said. "A few days ago the police arrested a lame man who knew a little. He talked, and the word ran around that I would be a good conversationalist. So I became very popular in many bad places. The nice little guy who warned me last night is dead tonight. And so you see. . ."

KETTI frowned. "What all do I see, Joe?"

"Dulcie—the Gentleman is Dulcie—wants me very much. I understand him only too well. If he cannot find me by looking, he will find me by pressure. He knows about you because Dulcie has always made it his business to know the

things he may need. And that is why you will enjoy a little trip, Ketti."

"I see." She looked at her cigarette that had gone out, then put it aside and tapped out another. "I see," she repeated. "And what are you going to do?"

"Oh, I will be in and out, around and about," he said with a laugh. Then he leaned forward, drawing patterns on the checkered table cloth. "I've been thinking, Ketti, of course. Dulcie is a man of many ways and means; he is a character of great patience. He remembers like an elephant. So the future is not for me in New York."

"Couldn't you go to the police, Joe, and just tell them?"

"I could, but I can't. After all, I am not a lily. Second, it leaves a bad taste in my mouth. It is so very much like squealing."

Finally she nodded. "So you are going away from New York?"

"I think so. But I am also a realist, as they say. I've worked hard and sold a good part of what people call their souls, so I would like to take the profit with me. I can get most of what I've got in a few days, with luck. Finally, I want to take a trip back to Brooklyn and tell Momma not to worry. That is most important. It is very funny, Ketti, how you will make a mess of almost everything—but work like a crazy fool to keep one front room in your life cleaned up and nice to sit in."

She nodded and turned her glass slowly. "Where, when are you going?"

"I don't know where. When? Two days, three. Depending on luck." He paused. "I can get the money for you tomorrow."

"I wasn't thinking of that." She looked up suddenly. "You thought of me and you thought of your mother, didn't you? And who else?"

"There wasn't anybody else to think of," he said quietly.

She kept looking at him and it seemed to him that she was trying to laugh. But she didn't. She looked down at the table cloth and her fingers were clasped tightly together. "Joe, answer me this, and please be sure it's true: Do you love me and will you love me next month or next year?"

Joe started to answer, and then it came to him what she was thinking. And suddenly it came to him that Ketti *was* the one who was different. All of it came to

him in a still moment, and then he began to think again. He waited a few moments and lit a cigarette. When he answered, his voice was gentle and calm. "No, Ketti. I wish I did, but I don't love you. You're nice. You're beautiful. But I don't love you."

Slowly she raised her head. When their eyes met it was as if her fingers had touched his cheeks, and then there were tears in her eyes. For that moment she was the most beautiful girl Joe had ever seen and she was smiling at him even as she cried. "Oh, Joe," she whispered, "if you'd said anything else, *anything else*, I wouldn't have been sure, but I know now. And I love you too."

In that moment Joe realized that she was not smarter, not quicker, but she was far wiser than he. And yet a fool. He tried to tell her that. "You don't know anything about it—any of the things I've done, or about me or what I really am. Once—"

She shook her head. "Why do I need to know a lot of little things?"

CHAPTER TWO

Die, Sucker!

AT TEN O'CLOCK the next morning, Joe walked into a small dust-scented room on Sixth Avenue and closed the door behind him. A vast moist-faced man looked up, his eyes soft and huge behind thick glasses.

"Oh, Joe. Hello this morning, Joe," he said.

"Hello, Ben." Joe sat down. Ben Tracy's breath smelled of garlic. His fingernails were stained. There was an expression of mournful resignation on his soft face, and his chair creaked beneath his loose body.

"What can I do for you? Is everything all right?" he asked.

Joe laughed. "Don't act dumb. You know things aren't all right. But you can do something for me. For a profit, as always. I need some checks cashed and some stock sold. I am thinking, Benny, of taking a trip. That doesn't surprise you?"

Ben sighed. "For a long time I've been in New York, seeing one thing and another. Nothing surprises me, Joe." He

heaved forward in the chair. "The stock? You got the certificates with you?"

Joe grinned. "You're going to get them." He took a key from his pocket. "They're in a box at the Empire Trust. Box 8863. This is the key. They don't know me. And you can get by on this." He pulled a sheet of paper toward him and scrawled his signature. "Dear Sirs, Please release to the bearer . . ." he wrote. When he finished, he pushed the paper back toward Benny, then took his billfold from his pocket. He wrote three checks on three different banks and passed them across the desk. Ben Tracy murmured softly, rather like a sleepy dog snoring.

"Near to a hundred thousand, Joey," he murmured.

"How fast you can add," Joe said wryly. He rose. "You can figure the market value on the stock and get it in cash, less your ten percent. I'll sign the certificates tonight at nine o'clock, right here. I'll pick up the cash, minus another five percent, and we'll shake hands and say good luck." He paused and looked down at the large moist-checked man. "Please be here, and please be alone, Ben. Please don't get gossipy. You have a nice business and you'll live to be an old man."

Ben seemed to moan. "Like you say. Always like people say, Joey."

"Fine," said Joe quietly, "and now give me a thousand on account."

From Ben's Joe rode to Pennsylvania Station and bought two tickets to New Orleans. It was nothing but a guess and a vague desire. New Orleans was something he'd never seen. People went there on honeymoons, and from there you could go east or west or south; or it sounded like the place where you could simply vanish.

He phoned Ketti in her room at the Brantley. She was fine. She sounded as if she'd just awakened. How was he? He was fine; just waiting around for the time to pass today. Did he love her? Yes, he wouldn't be surprised. He'd be home by ten tonight.

The hours were empty. He saw a show, then a newsreel theater; he had a drink in a bar he'd never seen before. Then another across the street. He wondered what Dulcie was doing now. He hated Dulcie, but not violently. He hated him

as a man would hate a sleek, fat pig who was smarter than pigs should be. And how much was that, Joe wondered.

At a quarter to nine that night, Joe finished a beer in the bar across the street from Ben's office. He had seen the light go on ten minutes before; nothing else had happened. He closed himself in the phone booth and made the call.

"Ben? This is Joe. Is everything ready? Fine. Take a walk up Sixth and I'll drop in on you for the stroll. Yes. . ." He hung up. From the phone booth he could see Ben's doorway. He saw him appear, bulky as an old soft bear in a worn coat. He slammed and tested the door, wheezed and blew his nose, then plodded northward. And still nothing happened.

Joe walked along on the opposite side of the street until Ben reached Central Park South. There he caught up with him. Ben was panting and moaning alternately. "Walking is fierce on my heart, Joey."

"I'm sorry. There's a quiet little hotel lobby back here, with big soft chairs." And there, in the shadowy lobby, Ben paid ninety-one thousand dollars, minus percentage, on the checks. Then Joe signed the stock certificates and Ben blew on the ink. He paid Joe another forty thousand and sighed sadly.

"It is nice, the way young folks get ahead these days, Joey. I never had that luck."

"Yes. We are all crying for you, Benny. Poor Benny." He rose. "But this time you earned it, and thanks. Good luck and don't go broke, Benny."

Benny sighed and almost smiled. "I get along, is all."

"Almost making ends meet, twice." Joe laughed and walked out. It was all in his pocket—the part that was left from the part of him he had sold. It was a lot. More than most people ever saw. But it didn't make him happy.

KETTI was waiting for him in her room when he got back to the Brantley. He kissed her, once swiftly, then slowly and hungrily. "It's all done. I'll make the visit to Brooklyn tomorrow, and by this time tomorrow night we'll be on the train to New Orleans."

"Are you sorry?"

He shook his head. "I'm glad. This is new and fresh and. . . Oh, hell, that sounds corny. You know what it is, so let's have a drink. But first. . ." He kissed her again.

* * *

People laugh at Brooklyn and there are too many jokes about Brooklyn. But not everybody in Brooklyn goes crazy at baseball games, or belongs to a murder syndicate or collects alligators in their bathtubs, or those thousands of other things. Most people, much as Joe's mother, Mrs. Vincent Carlotti, live in small apartments. They go to church; they are hot in summer; they worry and they laugh and Brooklyn is home.

As Joe left the subway and walked along the crowded street, with the crowded steps of houses thrusting out and the scent of food pouring out, and the calls of children echoing, he felt strangely at peace, as he always did when he made this walk. For here was the part of his life that was right.

He had done what the priests would have him do, and he had prayed to do it well. He had lied, but perhaps, he reasoned, the priests would have said it was kinder to lie.

He stopped at the drugstore and bought a quart of ice cream. He was whistling as he ran up the front steps and into the brown-walled hall. He hurried to the second floor and rattled the knob impatiently. "Hurry, Mom, it's melting," he called.

There was no answer. He shook the knob hard and then knocked. There was still no answer. Then the door across the hall opened and withered little Mrs. Ventura blinked.

"Ah, Joey, your momma went away. And wasn't it strange, her leaving the door open like that? I have a key, Joey, if you're wanting to go in."

Joey stood quite still for several moments. "Was anybody with her when she went away, Mrs. Ventura?"

"It was in a big, fine car, Joey. My Gus saw it from the window. And with her, yes. Two men, Gus saw them. You didn't know the men, Joey?"

Again several moments passed. "Yes.

I know them, I think. May I have the key, please?" he asked slowly.

It was a two-room apartment. A clean apartment with a rosary over the imitation fireplace, and the old wedding photograph over the brocaded couch. In the bedroom was Joe's picture on the dresser, and on the bedside table was the note Joe was looking for. It said simply:

Call me, and we'll get together soon.

D.

Joe thanked Mrs. Ventura and gave her back the key. He walked away from the house. The children were still shouting. His fingers were sticky. He looked down. The ice cream was melting; he'd forgotten it. He dropped the sack in the gutter. It broke and the colors of strawberry and chocolate melted together. Always, before, Joe had thought the color was pretty; now it was ugly and it frightened him.

How? How did Dulcie know? How could he have learned?

Joe's brain shouted the questions but kept the answers. Anyway, the answers didn't matter now.

From a drugstore in front of the subway entrance, Joe dialed Dulcie's number. A man's voice answered—a voice Joe didn't recognize. He asked for Dulcie.

"Who's wanting him?" the man asked.

"This is Joe. Joe Carroll. He's expecting me," Joe said wearily.

"Huh? Oh, yeah. Now I get it." The man laughed softly. "You was sick of carrying the ice cream, huh?"

So they were that close. Watching that close, Joe reflected. He wet his lips. "Put Dulcie on the line."

"Naw, but I've got a message. It's from Dulcie, saying he'll be here around six tonight and would like for you to give him a ring. Important, he says."

"Thank you very much," Joe said and hung up.

AS HE stepped back onto the sidewalk, he looked up and down the street. How strangely serene it seemed! Even the sack and ice cream were still there. He tossed away his cigarette and went down into the subway. He did a sharp turn and flattened himself against the

wall. But no one followed him down the steps, and when the train came he was the only one who got on. For some reason it worried him more than certainty would have worried him.

He started back to the Brantley, then changed his mind. He wasn't quite sure why. It had something to do with Ketti—the questions she would ask, the anxiety that would fill her eyes. It wasn't Ketti's party any more. So Joe simply waited. From twelve until six was only six hours, but the hours were long—longer than any Joe had ever lived before. And when six o'clock came and he lifted the telephone receiver, his throat felt dry; his fingers trembled. He could not remember the number at first.

"Dulcie? This is Joe Carroll. I want Dulcie," he said.

Then came Dulcie's voice, organ-soft and amused. "Joe, you're a good boy," he said. "From the beginning I looked at you and knew you were a good boy. Why? Because always on Christmas you went to visit your mamma in Brooklyn. I will give you a rule, Joe: If you want to learn about somebody, always look and see what he does on Christmas." He laughed and sighed. "She is a nice lady, Joe, and she thinks a lot of you."

"Dulcie, I'm listening. What do you want me to do?"

There was a long, silent interval, then Dulcie sighed again. "Joe, it's not a good idea to take a trip. You should know that, smart as you are. It's very much like I always told you: When the dance is over, it's time for the last drink and good-night." Joe could hear Dulcie's chair groan as he shifted. "Joe, I want you to go on back home to your apartment, where you have always lived so nice and we have had such good talks and drinks together. I want you should have the drink, like I say after the dance, and then, Joe, when I pick up the evening paper tomorrow, for instance, I want to read how it was that Joe Carroll, a lawyer, committed suicide. I would like to read how you didn't leave any notes or such, and even better, burned up any things of interest that maybe are around. That is it, Joe."

Joe could have counted fifty to himself while he breathed. "Dulcie," he said

softly, "you're a remarkable gent, aren't you?"

"Oh, yes, Joe. A kind of a success story, maybe you could call me."

Joe had to laugh, a harsh, soft laugh. The laughter dissolved, leaving a flat echo. "And, Dulcie, do I gather that I am supposed to trust you to take care of the little lady from Brooklyn, in case I go away tomorrow?"

Dulcie spoke gravely and gently. "You should know by now, Joe, that I always keep my promises. Yes, things will be all right with the little lady if I like the news in the papers, Joe."

"It's a funny world, Dulcie, full of honor and promises." Joe hung up. Then he began to hurt. Perspiration coated his face. He wiped his lips and walked out. He thought of Ketti waiting at the hotel. He should call Ketti, yes. She would worry. But the only things he could tell her would only worry her more. Tomorrow, early in the morning, he would call her. Or tonight, late, he might write her a letter.

So Joe went home to his apartment on East Seventy-eighth Street. A pleasant apartment, with windows facing east and south; a nice apartment where he and Dulcie had had many pleasant drinks.

Joe had one himself, straight. Then he sat down at the window and turned on the radio. He didn't listen. He looked at the lights that glistened below and to the south as far as the Grand Central Building. This was a night when he should be thinking, but what could he think about?

He took the money from his pocket and rippled the edges of the bills, much as he would have shuffled a deck of cards. Then he sat down at the desk and pulled out a sheet of paper. He began the letter, stopped, smoked a cigarette, then started again. It was hard going.

Dear Ketti,

A few things have happened that I didn't count on, so I would like to talk to you in this note. I've cashed in some things and I am enclosing the money. It's funny how, when it finally comes around, there's only one or two people in your life that you trust. It was a great night when I met you, Ketti.

But about this money. I've never gotten around to fixing my mother as I'd planned, so I'd like for you to do that. Government bonds, anything like that. Go to one of

those investment outfits and let them tell you. You better see a tax guy, too. My books will show the money with its nose clean. Then, after that, I want you to pinch off the last few grand—make it fifteen—and do whatever you want. Take a look at Europe, buy yourself a drink and a bottle of French perfume. Anything you want. . .

Joe lit another cigarette and leaned back. He had always hated to write, and this time he hated it most. He walked back to the liquor shelf and had another drink. The radio was playing a song he remembered from six, eight years ago. What was the name? Funny, the way things slipped away and everything seemed so long ago. He turned the radio up a little and turned the lamp down low. He moved the bottle of Scotch over to his chair, and finally he turned the lamp off entirely.

The light twinkled in the windows and threaded restlessly through the streets. A plane went by from LaGuardia Field, its lights blinking and winking against the sky and stars. Joe wondered why he'd not sat here more often. He wondered why he hadn't gone somewhere—gotten married, bought a farm in Marylyn, practiced law in a town without a paved street. Why hadn't he done those things?

Then he laughed at himself and lifted the bottle of Scotch. This one, he reflected, would be to Dulcie. A nice drink to a fat rat. Hello, Dulcie!

Then, at last, Joe admitted that he was afraid. It was fear as he had never known it, never contemplated it before. Always, before, fear had been of small things, but now he was afraid to die. He was afraid, not so much of the moment of pain, but of the long blankness. He was afraid because he didn't know where he was going.

He turned on the lights, suddenly tormented by the darkness. He turned the radio as loud as it would go, haunted by any moment of silence. He took a drink, another drink. He went to the door; it was locked. Perspiration coated his cheeks. The telephone? He picked it up, and the gentle humming relieved him. Why had he wondered? What difference did the phone make? He couldn't have said. He was simply afraid—desperately afraid—of the loneliness of dying.

He pushed his chair into a corner from

which he could see the entire room, the windows, the door. He drank again and his fingers shook. He was cold. He wanted his coat. He started to get up and fell back into the chair. He overturned the bottle and stared at the whiskey as it inched across the rug. Then he began to laugh—a ghostly and terrified laugh that was lost in the tumult from the radio. Then his head sagged on his chin and his eyes closed.

CHAPTER THREE

The Big Act

THAT was where Ketti found him, before dawn the next morning. He was afraid to answer the door. It would be Dulcie. But then he was suddenly too tired to care. It was too late to care, and there was nothing he could do about it. So he opened the door and Ketti rushed into his arms.

"Joe, what happened to you? Why didn't you. . ." She stopped and stepped back to look at him. "What is it, Joe?" she whispered.

"Nothing. I only . . . I got to thinking. I thought—"

"You're not telling the truth. What is it? Why didn't you come back?"

When he didn't answer, she looked around the room. She saw the overturned bottle, and then the unfinished letter on the table. She ran and seized it and pulled away from Joe as he tried to grasp her.

"Ketti, that doesn't mean—" he began. "Here, let me have—" It was too late. His arms sagged to his sides. Her eyes met his.

"Why did you have to write this letter?" she whispered. "What has Dulcie done? Tell me!"

There was a sputtering sound as the radio, still turned on, woke up for another day of broadcasting. The sky was turning muddy grey. Slowly Joe crossed the room and turned the radio off. And in those slow moments he knew that he must not tell Ketti the truth. He wanted, *yearned* to tell her, and in that yearning lay the selfishness of love. He didn't want to die at all, he thought with lonely detachment. He wanted to stay alive and

start living. He remembered something he'd heard years ago: The trouble with women is trying to tell them good-bye.

He straightened and faced Ketti, and his expression was calm. "I wrote the letter because I wanted to, Ketti," he said. "I didn't come back to the hotel last night for the same reason—I was doing what I wanted. I want to go on living my own way, not with a lot of complications and people close to me. I want to go where I want to and do what I want to."

"You're lying," she whispered. "You wouldn't have come home to this apartment unless you *had* to. It's too dangerous. You're lying and you're too confused to think straight. Oh, can't you tell me?" she begged.

As her eyes implored him, Joe tried to turn away. Then he knew he was beaten. But more than that, he knew desperately he wanted to be beaten. He felt tired in every muscle and sinew. He wanted nothing but to stop fighting and reach out to Ketti and tell her. He looked at her helplessly. "I didn't want to tell you. At first I didn't . . ." Then he told her and she listened silently. When he finished she kept looking at him.

"Joe, you're a fool," she said softly. Then her eyes filled with tears of fury. "You're the biggest fool in the world, Joe Carroll! Can't you do even an inch of thinking? Don't you know how to outsmart even a fat rat like Dulcie?"

"Huh? No," he said with a faint smile. "In books and movies and plays, yes. I would outsmart him with two down in the ninth inning and carry away the big bouquet. However," he said, "this is different. If I made some double-foxy move and then it soured, where would the payoff be? The payoff being my mother is not like a payoff being in chips of a drink, you see?"

"Oh, I know, but—but you're just giving up too easy and I hate you for it!" she wailed. "I hate you because—because of me, too," she added forlornly. Joe tried to think of something to say. It was just the same old truth about women. You made it harder on yourself and them, if you ever . . . "Joe, come here and look," Ketti said suddenly. She was standing by the window, looking down to

the street far below. "See those people down there?"

"Sure. Nice people rushing to the subway," he said. "Very lucky, also."

"But think, Joe," she said swiftly, "all of them are alive. They're not going to die. So why should you?"

"You're not being logical," he said. "They don't know Dulcie or . . ." His words dissolved as a cool premonition struck him. He turned around, but he was too late. Ketti swung with the empty whiskey bottle, and the swing ended on Joe's temple. He went down and out without a sound.

WHEN he woke up he was able to look straight in front of him and see quite an assortment of friends—or rather acquaintances—all of whom were obviously impatient for him to begin a conversation. There was Sandlin, a deputy inspector of police. There was a face whose name Joe had forgotten, but the face was that of a plainclothes detective. And finally there was Carr Benton, an assistant district attorney. There was also Ketti, who was looking at Joe as if she wished she were dead, and knew that he wished the same even more.

"Now," said Carr Benton in his most practical manner, "nothing is to be gained by clamming up, Carroll."

"Anyway, we know all we need to know. All we're asking is a statement that'll make it easy on you, Joe," Sandlin said silkily.

Joe wet his lips. His head ached. The plainclothes man put it most clearly: "You got to remember: Suppose we should just bull in on Dulcie, that would bust the china mighty fast. And so wouldn't it be better for you to just tell the inspector what he needs to know?"

Joe thought it over. He wanted to hate Ketti, but he couldn't. He found that he was incapable of any real feeling. He merely felt utterly tired and hopelessly trapped in a net he had started to weave years ago. And it was quite a net, he admitted to himself as he looked at the faces before him. Here he was. Somewhere else was his mother, plus Dulcie. And he could talk or not. It didn't matter, because the wheels were going to turn anyway and somebody was going to get

hurt. The bitter irony of it was that it wouldn't be he—not immediately. He would just talk.

He rubbed at his lips. "All right," he said. "Lick your pencil and listen to the song. You persuaded me." Ketti tiptoed out into the kitchen and closed the door.

Joe talked slowly and monotonously, telling where Dulcie had done what, and to whom and why, and for how much. Plus addresses. When he finished and lit a cigarette and closed his eyes for a



Ketti

moment, Sandlin stood up and sighed. "It will make a beautiful story for the grand jury, Joe. All of us admire you."

"Thank you. Thank you so much," Joe said. "And now, what about today?"

Sandlin looked at Benton, and Benton walked over to the window. He raised it. The sky was heavy and snow was blowing in flurries. "You have no idea what a persuasive talker your friend Ketti can be, Joe," he said. "And also a fair thinker—at least, we hope. Okay, bring it along," he said to the detective. He turned out the light and the apartment was almost dark.

Out of the bedroom the detective brought some bedding tied in a thin roll with rope. Over it was pulled a coat and pair of pants. As Joe watched, Benton glanced down to the street, then shoved the bundle out. As he did so, Sandlin spoke into the telephone:

"Okay. Send the ambulance." He walked over to the window. "Like to watch, Joe?" he said. Joe did not answer. He stared down. Far below on the walk

lay the foolishly grotesque bundle. Already a cop was racing across the street. As if—yes, Joe realized, just as if he had been waiting for this moment. And he knelt down, straightened, and ripped off his vast raincoat and threw it over the bundle.

It seemed scarcely a moment before a bell began to clamor in the distance and draw nearer. A crowd gathered. More cops swarmed in and pushed the crowd back. The ambulance swayed around the corner and stopped. The crowd was pushed further back. The ambulance attendant knelt and rose. Deftly, swiftly, the bundle vanished under a sheet and was thrust into the ambulance. The ambulance clanged away. Joe wet his lips and remembered to breathe. He was beginning to understand.

"Now," said Sandlin complacently, "maybe you should take a nap in the bedroom. The gentlemen of the press will be dropping in before long."

"I—I'll be in the kitchen," Joe said jerkily. He entered and closed the door behind him. Ketti was sitting at the kitchen table, her face white, her lips parted. Her lips tried to speak.

"Joe, it will—will work. It must!" she whispered. "And the other way . . . You dead and Dulcie . . . You can't trust people like Dulcie, don't you know that?"

"I know. I know . . ." He began. Suddenly he bent over and touched her waves of hair and held them to his cheeks as he kissed them. "Ketti, Ketti, Ketti," he said wearily, "why can't people like me find people like you before they—they lose so many years?"

The gentlemen of the press were hammering at the door. Joe and Ketti listened. Sandlin and Benton talked hard and excitedly. No, they didn't have any statement. No, they'd just got here. No, get out. All right, only one statement. They had nothing to say at this time.

The reporters screamed. It was better than telling them Joe had jumped with a pipe organ in his mouth. What about that red stain down on the sidewalk? Wasn't that blood, or wasn't it?

"Maybe," Sandlin said, "it was a bottle of ketchup that somebody dropped out a window." Again the reporters screamed. Joe looked at the kitchen shelf. His bot-

tle of ketchup wasn't there any more.

THE HOURS of daylight seemed endless. There was nothing else to do now, Sandlin kept repeating. The newspapers would be out at five o'clock. Dulcie would get his copy. Maybe—just barely—he would keep his promise. But nobody believed it. Midnight would be the deadline. After that it would be just a gamble of hitting Dulcie before Dulcie could hit back. Tough? Yeah, it was tough, Sandlin agreed, looking at Joe. But his eyes told Joe that Joe could have thought of that long ago.

"We've got to be realistic, Joe," Benton said. Joe wanted to laugh. It wouldn't have been a very happy laugh.

The papers came out at five. Darkness came. Eight o'clock came. Nine o'clock came. The shades were drawn and the lamp was turned low. The air was dense with smoke. The telephone rang and Sandlin answered. When he hung up, he nodded tensely. "They just got Jeppison. Got him before he could make a call to anybody. He told 'em where Dulcie's staying."

Jeppison was very close to Dulcie. Joe had told about Jeppison and now Jeppison was telling, too.

"From now on, what we need is luck," Sandlin said softly. "I would like to be making that trip and dropping in on Dulcie. Over to Brooklyn, Harry says Jeppison told 'em."

Joe's head jerked up. "Brooklyn? Not the Chowder Club on Diamond Street?" he asked sharply.

Sandlin sat still. "Yes. Why, Joe? You know it?"

"It's a booby trap!" Joe was on his feet. "Hurry! The club is just a joint for the coke peddlers to pick up their orders, but it's rigged in case of trouble. The warehouse is downstairs in the basement and you don't go down the stairs and stay alive if— Don't sit there! Get started!"

Sandlin and Benton weren't sitting any longer, nor was Ketti. Sandlin grabbed the telephone, made a call, then threw the telephone away. "Started! They've already started!" he bawled. He lunged for the door. They went out the back way and into Sandlin's sedan. The streets

were icy. At Madison and Forty-sixth Sandlin folded both right fenders into the body with a long loose slide that ended against a bus. The big sedan seemed to shake itself, shudder, then right itself and lumber ahead. Benton had closed his eyes. Only once did he murmur something about his family and small insurance policy.

"Stop here," Joe said, a block from the Chowder Club. They sent the detective across the street and along the block. When he returned from the darkness he reported that two police cars were parked and empty on the next side street. Which meant, Joe knew, that six cops, eight cops, ten cops were already in the club. And presently they would go down the stairs and the building would go beneath them at the landing.

And they would be going down those stairs because of him . . .

He opened the car door and took a deep breath. "Don't get any closer than this," he said, and then he ran toward the club. They shouted behind him and Ketti screamed. He heard her high heels clicking on the walk as she started to follow. He looked over his shoulder and saw Sandlin catch her, drag her back. He flung himself into the shabby chrome-and-blue doorway of the club. It was deserted. Silence hung over everything. He plunged into the bar and there were perhaps a dozen customers—sullen faced, silent, standing against the wall while three cops worked them.

"Where are the others? The others?" Joe demanded wildly. The cops talked too slowly. Joe broke past them and along the beer-scented corridor that led first to the men's room, then to the stairs that went up and down. It was precisely then that a bulky sergeant was opening the basement door. A flashlight glinted in his hand. Joe shouted to him. He turned slowly, one foot already descending.

Joe seized him, too breathless to speak. He dragged at him and the sergeant wrestled free and drove a shattering left into Joe's stomach. Joe went to his knees and rolled away as the sergeant slugged at him again.

A gun roared and the shape of the sergeant's face changed, growing suddenly

lax and surprised as he gasped. The gun roared again from the basement, and Joe managed to kick at the sergeant, sending him toppling away from the doorway. Joe crawled over to him and got his gun as the sergeant writhed on the floor. Footsteps pounded in the corridor. Joe crawled back to the doorway. The basement was dark. He shone the sergeant's flashlight down. Its beam snatched at a fleeing shadow.

Joe fired, and thunder roled back at him from below. He turned off the flashlight. In the timeless interlude of an instant, he knew what he had to do. And he had to do it without tripping the platform at the landing. He crawled back from the door and gestured to the cop who had come out of the bar. Then Joe took a frantic run and a headlong leap, throwing his hands across his face. He sailed and crashed at last and felt unconsciousness streaming in at him as he fought to drive it back. Blood filled his mouth and he spat. The sound brought a blast of gunfire from the black darkness to his left. The violent roar seemed to help him fight unconsciousness.

He worked his fingers gently. They still held the gun. He swallowed blood instead of spitting. And then he fired. He fired at methodical two-second intervals, aiming three feet above the floor, starting to the left of the shot he had heard

and moving to the right. His fourth shot smashed out a scream and Joe stopped moving the gun. He held it still and emptied the gun and then he listened. He heard his brain counting. It got to nine and something fell—a gun. At twelve something else fell, and he did not count any more. He twitched his other hand. It still held the flashlight. He turned it on and looked at Dulcie. Dulcie lay on his face in his nice blue suit. His gold watch shone on his wrist and the blood glistened beneath his face. His sleek hair was neatly combed, still, as if he had planned to go somewhere later that night . . .

THERE is not much more to say about Joe Carroll. He doesn't live in New York any more. He lives in a very small town where there are two paved streets—neither of which is Joe's. Ketti lives there, too. And Joe's momma still lives in Brooklyn. And she will tell you, with her eyes glowing, how she used to worry about Joe. Because Joe was always restless and she worried about Joe without telling him, but now it is nice not to worry any more. She will say that she always knew Joe was a good boy.

It is strange, too—or maybe not so strange—but a number of cops who were in the club that night will tell you the same thing.

THE END

MR. MADDOX TIPS A HOMICIDE

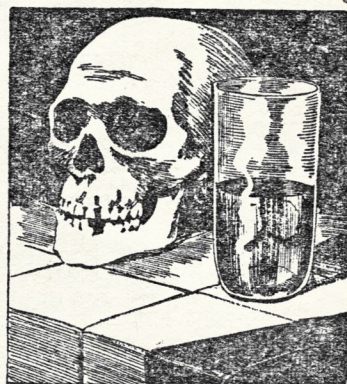
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Stand-In for Slaughter

How crazy can you get? There she was, five feet odd of softly curved movie star—and Deagan had to waste film snapping pictures of murderers!

My flash bulb went off just ahead of his gun. It was a perfect shot.



By

JACK V. PORTER

I LOOKED at the hundred-buck bill Carlos waved in front of me. Then I looked at Suzanne, the Body Voluptuous. Maybe I hesitated one three-hundredth of a second.

"Chum, you've made a deal," I said.

Funny, when there's money and women involved, you don't stop to think—of murder. I wish I had.

This Carlos DeMann was a Hollywood character I had known for years. Dark, dapper, around forty-five, he had a brain

like a honed razor. He'd been up and down in the technicolor rat-race called Hollywood more times than he and I could count. The last time I'd seen him, six months ago, he was standing in front of the Brown Derby. I passed, he followed. Result: a five-dollar touch from my bank-roll.

Now here he was in the middle of two hundred dollars worth of tailor-made clothes, sitting back behind his fancy desk and airily waving a century note in my

face. That's Hollywood for you. It's nuts, but it's wonderful.

"Deagan," he purred from behind the fancy cigarette holder, "there is a reasonably exact facsimile of this waiting for you if your pictures are right."

"Deagan always delivers, you know that," I said. Looking at Suzanne, *after* the C-note was safely in my pocket, I couldn't see how I could miss.

She was the most female female I'd ever seen. It was all there. Midnight-black hair that cascaded over her bare shoulders, wide eyes, full lips, and generous curves in the right places. Perched on the arm of Carlos' chair in a tight off-the-shoulder dress, she was more than photogenic. Photo-terrific was the word.

"Mr. Deagan," she drawled in her South-Iowa best, "I do declare, you're a downright wolf. A body's not safe with you around."

Could be. I skipped the obvious wisecrack. Even with a lush layout like this I still wanted the whole pitch. After all, a new photog on his night off, like me, has his principles. But don't pin me down as to what they are.

"Carlos, chum," I said, "give me the full treatment. You say you want publicity shots of Suzanne. Your publicity department must be loaded with same. What's the scoop?"

CARLOS DEMANN squared himself in his plush chair and eased his shiny brogans from the polished mahogany of his king-size desk. His beady black eyes lost their usual twinkle.

"It's simple, Deagan," he said. "Stanville and I recognize you as the best news photog in L. A. You get the human-interest shots the other boys miss."

"I'd curtsy if I was standing," I said, "but I don't believe a word of it."

Carlos hesitated, then:

"Okay, I'll toss it straight," he said. "As you know, Dean Stanville and I have started this independent studio under the name of DeMann Productions. You needn't kick this around, but Stanville foots the bills. I supply the brains and the know-how. We split fifty-fifty. As you probably also know, we borrowed Suzanne here from one of the major studios—you know the one—and shot a

little opus called *Murder by Appointment*. It's cut and in the cans, but we need plenty of publicity to get the right distribution."

"That's where I come in," I anticipated.

"Right. Dean Stanville plays the murder victim in the picture. He is also in love with Suzanne, according to the script."

"Who wrote the script?" I asked.

"I did. The gimmick is this: We want stories in all the fan mags about the real-life romance of Suzanne Launi and Dean Stanville. Tonight I want you to get some shots of them together at various night spots along Sunset Strip and down on the beach. I'll write the stories to go with them. After they break in the fan magazines, I'll release the pictures. Get the idea?"

"Sure," I said. "Only one thing."

"What's that?"

"According to my operative, *you're* the one that's carrying the torch for Suzanne. Why is Dean Stanville being cast as stand-in?"

Carlos gave me that tight little smile of his. His hands spread expressively on the top of the mahogany desk. "Dean Stanville is still a box-office name to the cash customers. So far, I am just the behind-scenes operator nobody knows."

"Don't make book on that," I cracked.

He gave me a quick double-take. There was not a friendly look in his eyes. I beat it out the glass-paneled door. That plush-and-buff office was not the place for the thoughts I was thinking.

The setup was screwy. Carlos DeMann didn't toss century notes around like that. Not unless there was an angle. Still, the crisp C in my pocket would square a bookie that had been getting nasty over a little matter of two hundred I owed him. Besides, they say a photog is a reporter with his brain knocked out. Maybe that describes me.

IT WAS ten bells on the nose when I eased my jalopy in front of the Monaco Club at the end of the Strip. The Strip is night spot row in Hollywood.

The six-foot-eight doorman in the Gilbert and Sullivan uniform looked down his nose at me. That's not much of a trick since I'm short of five-six on my tiptoes and flutter the scales at only one-

fifty. I tossed him the car keys and went inside.

Suzanne and Dean Stanville were seated at a ringside table at the edge of the postage-stamp-size dance floor. Suzanne was in—mostly, that is—a white evening dress with a V-neck that plunged almost to her waist. Her black hair was piled high with sparkly things here and there to catch the light. The rest I can't describe without gestures.

Dean Stanville was a distinguished-looking gent in tails and white tie. Maybe he's still on the sunny side of fifty-five, but I doubt it. He'd been kicking around pictures a long time. But there wasn't a wrinkle in that handsome puss of his. The touch of grey at his temples gave him the man-of-distinction look that stampedes dewy-eyed females.

The rest of Hollywood was there, too, in full force. I could have caught a million bucks' worth of talent in one flash if I'd wanted to. Only it wouldn't have been smart. Several wives were with the wrong husbands, and vice versa. Besides, the C-note in my pocket was crying for its mate—the one I would get after the art work was completed.

My first three shots of Dean and Suzanne were on the button. The best was an angle job of Suzanne giving him that "you're the only one" gaze, and Stanville smiling that quote—mysterious—unquote smile of his. There's nothing mysterious about it. He knows that if he opens his mouth too far his uppers might drop down.

He was waving a cigarette in his left hand so his king-size diamond ring would show. According to his publicity agent that ring was given to him by a Maharajah following a command performance in Bombay, India, and had been molded to his finger so it could never be removed. A good story.

Mission complete, I looked up Zeb, the bartender I know, and cadged drinks on the house. While I was relaxing and counting the many blessings of being a member of the working press, Nancy came up. Nancy is the cute little cigarette girl with the long legs at the Monaco. Maybe you've seen her. She has taffy-colored hair, twinkling blue eyes and other obvious things in her favor. Even not smiling she was terrific. She was not smiling.

She made much conversation. Without the hot adjectives it boiled down to the fact she thought I was a low snake in tall grass. It was all because I had made a date with her the night before and failed to show.

I started with the sick grandmother routine. Remembering I had used that one on her once before, I shifted smoothly to the special-assignment alibi. Modestly, I was terrific. When I finished with the lurid details she was all apologies. We have a date for next Thursday night—providing I can talk Mary out of the one I made with her. Also providing the D. A. doesn't want to ask me any more questions about murder.

Just as I was beginning to get in a mellow mood, Suzanne and Dean Stanville decided to move along.

"We simply must catch the floor show at Sinbad's" Stanville told me as he went to get Suzanne's wrap. "Be a good fellow and reserve a table for us," he added in that fake clipped accent of his.

When I phoned Tod, the peppery little manager at Sinbad's, he almost busted my eardrum. "The place is packed like sardines, we got a name band no less, and you want a ringside table! What's with you, your birthday, mebbe?"

I reminded him of the facts of life. Namely, the juicy free-for-all pictures I happened to catch in his place of business a month ago. "Only because you are my pal did I keep them out of the paper," I emphasized. I didn't add they were too lousy to print.

He reserved a table.

Sinbad's is one of those intimate clubs. The lights are low and the tables are so close together you can't tell whether you're gnawing on a steak or your neighbor's elbow. It's strictly for tourists and the chip-heavy Hollywood crowd. I don't like it. I don't know any of the bartenders.

CARLOS DEMANN was waiting for us by the hat-check booth when we waltzed in. Dapper as ever, he was wearing a pin-stripe suit with a red carnation on his lapel. He was having a field day, waving and smiling at every celebrity he could spot. Most of them didn't give him a tumble.

Carlos, for all of his act, was burned

up at the no-attention he was getting. The prop smile stayed in place, but he muttered to me between clenched teeth, "I'll show them. Why it was my makeup artistry that made most of these goons stars before the camera. If they don't remember Carlos DeMann, the makeup artist, perhaps they will soon hail Carlos DeMann, the successful director." When he finished, he gave with the grin and spoke to a broad-shouldered bit-part actor, who deliberately turned his back.

Meanwhile, I clicked off a couple of Stanville removing the wraps from the Body Voluptuous. She was smiling up at him and he had his best profile forward. There was a nice crowd background. When they had recovered from the flash bulbs all three went to their table. I was just considering the best approach to the cute little red-headed hat-check chick when a waiter accosted me.

He said, "The joe sittin' by the post there, the dapper little guy with the big-time greetin' routine, said you were to have anythin' you wanted."

"I'll take the redhead."

He shook his head. "That ain't smart. Her grandson is the bouncer."

Great sense of humor. Elbowing my way to the bar I ordered a tall something called "Atomic Special." I was just on the point of sampling some when Carlos tapped me on the shoulder.

"We're heading for the Garden of Allah ballroom on the pier down at the beach. I want shots of Suzanne mingling with the common people, to prove how democratic she is."

"She couldn't be with a commoner crowd than right now," I said, but I was talking to Carlos' well-tailored back.

My car strained her gaskets and pistons on the way to the beach, but keeping up with Stanville's long yellow Cadillac was a little beyond it. By the time I reached the Garden of Allah, Suzanne, Carlos and Stanville were yawning over their second cocktail.

This Garden of Allah is a barn of a place with a dance floor like a football field, and just enough colored lights to give the gals the air of mystery they like. On this Saturday night the joint was jumping with jitterbugs, what with two name bands spelling each other on the gilded

bandstand. I could barely wiggle through.

I tried for fifteen minutes to get a rug-cutting shot of Suzanne and Stanville, but the old boy couldn't unlimber enough to make it convincing. I compromised on a pic of Suzanne saying hello to one of the band leaders, and another of her warbling into the mike with Stanville's arm around her.

After this, I parked the Speed Graphic with the hat-check gal and headed hopefully for the bar. Carlos was right behind me with a pat on the back. "Order whatever you want—and as many. I'll be right back. Got to make a phone call."

Charlie, one of my favorite bartenders, fixed me up one of his own "specials." That's the one *with* the bar rag. I spilled a little on the bar. It didn't curl the varnish. I had taken one big gulp when Carlos was back at my shoulder. He had a worried expression.

"Sorry, but we're off again. We're going to run up to Stanville's beach house for a short production conference. But you can relax and stay here. Only—and please remember this—we have some very important pictures to take at the Coq Bleu at one A. M. That's an hour and a half from now. The Coq Bleu is in Beverly Hills. Know the place?"

I nodded unhappily. Mary danced in the chorus there. I didn't want to talk to her tonight.

Carlos went on, emphasizing each word by jabbing me in the chest with his index finger. "You must be there. Absolutely. Very, very important. You won't forget?"

I shook my head the other way.

Carefully he rehearsed the directions a second time. When they finally left, I was about to blow up. The mouthful of the "special" Charlie had mixed was too hot for my Adam's apple to handle. It took two quick highballs to bring back my strength.

The time passed quickly. The selection of lonesome babes was choice. One or two I danced with seemed susceptible to my routine about getting them in the movies. I wasn't lying. I've gotten a lot of girls into the movies, and paid both our admissions myself. But before I could get down to details it was time to scram.

My jalopy had recovered from the mad dash to the beach. It purred like a kitten

as I headed her battered nose toward Beverly Hills. I took it easy. There were a few things I had to figure out.

Every so often I do pick up a neat handful of green folding stuff for publicity art. Most good news photogs do, but it's ice-cube day in Hades when you get two hundred rags for routine stuff like this. Carlos had been around. He knew that. What was the pitch? Something did not add up.

"In fact," I said aloud, "there is a very fishy smell."

I thought so hard and so long that I was ten minutes late reaching the Coq Bleu.

CARLOS, as usual, was waiting for me, and as nervous as a bride with the hives. "It's a damn good thing you got here," he snapped. "Luckily, the people we want haven't arrived yet."

"What people?"

"Never mind. While we wait we shall drink."

I was already beginning to feel like the last of a lost weekend. But you have to humor customers in this business, even squirmy ones with loose hundred-dollar bills. Besides, the last floor show was just starting. The five-girl chorus had just appeared, with Mary in the middle. She wouldn't be able to see me at the bar.

After two-three quickies it dawned on me that Carlos was working hard to get me drunk. It also came to me that neither Carlos nor the two at the table were waiting for anyone in particular. Not once did they turn their eyes toward the door.

Stanville and Suzanne were at a table about thirty feet from us. Through my haze of drinks Suzanne looked more luscious than ever, but evidently the big "production conference" had been rough on Stanville. His sun-lamp tan was faded a little, and the cigarette holder waving constantly in his right hand didn't make the usual Stanville flourish. I decided the guy was either looped to the gills or tired of the whole routine.

Suddenly Carlos decided it was time for more art.

"Get a good shot of the three of us together," he ordered. "We'll tag it, 'Seen at one-third at the Coq Bleu' in the fan magazines."

I picked up my gear and started to follow him.

"No, shoot it from here for the candid effect. Okay?"

Sure, why not? I climbed up on the stool I was occupying and got a nice angle shot of the three of them at the table. Carlos signaled for one more, and I obliged from another point of vantage.

"That will do it, I guess," Carlos told me as he rejoined me at the bar. "Stanville is tired and wants to go home. I'm sure you won't mind if Suzanne and I accompany you to wherever you develop your pictures. I'll need them tonight."

I didn't mind.

Stanville went out ahead of us. At the door he accidentally dropped his white scarf. I retrieved it and started after him, when Carlos grabbed my arm.

"No time for that," he said. "I'll give it to him tomorrow. Let's get going."

Suzanne and Carlos piled into the back seat of my car, and we headed for downtown L. A. I felt like a chauffeur for a couple of teen-age lovers. Without meaning to, exactly, I couldn't help but see their silhouettes merge. I also noticed something else in the rear vision mirror that was not as entertaining.

A pair of headlights moved along about a quarter-mile behind us. I pushed the accelerator to the floorboard and the old trap finally coughed her way up to fifty. The headlights held the same distance. I slowed to twenty. So did the car behind. This I did not like.

Carlos noticed it, too. He leaned forward and said, "Pull over. Let's see if that car is really tailing us. Besides," he added, "I think you have a flat tire."

It did seem that there was a new vibration. I braked to a stop on the edge of the road. Easing out the door I noticed that the headlights behind had disappeared. Just some wise guy playing games, I decided. Either that or he didn't know the road and was following my tail light.

I checked the front tires. They were okay. The right rear was in good shape. As I stopped to look at the left one, I felt the pavement vibrate under my feet.

Something told me to dive for the side of the road. As I did, a swish of air, like a huge hand, pushed me. There was the scream of rubber on cement. Then the

screech of fender against fender. My car rocked crazily above me. Powerful headlights flooded the road ahead. As I watched, twin tail light disappeared rapidly into the blackness. When I got to my feet my knees were making like castanets.

Suzanne let out a scream—the delayed-action type—that almost sent me diving again. Her head appeared out the side window.

"You all right?" she asked.

I assured her I was as I went forward to examine the front fender. The fender was badly smashed. Along the edges were flakes of yellow paint.

When we started again Suzanne went into a tantrum about drunken drivers. "Why that fool might have killed you!" she raved.

I had a hunch he was sorry he *hadn't*. I also had a hunch about a long, yellow Cadillac. Neither of these did I mention to my two passengers.

It was after two A. M. by the time we got to the Trib Building. Strangely enough, we didn't find a soul in the photographers' room upstairs. Even Charlie, the chief photog on the night side, was out some place. I motioned Suzanne and Carlos to a couple of uncomfortable straightbacks and headed for the dark room to soup the art.

"How long will it take?" Carlos asked.

"Twenty-thirty minutes," I told him.

"Don't worry, I'm as anxious to see them as you are."

His eyebrows went up, but he didn't say anything.

WHEN I was about through, the door slammed in the outside room. It was Steve, the night city editor.

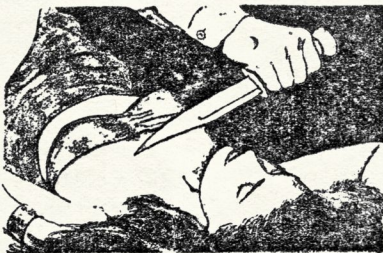
"What kind of a shutterbug department do we have, anyhow?" He demanded. "Where's Charlie? What are these people doing here? Deagan, don't just stand there. Grab your box and take off. Johnson's already out there covering the story. But we need art. Do you hear?"

"Stevies," I started soothingly, "come in again and let's start over at the beginning."

"They've just found Dean Stanville's body. At the bottom of the cliff below his beach house. All he had on was a pair of shorts and a bathrobe. The police say its suicide, but our boy Johnson just called in to say he thinks its murder—in spades. We don't have a single piece of art in the morgue on the guy. Not even a stinking snapshot. Get going, Deagan. This might be worth an extra."

"Steve," I said, "tell your ulcers to give you a rest. Relax. I got art on Stanville, a handful of it, not an hour old." I handed him the damp prints.

Carlos cleared his throat behind me. "How tragic!" he was saying. "Why



Out of the swollen sea the corpse came . . . to doom Mary Lou to a widow's tears. . . .

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**20c DIME
MYSTERY
MAGAZINE**
COMBINED WITH 10 STORY MYSTERY

Miss Launi and I were with poor Dean scarcely an hour ago. In a way I feel responsible."

Suzanne leaned over to pat his hand restrainingly.

Steven wasn't listening. He was spreading the prints out on the table in front of him. "You say these were taken an hour ago?" he asked.

I nodded.

"They're not bad," he said. "But we need one taken an hour *after* the murder to make a good spread. Get the idea, Deagan? Scram!"

I said, "Steve, you're slipping. These *were* taken an hour after the murder. Look again."

He squinted at them once more. "You got rocks in your head. Not only that, but you reversed a couple of negatives."

"Guess again," I snapped. "I know the emulsion side from the back of a negative as well as the next Joe. What you see is exactly what I took." I pointed to one near his hand. "This one was taken at Sinbad's around ten-thirty. Here is almost the same shot taken at one A. M. at the Coq Bleu."

"You're nuts. I know Stanville. He's as southpaw as they come."

"That the point" I continued. "In the first one he's smoking with his left hand, in the second with his right. That's the tipoff. You'll also notice the difference in the color of his face. Here in the second shot the famous Stanville ring is missing. And this you'll like. Sitting next to him is his murderer—Carlos DeMann!"

Carlos came bounding to his feet on that. The look in his narrowed eyes gave the phony sign to his easy smile. "That's not a smart thing to say, Deagan," he said softly.

"I'm not a very smart guy, Carlos. But I can put two and two together. You know, you're a better director than you are a makeup artist. Your little production wasn't bad. You hired me and my pictures to alibi you *after* the murder."

Steve was still rubbing his forehead bewilderedly. "Anybody got an aspirin?" he mumbled.

His attitude was disappointing. I gave it to him slow, and with gestures. "Carlos the Great stands to collect the full gravy

from the picture he and Stanville made, now that the latter is out of the way. The studio is in Carlos DeMann's name *even* though Stanville put up the dough. If there ever was anything in writing covering the financial end of the deal, I'll bet it's destroyed now."

"So?"

"So Carlos and his girl Friday here gave me the slip down at the beach and bumped off Stanville around midnight, taking the chance he wouldn't be found until much later. Meanwhile, they had me take alibi pictures of them as the Coq Bleu with the stand-in Carlos had made up to look like Stanville. Carlos figured to get me so polluted I wouldn't notice the difference. He almost did, but my camera doesn't drink. He didn't think of that."

Carlos was still smiling. "That's a good story, Deagan, but no jury will believe it."

I didn't think they would either. The important thing to me was that Steve didn't seem to believe it.

"Carlos," I said, "if they see this picture showing Stanville's stand-in with his wig showing they might. Even a jury would buy that."

It was a wild hunch. Carlos took the bait. He made a dive for the picture in my hand. I drew back and grabbed for my camera, which was not a smart move. When I focused I had a perfect shot of Carlos—with a gun pointed at me!

My flash bulb went off just ahead of his gun. Whether it was the flash or Steve's football dive that spoiled his aim I'll never know. I do know there was a tangle of arms and legs in front of me on the floor. Half of them were Steve's. His half were on top.

I jumped in to help him, and when the cops arrived ten minutes later both Carlos and Suzanne were securely tethered.

Steve wrote the story himself. He didn't miss a trick. He even included the part about the stand-in trying to run me down in Stanville's car on the pre-arranged signal from Carlos. Yes, it was good, except for one thing. Over my last picture of Carlos, Steven put the caption, "Dumb Photographer Snaps Pic of Own Attempted Murder."

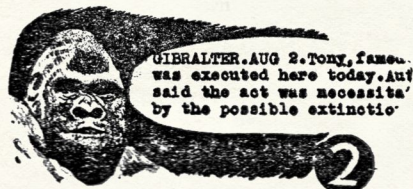
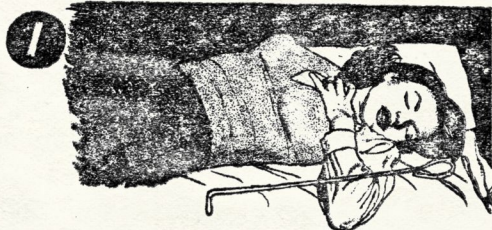
I didn't like that.

ODDITIES IN CRIME

By MAYAN and JAKOBSSON

Doris Sefton, a wheelchair invalid for years, had watched helplessly while her husband escorted their neighbor, a widow, through the world Doris was barred from, a world of movies and streetcars and shops and stairs. One day, the widow dropped in on Doris for tea. Suddenly the thing happened. Doris could walk. Doris was an Amazon. She may have used her moment wrongly. She wreaked her rage on her rival with a hot poker snatched from the cozy hearth.

For this act of assault, she was sentenced to three years in prison, perhaps the only prisoner who would never need guards or bars . . . for Doris was back in her chair forever.



GIBRALTAR, AUG. 2. Tony, famed, was executed here today. Aut said the act was necessitate by the possible extinctio-

Tony, an ape once court-martialed by the British, was no ordinary anthropoid, but the king of the famed apes of Gibraltar, of whom tradition says that they shall stay on the Rock as long as the British do. It is a tradition the British take seriously, and Tony, for reasons of his own, had embarked upon a campaign of mayhem against his fellow male apes. When, besides Tony, only one male ape in good condition remained on the Rock, the very Empire seemed to totter.

Hence the court-martial for formal treason and Tony's execution. He died, like Charles I, because he could not get it through his thick head that there are no absolute monarchs in Britain!

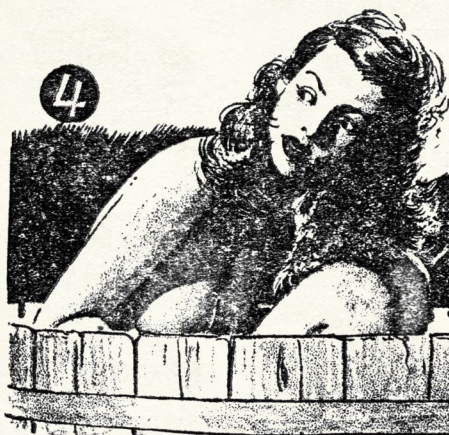
Miss Dora Camusso, of Para Sabina, Italy, couldn't stop talking. Owner of a small cattle farm, she sold some beef in town one day for 180,000 lira, and let the whole village know it. Worried, she asked her brother for protection. He gave her a revolver, warned her to keep quiet. But on the way home, she met more friends, told them the story, showed them the gun. . . .

A mile from Dora's house a masked bandit appeared. He only laughed when she aimed at his heart, and he died with a strange look of surprise. The mask slipped off, and Dora wailed, too late. She had killed her brother. She had explained the gun and its reason to a previous man she had met on the road; the man had discovered its emptiness and lent her a few cartridges.



Are you something of a bum? Does the small boy or the anthropoid in you revolt atavistically when the super-ego suggests you take a bath? Relax and call off that doctor's appointment. You are merely harking back to austere Puritan law.

In colonial Philadelphia, thieving got you the stocks, murder got you a trial. But if you were so lost in depravity as to take more than one bath a month, and this was proved against you, you went for an indefinite term to jail—at least, until you had once more acquired the decent aura of the times.



Notice to Townspeople
A Bath, more than
once a month

I LOVE YOU DEAD!



Silhouetted against the break in the hill, Dave saw a figure running desperately for the shelter of the trees.

By
**RICHARD
GOGGIN**

She wasn't much good, Dave Shea knew, but, by God, when somebody murdered his wife, the execution chamber was going to have an occupant—even if Dave Shea himself had to move in!

•

IF IT hadn't been for the dream, he probably wouldn't have pounded up the stairs when the kid didn't answer. Edith was in their room and she had company. Edith was his wife, a slender whip of a woman with strawberry hair that fell almost to the middle of her back when she let it down. No one ever said, "Dave, you sure got a beautiful wife." But people shifted from foot to foot when they met her, and the men always had a tough time getting their breath for a second. The two cops and the ordinary-looking guy with the long stogie in his mouth didn't look very social. The ordinary-looking guy said, "Come on in, Shea, if that's who you are."

Edith wasn't fussing over her company,

however. She had her denims on and a studded belt. Her white silk shirt with the big glass buttons was open at the neck. Her skin looked like cream against the silk blouse but no one was looking at her. They all watched Shea while he looked at her. Her neck was puffed up and angry looking, and she was dead.

The ordinary-looking guy said, "I'm Flasherty of Homicide. I tried to get you at the shop but you'd left."

Shea's hands were clenched and he kept running his lower teeth up and down his lips. One of the cops threw a sheet over her. "What do you think, Shea?" Flaherty asked. Shea shook his head and stared from one to the other of them. "A woman named June Brookes found her about an hour ago." Flaherty glanced at his watch. "Make it three o'clock on the nose. You know her?" Shea nodded. She was one of his wife's best friends, who lived on the other side of the valley. "Said she dropped in to chat and found her just like this. She's been strangled, Shea."

It had bothered him first after lunch. He worked in the second operation of the line. Assembly was the best job in the shop, all piecework, and he worked with a good gang. It bothered him so much that his work slowed down and the line began to gum up. Everybody has them at one time or another. Dave Shea remembered—almost. You try to forget it; you know how it is. And it sneaks back into your mind when you're not watching. And the little sweat beads you don't want anyone to see start rolling down your palms. And suddenly you stop doing what you're doing and start thinking. That was when the guys on the first and third operations really began moaning.

Once in a while a nightmare comes back to you, all at once, fast. Shea was a big guy, six-two, and he dwarfed the newly planted sapling maples along the walk to his house. He hadn't thought about the damn dream for nearly three hours, till he looked at the maples. Then it flashed back so sharply that the skin on his scalp got hot and dry and began to tingle, and a chill ran down his back.

It seemed he'd been passing the maples just like this. He'd opened the door as he always did and yelled for the kid, but the kid wasn't there. And the fear crept

and crawled in him. He'd gripped the lower banister with both hands till it quivered beneath his clutch. Then he'd begun to shake his way upstairs to kill someone. He hadn't been quite sure whether the guy was in his wife's room or the kid's room. The guy was a stranger; he was sure of that. And he hated him as if he'd never known hate before. But he knew he had to kill the guy and the fear kept telling him he couldn't. He could hear whoever it was walking around and there was something awfully familiar . . .

Visitation Valley is really part of San Francisco, but the old-timers in the Valley think of it as separate. It's ringed with hills and it runs clear down to the bay. When Shea had finally gotten the door open, the four-fifteen fog rolled in with him.

EDITH had been taken away and they were sitting downstairs before Shea finally found his voice. "I can't figure anything—or anybody," he said flatly.

"It really rocks a guy," agreed Flaherty. "This Brookes woman, she a friend of yours, too?"

"All my wife's friends are my friends," said Shea. "What are you getting at?"

"I don't think she likes you. And I'm not sure she really liked your wife. She told me you both fought all the time." He paused. "She said you hated your wife."

Shea lit a cigarette and nodded wearily. "That's June, okay. What am I supposed to say now? That she's a liar? I can't. Because she isn't." He suddenly sat upright and snapped the cigarette in the fireplace. "I gotta make a call," he said.

Flaherty didn't move. "Who?" he asked.

"My kid," said Shea. "He's still at nursery school. He'll be scared. She was supposed to pick him up at three-thirty."

"The teacher already called," said Flaherty. "They're keeping him till you get there. Sit down," he said quietly. "Take it easy, guy. She said he could stay till six."

Shea sank down in the chair and covered his face with his hands.

"Why don't you get it off your chest? Look," said Flaherty, "your wife's been murdered in the middle of the afternoon

and you're more upset about your kid than her. Why don't you tell me about it now and save time?"

Shea raised his head and looked directly into the Homicide man's eyes. "I loved her," he said. "But less than I hated her. You know how that can be?" Flaherty nodded. "I don't know how much June told you," he said, "but this is my side. I was a little out of her class. You been in the basement?" The detective nodded again. "That was her workshop. All that silver and copper stuff. She could beat a silver dollar into one of those art museum pieces. Or she could take a hunk of copper and heat it up and pull it out till it looked like Irish lace." He took his eyes away from Flaherty and stared at the ceiling. "I guess that's what she tried to do with me," he said. "Only I don't beat easy. I'm an assemblyman at Reid's precision shop. That's all I ever was or ever will be."

"Or ever want to be?" asked Flaherty.

"Yeah." Shea looked at him evenly. "I think once in a while she stopped trying and worked out on other guys." He looked away again. "How big a fool can you be? She always came back, and besides there was the kid. I just told her I'd kill anybody I ever found with her."

"That's almost enough," said Flaherty. "You ever get out of line yourself?" Shea shook his head. "Not even with her sister?" The two cops sprang in front of him as Shea heaved himself out of the chair. "Sit tight," Flaherty said calmly. "I'm talking to you about a murder."

The two veins in Shea's temples slowly subsided. "Annie's worth a dozen of Edith," he said matter-of-factly. "She's all that kept her sister and me together more than once." He stopped. "I see what you mean about June."

"You always come home for lunch?"

"Mostly. Unless, like today, Edith told me she didn't want to bother with lunch."

"Where'd you eat?"

"I took along a couple of sandwiches and drove out to the beach."

"Alone?"

"That's right."

Flaherty nodded to one of the cops and he went upstairs and came down with a paper bag. The detective gave it to Shea. "Take a look," he said. "We found this

inside the back door. The door was open."

Shea took it and nodded absent-mindedly. "We always leave it open," he said. He shook out two pieces of silver from the bag, letter plates, clean and gleaming. He held the bag upside down and three more fell out. He sat there staring at them.

"Mean anything to you?" asked Flaherty.

Shea shook his head. "Just some of her work," he said. "It was always kicking around."

Flaherty got up and told the cops to wait for him outside. "One of these days those veins on your temples are going to pop wide open," he said. "I'm not going to take you down and lock you up. You're old enough to know what you're doing. If you won't talk to me, you won't talk to me." His voice hardened. "There's just one thing, Shea. No matter who does it to whom or for what, we put people in gas chambers for killing people. Remember that." He turned as he started to leave. "I nearly forgot. Some guy named Jim Crockett called and said to get in touch with him if he could help."

CROCKETT said, "Here's the key. Get us a couple of cold ones." He was a slim, gangling man who wouldn't have been very hard to picture in buckskins. He was running a curry brush along the belly of Jason, a sixteen-hand white stallion that most of the neighborhood kids confused with the movie horses and to whom they gave the same respect. Crockett and Shea had grown up together, but Crockett had shipped out for years before he'd finally settled down and opened up the only liquor store in the Valley.

When Shea came back with the beer, he said, "You got a couple of guys waiting for you, Jim."

The slim man said, "Let 'em wait. If they're Valley guys, they know I don't open up nights till seven, and if they're not Valley guys I don't give a damn." He kept the curry brush moving with one hand while he tilted the beer can with the other. "I called up as soon as I heard about it," he said. "What the hell is a guy supposed to say?"

"You don't have to say anything, Jim."

Crockett stared at the bay quietly. "It's

tough to say anything about a woman when she's dead."

Shea said, "Yeah, that's right." He paused. "You know better'n anyone how I felt, Jim. Relief, that's all. Just relief."

Crockett nodded.

"But," Shea's voice hardened and he threw the empty beer can against the side of the stable like a sandlot kid throwing a beanball, "I'm going to kill whoever did it, surer'n hell."

Crockett put the curry brush down and walked over to Shea. "I know how you feel, Dave. But take it easy. You got a kid, you now. Murder is still murder."

"You're the second guy told me that in the last hour, Jim. I don't think you do know how I feel. A lot of guys got a beef in for their wives. But a guy's wife is his wife. She's his. She's part of him." His eyes blinked once or twice. "Maybe I'm crazy. But the way I figure it, it's almost the same as murdering me. I don't need any law to tell me what to do."

Crockett didn't say anything for a second. Then he said, "You talk like you got a good idea who it was."

"I don't," said Shea. "I only got a good idea I'm going to find out who it was." He took a key from his pocket. "I don't know exactly what you do from here in, Jim. The Homicide guy said they'd keep the body at the morgue till they got a coroner's report. After that she's gotta be buried." He tossed the key over to Crockett. "I figured maybe you'd move in with me for a couple of days till I get this straightened out."

"Sure," said Crockett. "I can be around evenings after the store closes." He scuffed dirt for a moment. "If you need any help on this other deal . . ."

"Thanks," said Shea. "I'll know what to do when I find out."

* * *

It was ten minutes to six when Shea picked up his kid at the school. The kid sprang it first crack out of the box. "Where's mom?"

He was four and a half and Shea didn't know what to tell him. "She's gone away," he said finally. "We're going to live by ourselves, Pete. Would you like

that?" He drove on for a minute and then added, "Maybe you could live with your Aunt Annie for a while. How'd that be?" Pete thought that would be fine so Shea stopped at the next drugstore to call her.

Anne Peterson ran a boarding house with her mother in the Mission district. She was standing on the steps waiting for them when he pulled up. She was a tall girl and she looked as if she was real glad to be a woman. The street was out of the fog belt and the fading sunlight touched off her tawny hair. She wore a beige gabardine dress and her rounded arms were stretched out for Pete before Shea got the car stopped.

"Pete, you're going to live with me. Hurray, hurray, hurray." The kid went for it and they danced around. Then Anne's mother came out and threw herself, sobbing, into Shea's arms. He held her awkwardly for a moment. "Will you take care of Pete a minute?" he asked her. "I want to talk to Annie."

Anne poured the coffee for him before they said anything. Then she said, "You poor guy."

He looked at her steadily. "I'm not dead," he said.

"We know each other well enough to skip that, Dave," she told him. "She never was good enough for you, anyway." She sat up and clenched her hands. "I don't know any law says you have to love your sister," she said. "I never really hated her, I guess, but I'm not going to sit here and lie about the way I felt."

He smiled slowly. "You couldn't lie if you wanted to, Annie. I wish I'd . . ."

"You'd what?" she asked softly.

"Forget it. I don't know what I wish."

He turned off a sudden impulse to bury his face against the beige gabardine. "This thing's got me coming and going."

"Have the police any idea who did it?"

"No."

She watched him closely. "How was Edith behaving lately?"

He didn't say anything, and her cheeks flamed. "I don't care if she was my sister," she said. "She deserved it. The stuff you've put up with the last five years!"

"But I did, Annie," he reminded her. He shook his head miserably. "I knew

what I was doing or"—he drained his coffee—"I thought I knew what I was doing."

Anne didn't speak for a moment. The night she found out Shea had asked Edith seemed suddenly like five minutes ago. And the same blind resentment swept over her again. "Why?" she cried to herself. "Why Edith?" And the only answer had been Edith's mocking laughter.

"About Pete," he said. "It'll only be for a couple of days till I get organized."

"I don't care how long it is, Dave," she said. "You know that. Is there anything I can do at the house?"

He shook his head. "Jim Crockett's moving in for a while," he said.

"Crockett?"

"Yeah. I've got a couple of things to attend to." Something in the tone of his voice made her jump.

"Dave! You know who did it!"

Suddenly angry, he pounded his fist on the table. "No, I don't know who did it but I'm going to find out."

She ran over to him and threw her arms around his shoulders. "Don't, Dave. Whatever you're thinking about, don't. Edith wasn't worth it. Can't you see that? She never was worth it."

He shook off her arms. "I've got to go, Annie. I'll pick up the kid and drop him off tomorrow night."

She looked at him quietly. "I'll be here, Dave."

THE VALLEY was building fast, but high up on the hill where the Brookes's lived they still had the only house around. Shea and Joe Brookes used to ride horses up the same road when they were kids. The car bumped to a stop and he walked over and rang the bell.

She was a big, angular woman and she only held the door open about four inches. "Dipper's not home," she said. And as an after-thought. "I don't want to talk to you, Dave Shea." Edith had tagged Joe with that nickname, Dipper. She'd always been making up nicknames for everybody. "You know he's still at the shop," said June.

He stuck his foot in the door. "That's why I'm here," he said. "Because he's still at the shop. You want to open up or shall I bust the door down?"

Her eyes got frightened and she backed away from the door, leaving him to push it open and walk in. "You could've called me at the shop before you spilled everything to the cops," he said.

"I only gave them your number," she said sullenly. "And then I told them the truth." She lost her frightened look. "You afraid of the truth?"

"No," he said. "Are you?"

She sagged a little. "If you've waited till ten o'clock to come up here and brow-beat me like you did Edith," she said, "you've got another—"

"I didn't want to spend any more time with you than I had to," he told her. "And I wanted to be sure and be here when the Dipper got home."

"What do you want with Joe?"

"You know what I want with Joe," he mimicked her. "We had this all out a couple of months ago. You want me to go over it?"

She lost some more of her assurance. "Joe hasn't been near your house for weeks," she said. "He never would've spent so much time there if your wife hadn't—"

"Leave her out of it, June," he snapped. "She's dead."

Her voice became shrill. "Tearing around the Valley after every man she saw."

"I said, leave her out of it."

"Why should I? Joe wasn't the only one. She had every man in the Valley running errands for her." She rubbed her hands nervously. "'Dipper, do this for me. Dipper, do that for me. Dipper, clean my pretty silver pieces for me.'" Fear pushed her against the wall when he stepped toward her. "Don't touch me, Dave Shea," she whispered. "Don't dare touch me. You know I'm right."

"I know he spent half the day at my house till I found out about it and told him to keep the hell away from there," he said. "And I know something else. You want to hear it?"

She stood frozen there, fingering her dangling green earrings. "The cops found six silver pieces inside my back door today," he said. "Nice and fresh and clean. A neat job, the kind of job only Joe ever did on them." He paused. "The other guy I used to have do them at the shop

never did them nearly as good as Joe."

"It's a lie." There was no conviction in her voice.

"You know I don't lie, June. They were in a little paper sack just like always."

She straightened up. "He wouldn't dare."

"He did, though." Shea suddenly grabbed her by the arms and shook her. "That's why you went to see her this afternoon, isn't it? Because you knew damn well he'd been spending time there again." He pushed her into a chair. "But he didn't tell you he'd killed her, did he?" He caught himself and straightened up. "Edith was a long way out of Dipper's class," he said. "He should've known that."

She sat there shaking for almost two minutes. Then everything seemed to got out of her at once and he expected her to faint. Instead, she lifted her head and stared at him calmly. "Give me a cigarette, Dave," she said. She blew the smoke directly into his face. "You scare people," she said. "You scare them good for a while. You want me to tell you something?" She laughed. "I think maybe you're right, Dave. All the way. About everything. And you want to know something else? I don't give a damn."

She acted as if something had been on her mind for a long time and she'd finally decided to do a couple of things about it. "You're wrong about one thing, though. I didn't drop down to fight with Edith about Joe." The sincerity in her voice puzzled him. "Because I'm sick of Joe, understand? I've been babying him for ten years and I'm sick of it." She looked him directly in the eyes. "Why don't you get out of here?" she asked him. "I don't care what happens to you or Joe or anybody." She stood up and walked toward him. "Get out of here!" she yelled. "Go on. Get out of here." She sounded as if she were close to the breaking point. Shea turned his back on her and left the house.

THE CAR rocked down the steep tortuous road as he thought it over. She plainly had been telling the truth. She didn't give a damn what happened to Joe; and that didn't fit in at all. Shea suddenly felt very tired and his hands were relaxing on the wheel when the rock cracked through the side window.

For ten seconds he fought to keep the car on the dirt road. When he'd finally stopped it, he opened his door and leaped out. The fog seeped away through the scrub and pine trees, but back of him, silhouetted against the break in the hill, he saw a figure running desperately toward the shelter of the trees. His stomach muscles tied themselves in knots as he pounded after it. He'd nearly caught up with it when the pine trees swallowed it. Shea ploughed back through the scrub into the silence of the stand of pine. The second rock was held in someone's hands and it tore a chunk out of his ear as it crashed against his skull. He made one instinctive move to cover his head, and then he fell into the rushing darkness.

A soft, insistent voice was swearing over and over again. When Shea finally got his eyes open, he was lying on his back in the scrub and Flaherty had a flashlight shining into them. The Homicide man stopped swearing and said, "Keep that handkerchief against your head. They took a good piece out of you."

Shea tried to cock his aching head at him. "How'd you get here?" he whispered.

"It was such a nice night I thought I'd take a short walk," said Flaherty bitterly. "You think you're able to drive, wise guy?"

Shea got to his feet shakily. "Yeah," he said. They climbed into the car.

When they reached the highway, Flaherty pointed out his Ford and Shea stopped. "I'm curious, Shea," he said. "Are you glad you're still alive?"

Shea just stared at him. "Whoever it was would've finished you off if I hadn't scared them," continued Flaherty.

"Thanks," said Shea.

The detective looked disgusted. "You learn real slowly, don't you?" He blew a cloud of smoke over Shea's head. "Maybe I should have taken my time and let them finish you. That way I would have had them under the cuffs now."

Shea said, "Maybe you should have." All his emotions had shifted to his stomach and centered in a big knot. "I meant that 'thanks,'" he said. "But," he looked Flaherty squarely in the eye, "I want to get my hands on whoever—"

"That's why I've been tailing you all

night," said Flaherty. "I know you do." He paused. "And whoever did it knows you do, too." He shook his head. "I can't figure why you're so hell bent on getting your head knocked in."

"Maybe that's what they counted on," said Shea. "That I wouldn't give a damn." He stared at the detective. "I suppose you were at a window when I talked with June?"

Flaherty nodded. "I left my car here when you started up the hill. In addition to everything else, that's a hell of a climb on a foggy night."

"Was it June?" asked Shea.

Flaherty clapped his hand to his head. "Well now, the guy asks a question. Don't tell me you want help." Shea froze. "I should slap you in the can for obstructing justice," snapped Flaherty. Suddenly his eyes got very reflective. "No, it wasn't June," he said. "Not unless she had wings. Whoever tossed the rock was waiting for you."

"A kid's trick," said Shea. "I used to do it myself. Nobody ever caught us once we made the trees."

"I found that out," said Flaherty. He started to get out and stopped. The silver letter plate gleamed against the dashboard as he pulled it out and handed it to Shea. "Take a look at it," Flaherty said. "That's one that wasn't in the bag."

Shea picked it up and examined it. It was just like the others except that the filigree work on the outside of the plate was crushed and torn. He held it up in front of him. The sharp neat outline of the heelprint focused.

"Somebody stepped on that very hard," said Flaherty. "They must have been running."

Shea said, "Did you ever meet a woman who really told you the truth about anything?"

"Hell," the detective snorted, "I've never really been certain when I'm telling the truth. I say one thing today and mean it but tomorrow six different things hit me all at once and I know I've been lying in spades the day before."

"I'm better now," said Shea. "Thanks again." He started the engine.

"Relax," said Flaherty. "You think I showed you that heelprint so you could run back and slug someone? Your wife

could've made it, you know. She was a big woman. Peterson could have made it."

"Annie?"

"I said I'd been tailing you all night," Flaherty told him. "I'm going to tell you something else. All I'm interested in is finding who murdered your wife. That's what I'm paid for. But I got a wife myself. I know a little about what's eating you." He waited a second. "For a moment I nearly forgot what I'm paid for," he said. "That's why I tell you to watch your step. That's what guys made these laws for—to help guys like you. But the ice cuts both ways. And the law wants a life for a life. Think it over, Shea."

SHEA made the call while Crockett was fixing the Johnny Walker. It took him five minutes to break through the switchboard girl to the foreman of the dipping room at the shop. When he reached him, the guy told him Joe Brookes had left him about nine o'clock complaining of a headache.

"He must have been hiding in the house all the time," Shea muttered to Crockett when he'd hung up. "Waiting for me."

Crockett handed him the drink silently. He shrugged his shoulders. "Flaherty told you what I think, Dave. What good's it going to do you?"

Shea swallowed his whiskey. "Both of them, sitting there, laughing at me."

"Don't you think Flaherty will check the plant?"

"As far as I'm concerned, Flaherty is just a guy who happens to be around," Dave said. "I've got two pains, one in my head and one in my stomach; and I think I could get rid of them both with a good workout on Joe Brookes."

"Well, wherever he was or is, it's a sure bet he isn't going to come back to his house tonight," said Crockett. "Why don't you hit the sack and think about it in the morning?"

Shea stretched wearily. "I guess you're right, Jim," he said, yawning. As he turned for the stairs the doorbell rang. He reached it just before Crockett. "I'll get it, Jim. It's probably Flaherty again."

It wasn't. It was Annie. She flew past him into the house without a word. "Dave, I've been trying to reach you. I'm wor-

ried sick. Where have you been?" He told her briefly. "That's what I was afraid of." She turned to Crockett. "Jim, we've got to do something. Fast!"

The liquor store owner rose to his feet quietly. "Sit down, Anne," he said. "Take this drink and relax. Then tell us what you're upset about."

It seemed to soothe her. She checked her watch. "It's just twelve," she said. "So it must have been an hour ago. Mother had gone to bed and I was sitting downstairs alone when the phone rang. It was June Brookes." Shea started to his feet.

"Let her finish, Dave," said Crockett.

"She told me Joe had just come home drunk and that some man from the police had picked him up at the door."

"You were right about Flaherty, Jim," said Shea. Crockett nodded.

"Joe told him it was all over the shop how nervous and upset you'd been this afternoon." The tears began streaming down her face. "Joe told him he was down here at twelve-thirty and he heard you arguing with Edith upstairs." She stared at Shea. "He told the detective he heard Edith scream, 'Davy, don't, please don't.' Then he said he heard a crash and he dropped his bag and ran out the back door."

"Dipper must be really drunk," said Shea coldly. "Why'd she call you, in the first place?"

"She told me she didn't think you'd believe her. Oh, Dave, she really sounded frightened."

"She must have been," said Shea. "But not for me." He told them about the silver plate with the heelprint.

"But what reason would she have to kill Edith?" asked Anne.

"The same reason any woman would have if she thought her husband was get-

ting away from her." But even as he said it, he remembered June's expression when he left the house.

"Let's not sit here and argue," said Crockett. "Let's face facts." He turned to Dave. "This puts you in a tough spot, fellah. I'm not going to ask you if Dipper is right or wrong. I don't give a damn. But maybe Flaherty isn't going to, either. All Flaherty is going to know is that he's got a guy who heard something in your house just before Edith was killed." He shook his head worriedly. "You shouldn't have been so free with him, Dave. He's got enough motive on you to give you all the gas in California."

Anne raised her head. "That's what I mean. Everybody in the Valley knows how jealous you were of Edith. Look," she said, "why don't you go to Mexico for a few weeks till this thing is cleared up? They're bound to clear it up."

"Is that one of June's ideas?" asked Dave. "That I run out and prove I did it?" He stared at her. "Or did you think it up by yourself?"

She shrunk back from him and buried her face in her hands. "Dave," she whispered, "don't look at me like that, please. I'm only trying to help you. That's all I ever wanted to do."

Shea cursed himself for a fool. He placed both hands awkwardly on her shoulders. "I'm sorry, Annie." He rubbed his hand across his aching head. If only that damn nightmare didn't keep bouncing back on him with the same foolish thought, he might be able to think straight. "This mess has got me running around in circles." He ran his hand through her bronze hair gently. "I'm an awful idiot, Annie." It gave her the strength to lift her head.

"Id go with you, Dave," she whispered. "Id go with you anywhere."

TOUGH!

That's the only word that can describe John D. MacDonald's new novel, coming up in the September issue of **DETECTIVE TALES**. You'll thrill and chill with every word of this raw, red, man's yarn. *Don't miss:*

"POOR LITTLE RICH CORPSE!"

Coming out July 27th!

THE PAST five years ran through his head in a crazy pattern of longing. It seemed like a picture screen with stupid little dolls fighting at cross purposes while Annie waited in the background. They stared at each other till Crockett broke in.

It makes some sense, Dave," he said briskly. "You're only going to get in one hell of a mess around here. Why don't you let me handle Flaherty for a while?"

The old ache and hurt was still there. "My wife's been murdered," he said dully. "I've got a job to do."

Crockett shook his head impatiently. "Why don't you get off that track, Dave?" he asked brutally. "Your wife's been strangled. All right. The three of us know how you felt about her. What's the sense of knocking yourself out any more?"

Shea's head felt as if it were swelling like a balloon. He could almost feel the pin sliding into it. But instead of bursting, it began to purr like one of his counters.

"You haven't got a hell of a lot of time," said Crockett. "Flaherty should be here any second."

Shea drew back from Anne and turned around. "You want me to go pretty bad, don't you, Jim?" He held his hands loosely at his sides. "When *did* you you decide to dump Edith for June Brookes?"

Crockett got up on his toes and looked at him as if he had gone crazy. "I didn't tell you Edith was strangled," said Dave. "And June's the only other person who knew it besides Flaherty." He walked toward Crockett one step at a time. "A woman isn't the only person who could've made that heelprint. A guy who wears cowboy boots a lot could have made it too, Davey."

For a moment Shea was almost glad he'd let Crockett take the first one. It rocked him back against the wall, but it cleared his mind of everything but the man in front of him. He cut Crockett's face three times running before he remembered first principles and shifted to his stomach. Crockett fought silently—like a man fighting against time who has to win in a hurry. But his fury left him wide open. A straight left whistled by

Shea's ear as he closed with Crockett. He put all his strength into the setup, burying his right in Crockett's stomach till he rocked. The low French window shattered as Crockett's heavy body crashed through it.

"Dave, don't, don't!" Annie's scream rang in his ears as Shea raced through the door.

* * *

Flaherty stared pensively at the broken window. "I'm sure glad I happened along when I did," he said. A thin smile crept across his face. "You'd better stay out of the way of those two cops who pulled you off Crockett. I don't think they like you."

Shea grinned sheepishly. "They got their two bits' worth," he said, rubbing his head. "That damn dream did it," he muttered. "I kept seeing cowboy boots walking around Edith's room till I was dizzy. I got suspicious when I realized June was the only one who could've told Crockett Edith was strangled. Then Annie said no one answered the phone all night. And when I heard what Joe Brookes told you, I knew. My wife and her nicknames! She always called him Davy Crockett."

The door banged and Flaherty took a pair of boots from a cop with a beautiful shiner. Shea kept staring at the ceiling. "They were in the back room of the liquor store," the cop said.

Flaherty pulled the dented silver piece from his pocket and compared the boot-heels. The right one fitted like a trademark. "That does it," he said. "He should've known. A gal like your wife gets mad when a guy busts it up for another woman."

The pain flashed and died in Shea's eyes. He nodded his head. "When June finally decided Crockett did do it, she called Annie—hoping I'd go for a long shot."

When Flaherty had left, Shea stared at Annie for a moment. Then he coughed. "The kid tells me you play real good," he said slowly. "He wanted to know if you'd come live with us?"

"Could be," she said softly. "It just could be."



HERE, on DETECTIVE TALES, as you can imagine, we act as a sort of port of call for people from all over the world, and it's not at all unusual to have authors drop in from Cuba or California, or even Casablanca. And again, as you can imagine, we get a lot of strange stories. We take them with a big grain of salt.

That was our attitude when Dan Gordon sent us in his latest Lew Guyon yarn. In the last couple of years we've published several stories about Dan's marine investigating hero, and judging from the letters we've received, the stories have met with overwhelming success. But in this story, "Anchor the Stiff!" we thought that maybe Dan had gone a little too far. He had Lew Guyon riding on an underwater platform, being towed by a boat. Our eyebrows practically disappeared into our hair on that one. We wrote Dan Gordon about that, and this is what he had to say:

"In 'Anchor the Stiff!' Lew Guyon permitted himself to be dragged along beneath the surface while the boat above him was actually in motion. This somewhat suicidal practice was common among the Japanese who pearl-fished off Australia some years ago. The fatalistic temperament of the Japs probably made it easy to replace lost divers. I spent several weeks at this pastime in Argentina, Newfoundland, during the late emergency. Ships would lose their anchors and chains during the constant storms, and these

items, while inexpensive as ships' gear goes, were irreplaceable for a time. Partially as a result of this foolishness, I eventually became diving officer—when I discontinued the method, being unwilling to worry in the boat above while some wide-eyed, corn-fed lad dangled at the end of that rope.

"I hope I've made clear in the story just what was being done. You are perfectly right in saying it would be quite a project to cover the bottom, footstep by footstep. Walking or crawling underwater is done in very slow-motion, and the diver who covers a radius of fifty or a hundred yards has done a good day's work. That was why it was necessary for Lew Guyon to resort to the method he did use to explore the bottom of Millionaire's Cove."

Well, thank a lot, Dan, both for a fine story and an interesting sidelight on some of your experiences that made "Anchor the Stiff!" possible. Hereafter when we read a Dan Gordon story that has to do with marine matters, we'll do a lot less worrying about its authenticity.

The lineup for the September issue of DETECTIVE TALES is just about ready, and we know you're going to enjoy it. We've got stories by John D. MacDonald, Francis K. Allan and Larry Holden on the fire, ready to serve you, with a strong dash of murder in each of them and a plentiful flavoring of the kind of fast-moving adventure good old DT specializes in. See you July 27th.—*The Editor*





SEND ME YOUR KILLERS!

By WILLIAM CAMPBELL GAULT

Smashing Novel of Homicide in Hawaii

There were some strange people mixed up in Lois Dutton's life, and some even stranger people in her death. . . . Which made it peculiar, to say the least, for the cops to mistreat so woefully that unobtrusive, harmless citizen, Sandy McKane, who knew nothing about the murder—except who had done it!

CHAPTER ONE

New Client—Old Trouble

IT WAS at breakfast that Linda first told me about Lois coming home. Linda's my wife of a year and Lois was—well, Lois had been my girl for two years, but that was kid stuff.

"Lois?" I said. "I scarcely remember her. Wasn't she short and fat?"

"She was medium and slim," Linda said, "as you very well know, Saunders McKane, and you thought she was wonderful."

"Did I?" I said. "Where's she been?"

I was cutting into Waialae when I heard the siren. I was a marked man now.

"All over the world, probably nursing a broken heart. Don't be so obtuse, Sandy. She's almost famous. She's a writer."

"Writer?" I said. "Oh, you mean Lois Burton . . ."

"No," she said, "I mean Lois Dutton. She's home to stay."

Home is Honolulu, or, more precisely, Waikiki on Seaside, near the canal. My home and Linda's. Small but comfortable and—most of the time—peaceful.

"Where?" I asked.

"Out in St. Louis Heights, on Maigret. The old Dutton place." She sighed. "It

must be nice to have money, like that."

I finished my coffee and rose.

"The Rooks are having a party for her, to welcome her home," Linda went on. "A luau. And we're going, Sandy."

"Okay. But if Rod Rook offers me a job again, I'll walk out."

"He won't," she said sweetly. Too sweetly. "All our friends are resigned to your Hawkshaw complex by now, darling."

"Fine," I said. "And when is this luau?"

"Helen isn't sure yet. She has to find out about the others."

The others would be the Van Albrechts and the Dickinsons and some of the others I'd known when I was Saunders McKane, social butterfly. There'd been some rough years since the butterfly years, a few on the Honolulu police force and some with a rifle in my hand as Sargeant McKane.

There'd been some rough years for Linda, too, maybe, but not as many. Her dad hadn't been dead for long; mine had died when the market broke.

I looked at my lovely now and said, "Why don't you buy a pretty dress for the party and I'll meet you somewhere for lunch?"

She kissed me. "I'll be at your office around noon."

THERE'S a book store below my office, and the window to the left was featuring the work of Lois Dutton that morning. *Unwanted Millions*, *Send Me The Refuse*, *Your Teeming Shores* were a few of the titles, the last two from the same quotation, I think. Louis seemed to have a feeling for the submerged tenth.

I remembered her, all right, though it's nothing any sane husband will admit to his bride of a year. There was a lot of fire in Lois, a lot of sparkle.

The office still retained the night's coolness and I kept the shades drawn against the glare from the sun. It never gets really hot on our island, but the sun shines pretty brightly.

I sat there listening to the whirr of Dr. Ray Nakamura's drill across the hall and thinking of nothing.

When the phone rang I reached for it eagerly. Business had been dull.

After all these years I could still tell her voice.

"Sandy McKane?" she asked.

Right, Lois. Welcome home. *Aloha*."

"How did you know?" she asked.

"That's a question you've no right to ask a married man," I said.

"Linda, isn't it? Linda Ramsay. Sweet girl." She didn't sound as if she meant it. "But this isn't a social call, Sandy. I may need your professional services. I may be in trouble."

"You want to come to the office? Or shall I come out?"

"I'll be coming downtown around eleven," she said. "It's on Hotel Street, isn't it?"

"That's right," I said. "And eleven will be fine, Lois."

There was a silence on the wire, and I thought for a moment she'd hung up. Then I heard, "Oh, Sandy—it's a mess," and the line went dead.

I thought of calling her back but decided against it. I mixed a Tom Collins and sat listening to the sound of Dr. Ray's drill. Then I went over my accounts, trying to find some that were collectable, wondering if I wasn't in the wrong business.

At eleven I straightened my tie and combed my hair.

At eleven-thirty Lois still hadn't shown up.

At eleven-forty-five Linda did. With a new dress. One of the simple kind that costs a lot of money.

"You'll be the belle of the ball," I assured her. "Or the lulu of the luau."

"I mean to try," she said, and then frowned. "Sandy, you're worried about something."

"Just a lost account," I said.

She was quiet, studying me.

"I know," I said. "Why don't I work for the Rook Sugar Company."

"I didn't say it."

"Which I appreciate." I put my file cards away. "Well, maybe I will yet. Maybe by luau time, I'll accept Rod's offer." I smiled at her. "I'll meet you downstairs. I've got to call this client."

"Can't you call while I'm here?"

I shook my head. "Then you'd know who it is, and your bridge club would learn who it is, and I wouldn't be a *private* investigator."

"All right." She made a face. "I'll go down and buy one of Lois' books. If

she knew I hadn't read a single one of them..."

I phoned information. But the new phone hadn't been installed in the Dutton home yet. She must have phoned from a neighbor's.

DOWN in the book store, Linda had a copy of *Unwanted Millions*. She said, "The clerk says this is Lois' best book. It's about China and the stupid immigration quota."

"China's?"

"Ours. Regarding the Chinese."

A man standing nearby looked up in open curiosity at the mention of Lois' name.

He was short and fairly thin, and his face seemed disturbingly familiar. It was no friend or acquaintance.

He walked away then, limping. It was the limp that brought my memory into focus. It reminded me of Goebbels, Hitler's propagnada chief.

Linda said, "Do you always stare at people in book stores?"

"That man," I said. "Didn't he look like Goebbels?"

"I didn't notice," she said. "You don't mean because of the limp?"

I shook my head.

Linda sighed. "Goebbels is dead, Sandy."

We had lunch at the Hibiscus Room in the Gramercy. It's not really a room, but a court in the center of the hotel enclosed all around but not above.

Helen Rook was there, just leaving as we entered. She said, "The party will be Friday evening. You'll be there, of course?"

Linda held up her package. "I couldn't miss it now."

"It wouldn't be a party at all if you two weren't there," Helen said.

I watched her walk away and asked Linda, "Does Helen like Lois? I didn't think they were particular friends."

"Lois is famous now," Linda said. "And all Helen ever had was money, really. They detest each other."

I went back to the office after lunch and Linda went home. About two-thirty Dr. Ray Nakamura came in for his midafternoon cigarette and chat, and we discussed the latest turndown of the 49th state proposal.

Dr. Ray Nakamura is and has always been a solid, loyal citizen of his adopted land, and it hurt him to think the preponderance of his fellow Japanese in the territory was one stumbling block to the legislation.

I said, "Reasonable people don't feel that way, Ray."

"Reasonable?" He smiled again. "Do you think the *reasonable* people are in the majority here, or anywhere?"

"I'd like to."

"You're naive, Sandy," he said. "You're from the right side of the tracks."

He finished his cigarette and went back to his office. In a little while I heard the sound of his drill again. I stood by the window, watching the pedestrian traffic below. Chinese, Portugese, Japanese, Hawaiian, Korean. All American, but we couldn't vote, excepting for local officials. Disenfranchised citizens.

I went home early. Linda was out in front, watering the pikaki. "Something's happened," she said.

"No, that's the trouble." I regarded her. "You win, kid."

She stared at me.

"If Rod wants me, I'll take it. I'll take anything that pays."

She shook her head. "No, you won't."

"It's what you want."

"But not now. Sandy, I didn't know things were that bad. Why didn't you tell me?"

"It's my headache," I said, "not yours."

"Is it? And I've been spending money like a drunken sailor while you worry about business."

"No, you haven't. You've been very good. Honey, let's not talk about it."

"Sandy..." she said, and the phone rang.

I went up the steps and into the living room as it rang again. It was Dan Arliss. Dan's head of the Detective Bureau, and I used to work for him.

He asked, "Get that business I sent you?"

"What business?"

"Man named Jerick. Didn't he show up?"

"Not at my office."

"Sent him over about noon. Thin fellow, walked with a limp."

"I think I saw him," I said, "but not in the office. Did he look like Goebbels?"

"Who's that?"

"That Nazi—you remember."

"I didn't notice," Dan said. "Anyway, he's a *malihini* and he wanted the name of a reputable private operative, but I gave him yours."

"He didn't tell you anything about what kind of job it was?"

"No, but I kind of got the idea it was a missing relative."

"I'll look him up, Dan," I said. "And thanks."

I phoned the Royal Hawaiian and the Moana, but neither of them had a Mr. Jerick registered. I got him finally at the Lanai Lodge.

I said, "This is Saunders McKane, Mr. Jerick. I think Lieutenant Arliss talked to you about me."

"Oh, yes, Mr. McKane. I tried to get you this noon, and then again about ten minutes ago. Are you available now?"

"I am. Shall I come to the hotel?"

"If you will. I imagine the clerk knows you so it would be better if you came up without stopping at the desk. Suite 203."

SUITE 203 was a newly furnished luxury layout with a small porch overlooking the patio. Jerick was the man I'd seen at the book store. He didn't look as much like Goebbels as I'd thought at first.

He indicated I should sit on the davenport. He sat in a chair nearby, smoking a cigarette. The ashtray next to him was loaded.

"The reason I went to the police first," he said, "was because I wanted the best *private* operative available." The hand holding the cigarette shook a little. "It's a *private* matter."

"Privacy is what I sell," I told him.

He nodded. "Didn't I see you some place today?"

"In the book store below my office, on Hotel Street."

He nodded. "Ah, yes. You mentioned a name there, I think. Lois Dutton, wasn't it?"

"That's right."

"You know her, Mr. McKane?"

"Very well, at one time. When I was younger."

He smiled. "I, too, knew her very well at one time. Our friendship had cooled somewhat since then."

I said nothing.

His eyes were on the cigarette now. "However, Miss Dutton still has some . . . mementoes of our . . . friendship. Letters." He looked up. "I want them back. I'm prepared to pay."

"Lois Dutton?" I said. "You mean she'd resort to—"

He shrugged. "Call it what you will. I call it blackmail."

"You're married, Mr. Jerick?" I asked him.

His smile was cynical. "To a very jealous, fairly old, and very wealthy woman, Mr. McKane."

It had been a quiet month, and I could use the business. But I said, "This is out of my line, Mr. Jerick."

"I hoped it was." His eyes met mine evenly. "Because the kind of operative who handled it as a standard part of his service would be of *my* line. I wrote to Lois about it. I have one of her replies right here."

He took a letter out of his pocket, just a short note. I read:

Dear Carl:

These letters are insurance against a hazardous future. I wouldn't think of parting with them now. And I don't really need the insurance now.

Lois

"Lois should be making money from her books," I protested.

He shrugged. "She used the word *now* twice. I'll use it a third time. She's making money from her books—*now*. But writing, I've heard, is a hazardous business financially."

"I can't believe it," I said. "She inherited some money, too."

Again he shrugged. "I don't know about that. I do know I'm willing to pay ten thousand dollars for the return of those letters. If blackmail is too *strong* for you stomach, perhaps you can convince her that she could return them gratis. In that case the ten thousand dollars would be yours."

He paused and then went on. "You could point out to her that a woman of her achievement and background has nothing to gain and much to lose in the unpleasant publicity a case of this kind would reveal."

I watched him light a cigarette from

the stub of the one still in his hand. I said, "I don't know. I have a clean record here."

"What has that to do with it? Have I asked you to do anything illegal?"

"Being a party to blackmail is illegal," I said quietly.

"That's putting it crudely. Miss Dutton has some letters I want to buy, just as she has books the public buys. The offer is mine; she didn't solicit my business."

It was one hell of a time to sharpen up my ethics. I still hesitated.

"Don't decide now," he said quietly, "if you don't want to. But you could talk to her."

"All right, Mr. Jerick," I said.

He put the cigarette out and reached into an inner pocket for his billfold. "I believe a retainer is customary in your work." He handed me a sheaf of twenties. There were ten of them.

I gave him a receipt and told him, "If I don't want the business after I've talked with her, I'll return this."

He was still smoking when I left.

CHAPTER TWO

Body Under the Banyan Tree

I DROVE out Lois' way going home, and there she was, on the front lawn. She was sitting in a deck chair with a parasol attachment. She had on some kind of nubby-finish, low-necked dress in blue, and she was as attractive as she'd ever been.

I stopped and got out. As I came up the walk I could see she was smiling.

"Long time, Sandy," she said. "I've been expecting you."

"Long time," I agreed, and took the chair next to hers. "Your troubles all evaporated, Lois?"

"No," she said quietly, looking out toward the street. Her brown eyes were sad. "I don't want you involved, I decided, Sandy. Not an old friend."

"Trouble's my trade." I offered her a cigarette.

She took one and I held a light for her. "Your trouble have anything to do with Carl Jerick?"

The cigarette was motionless in her hand. "How did you know about Carl

Jerick?" She had turned to stare at me.

"He hired me to get some letters back. He authorized me to pay ten thousand dollars for them."

"Carl Jerick? You'd work for *him*?"

"Any reason I shouldn't?"

"I suppose not." Her voice was hollow. "Not if you don't know him. The letters aren't for sale. Not for ten thousand or ten million."

"Then why are you keeping them, Lois?"

She didn't answer that. She smoothed her dress over her knees. "He's clever. He's . . . a devil, Sandy."

"He seems smooth enough," I said, and rose. "I'll tell him you're not interested. I'll give him back his retainer."

"Wait," she said, and I waited.

She didn't look at me, and it seemed as if she wasn't talking to me. "He's open enough about it. He's banking on my fear of him." She looked up at me. "Sandy, I'll give you those letters."

"For him?"

She shook her head. "For safe-keeping. I'm sick of having him chase me. I want to know they're *safe*, and I can get to them."

"You want me to hold them until you make up your mind?"

She nodded. "Would you do that?"

"And if you should decide to let him have them, what's the price, Lois?"

"No price. If I decide, he can have them for nothing."

I went into the house with her. It had been completely redecorated and the smell of paint still lingered in the air. She left me in the living room.

When she returned she had a compact bundle wrapped in brown paper.

She handed it to me. "That's the first time those letters have ever been out of my possession. Guard them well, Sandy." She put a hand on my arm. "I'll see you tomorrow night, at the Rooks."

"Shall Linda and I pick you up?" I asked.

She shook her head. "Thanks just the same."

I kept the package concealed under my coat and went out to the car. Lois hadn't lost any of her fire, I thought. She was still a torch.

Maybe it was the torch that did it, but I began to remember the quotation, on

the way home, just the last part of it.

Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe
free,
The wretched refuse from your teeming
shore,
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to
me.
I lift my lamp beside the golden door.

That's part of the inscription gracing the base of the Statue of Liberty, more than five thousand miles away, in New York Harbor. I felt very knowing and solvent as I drove toward home.

I also had the small but uncomfortable feeling that somebody was playing me for a patsy.

At home Linda was picking some mint leaves from the bed in front of the lanai. "Mint juleps?" I asked her.

"Iced tea," she said. "You look happier."

"I am," I said. "Don't waste that mint in tea. I'll be with you in a minute."

I phoned the hotel and asked for Suite 203. When Jerick answered I said, "There's a possibility you may get what you're after. She wants a little time on it."

"I can wait," he said.

I TOOK the packet out into the utility room. There was a dead fuse box in there, disconnected since we had circuit breakers installed. I pulled the panel out and put the bundle behind it.

Linda asked from the kitchen, "What in the world are you doing out there?"

"Washing lipstick out of my handkerchiefs," I said. "Shave some ice, will you?"

After I'd made the juleps we sat in the back yard.

Linda said, "There's going to be a new man at the Rooks' tomorrow night. I hope he's handsome."

"*Malihini*?" I said.

"Uh-huh. Man named Jerick, Helen said."

My drink wavered only a little. I couldn't figure that one.

I put the two hundred in the bank next morning and then dropped over at the Detective Bureau to thank Dan Arliss for the business.

He was in his office talking to Lemke.

Lemke is his right hand and no friend of mine.

"Hello," Dan said. Lemke said nothing.

"Thanks for the business," I said.

Lemke left the room and Dan looked at me. "What's this Jerick do for a living?"

"He didn't say."

"You take care of him all right?"

"So far."

Dan pulled out one of those cigarette-size cigars he favors. He looked at it and at me. "Care for one?"

I shook my head.

He lighted it and sighed. "Trouble, trouble, trouble."

"Which keeps you eating," I said.

"I'd eat as well if there was less of it. What's the matter with people these days? Drunks, fights, two-timing husbands." He shook his head, and his stiff white hair caught the afternoon sunlight.

"Too much money," I said. "Or not enough. The dollar-a-day natives here aren't going back to that, not after the war and the wages they learned about then."

Dan shrugged and went over to look out the window. "This Jerick deal is legitimate, I hope." He turned to face me.

"I hope."

He frowned.

"Something wrong?" I asked.

"Lemke doesn't like this Jerick, for some reason."

"Gus Lemke doesn't need a reason," I said.

"Maybe." Dan came back to sit behind his desk again. "Luis Chuca was over to see Jerick today at the hotel."

Luis Chuca was a minor god among the Filipinos in town. He was a political hot-head who'd clashed with the law from time to time.

"I don't know about that, Dan," I said. "This much I'll tell you—my business with Jerick didn't include Chuca. It had to do with love or romance, anyway."

Dan nodded, and crushed out his miniature cigar. "Okay, Sandy. I know you wouldn't lie to me."

That last sentence sounded more like a threat than a statement of fact. When I left he'd gone back to the window and another cigar.

I spent the rest of the day looking up

a hotel skipper. I found him finally in a pool hall on Nuuanu. There's only a very limited space to skip to on the island, which helps.

And then home to prepare for my social evening.

Linda certainly was a dream in the new dress. Her dark hair was up; her bare shoulders had that golden tan only she can achieve. She has such beautiful shoulders.

THE ROOKS' HOUSE was a big one, the front of it *makai* (toward the sea), the rear *mauka* (toward the mountains). It was off the Diamond Head Road, up beyond the Elks Club.

The rear yard was huge, fenced by flowering shrubs. That was where the luau would be.

Helen Rook met us at the door. Rod had gone to pick up Lois, and the servants were all busy in the back yard. Helen looked about five seconds away from a nervous breakdown.

"Everything has gone wrong," she said, "just *everything*."

She takes a lot of pride in her parties. I said, "It will probably be the best wing-ding you ever threw, and you're tops in the field, Helen. Stop fretting."

"If you only knew . . ." she said, and then some others arrived and she went to greet them.

The rear yard was lighted with Japanese lanterns, and the Filipino servants were carrying drinks to the half-dozen guests already present. Over near the mound, where the pig was steaming in the ground, my client Carl Jerick was sitting and smoking.

He nodded, and I took Linda over to introduce her.

After the introduction Linda said, "I didn't know you knew Mr. Jerick, Sandy."

"Sit down," Jerick said, "and I'll tell you about that."

We sat down, and a pair of drinks arrived, a Cuba Libre for Linda, and a Tom Collins for me. That's the kind of servants the Rooks have.

He never did find time to tell her, for which I was thankful. Telling Linda means telling her bridge club. More guests came, and he was introduced to all of them.

Then, from the house, Helen and Rod

Rook came down the steps with Lois, and all eyes turned that way.

Next to me, Carl Jerick leaned forward in his chair. "As beautiful as ever," he said softly. "She'll never change."

"You know Lois?" Linda said in wonder.

He smiled. "I met her years ago when I was over here."

Linda said, "I had the impression this was your first visit."

In her new dress, with her hair high, she didn't look at all like a Congressional Committee.

Jerick chuckled. "I thought your husband was the detective, Mrs. McKane."

Lois was making the rounds then, and Jerick rose with me. She took my hand and smiled. She took both Linda's hands.

In front of Jerick she didn't smile or say a thing. She nodded, and her eyes were blank.

I thought both the Rooks looked uncomfortable, and then they passed on. We sat down again, and nobody said a word, including Linda.

It was a wonderful meal. *Poi* and *lomi-lomi* to go with the pig, and music from drifting down in the cool night air.

Later I danced with Lois. She said, "I can't make up my mind, Sandy. I . . ."

Somebody cut in.

When I got back to Jerick some time later I said, "Nothing yet. She can't make up her mind."

He shrugged, watching the dancers, the perpetual cigarette in his hand.

How long we sat there I don't know. Neither of us had anything to say to the other, but I stayed there, watching the guests dance, until Helen came over to us, looking even more nervous than she had when I arrived.

"Have you seen Lois?" she asked. "She's simply disappeared."

"I haven't seen her since I danced with her," I said.

Helen seemed to hesitate, and then she said, "Sandy, will you come with me to look around? You'll pardon us, Mr. Jerick?"

He nodded and smiled.

"I've checked the house," Helen said, "and all the available single men. I can't believe she'd leave without saying anything."

We were walking along the hibiscus

hedge that fenced the north section of the yard. We came to the garage, a four-car affair with chauffeur's quarters above.

I snapped on the lights, and the place was flooded with light. Three cars, no Lois.

I was about to snap them off again when I saw the shadow on the grass under the banyan tree.

It was a mammoth tree, spreading over a section of the garage and the concrete service area. Its roots looked grotesque in the reflected light, but it wasn't the shadow of the hanging roots I'd seen.

There was a figure huddled there.

Helen followed me over. Helen seemed to sigh, and then I heard a suppressed semi-scream come from her.

It was Lois. Bent double, her hands pressed to her stomach. The fragrance of her perfume came up to me as I squatted next to her, as I took her wrist in my fingers.

There was no pulse.

Off to one side of her, something glistened. I strained to see a glass, a cocktail glass that must have fallen from her hand.

Behind me, Helen's voice was like a scratched phonograph record. "Sandy—is she dead?"

I nodded and rose.

The light was on Helen's face, and it was chalk-white. She started to sway.

I said quickly, "Call the police. I'll stay here. Ask for Dan Arliss. Quick, now." I put a hand on her shoulder. "Steady. You can make it all right?"

She nodded. "Dan Arliss. I'm all right, Sandy."

I watched her walk quickly past the garage and out of sight.

Above me the banyan tree was like some enormous monster, its dozen tentacles reaching down to burrow into the earth. Around me the night was quiet, except for the distant music coming from the house. Hawaiian music now, soft and seemingly ironical against the night's violence.

CHAPTER THREE

On the Lam

SOME minutes later the music stopped, and I heard the hum of voices getting louder, and then Rod Rook was com-

ing across the areaway toward me, his face stone-grey.

"What in the world's happened, Sandy?"

"Lois is dead," I said. "Helen is phoning the police."

"My God!" His voice was ragged.

"You're sure, Sandy?"

"I'm sure."

"You don't think . . . I mean, it couldn't be suicide? She seemed so . . . depressed, tonight."

"I wouldn't guess," I said.

Another figure came across the lighted areaway. Carl Jerick. "Is it true about Lois?"

"It's true."

He stared at me. "You've called the police?"

Rod said, "My wife is calling them. Would you go back and keep the other guests quiet please, Carl? I don't want them out here."

He nodded and went back, limping badly.

In a few minutes the first of the curious came hesitantly around the corner of the garage.

Rod said impatiently, "Damn that Jerick! I told him to keep them in the yard."

I could still smell Lois' perfume rising from her still body.

Then Lemke came into view, and Dan Arliss, pushing through the guests. Lemke stayed behind, to keep them back, while Dan came over.

He looked tired and unpleasant. "What happened?"

I told him about finding her, about Helen's concern.

Then Doc McGuire came around the corner of the garage, carrying his badge and wearing his frown.

Dan said, "This have anything to do with that business you had with Jerick, Sandy?"

"Why should it?" I asked.

"I asked you a question. Jerick's here and you're here and Miss Dutton just came back home."

"Jerick didn't kill her, if that's what you mean," I said. "I was with him all the time, every second, since I last danced with Miss Dutton."

"Of course," Dan said quietly, "he's your client."

"That's rough talk, Dan," I said.
"Is it?"

"How do you know she's been killed, Dan? Don't you think we'd better get Doc McGuire's verdict first?"

He looked at Doc, and said to Rod, "I want all the guests held, and I want to talk to the servants. I want the names of any who left."

Then he looked at me. "If you didn't think it was murder, why did you have Mrs. Rook call me?"

I didn't answer right away.

He said, "Don't underestimate me, McKane."

We were down to last names now. I said, "I don't."

He had us all brought into the living room. He had Arnold and a uniformed man in there, and Lemke. The uniformed man had a notebook.

They worked fast, and Dan let them handle it. He spent most of his time with Carl Jerick in one corner of the room.

Then, when he was ready to leave, he said, "You'll go along with us, McKane."

I asked him if I could take Linda home first.

Lemke cut in with, "You want me to bring him along, Dan?"

I looked at Lemke and thought seriously of pasting him.

Dan said, "All right, McKane. I'll drive over with you."

Linda said, "What's the matter, Sandy? Why do you have to—"

"I'm working with them on it," I said.
"Let's go, honey."

She looked from Dan to me. Then we went out together, without another word. Down to the Diamond Head Road and along that to Kalakaua. Past the beach, still populated, to Seaside and the McKane estate, five rooms and bath.

Linda got out. "Sandy, I'm scared."

"Don't be," I said.

"Why must you live with trouble always?"

"I don't look for it." I kissed her. "I'll be home soon."

I watched her go up the walk. I watched the light go on.

Dan said, "Straight ahead. We'll go to the Dutton Place."

I said, "You think there might be something there?"

"There's got to be something some-

where. I made the mistake of not listening to Lemke."

I started out slowly, thinking it over. I said, "Listening to Lemke would be the biggest mistake a man could make."

"I'll string along with my men," Dan said. "Lemke's out on the street all the time. I've been in that office too much. I'll string along with him."

"You haven't forgotten you sent Jerick to me, have you?"

"I'm trying to."

I cut off Kapahulu for the short jog that led to Saint Louis Drive. Then along this almost to the end, to Maigret and the Dutton home.

It was dark and I took a flashlight from the glove compartment. Then we went up the walk together, past the deck chairs on the lawn.

Dan tried the door just as a matter of routine, and it swung open. My flash found the light switch in the hall, and I snapped it.

LIGHT from the hall splashed into the living room and revealed the chaos there. All the cushions from the furniture were on the floor. Books were scattered all over.

Dan turned on some table lamps and went out into the dining room. There was less confusion here, but the drawers to the buffet were open.

We went through the kitchen and bedrooms. It was the same thing in all of them. It had had a going-over, but good.

Dan went to the phone and called for a couple of men. His face was white when he turned to meet my gaze.

"Well?"

I said, "I suppose this is Jerick's, too? The man was at the Rook house before Lois got there."

"The man, the man, the man!" Dan's face was working angrily. "How about you? How about Chuca?"

"Dan," I said, "I'm going to work with you on this."

"*You will like hell.*" His frozen smile held not a trace of humor. "You're Lemke's baby. I don't want any part of you."

"You're not yourself, Dan," I said. "Lemke couldn't find the gas pump in a filling station. You can't do that to me."

"I already have. Now shut up!"

It might be, I reflected, the right time to tell him about the letters. And it might not. My first duty was to my client, unless I had more grounds for suspicion than I had right now.

Dan said, "Stay here. I'm going to check the basement."

I thought about Lemke and his special room. Lemke, who hated my guts and now had the authority to do something about it. It wasn't for me.

I waited until I heard Dan's feet going down the basement steps before I went quietly along the hall to the porch. Far below I saw the lights of a department car coming up the winding road.

I was grinding the starter when the headlights made the last turn. The motor caught, coughed, and I was in low gear, heading for Alencaster.

I didn't gun her. I moved easily into second, into high. In the rear-view mirror, I could see the headlights growing.

But now they stopped, in front of the house, and I stopped holding my breath. I was cutting into Waialae before I heard the siren.

The car was a marked car now. In town, I headed for Nuanu, and I really barreled her, heading northeast.

I pulled into the driveway of Dr. Ray Nakamura's low frame cottage a few minutes later. There was no light on, and it was a hell of a time to come visiting.

I rang the bell at the side door. A light showed in the glass top of the door in a few minutes, and then it opened and Dr. Ray stood there, fastening his robe.

A cautious, prudent, professional man, Dr. Ray, and one who wanted no turmoil in his life.

"Ray," I said, "I'm in trouble. The police are after me."

His smile was nervous, but he didn't hesitate before saying, "Come in, Sandy." He looked at my car. "You'd better put that in the garage first."

When I had closed the garage doors, he still stood in the open doorway. He led me through a small, neat kitchen, through the dining room, into a low-ceilinged and comfortable living room, bright with color.

We sat down, and he said, "Have you done something wrong, Sandy?"

"I don't think it was wrong." I told him as much as I thought he should know

about the affair. He listened intently.

When I'd finished I asked him, "What do you know about Luis Chuca?"

He shrugged. "He does some shipping, has a partial interest in some small freighters. He gets jobs for his countrymen, especially the Tagalogs."

Among the Filipinos, the Tagalogs and Visayans are not hot-headed than their more stable neighbors, the Ilocanos.

"Handles their legal work for nothing, doesn't he?"

"For nothing?" Dr. Ray smiled. "I imagine he finds a way to get paid. Any jobs he gets for them, he gets paid well I'm sure."

I said, "I think he or some of his gang went through the Dutton house tonight, looking for something."

"So? That would be for the police. Luis Chuca is no one you'd want to fight alone, Sandy."

"Maybe not. Doesn't he get jobs for some Japanese laborers, and Chinese, too?"

Dr. Ray nodded. "If they're gullible enough. Sandy, you can do nothing tonight. Why don't you go to bed?"

"I'm a fugitive, Ray," I warned him. "You'd be harboring a fugitive."

"It's a comfortable bed," Ray said. "Come, I'll show you the bathroom, too."

I didn't think I'd be able to sleep, but I did. It was the sound of a lawn mower that woke me, and a glance out the window showed me Dr. Ray was the motive power.

IT WAS a beautiful lawn, but the impact of the flowers that were banked against the rear fence was too much for grass to compete with. Purple bougainvillea, yellow alamanda, candle bushes, and hibiscus in all the shades. Linda should see this; flowers were her love.

Which reminded me that I was, too, and she'd be worrying.

I called her from the phone in the hall. The moment she answered I said, "I'm all right, but I can't talk for long. Don't worry."

"Sandy," she said. "I am worried. There's been a department car in front for hours."

"I'm in good hands, and I'm safe," I said. "I'll call again." I hung up.

Dr. Ray came in from the kitchen and

said, "Breakfast's ready, Sandy. Have a good sleep?"

"Better than I deserve," I said. We went into the kitchen.

Bacon and eggs and tomato juice and rolls. Mrs. Nakamura did all right by an egg. She was as Americanized as her husband, trimly and brightly garbed in a cotton house dress. But she let her husband do all the talking, which I considered an improvement over the American way.

The morning paper had my picture on page one.

"This Man Is Wanted," the caption under the picture read. There was a picture of Lois, too. But no picture or word of Carl Jerick.

The story was garbled, the only clear statement being Dan's, to the effect my apprehension was expected hourly. There was no reward offered, however.

After breakfast I told Ray, "I think my car will be safe here. But if you don't want it here, say so."

"You leave it here. You're not going to leave, are you?"

I nodded. "I've got to see Chuca, for one thing."

Dr. Ray sighed and said, "You're the boss."

I left before he did, walking all the way to School Street. I'd need transportation; public transportation would be too dangerous. What I wanted was a nice, inconspicuous car.

Tommy Dye's garage was on School Street, and I'd known him a long time. I could hope.

He was in his office going over some bills when I entered. When he looked up his face was expressionless at first. Then he smiled.

"How're things, Sandy?"

"If you've read the morning paper, you know."

"I read it." He was still smiling. "Trouble with Lemke again?"

"More or less. Tommy, I want a car."

"I've got a '41 Ford Tudor. Black and very inconspicuous."

"Ideal," I said. "And thanks, Tommy."

"Don't mention it. Glad to help any enemy of Lemke's."

He went to get the car, and when he brought it he had something else in the

front seat with him. It was a big-brimmed light-weight hat.

"You're known all over town as the man who never wears a hat," he said. "This should fit, I think."

It did, very well. I thanked him again and toiled the Ford out onto School Street.

CHAPTER FOUR

Spray of Death

I DIDN'T look for anybody or anything but the traffic ahead and behind. I was nervous and perspiring, and I realized this might be a stupid move.

I cut down Punch Bowl to Beretania and took that out past the Academy to the Chuca Foundation. It was a small but modern building.

I sat there for a few minutes watching the traffic, waiting for a lull. Then I walked quickly up to the front door and through it.

It opened into a long, fairly wide corridor. There was, fortunately for me, no reception desk. I went along the corridor, checking the titles on the glass of the closed doors.

Finally, I came to one stenciled, *Luis Chuca, Director*.

I knocked, and someone said, "Come in."

I went in and closed the door behind me. Luis Chuca was a stocky, brown-eyed gent with excellent taste in clothes. No zoot suit here. He sat behind a mammoth koa wood desk and his eyes met mine squarely.

"Mr. McKane," he said.

I nodded. "I'll lock the door if you don't mind."

"I mind. You're a little too hot for me to talk to, McKane." He was reaching for the phone on his desk.

I said quickly, "Phone Carl Jerick, first."

He paused in mid-air. "Carl Jerick? What has he to do with you?"

"Ask him."

His hand came to rest on top of the desk. "What has he to do with me?"

"I'm not sure," I said. "That's why I'm here."

"You came here for information?"

"That's right."

"Sit down." He indicated a chair across from him.

"I'll lock the door first."

He regarded me quietly a moment. "As you wish."

No pidgin English with this pigeon. I locked the door and came back to sit in the chair he'd indicated. "You and Jerick are working together?" I asked him.

He didn't answer.

"The police think so. I'd like to know."

"We've done some business."

"Some murder?"

He shook his head. He was smiling.

I said, "I'd hate to think either you or Jerick or both would play me for a patsy."

"And if he did, or I did?"

"It would be most unpleasant—for anyone involved."

His smile was still there. "All I have to do is pick up the phone." His hand moved swiftly to a drawer. When it came out there was a gun in it. "Or put a bullet in you and *then* pick up the phone."

I looked at the gun and up at him. "Why don't you put that thing away and phone Jerick. Tell him I'm here."

"You're talking to me. If you want Jerick, go to him."

I said quietly, "You didn't find the letters, I suppose."

That scored. I could see the gun drop a fraction of an inch.

"What letters?"

"The letters that might tie Jerick to Lois Dutton's death."

"You're telling me you've got some letters Jerick wants?"

"Maybe I'd better talk to him, as you suggested," I said.

His eyes were thoughtful.

I stood up. "Jerick will be glad to hear how you cooperate."

"Where are you going?"

"To see him. I'll see you later."

His voice was dry. "Mr. Jerick's in jail right now." He put the gun back in the drawer. "We're arranging for bail. Maybe you'd better wait here."

This smoothy sitting across from me was quite a change from the dungaree-and-work-shirt Joe who went out and mixed with his people.

"It's not the best place in the world to wait," I said. "I wouldn't be surprised if the law dropped in here today."

"They left a half-hour before you came," he said. He stood up. "Lemke was along. He likes me as much as he likes you."

That didn't make us buddies.

He walked to the door. "You want to wait here?"

"For a while," I said.

He opened the door, and I followed him out into the corridor, then down this to a door that led to a flight of steps going down. At the bottom they opened into a short hall, and then we went through wide doors into a sort of meeting hall. This was what he must have used for his employment agency. But there was no help in sight, and only two desks.

We went through this big room to another door, and through it into a room about nine by twelve feet.

There were wicker chairs in this room, a radio, and a library table covered with magazines. Recent ones, too. There was a small washroom.

He left and the door closed behind him. I turned on the radio, but there were no news reports at this time. The morning paper was there, and I went through it again.

ON THE society page I learned that Linda's flower club was having the semi-monthly meeting at our house, and I wondered if she'd call it off.

There was something bothering me, something the thought of flowers had prompted. But it wouldn't come.

I was leafing through a magazine when Carl Jerick entered.

He looked haggard and irritated. His thin face was sour and the dark eyes shadowed and bloodshot. Chuca stayed near the door.

"What's this talk about letters?" Jerick said.

"I asked Chuca if he'd found them."

"Chuca?" His voice was sharp. "What do you mean?"

"Why else would her house be searched? There was nothing stolen." I paused. "Who else but you would be interested in searching it?"

"You didn't say me. You said Chuca."

"He works for you, doesn't he?"

Jerick shook his head slowly. "Aren't you getting out of line, McKane? I hired

you to get the letters, not pry into my affairs."

"That was two days ago," I said. "Since then, with your help, I've got myself smack into the middle of a murder. I'm speaking for myself now. I'm protecting myself."

He was glaring at me. I'd been glared at before.

I said, "Lemke probably gave you a bad time. He'll give me a worse one if he catches me." I stood up to face him.

From near the doorway Chuca said, "Rough, isn't he? How did you get tied up with this rough guy, Carl?"

I said to Chuca, "Go some place. Go right a wrong or sign up a couple cheap laborers for life. My business isn't with you."

Chuca growled something, and Jerick looked his way. "I can handle everything," Jerick said quietly. "I'll take care of this, Luis."

I sat down again, and Chuca left. Jerick expelled his breath and sat down, too.

"You . . . said something to Chuca about letters. You know where they are?"

"Maybe. But right now I'm concerned with my own neck. I mentioned the letters because I knew they'd bring you to me. I knew they'd be a weapon for a deal."

"Deal? What kind of deal?"

"I want the person who killed Lois Dutton."

Carl Jerick shook his head weakly. "How should I know who killed her? I didn't."

"I know you're clear, personally. But the servants? They're Filipino and maybe even got their jobs through Chuca. They could have poisoned her."

Jerick shook his head again, more emphatically. "I know nothing about the murder. I . . . did put in a phone call from Rooks and have the house searched. I didn't want the letters made public."

"Chuca? One of his boys?"

"Never mind. Are you telling me you have the letters?"

I shook my head.

"You're lying to me, McKane." He lighted a cigarette. He seemed relieved. "You have them, or you wouldn't offer a deal."

"Maybe Chuca killed her," I said. "But why was Lois back there? What was she doing back there?"

"I haven't the faintest idea. McKane, you could use a friend right now, the spot you're in. Don't antagonize me."

I thought of Dr. Ray and Tommy Dye. I said, "I've got friends. What I'm looking for now is a murder."

He took a deep breath. "I hired you to get some letters. I think you have them. The murder is not my concern."

I stood up. "I've been patient. But this is enough. Let me know when you're ready to talk, and talk *business*."

I went to the door, opened it—and Luis Chuca stood there.

"Going somewhere?" he wanted to know.

I nodded. "Out. Get out of the way."

"No." He shook his head, smiling at me.

There was no gun in his hand, now, and I started to move past him. He put a hand on my chest.

Behind me, I could hear Jerick moving. I didn't look his way. My hand moved down to Chuca's wrist, and I slid to the right.

A twist of the wrist. I guess you'd call it. He went through the open doorway head first and out of control, and I heard Jerick grunt as he crashed into him. Then I was sprinting down the hall.

I heard a shout as I went out the door. I was just pulling away in my car when Luis Chuca appeared in the building's entrance.

I cut off Beretania at the next corner. I went directly back to Tommy Dye's garage. He was in the shop, cleaning some plugs in one of those sand blasters.

"Everything okay?" he wanted to know.

"Not yet." I looked at him, hating to ask for any more. But I said, "Tommy, would you go to my house for me? Would you get me something?"

"Isn't the house being watched? Wouldn't they follow me?"

"Maybe." I went to the phone and called my number. When Linda answered, I asked, "Any single girls in that flower club, honey?"

"June Currier," she said. "Sandy, what—"

"Be quiet and listen to me," I said.

"Tommy Dye will bring June to the meeting. He'll come into the house. It's very important."

"I wasn't going to have the club. Sandy—"

"Have the club. I'm safe. Say nothing to anyone."

TOMMY liked the idea. He knew June, and she was a good sport. He said, "Why don't you go up to my house and wait? It's only a block. I've got to stay here until my helper comes." He handed me a key. "You know where it is."

I knew it, all right. I'd played in the yard there when I was a kid. I walked over and went in through the back door and sat in the living room.

I turned on the radio and heard the news account, heard that the poison which had been unidentified in the early paper, though presumed to be nicotine, was nicotine.

I thought of the gang who'd gathered at this house, the Van Albrecht twins and Jerry Dickinson and Rod and Lois and . . . And then I stopped thinking.

Some of us had made a mint, and some like Tommy and I just about made ends meet. Of course, some were better business men than we were. Rod had never had a strike, though the other sugar companies had been plagued with labor trouble since the war. Rod knew how to get along with help.

Rod and Lois and Chuca and Jerick. *"I lift my lamp beside the golden door . . ."* All heart, Lois had been, and a patsy for anyone with trouble. Sure, sure, sure . . . unwanted millions . . .

Love letters—like hell!

I went out into the kitchen and fried a couple eggs after a while and made some coffee. Business trips he'd taken. Foreign markets he'd gone to investigate. Alone, always. Well, he had the money. He could afford to travel. Travel to meet Lois.

Tommy came back as I was drinking a cup of coffee. He threw the letters on the table.

"Thanks, Tommy," I said. "I'm not going to forget this."

"You can buy your gas from me," he said. "Any eggs left?"

He started to fry them as I took the

letters into the living room. They were mine as much as anybody's now. I didn't have any twinge of conscience as I opened them.

I read in one:

I want to thank you for the contribution which enabled your illustrious friend and some others to enter the country which they cherish above all others, but which because of a stupid Congress . . . Some day, when intellectual attainment is valued above mere geography of birth . . .

Immigrants, that was Jerick's racket. Beyond the quota, and Lois, the soft of heart, had thought her contributions went to enable the worthwhile foreigners to become citizens. She had no idea that Jerick wasn't honestly getting them in through influence with the immigration officials. Once she learned that they'd been smuggled in and had no legal status . . . That was why she'd kept the letters.

Chuca had a few ships. Chuca also had cheap labor to sell. They couldn't get out from under his thumb. They had no standing, once they were here. Jerick at one end, Chuca and other like him at the other ends. And suckers like Lois to pay. Her money must have been sheer gravy, because the poor devils paid, too. Plenty. The huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse . . .

I went to Tommy's phone and called the Rook place. When Rod answered I said, "I want to see you."

"Me. What—"

"I'm not clear yet," I said. "I'll park on the street behind and walk through the back yard. Your study is right off the yard, isn't it?"

A silence. "Yes. What did you want to see me about, Sandy?"

"About Lois."

A longer silence. Then, "I'll be in the study."

THERE were no cops in sight as I drove out the Diamond Head Road, and there were none on Rod's street. So I didn't go to the back; I used the front door.

To the Filipino who opened the door, I said, "Mr. Rook's expecting me," and walked right out to his study.

Rod was sitting in a huge leather chair, gazing into space. He had a drink in his

hand, but he didn't look like a man of distinction by any means. He looked as if he hadn't slept in a week.

He nodded toward a chair. "What's on your mind, Sandy?"

I sat down. "Lois. Or rather, you and Lois."

He looked at me without interest.

I said softly, "I remember how you used to sail for her, and I got to wonder-



Chuca's eyes blazed.
"Come along," he said.

ing if she came home for refuge, if you were the one she thought of as refuge?"

He stared at me.

"In some letters I've just read," I said, "you were mentioned by Jerick as being with Lois, here and there around the globe."

"If you're suggesting I killed her . . ." His eyes were blazing.

"I'm not suggesting that. I should have realized this luau wasn't Helen's idea, it was probably yours. Or maybe Jerick's. Did you get your cheap help from him?"

"Sandy," he said, "I loved her. I'll tell you that. I've always loved her."

"But you didn't divorce Helen."

"You think it's not possible to love two women? You think I wanted to hurt either of them? You think it's been easy for me the past seven years? Jerick did some things for me, things I'm ashamed to admit now. Lois introduced him to me. If I'd known the mess she was going to get into because of him, I'd have . . ." He shook his head. "She came here, hoping I'd help her against him; she had no one else to turn to."

"And because she loved you."

"That's right. And now they've let that damned Jerick go. Who else could have killed her?"

"Jerick didn't," I said. "I know that."

"One of his stooges then. What difference does it make?"

"You've told all this to the police?"

"Of course not. Helen will *never* know about Lois."

From the doorway a voice said, "Won't I?"

It was Helen Rook, pale as death and as motionless.

Rod rose halfway to his feet. "Helen, I thought you'd gone to the flower club at Linda's."

"Did you?"

"Of course. Why, you told me at lunch . . ."

Her smile was mechanical. "Don't worry, Rod. I didn't overhear anything I haven't known for days. Mr. Jerick told me all you've told Sandy. And more. He even had some pictures . . ." Her voice broke.

He was staring at her now as if she were some kind of monster.

"Helen," I said quietly, "look at me."

She turned her head woodenly to stare at me.

"The roses," I said. "That's what I should have thought of. You were the rose expert in the flower club. You would know about aphids—and nicotine. Nicotine is the best spray for aphids, isn't it?"

Her face was a mask.

"You were worried about Lois," I said, "and you wanted me along when she was found. I never realized that you led me directly to her. You couldn't stand any delay in her being found; you wanted to get it over with."

Her smile wasn't human. "Clever, Sandy. I'm not sorry about it, either. I should be, shouldn't I? If I'm civilized, I should—"

She started to fall, and I scrambled up to catch her. Rod was paralyzed, just staring at her. Both of his loves were destroyed now.

I carried her to the couch and went out to the phone in the front hall.

I was reaching for it when I saw Luis Chuca standing in the doorway. He had

(Continued on page 130)

(Continued from page 76)

huge and threatening. He felt the upward tug on his lines, and the rope sling pressed sharply against his legs as the worried men on deck heaved desperately to take him out of danger.

He had no control over his own movements, and the men on the tug were working blind except for his directions. If he failed to clear that boulder, he'd be smashed against it like a yo-yo swung on a string. His face plate would be bashed in, his lines and the air hose parted. He would die in a matter of seconds.

Lew Guyon knew all these things, yet all he said was, "Up!" again in that urgent tone. He felt his lines jerk more rapidly. His feet cleared the boulder by inches.

"Big rock," he said into the mouthpiece. "Lower me away." He went coasting down toward the bottom again as the men paid out on his lines. Then: "Hold it there," he said.

Riding about ten feet off the bottom, he dared not go any lower. A field of boulders stretched before him as far as he could see.

And it was between two of these that he found the thing he sought. The body of Gilbert Cipelli.

"On deck," Lew said. "Can you hold her where she is?"

"We'll try, sir," came Callao's voice.

The body appeared to be standing upright. It moved in the gentle current as if Cipelli were walking over the bottom. But as Lew worked his way closer, he saw why the man wouldn't walk away. Cipelli, if this were Cipelli, was wearing a harness of galvanized wire, well rigged and seaman-like. Bound securely at his feet was a fifty-pound mushroom anchor.

Lew went over the body carefully, disliking every moment of the grisly work. He found the wounds on the chest when he tore the shirt away.

Callao Johnson's voice came down from above: "You have find him yet, sir?"

Lew hesitated. Then: "Don't think so," he said. "Thought I had, for a minute. Take in the slack and haul me up." There'd be time enough to break the news after he'd thought things through. Cipelli wasn't going anywhere. Not with the rig he was wearing. Cipelli would be there for

years. Maybe forever, for all Lew knew.

"Coming up," said Callao Johnson.

The men on deck laid back on the lines. Lew Guyon rose toward the surface. . . .

THE FIRST THING he saw when he entered Sammy Sultan's room was the knife in Sammy's hand. It was an oyster knife, a sturdy little implement designed to coax the tough-fibered bivalve out of its protecting shell. Moreover, the knife was clean and shining. Anyone, that is anyone except Lew Guyon, would have thought the knife was new. Sammy had been standing there, apparently balancing the knife in his hand, looking at it thoughtfully. When Lew came in, he laid it gently on the top of the desk.

Lew said, "What are you saving it for? You too cheap to throw the damned thing away?"

"They won't sink," Sammy told him. "Wooden handle would keep one bobbing right there on the surface."

"Cipelli won't bob," Lew said casually. "I was out to see him in the cove just now."

Sammy Sultan's eyebrows moved upward. "Yes?" he said. "How does he look?"

"Comfortable," Lew said. "He's spotted between a couple of boulders. They'll never get him by dragging for him. A grapnel hook would just go bouncing off the tops of those rocks. I found him by riding under the boat, but I doubt if they've got any boys around here who would work a search job that way."

He was talking, trying to convince Sammy—and himself—that their friendship was still the same. It wasn't, of course, and it would never be, not any more. Because Sammy had lied to him. Lew said, and his voice was harsh, "Why the song and dance? Why didn't you tell me you knocked the jerk off? You think I'd turn you in?"

"You don't understand," Sammy said mournfully. "It is not a simple thing, Lew."

"Then tell me about it. I'm a bright boy, Sammy. I'll understand what you say."

"I cannot," Sammy shook his head. "It is not mine to tell." He looked at the knife on the desk, then back at Lew. "When

ANCHOR THE STIFF!

you brought Cipelli in, what did Pryor say?"

"I didn't bring him. Nobody knows he's out there but you and me." Lew's voice was tired. All the good years they'd had together were gone. Now they were playing it cagey, eying each other suspiciously, filled with doubt and mistrust.

"Louie, it is all right!" Sammy said. He smiled a delighted smile. "We leave the body there, get rid of the knife. Hartlett will be okay!"

"Hartlett?" Lew repeated. "Hartlett did it?"

"Him," said Sammy. "I guess," he added. "Today when I went into his galley, I found three of these knives in a rack. Two of them used and dark colored. This one bright and shiny. A guy like him, he wouldn't know about blood stains. He'd think he could scrub the knife off." He winked at Lew. "Lew," he said, "a man should stick to his trade."

Remembering Hartlett's daughter in the sunlight on the pier, Lew said, "Then it would be Cipelli who kicked the Hartlett girl around?"

"Who else?" said Sammy. "It would take a thing like that to make Hartlett kill. He is not like you or me. . ." He broke off, for Lew was crossing the room, reaching for the phone.

Lew said, "What's Pryor's number?"

Sammy Sultan moved quickly and clamped one hand on the phone. "You can't do that, Lew. Cipelli had it coming. You can't turn Hartlett in."

"He murdered a man." Lew made his voice stern. "So we know he has to pay. Only question is—how much? Now, down there on his boat today I noticed a box of crabs on deck. Some were under the legal size. I figure we'll tell the fish-and-game boys. They'll fine him a hundred or two. . ." He let his voice trail off and looked at Sammy questioningly.

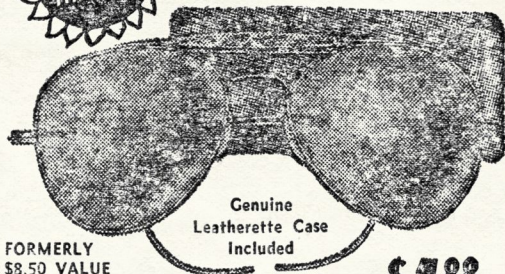
Sammy took his hand from the phone. "Boy," he said, "you had me worried. I thought—"

"Maybe," Lew said thoughtfully, "Cipelli wasn't worth a hundred. But Hartlett's no better than any one else—and everything's high these days." He shrugged and picked up the phone.



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DETECTIVE TALES

(Continued from page 36)

peevd about it. That was a choice perchin' place. But nary a bird lit there the next day. That was an angle you city folks never heard of."

She began to cry, tearfully, noisily.

Cyrus Harper said, "You gimme an idea with your fancy lie. Maybe them guards left widows an' orphans without a cent. I aim to find out. I got an awful lot of reward money comin'. I'd admire to play Santa Claus." He sighed. "A skinflint Santa Claus. One of them paradoxes, like in that opry."

There was a lot of noise and confusion at the gate as the fire truck arrived. Then wild-eyed men poured into the cottage, front and rear, and an efficient state trooper handcuffed the blonde woman.

"I ain't slept well in two weeks," avowed the old man fretfully. "I sit up in bed sweatin' every time them dratted guinea hens chattered. I ain't goin' to talk till I make a phone call."

No one protested as he surrendered the automatic to the trooper and marched into the living room. The number was written



on the cover of the phone book. He picked up the handset.

"Mildred?"

"Yes," said the operator.

"This here number is a special one the insurance company gimme. It's New York. There'll be somebody there at all hours." He read off the number.

"I'll call back," Mildred promised.

"Okay," said Cyrus Harper wearily. He was about to hang up when his eyes widened in alarm. Voice frantic, he cried, "Mildred! Mildred!"

"Yes?"

The old man scowled fiercely. "Reverse them charges!" he growled. "Reverse them charges or I don't talk."

KILLER'S KISS

(Continued from page 72)

They were locked fiercely together when the knock came on the door, accompanied by Sweeney's thin voice, "It's me."

Leah panted, "See?"

Eddie strode to the door. Sweeney catapulted into the room, and behind him came Quinn, Jerry, and what, for the moment, looked like all the cops in the world.

Crying, "Susie!" Jerry ran to the bed. She held him tightly, half crying, half sobbing. The titanic struggle at the other side of the room might have been in another state, for all they cared.

THREE HOURS after Eddie had been carried out unconscious, Susan, Quinn and Jerry were sitting in the same booth in Luigi's.

"It seems fitting," Susan explained.

"I told you the police need only one lead," Quinn said to Jerry. Then to Susan. "You gotta give Jerry credit. He came up with the lead. He knew you didn't have any pills, and he knew the prescription could be filled only at Zabriski's Pharmacy—so that's where we camped. We knew you'd be smart enough to send some one of them there for a renewal of the prescription, if you could manage it."

"I was very smart," said Susan solemnly. "I figured it out hours in advance. It was kind of an accident, too."

"We grabbed Sweeney the minute he handed his bottle to Zabriski," Jerry said. "The lieutenant got the address out of him in nothing flat."

"That's police training," Quinn said, grinning. "And I was just beginning when he sang. I knew six other ways to twist his arm. And did he tell all! He implicated Eddie Webb in a dozen robberies and killings that we hadn't even heard of. I'll get you a medal for this, Susie."

"The Purple Heart," said Susan. "Shh! The entertainment's beginning."

The house lights went out, and a spotlight came down on a shaggy Airedale on the dogstand. The music started and the dog raised its muzzle.


It didn't sound like *Chloë* at all. It just sounded like an Airedale.



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SEND ME YOUR KILLERS:

(Continued from page 125)

his hand in his pocket and there wasn't a
doubt in my mind that he'd kill me where
I stood if the mood possessed him.

"Come along," he said.

"I've got to call a doctor."

His eyes burned at me and his voice was
ugly. "Come now, damn you."

I came. From the dimness of the hall
to the shadows of the porch and down the
steps into the sunlight. He walked close
to me, and I counted the steps going
down—one, two, three, wondering how
many steps were left to me on this earth.

His car was there at the curb, and there
was a young Filipino behind the wheel.
The rear door was open, and the gun
was prodding me on.

Then I heard the squeal of brakes, and
a department car slammed in at the curb.
And who should dash out of the door on
the curb side but Detective Lemke, gun in
hand.

For the first time in my life I could
honestly say, "Lemke, I'm sure glad to
see you."

THE TOM COLLINS was just right
and our porch was cool and Linda had
never looked lovelier in a halter and
shorts.

"I can't believe it," she said, "not of
Helen. Luring poor Lois back there on
the pretext of drinking alone to a 'better
understanding' and then..." She shook
her head. "Oh, Sandy—"

"You never know," I said. "It's a
good thing I sent Tommy to the immi-
gration office with those letters before I
went to the Rooks. That made my story
stronger. Dan even half apologized to
me."

"Dan Arliss—*pouf*," she said. "I hate
him."

"You should feel sorry for him, honey,"
I said, considering my half-empty glass.

"Sorry? And why should I feel sorry
for him?"

"He's married, too," I said.

"Why, Saunders McKane," Linda
said, "of all the nasty, sarcastic, incon-
siderate—"

I felt better after that. I knew I was
home.

THE END

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