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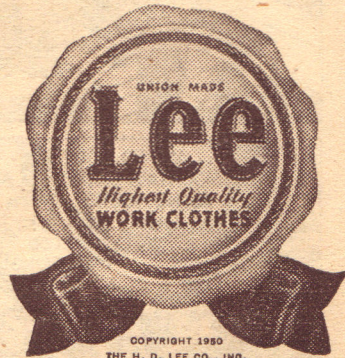
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VOL. FORTY-FIVE

MAY, 1950

NUMBER TWO

Four Thrilling Murder Novellettes

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—whispered Carl Branneck . . . and that was the last of the only witness who could testify against him. . . .
2. **SMITH VS. THE SCANDAL SYNDICATE**.....*Donn Mullally* 50
—made the kind of fight only poor Dave Smith's happy heirs would enjoy. . . .
3. **NOW YOU SEE ME**.....*Lawrence Lariar* 86
—and now—hiding behind that lethal blonde—you don't!
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—all ready to turn a nice, gentlemanly blackmail touch—into sudden death!

Seven Smashing Detective Short Stories

5. **LADY IN RED**.....*Alan Ritner Anderson* 28
—was dressed to kill!
6. **LONESOME ROAD**.....*Dan Gordon* 36
—is no place for a crooked cop to walk. . . .
7. **MANHUNT!**.....*Talmage Powell* 44
—put Sam Wilson only a dead man's leap ahead of those snarling bloodhounds!
8. **NIGHT WATCH**.....*Scott O'Hara* 68
—left FBI Agent Raymes with too much woman—and too little time!
9. **BY THE SKIN OF HIS TEETH**.....*Richard Brister* 74
—Meacham beat the Grim Reaper's rap—and wrote his friend's death notice. . . .
10. **THE LONG, RED NIGHT**.....*John Lane* 79
—taught Hunt a grim lesson in terror. . . .
11. **KILLER UNLEASHED**.....*Stuart Friedman* 101
—was Jack Courtney—the meekest guy in town!

Four Special Crime Features

12. **THE CRIME CLINIC**.....*A Department* 6
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The Crime Clinic

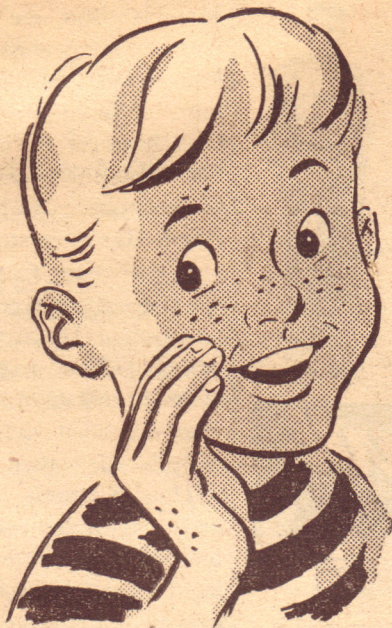
IN THE PAST, this department has occasionally amused itself—and we hope our readers—by taking a crack at Sherlock Holmes and his methods of detection. Now, however, comes a letter from Mr. George Harrison of New York City, who tells us that he is not amused. In fact, Mr. Harrison considers the whole thing not only unsporting, but downright despicable. But we'll let Mr. Harrison speak for himself. He seems to do all right in that department.

I admit that I read DETECTIVE TALES every month, but I don't want you to get the idea from that that I enjoy it. I read it only because present-day "detective" fiction has sunk to such a lamentably low estate that, hard as it is to believe, DT is the best of its sorry contemporaries, and my reading taste seems to be conditioned to crime stories. (The term "detective" as applied to current magazine fiction is a sad misnomer). It is when you poke fun at Sherlock Holmes that you exceed the limit of my patience. Not only is it unsportsmanlike to attack those who can not reply, in this case it resembles nothing so much as a cur yapping at the heels of his superiors. Believe me, gentlemen, if you could find one author—just one—who had half the ability of Conan Doyle, and could tell a story even one quarter as well, I wouldn't say a word. Likely I'd be stricken dumb from pleasurable surprise. But when I consider the array of entirely obvious, even puerile, stories you offer each month, it makes me ill to see, in your pages, even the mention of Holmes' revered name. Enough is enough. Right?

Right. Hereafter this department promises to walk softly when it comes to S—— H——. After all, it is Sir Arthur Conan Doyle who is probably responsible for the present-day popularity of the detective story, and God forbid that

(Continued on page 8)

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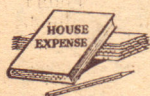


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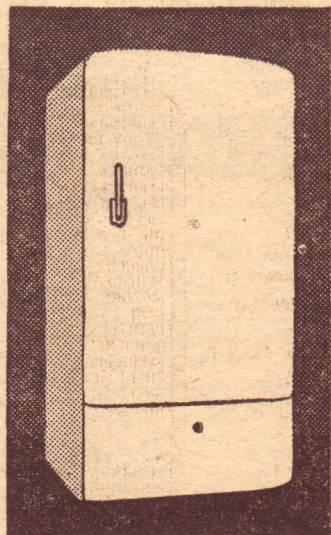


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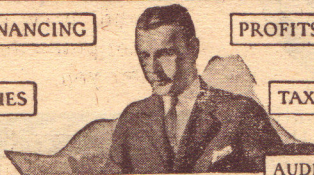
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DETECTIVE TALES

(Continued from page 6)

those of us who earn our bread from detective stories should bite the hand that feeds us. (Aside to boss: This is food?)

We have to admit, too, that Doyle and his boy Holmes had something. Like you, Mr. Harrison, we've spent many happy hours reading of the adventures of Sherlock Holmes, and if we comment on them now, it is only because it seems to us that, however skillful and enjoyable, the Holmes-type yarn is dated, and a new type of detective fiction has taken its place: the crime-adventure story.

If you want to find out what that is, we suggest your continued purchase and persusal of DETECTIVE TALES for a few months. You may not get your brain twisted into knots trying to figure out who did what to whom. You may not learn a thing about what kind of an ash a Havana stogie leaves. You may not have to unlimber your slide rule even once, or wear your brain cells to the bone trying to untangle a lethal puzzle. But we guarantee that you'll get, from each issue of good old DT, an evening of solid, suspense-packed reading pleasure. For right from the crack of the first gun in the first yarn, DT is loaded with excitement, loaded with thrills, loaded with the kind of madcap murder and mayhem that just won't let you put 'er down until you've hit Page 130.

Just to show you what we mean, here's a partial list of authors whose stories are on the docket for next month. Novelettes by William Campbell Gault and William Holder. Short stories by Dan Gordon, Richard Brister, Fredric Brown, Tal-mage Powell and many others. And, of course, there'll be those gruesome true-some illustrated features, "You Can't Get Away With Murder!" and "Oddities in Crime." How about it, Harrison—forgive us now? Okay. See you April 26th.

—The Editor.

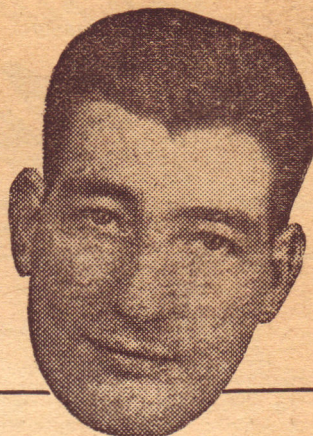
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YOU CAN'T GET AWAY WITH MURDER!



By NELSON and GEER

KILL, KILL AGAIN!

"If at first you don't succeed—try, try again!" is a good, workable motto, but not for murder. However, Attorney Alfred Payne of Amarillo, Texas, had to learn that the hard way. Payne had a wife, Exa; he also had amorous ambitions elsewhere, and murder seemed the obvious solution.

First the lawyer fed his wife a preliminary dose of arsenic. But it made her so sick he didn't dare try another. Instead of realizing he wasn't fated to be a successful murderer, he tried a different tack. Encouraging Exa to swim far out beyond her depth, he abandoned her. But somehow she managed to flounder to shore.

Undiscouraged, Payne wrote himself threatening letters—which he dutifully turned over to police to absolve himself of what was to follow—and rigged up a shotgun booby-trap in a closet. Exa, fortunately, bent over as



she opened the door and the blast missed her head by inches.

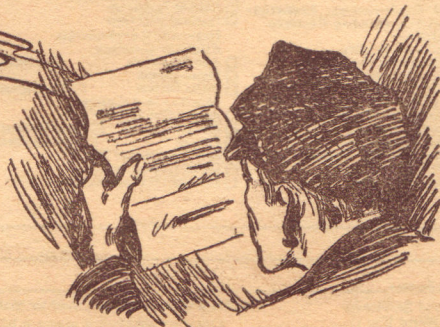
Figuring this failure as a blessing in disguise, the attorney ingeniously planted a dynamite bomb in his car. On June 27, 1930, Mrs. Payne started downtown, the infernal device went off and she ended, instead, in eternity. After a masterly display of grief, Payne sat back smugly while outraged police hunted for the "disgruntled clients" who had taken this horrible revenge. As added irony, Payne offered a \$10,000 reward.

In their search, police went through Payne's correspondence, through even his secretaries'

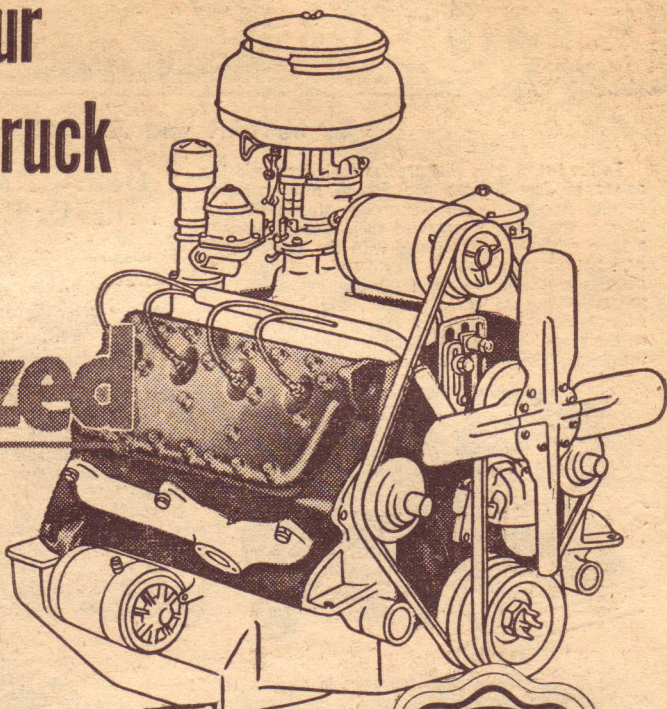


old notebooks. There, among the pothooks and curlicues of a business letter, they found an unexpected clue—a line of endearment, heavily crossed out—which led to a former secretary of whom the lawyer was enamoured, and gave the police the real motive.

Confronted with this, the persistent killer confessed. But he never went to trial. Somehow he managed to smuggle nitroglycerine into his cell and blow himself to bits—which he probably should have done in the very beginning!



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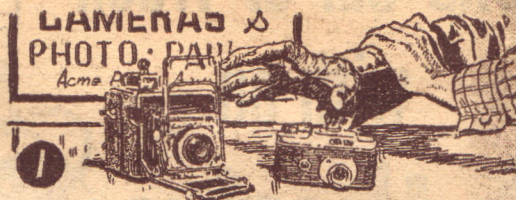


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ODDITIES IN CRIME

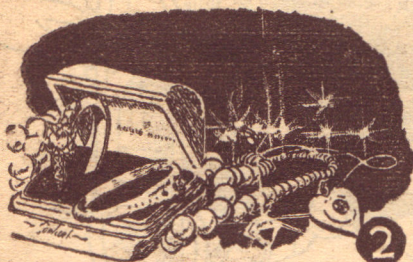
By MAYAN and JAKOBSSON

To the list of guys who pressed their luck, add the names of Jose Servera and Joseph Alvarez, shoplifters. Accused by an overanxious store detective, Servera and Alvarez screamed their innocence, while a third confederate scrambled with the loot. They'd have gotten away clean if they'd been willing to let matters rest, for the store management apologized profusely—but so carried away were Servera and Alvarez that they slapped a fifty-grand damage suit on the store. The ensuing legal proceedings betrayed them—and the whole gang went to jail!



Every era spawns its own brand of crook. One by-product of the depressed early Thirties was Willie Hahn, the burglar who took a little and left a little. Willie, who fancied Park Avenue, specialized in heirloom jewels, and though he would take your mother's wedding ring, he would eschew your grandmother's garnets.

It would be pleasant to report that Willie had a sentimental streak, but untrue. Willie's idea was simply that his victims would blame themselves for the loss of a few pieces, or else suspect a servant. So well did Willie's psychology work that he had lifted \$4,000,000 worth of loot before police gave him a forced vacation.



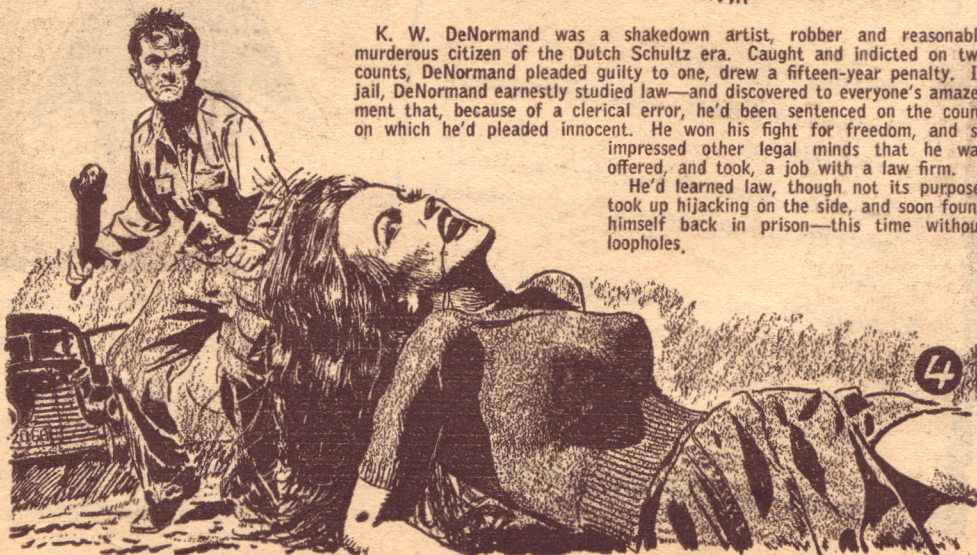
One of the largest bank robberies in modern annals occurred when two men successfully made away with \$175,000 from the Farmers' State Bank of Chenoa, Ill. The job bore all the earmarks of a caper by Harry Funk, who, however, at the time was supposedly serving out a sentence at the Jefferson City Jail. A check-up brought out, though, that while in jail, Funk had sustained a crippling back injury and had been "borrowed" as a guinea pig by a local doctor. The doctor moved away, but his cure worked—and his successor had simply discharged the robber.

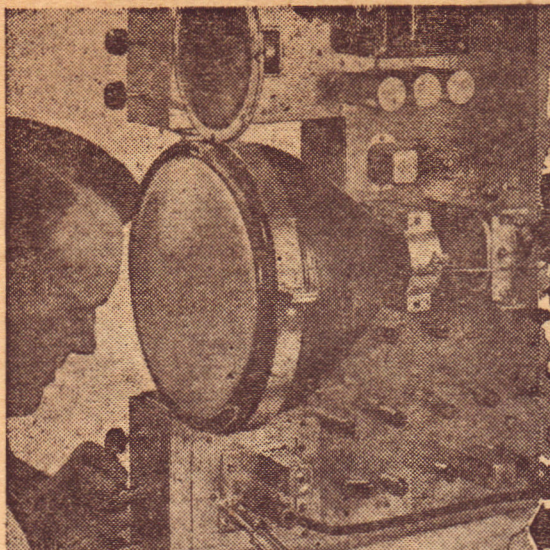
Nobody ever recovered Funk's loot. Dying in jail, he insisted to the last he was "gonna take it" with him!



K. W. DeNormand was a shakedown artist, robber and reasonably murderous citizen of the Dutch Schultz era. Caught and indicted on two counts, DeNormand pleaded guilty to one, drew a fifteen-year penalty. In jail, DeNormand earnestly studied law—and discovered to everyone's amazement that, because of a clerical error, he'd been sentenced on the count on which he'd pleaded innocent. He won his fight for freedom, and so impressed other legal minds that he was offered, and took, a job with a law firm.

He'd learned law, though not its purpose, took up hijacking on the side, and soon found himself back in prison—this time without loopholes.





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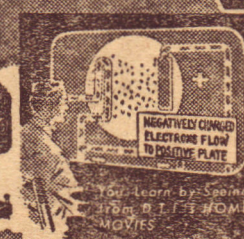
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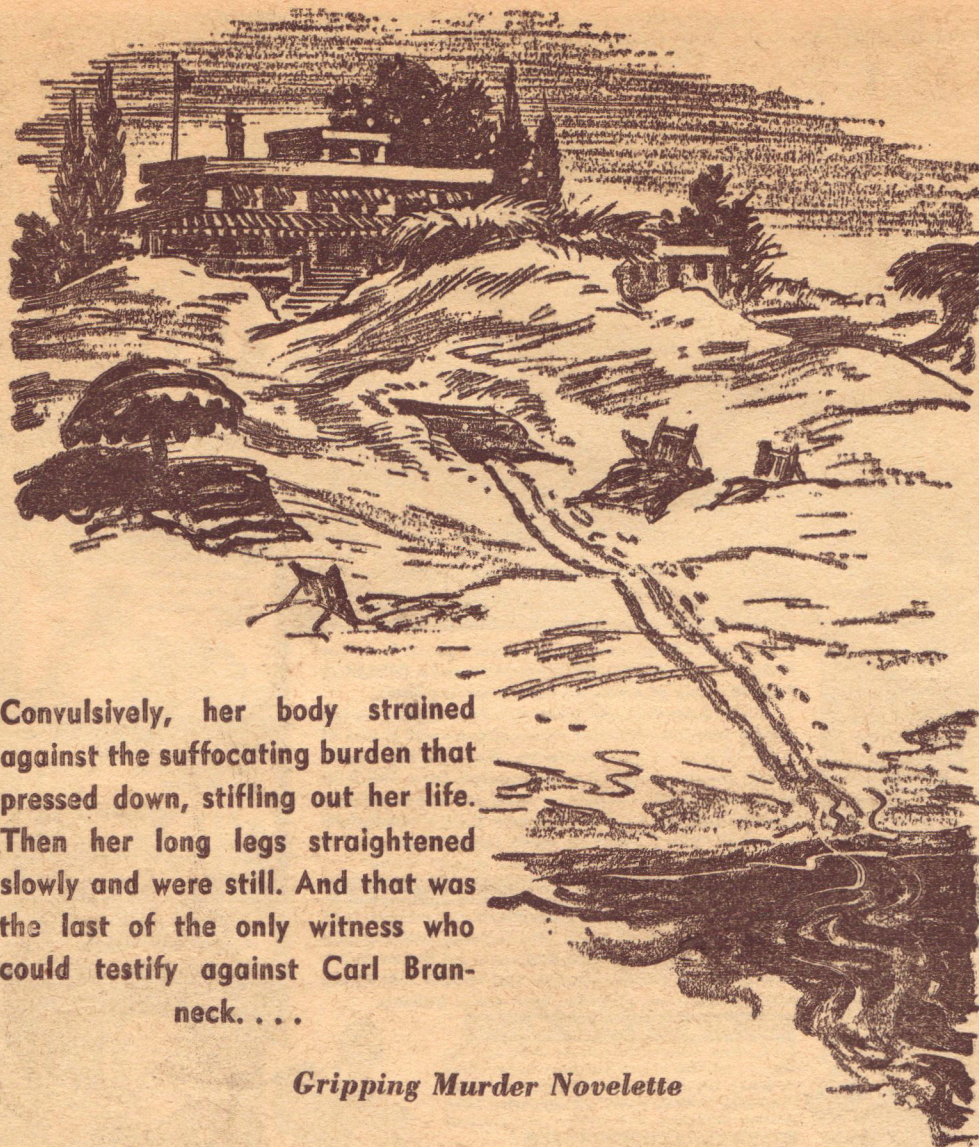
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Convulsively, her body strained against the suffocating burden that pressed down, stifling out her life. Then her long legs straightened slowly and were still. And that was the last of the only witness who could testify against Carl Bran-neck. . . .

Gripping Murder Novelette

CHAPTER ONE

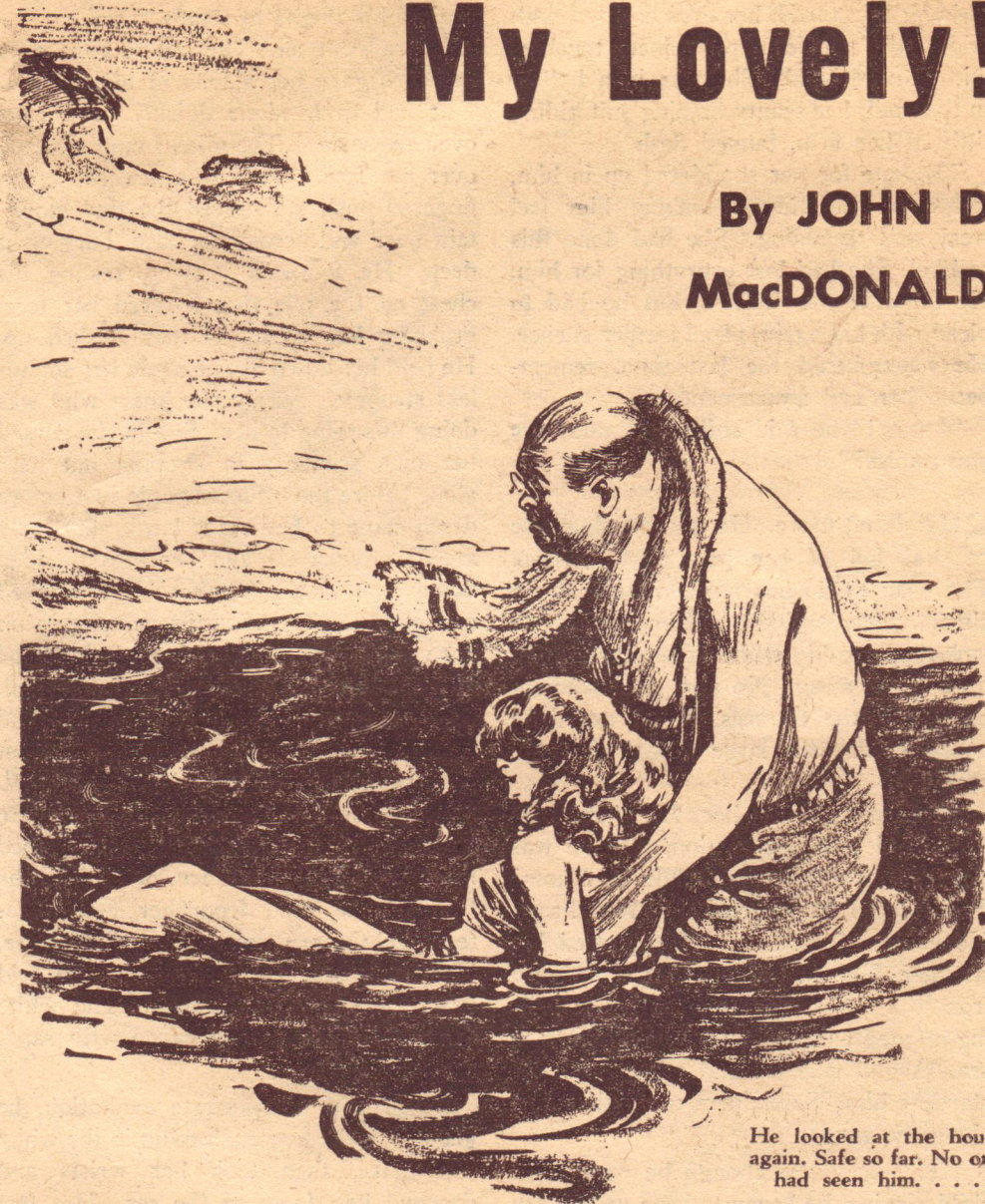
The Killing Hour

HE LOOKED like a fat child as he walked gingerly down the beach. He winced, sat down, picked a wicked little sand burr from the pink pad of his foot. For a time he sat there, pouting and petulant, his fat tummy and thick shoulders an angry pink from the mid-afternoon Florida sun. A porpoise, chasing sand sharks, made a lazy arc a hundred yards out. The gulf was

oily and torpid. The fat man wore spectacular swimming trunks. He was semi-bald, with rimless glasses pinched into the bridge of his soft nose. He sat and looked dully at the small waves, tasting again the sense of utter defeat that had been with him these past two days on Grouper Island. Defeat. Everything gone. Not much more time left. How would it be to wade out and start swimming? Swim

Breathe No More, My Lovely!

By JOHN D.
MacDONALD



He looked at the house again. Safe so far. No one had seen him. . . .

until there was nothing but exhaustion, strangling and death.

He shivered in the sun's heat. No.

Slowly he stood up. Sweat trickled down through the grey mat of hair on

his chest. He walked back toward the house of his odd host, toward the gleaming-white terraced fortress of the man called Park Falkner.

Twenty feet farther along he angled up

across the dry sand. He saw here, bronze, oiled and gleaming in the sun. She lay on a blanket, her hair wrapped, turban fashion, in a towel, her eyes covered with odd little plastic cups joined together with a nose band. She was in a hollow in the sand, her scanty bathing suit hiding little of her firm, tanned flesh.

The hate for her shuddered up in him, tightening his throat, making him feel weak and trembling. She had done this to him. She had lost everything for him. He knew it was useless, but he had to plead with her again, plead for her silence. He remembered the last time, remembered her evil amusement.

"Laura!" he said softly. "Laura, are you awake?"

SHE didn't move. He saw the slow rise and fall of her breathing. Asleep. The wish to do her harm came with an almost frightening suddenness. He looked at the big white house three hundred yards away. No sign of movement on any of the terraces. They would be napping after the large lunch, after the cocktails.

He moved close to her. He knew, suddenly and with satisfaction, that he was going to try to kill Laura Hale. But how? There could be no marks on her throat. No bruise of violence. He squatted beside her. Her underlip sagged a bit away from the even, white teeth. Her breathing merged with the husky whisper of the sea. A gull wheeled and called hoarsely, startling him. Sandpipers ran and pecked along the sand.

Methodically, as though he were a fat child playing, he began to heap up the dry white sand, removing the shell fragments. He piled it on the edge of the blanket, near her head. Sweat ran from him as he worked. The conical pile grew higher and higher. The widening base of it moved closer to her head. He stopped when it was over two feet high and again he

watched the white house. So far he had done nothing. He forced himself to breathe slowly. He held his wet hands hard against his thighs to steady them.

Laura slept on. The plastic cups over her eyes gave her a look of blindness.

It had to be done quickly. He went over every step. The pile of sand towered over her face. With an awkward, splay-fingered push, he shoved the tiny mountain over and across her face, burying it deep. He followed it over, resting his chest on the pile that covered her face, grabbing her wrists as they flashed up. He held her down as she made her soundless struggle. Surely she knew who was doing this thing to her. Surely she cursed her own stupidity in sleeping out here alone before the ultimate panic just before death came to her. Her hard, slim body arched convulsively and her hips thudded down against the blanket. She writhed and once nearly broke his damp grip on her wrist. Then her long legs straightened out slowly, moved aimlessly and were still. He lay there, pressed against the sand that covered her head, feeling an almost sensual excitement. He released her hand. The arm flopped down as though it were boneless. He squatted back and watched her for a moment. Then, with care, he brushed the sand from her face. Grotesquely, the eye cups were still in place. The sand stuck to the lotion she had used. She did not breathe. The white teeth were packed and caked with sand, the nostrils filled.

Filled with a desperate exaltation, he glanced at the house, sleeping in the white sun glare, then took her wrists and dragged her down to the sea. Her feet made two grooves in the wet sand. He dragged her through the surf and into the stiller water. Her weight in the water was as nothing. He yanked the towel from her head and her long black hair floated out. He tied the towel around his neck. The sand was washed from her

lead face. It was unmarked. He worked her out into deeper water, got behind her and wrapped his thick arms around her, contracting her lungs and then letting them expand, contracting them again. They would fill with sea water. There would be sand in her lungs also. But that would be a normal thing for one who had died in the sea. If they found her.

He floated and looked at the house again. Safe so far. He wound his hand in her black hair and with a determined side stroke took her on out, pausing to rest from time to time. When he thought he was far enough out, he stopped. He let her go and she seemed to sink, but the process was so slow that he lost patience. Her face was a few inches below the surface and her eyes, half open, seemed to watch him. He thrust her down, got his feet against her body and pushed her further. He was gasping with weariness and the beach suddenly seemed to be an alarming distance away. As he tried to float a wave broke in his face. He coughed and avoided panic. When rested, he began to work his way back to the beach. He scuffed out the marks of her dragging feet, walked up to the blanket. The eye cups lay there. He spread the towel out to dry, picked up the eye cups and then the blanket, to shake it. He shook it once and then it slipped from his fingers. Her bathing cap had been under the blanket. Why hadn't he thought of that? He trembled. He picked up the blanket again, shook it, put the eye cups on it next to the bottle of sun lotion.

With the cap in his hand, balled tightly, he walked back to the sea. He swam out but he could not be sure of the place. When he knew that he could not find her, he left the cap in the sea and swam slowly back.

He walked to the showers behind the house and stood under the cold water for a long time. He went up to his room, meeting no one. He stripped, laid a towel

across himself and stared up at the high ceiling.

He cried for a little while and did not know why.

There was a feeling of having lost his identity. As though the act of murder had made him into another person. The old fear was gone and now there was a new fear. "I am Carl Branneck," he whispered. "Now they can't do anything to me. They can't do anything. Anything. Anything."

He repeated the one word like an incantation until he fell asleep.

PARK FALKNER was awakened from his nap by the sound of low voices, of a woman's laugh. He stretched like a big lean cat and came silently to his feet. He was tall and hard and fit, a man in his mid-thirties, his naked body marked with a half-dozen violent scars. He was sundarkened to a mahogany shade. A tropical disease had taken, forever, hair, eyebrows and lashes, but the bald, well-shaped head seemed to accentuate the youthfulness of his face. The lack of eyebrows and lashes gave his face an expressionless look, but there was rapacity in the strong beaked nose, both humor and cruelty in the set of the mouth. He stepped into the faded tubular Singhalese sarong, pulled it up and knotted it at his waist with a practised motion. Except for the monastic simplicity of his bed, the room was planned for a Sybarite: two massive, built-in couches with pillows and handy book shelves; a fireplace of grey stone that reached up to the black-beamed ceiling; a built-in record-player and record library that took up half of one wall, complete with panel control to the amplifiers located all over the house and grounds; an adjoining bath with a special shower stall, large enough for a platoon. The four paintings, in lighted niches, had been done on the property by guest artists. Stimulated by a certain freedom that existed

on Falkner's Grouper Island, they were pictures that the rather prominent artists would prefer not to show publicly.

One whole wall of the bedroom was of glass, looking out over a small private terrace and over the sea. Park Falkner padded out across his terrace and looked down to the next one below. It extended farther out than did his own.

The conversation below had ceased. The two wheeled chaise longues were side by side. The little waitress from Winter Haven, Pamela, lay glassy and stunned by the heat of the sun, her lips swollen. Carlos Berreda, his brown and perfect body burnished by the sun, insistently stroked her wrist and the back of her hand. He leaned closer and closer to her lips. Park Falkner went quickly back into his bedroom and returned with the silver-and-mahogany thermos jug. He lifted the cap and upended it over the two below. Slivers of ice sparkled out with the water.

Carlos gave a hoarse and angry shout and Pamela screamed. Park held the empty jug and smiled down at them. They were both standing, their faces upturned. Pamela was pink with embarrassment.

"Have you forgotten?" Park said in Spanish. "Tomorrow in Monterrey you will meet two friends, Carlos. Friends that weigh five hundred kilos apiece and have long horns. This is no time for indoor sports."

The angry look left Carlos' face and he gave Park a shamefaced grin. "*Muy correcto, jefe*. But the little one is so . . . is so . . ."

"She's all of eighteen, Señor Wolf."

"What're you saying about me?" Pamela demanded.

"That you're a sweet child and we want you to come and watch the practice."

They went down to the patio behind the house. Carlos' sword handler brought the capes, laid them out on a long table, and, with weary tread, went over to the

corner and came back trundling the practice device, the bull's head and horns mounted at the proper height on a two-wheeled carriage propelled by two long handles.

Carlos grinned at Pamela. "Watch thees, *muñequita*." He snapped the big cape, took his stance, made a slow and perfect and lazy veronica as the horns rolled by. The sweating assistant wheeled the horns and came back from the other direction. Carlos performed a classic Gaonera. Pamela sat on the table by the capes and swung her legs.

She frowned. "But it isn't like having a real bull, is it?" she said.

Park laughed and Carlos flashed the girl a look of hot anger. "Not exactly, *niña*." The sword handler guffawed.

After Carlos went through his repertoire with the big cape, Park Falkner took the muleta and sword and, under Carlos' critical eye, performed a series of natural passes, topping them off with Manoletinas to the right and to the left.

"How was it?" Park asked.

Carlos grinned. "The sword hand on the natural passes. Eet ees not quite *correcto*, señor, but eet ees good. You could have been a torero had you started when young."

"Let me try!" Pamela said.

Park moved over into the shade. Carlos had to reach around her to show her the correct positions of the hands on the cape. Three more of the house guests came out to the patio. Taffy Angus, the hard-voiced, silver-haired ex-model, over forty but still exceedingly lovely. Johnny Loomis, the loud, burly, red-faced sports reporter from Chicago, ex-All American, current alcoholic. Steve Townsend, the small, wry, pale man who had arrived in response to Park Falkner's enigmatic wire.

Park pushed a handy button and a few moments later Mick Rogers, wearing his look of chronic disgust on his battered

face, appeared in the opposite doorway, which opened into the kitchen. He winked at Park, disappeared, returned almost immediately pushing a pale blue bar decorated with coral-colored elephants in various poses of abandon. The glasses clinked as he rolled it over into the shade in the opposite corner.

The others moved over toward the bar in response to Mick's nasal chant: "Step right up and get it. Give yourself a package, folks. The cocktail hour has been on for five minutes."

CHAPTER TWO

The Cocktail Hour

TAFFY stayed next to Park. "What is it this time?" she asked in a low voice.

He clicked open her purse and took out her cigarettes and lighter. "What do you think it is?"

"Damn you, Park! One of these times you're going to go too far. Why can't you just relax and enjoy it?"

"Baby mine, I'd go mad in a month. Don't ask me to give up my hobby."

"Twisting people's lives around is a hell of a hobby, if you ask me. I don't know what you're doing this time, but it has something to do with that horrid puffy little man named Branneck and that unwholesome Laura Hale and that Steve Townsend."

"How sensitive you are to situations, Taffy!" Park said mockingly.

"Sensitive? I saw Branneck when he got his first look at Laura Hale five minutes after he arrived. He changed from a smug little fat man into a nervous wreck. And she looked as though she had just found a million dollars. Park, I'm just not going to come here to this private island of yours any more."

"You'll keep coming, Taffy, every time I ask you. You have a woman's curiosity.

And deep down in that rugged old heart of yours, you have a hunch that I'm doing right."

"Are you, Park?"

He shrugged. "Who can tell? I'll be serious for a second or two. Don't be too shocked, lambie. My esteemed ancestors had the golden touch. Even if there were any point in making more money, it would bore me. The company of my Big Rich friends and relatives bores the hell out of me. So I have some clever young men who dig around in disorderly pasts. When they come up barking, carrying a bone, I just mix some human ingredients together and see what happens. A tossed salad of emotions, call it."

"Or dirty laundry."

"Don't scoff. I just make like fate and certain people get what my grandmother called their comeupance."

"It always makes me feel ill, Park."

"And—admit it—fascinated, Taffy."

She sighed. "All right. You win. Fascinated. Like looking at an open wound. But some day one of your salad ingredients is going to kill you."

"One day a toro may kill Carlos. The profession gives his life a certain spice. And I'm too old to take up bullfighting."

She gave him a flat, long, brown-eyed stare. "I wouldn't want you dead, Park."

"After this shindig is over, Taffy, can you stay here for a few days when the others have left?"

"Have I ever said no?" She grinned. "Goodness! I blushed. I'd better rush right up and put that in my diary. Say, are you flying Carlos to Mexico in the morning?"

"I can't leave now, the way things are shaping up. I'll have Lew earn his keep by flying Carlos and his man over."

"And the little girl too?"

"No. I don't throw canaries to cats, my love. This evening I'm having Mick drive her back to Winter Haven."

Taffy whispered, "Here it comes!"

CARL BRANNECK came slowly out into the patio. He wore pale blue shorts and a white nylon sleeveless shirt. He was lobster-red from the sun and his glasses were polished and glittering. His stubby hairy legs quivered fleshily as he walked. He gave Park a meek smile.

"Guess I overslept, eh?"

"Not at all, Mr. Branneck. Festivities are just starting. Step over and tell Mick what you want."

Branneck moved away uncertainly. Taffy said, "By tonight that poor little man is going to be one large blister."

Lew Cherezack, Park's pilot and driver, came in at a trot. He was young and he had the wrinkled, anxious face of a boxer pup. He grinned and said, "Hello, Taff! Why didn't I meet you before the war?"

"Which war?" Taffy asked coldly.

"What's up?" Park asked.

"Well, I see this car boiling out across our causeway and so I go over to the gate. This large young guy jumps out with a look like he wants to take a punch at me. He tells me he's come after his girl, Laura Hale, and, damn it, he wants to see her right away and no kidding around. He says his name is Thomas O'Day. I got him pacing around out there."

O'Day spun around as Park approached. He glanced at the sarong and a faint look of contempt appeared on his square, handsome face. "Are you Falkner?"

"It seems possible."

"Okay. I don't know what the hell you told Laura to get her to come down here without a word to me. I traced her as far as the Tampa airport and today I found out that your driver picked her up there and brought her here. I want an explanation."

"Is she your wife?"

"No. We're engaged."

"I didn't notice any ring."

"Well, almost engaged. And what the hell business is that of yours? I took time off from my job, Falkner, and I can't stand here arguing with you. I want to see Laura and I want to see her right now. Go get her."

"You're annoying the hell out of me, O'Day," Park said mildly.

O'Day tensed and launched a large, determined right fist at Park's face. Park leaned away from it, grabbed the thick wrist with both hands, let himself fall backwards, pulling O'Day with him. He got both bare feet against O'Day's middle and pushed up hard. The imprisoned wrist was like the hub of a wheel, with O'Day's heels traversing the rim. He hit flat on his back on the sand with an impressive thud. Park stood and watched him. O'Day gagged and fought for breath. He sat up and coughed and knuckled his right shoulder. He looked up at Park and glared, then grinned.

"So I had it coming, Mr. Falkner."

"Come on in and have a drink. I'll send somebody after your girl."

He took O'Day in with him, made a group introduction. O'Day asked Mick for a Collins as Park sent Lew to find Laura. O'Day watched Townsend, finally went over and said, "I've got a feeling I've seen you before, Mr. Townsend."

"That could be."

"Are you from Chicago?"

"I've been there," Townsend said and turned away, terminating the conversation.

Pamela was working the cape and Carlos was charging her with the wheeled horns. She was very serious about it, her underlip caught behind her upper teeth, a frown of concentration on her brow.

"A second Conchita Cintron!" Carlos called as she made a fairly acceptable veronica. Johnny Loomis, his tongue already thickened, began a braying discourse on the art of the matador.

Lew appeared and caught Park's eye. He left. Park caught him outside. Lew looked upset. "Park, she isn't in her room and I'll be damned if she's on the island. Come on. I want to show you something."

The two men stood and looked down at the blanket. The sun was far enough down so that their shadows across the sand were very long.

Park sighed heavily. "I don't like the way it looks. Break out the Lambertson lungs and be quick about it. Tide's on the change."

"How about O'Day?"

"If he can swim, fix him up. It'll give him something to do."

THE SUN rested on the rim of the horizon, a hot rivet sinking into the steel plate of the sea. The angle made visibility bad. Park Falkner was forty feet down, the pressure painful against

his ear plugs, the lead weights tight around him in the canvas belt. It was a shadow world. He saw the dim shape of a sand shark stirring the loose sand as it sped away. A sting ray, nearly a yard in diameter, drifted lazily, its tail grooving the bottom. The oxygen mixture from the back tank hissed and bubbled. He swam with a frog-like motion of his legs, using a wide breast stroke.

The last faint visibility was gone. He jettisoned some of the lead and rose slowly to the surface. The sun was gone and the dusk was grey-blue. He pulled out the ear plugs and heard Mick's shout. Mick was far down the beach. He squinted. Mick and Lew and Townsend were standing by something on the sand. O'Day was running toward them. Park shoved the face mask up onto his forehead and went toward the shore in a long, powerful, eight-beat crawl.

He walked over and looked down at

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her. She was as blue as the early dusk.

Mick said in a half-whisper, "The crabs got her a little on the arm but that's all."

"Wrap her in a blanket and take her over to the old ice house. Lew, you phone it in. Take O'Day with you."

O'Day stood and looked down at Laura's body. He didn't move. Lew Cherezack tugged at his arm. Park stepped over and slapped O'Day across the face. The big man turned without a word and went back toward the house with long strides.

* * *

Mrs. Mick Rogers had laid out a buffet supper, but no one had eaten much. The certificate stating accidental death by drowning had been signed. Mrs. Rogers had packed Laura Hale's suitcase and had placed it in the station wagon. The undertaker had said, over the phone, that he couldn't pick up the body until midnight.

Johnny Loomis had passed out and Mick had put him to bed, just before leaving for Winter Haven with a subdued and depressed Pamela. Carlos had complained bitterly about the death, saying that it was bad luck before tomorrow's corrida. He had gone nervously to bed after the arrangements had been made for Lew to fly him and his helper to Monterrey at dawn. Park Falkner sat on the lowest terrace facing the sea. Taffy was in the next chair. Townsend, Branneck and O'Day were at the other end of the terrace. A subdued light shone on the small self-service bar. O'Day, with an almost monotonous regularity, stepped over and mixed himself a Scotch and water. It seemed not to affect him.

The other three were far enough away so that Park and Taffy could talk without being overheard.

"Satisfied?" Taffy asked in a low tone.

"Please shut up."

"What was she? Twenty-seven?

Twenty-eight? Think of the wasted years, Park. Having fun with your tossed salad?"

"I didn't figure it this way, Taffy. Believe me."

"Suppose you tell me how you figured it."

"Not yet. Later. I have to think."

"I've been thinking. The little gal was vain, you know. Careful of her looks. You know what sea water will do to a woman's hair, don't you?"

"Keep going."

"I know she had a bathing cap. She didn't wear it. So she drowned by accident on purpose. Suicide. That's a woman's logic speaking, Park."

"I noticed the same thing, but I didn't arrive at the same answer."

"What—do—you—mean?" Taffy demanded, each word spaced.

"You wouldn't know unless I told you the whole story. And I don't want to do that yet."

Branneck stood up and yawned, "Night, all. Don't know if I can sleep with this burn, but I'm sure going to try." The others murmured good-night and he went into the house.

O'Day said thickly, but carefully, "I haven't asked you, Falkner. Can I stay until . . . they take her?"

"Stay the night. That'll be better. I've had a room fixed for you. Go up to the second floor. Second door on the left. Mick took your bag up out of your car before he left."

"I don't want to impose on—"

"Don't talk rot. Go to bed. You'll find a sleeping pill on the night stand. Take it."

Only Taffy, Townsend and Park Falkner were left. After O'Day had gone, Townsend said dryly, "This is quite a production. Lights, camera, action."

"Stick around for the floor show," Taffy said, her tone bitter.

"I can hardly wait. Good-night, folks,"

Townsend said. He left the terrace.

Taffy stood up and walked over toward the railing. She wore a white Mexican off-the-shoulder blouse. Her slim mid-diff was bare, her hand-blocked skirt long and full. She was outlined against the meager moonlight, her silver hair falling an unfashionable length to her shoulder-blades. In the night light she looked no more than twenty. In the hardest light she looked almost thirty.

Park went to her. "We've known each other a long time, Taff. Do you want to help me? It won't be . . . pleasant."

She shrugged. "When you ask me like that . . ."

"Go on up to your room and get one of your swim suits. Meet me by the garages."

CHAPTER THREE

Models for Murder

SHE came toward him through the night. He took her wrist and together they went into the ice house. When the door was shut behind them, he turned on the powerful flashlight, directed it at the blanket-wrapped body on the table. Taffy shuddered.

"I want to show you something, Taff. Be a brave girl."

He uncovered the head, held the flashlight close and thumbed up an eyelid. "See?" he said. "A ring of small hemorrhages against the white of the eye. Something was pressed hard there."

"I—I don't understand."

"I found it right after they examined her. Both eyes are the same. Other than that, and the sea damage, there's not a mark on her."

"Wouldn't contact lenses do that?" Taffy asked.

"They might, if they didn't fit properly, or if they had been inserted clumsily. But I don't think she wore them. She was

grateful to me for having her come down here. She . . . attempted to show her gratitude. The offer was refused, but in the process of refusing it, I had a good close look at her eyes. I'd say no. I have another answer."

"But what?"

He took the plastic cups out and held them in the flashlight glow. Taffy gasped. "No, Park. Someone would have had to—"

"Exactly. Pressed them down quite hard on the eyes. No point in it unless the pressure also served some other purpose. Smothering her. Evidently she was smothered while in the sun, while on her back. Maybe she was sleeping. The smotherer dragged her into the sea, forgetting the cap or ignoring it."

"Did he use a towel to do it?"

"I wouldn't think so. A little air would get through. She'd struggle longer and the plastic cups would have slipped and made other marks. And I don't think a pillow was used. Look."

He curled back her upper lip. Up above the ridge of the gum was a fine dark line of damp sand.

"No," Taffy said in a whisper. "No."

"It wouldn't be hard to do. Taffy, maybe I won't ask you to do what I originally planned."

She straightened up. "Try me, Park."

"I want that swim suit. She'll have to be dressed in yours. You go on along. Leave your suit here. I'll change it."

Taffy said tonelessly. "Go on outside Park." She pushed him gently.

Outside he lit a cigarette, cupped his hands around the glow. The luminous dial of his wristwatch told him that it was after eleven. The sea sighed as though with some vast, half-forgotten regret. The stars were cool and withdrawn. He rubbed the cigarette out with his toe. She came out into the darkness and silently leaned her forehead against his shoulder. He held her for a moment and then they walked

back to the house together. He took the damp swim suit from her. When her door shut he went up the stairs to his own room. He sat in the darkness and thought of Laura Hale, of the way the hard core of her showed beneath the blue of her eyes. Mick came back after driving Pamela home and later he heard another car, heard Mick speak to a stranger. Soon the strange car drove back across the causeway, the motor noise lost in the sound of the sea.

Mick knocked and came in. "Sitting in the dark, hey? They took her off with 'em. I delivered Pamela. She thinks Carlos is coming back to see her after he fights."

"He might. Go get Branneck. Don't let him give you an argument or make any noise. Get him up here."

The lights were on and Park was sitting crosslegged on his bed when Mick Rogers shoved Branneck through the door. Branneck's pajamas were yellow and white vertical stripes. His eyes were puffy. He sputtered with indignation.

"I demand to know why—"

"Shut up," said Park. He smiled amiably at Branneck. "Sit down."

Branneck remained standing. "I want to know why your man—"

"Because seven years and three months ago, in a very beautiful and very complicated variation of the old badger game, a wealthy Chicago citizen named Myron C. Cauldfeldt was bled white to the tune of two hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars. He was in no position to complain to the police *until* he was visited by the girl in the case. She explained to him that her partner, or one of her partners, had run out with the entire take. She was angry. She went with Cauldfeldt to the police and made a confession. In view of her age—twenty—she was given a suspended sentence and put on probation. The man who had run out with the take disappeared completely. Now am I mak-

ing any sense?" He paused, waiting.

BRANNECK gave a blind man's look toward the chair. He stumbled over and sat down. He breathed hard through his open mouth.

Park Falkner stood up. "Some day, Branneck," he said lightly, "you ought to do some research into the lives of people who run out with large bundles of dough. They hide in shabby little rooms and slowly confidence comes back. A year passes. Two. They slowly come out of cover and take up the threads of a new life. Sometimes they are able to almost forget the source of their money."

Branneck had slowly gained control. He said, "I haven't the faintest idea what you're talking about, Falkner. It wasn't true, was it, what you said about wanting to buy some of my properties? That was just to get me to come down here."

Mick leaned against the closed door, cleaning his fingernails with a broken match. He gave Branneck a look of disgust.

"Let's review, Branneck. Or should I call you Roger Krindall?" Park said.

"My name is Branneck," the man said huskily.

"Okay. Branneck, then. You are a respected citizen of Biloxi. You arrived there about six years ago and made yourself agreeable. You did some smart dealing in shore properties. My investigator estimates that you're worth a half-million. You belong to the proper clubs. Two years ago you married a widow of good social standing. Your step-daughter is now sixteen. You are respected. A nice life, isn't it?"

"What are you trying to say?"

"You came here thinking that I was a customer for the Coast Drive Hotel that you just finished building. Selling it would be a nice stroke of business. I might be willing to buy it. I'll give you ten thousand for it."

Branneck jumped up, his face greenish pale under the fresh burn. "Ten thousand! Are you crazy? I've got two hundred thousand in it and a mortgage of three hundred and twenty thousand outstanding!"

"He won't sell, Park," Mick said.

"No imagination, I guess, Mick."

Branneck stared hard at Park and then at Mick. "I see what you're getting at. Very nice little scheme. Now I can figure how you got a layout like this. Well, you're wrong. Dead wrong. If I was all chump you could have made it stick. But I'll take my chances on what you can do to me. You've got me mixed up with somebody named Krindall. You can't prove a damn thing. And if you start to spread one little rumor in Biloxi you'll get slapped in the face with a slander suit so fast your head'll swim. I'm going back to bed and I'm pulling out of here first thing in the morning."

He strode toward the door. Mick glanced at Park for instructions and then stepped aside. Branneck slammed the door.

"He knows Cauldfeldt is dead," Park said. "And I think he knows that too much time has passed for the Chicago police to do anything to him, even if they could get hold of Laura Hale for a positive identification. I had him going for a minute, but he made a nice recovery."

"So it blows up in our face?" Mick asked.

"I wouldn't say so. He killed Laura Hale."

The match slipped out of Mick's fingers. He bent and picked it up. "Give me some warning next time, Park. That's a jolt."

Park began to pace back and forth. "Yes, he killed her and he got his chance because I was stupid. And so was she. Neither of us figured him as having the nerve for that kind of violence. She was a tramp all the way through. She thought I had arranged it so we could bleed Bran-

neck, alias Krindall, and split the proceeds. Finding out that I had other plans was going to be a shock to her—but he fixed it so that she was spared that particular shock. He took his chance and he got away with it. Now I'm sorry I had you bring him in. He's been warned. And he'll fight. But we can't let him leave in the morning. Got any ideas?"

Mick grinned. The flattened nose and Neanderthal brows gave him the look of an amiable ape. "This won't be good for his nerves, boss, but I could sort of arrange it so he could overhear that the coroner has suspicions and is waiting for somebody to make a run for it."

"Good!" Park said. "Then he'll have to make an excuse to stay and that'll give me time to work out an idea."

THE ROAR of the amphibian taking off from the protected basin in the lee of the island awoke Park the next morning. Carlos was being carted away to his rendezvous with the black beast from La Punta. At three o'clock, when it was four in Monterrey, he would pick up, on short wave, the report of the corrido. Park pulled on his trunks and went out onto the terrace. The dawn sun behind the house sent the tall shadow of the structure an impossible distance out across the grey morning sea. He stood and was filled with a sudden and surprising revulsion against the shoddy affair of Branneck and Laura Hale. Better to give it all up. Better to give himself to the sea and the sun, music and Taffy. Let the easy life drift by.

But he knew and remembered the times he had tried the lethargic life. The restlessness had grown in him, shortening his temper, fraying the nerve ends—and then he would read over a report from one of the investigators. "A psychiatrist shot in his office here last year. Three suspects but not enough on any of them to bring it to trial. Think you could get all three down there for a short course in sus-

picion." And then the excitement would begin. Maybe Taffy was right. Playing God. Playing the part of fate and destiny. The cornered man is the dangerous man. The cornered woman has an unparalleled viciousness.

He saw a figure far up the beach, recognized Taffy's hair color. She was a quarter-mile from the house, an aqua robe belted around her, walking slowly, bending now and then to pick up something. Shells, probably. He saw her turn around and stare back toward the house. She could not see him in the heavy shadows. She slipped off the robe, dropped it on the sand and went quickly down into the surf.

Park grinned. In spite of Taffy Angus' modeling career, in spite of her very objective view of the world, she had more than her share of modesty. She would be furious if she knew that he had watched her morning swim *au naturel*. He glanced at the sixteen-power scope mounted on the corner of the terrace railing and decided that it wouldn't be cricket. The perfect gag, of course, would be a camera with a telescopic lens, with a few large glossy prints to . . .

He snapped his fingers. A very fine idea. One of the best.

* * *

At three o'clock in the afternoon Mick was ten miles down the mainland beach. He was hot, sticky and annoyed.

"Why do you have to be giving me arguments?" he demanded of the fat, middle-aged tourist and the bronzed, dark-haired girl.

The tourist looked angry. "Damn it! All I said was that if you stand so far away from us with that camera, you're going to get a bunch of nothing. We'll be a couple of dots on that negative."

Mick said heavily, "Mister, I know what I'm doing. I don't want your faces

to show. This is an illustration for a story in a confession magazine."

The girl adjusted the suit that had belonged to Laura Hale. "This doesn't fit so good, Mr. Rogers," she said.

Mick sighed. "This time I want to get the blanket in, too. I'm going back up on that knoll. Now get it right. We got the marks in the sand across the beach where you dragged her. I want you, mister, to be hip-deep in that surf and dragging her by the hair. Don't look around. Girlie, you take yourself a deep breath and play dead."

"We're too far away from the camera," the man said sullenly.

Mick gave him a long, hard look. The man grunted and turned away. "Come on, sister," he said.

CHAPTER FOUR

Shakedown—Showdown

MICK arrived back at Grouper Island at six with the dozen prints. He found Park, O'Day and Taffy on the lower terrace. Park stood up at once and they went upstairs.

"He still here?" Mick asked.

"Jittery but still around."

"How did Carlos do?"

"Too nervous. They threw cushions at him during the first bull. The second bull gave him a slit in the thigh. He's okay. Now let's see what you've got."

Park studied the pictures one by one. He laid three aside. "It's between these three. Nice job, Mick. The beach matches up pretty good. The girl seems a little small, but that man, from the back, is a dead ringer for Branneck. We can't use the ones with the blanket showing because we can't be sure whether or not Branneck shook the sand off it before or after he took her into the water. And we don't know how he took her out. He could have dragged her by the wrists,

hair or ankles, or even carried her. But I'd bet on wrists or hair. Now let's see. These two here. The surf blanks it out so he could be holding her either way. We'll have to take a chance on her being on her back. Did you have enough money with you?"

"Plenty. Twenty apiece to the man and the girl and a ten-buck fee to get 'em developed fast. Am I going to be in on this?"

"It looks that way. Taffy drove Loomis over to Tampa this noon. She ought to be back within the hour. Townsend and O'Day are taking a swim. Branneck is tanking up at the terrace bar and your good wife is fixing some food. Lew radioed that he'll be back by seven. You could bring him on up now . . . No. This'll be better. I've shot my bolt. I'll be in my room. Send Taffy up as soon as she gets back."

* * *

Taffy sat hunched on the hassock, the picture in her hand. Park finished the story. She said, "Once three of us had an apartment in New York. That was a long, long time ago. We had mice. One of the girls, Mary Alice, bought a mouse trap, a wire thing like a cage. Trouble was, it didn't kill the mouse. The idea was to catch one and drown him. I remember that first mouse. We got him and he sat up on his hind legs and begged. He was a nasty little item and I drew the short straw and took him into the bathroom, but I couldn't do it. We finally got the janitor to do it for us. Then we bought another kind of trap."

"Laura was taking a nice peaceful sunbath."

"I know, Park. I know. Don't worry, I'll do it."

"We'll have the tape recorder on it and for good measure I'll be in your closet holding a gun on him."

Branneck came into Taffy's room and shut the door gently. His smile was very close to a leer. He said, "I've been watching you, Miss Angus. You don't belong here with this crowd of sharpies."

"I thought that we should get a little better acquainted, Mr. Branneck."

"Nothing would suit me better, believe me."

"I suppose, as an important businessman, Mr. Branneck, you have a hobby."

"Eh? No, I don't have time for anything like that. Got to keep moving to stay ahead, you know. Say, I'm going to open my new hotel in three weeks. Why don't you take a run over to Biloxi and be my guest? Be the first customer in one of the best suites. What do you say?"

"What would your wife say?"

"Hell, we can use you to take some publicity shots."

"I'm not as photogenic as I used to be, Mr. Branneck."

"Call me Carl. Anyway, I can tell the wife you're there for some photographs."

"That's my hobby, Carl. Photographs. I suppose it came from standing in front of so many cameras."

"Yeah? How about giving me a picture of you? Got any . . . good ones? You know what I mean."

"I've got one of you, Mr. Branneck. Nobody has seen it but me. I developed it myself. Of course, it isn't too good of you."

Branneck beamed. "Say, isn't that something! A picture of me!"

She walked slowly over and took it from the dresser drawer and walked back to him, holding it so that he couldn't see it. Her lips felt stiff as she smiled.

"I'll give you a quick look at it. Here!" She thrust it out. His eyes bulged. As he reached for it, she snatched it back.

"This is only a print, Carl."

"You . . . you . . ."

"I used a fine grain. You'd be amazed

(Continued on page 123)



By **ALAN RITNER
ANDERSON**

LADY IN RED

Sibyl came all outfitted for her tryst with Carlos, with rings on her fingers —and a gun in her bag. . . .

THE RED DRESS was better than a brass band. It called for a girdle, but she wore no girdle. The neckline, originally censorable, she'd lowered an inch. Both her wrists were heavy with bracelets, and if the diamonds were phony they at least sparkled brilliantly in the hot sunshine of mid-afternoon. Her high-heeled slippers were red, her hat an absurd scarlet creation that visored her eyes and shadowed her face.

Her name was Sibyl Van Arsdale. She was twenty-eight, exactly forty years younger than her immensely rich husband. The garish red dress was a ticket to murder. The wherewithal was in the big black purse tucked under her left arm—a .22 with a silencer. She was setting the stage for a kill and the flashy red outfit was her first-act costume. Men on the sidewalk gave her the eye but didn't try to pick her up. Somehow, despite the too revealing dress, she managed to radiate icy hostility. The wolf stares didn't bother her in the slightest. Before her marriage, she had stripped to zero at stag smokers.

“Put the heater away, sis,”
Nick Wyatt ordered.
“Don't try to scare a
tough monkey like me!”

She was in the heart of the store district. Now and then she stopped to window shop. It always took her a while to spot the detective who'd been shadowing her for two weeks. Sibyl had been wise from the start. Her husband was snobbish, prideful and secretive. She was positive that he wouldn't wash his dirty linen at the office. Unknown to him, she had had the phone company install an extension to the unlisted phone in the library. She spotted the detective when she was looking at a radio display. He was a dapper little man who always wore a blue serge suit. Any moron could shadow a Junoesque blonde in a wicked red dress. But she had to be sure.

HER AFFAIR with Carlos Tuparo had been a calculated risk. The gossip columnist had mentioned no names, yet tagged her neatly. She'd dropped Carlos like a hot potato. The affair had backfired. Carlos Tuparo turned out not to be a rich Cuban plantation owner but a grade A blackmailer. He had her cold. With pictures. He'd mailed her a few copies, then phoned and made his pitch. Fifty thousand, cash on the barrelhead. Sibyl hated herself. It had shaken her confidence. She prided herself on her ability to evaluate men—but that was down in the beer-and-pretzel set. Her husband's money made her a prime target for the high-class heels, rats with elegance, and the species was new to her. Looking back, she now saw how adroitly Carlos had led her into the trap. She hated his guts.

She glanced at the clock on the Union Terminal ahead. Carlos was going to pick her up at the Cherry Street taxi ramp at four. She had better than half an hour. Time was important, but didn't have to be reduced to split-second reckoning. She'd spent a hectic week prowling from bar to bar during the cocktail hour searching for a passable double. As far as size and figure went, Gloria Hays was made to

order. She was a hat-check girl at a third-rate clip joint. And she was dumb and money hungry. They'd sewed up the deal while the detective had stood out on the sidewalk reading a magazine.

Sibyl entered the waiting room of the terminal and made a beeline for the ladies lounge. It was an elaborate affair with a lobby and beauty parlor. Because the city was a switchover point where many passengers had to change railroads, the management had thoughtfully provided bathrooms to rent to women travelers who wanted a bath during their layover.

Gloria Hays, looking chic and well groomed in a black suit, sat in an armchair smoking a cigarette. The women ignored each other. Sibyl walked into the private bathroom section of the washrooms. The attendant, an elderly Negress, took the five spot, made change, and unlocked the door to the third bathroom from the lobby. Sibyl, who'd previously studied the setup, handed the woman a quarter.

"Will you get me an extra bar of soap?" she asked.

The woman's smile was a study in black and white. "Yes ma'am!" she cried. "Right away quick."

As soon as the attendant turned and started toward the storage locker at the far end of the corridor, Gloria Hays tiptoed in from the lobby and slipped into the bathroom. Sibyl waited for the soap. Then she went into the bathroom and closed the door. Water gushed noisily into the tub.

Gloria Hays was unfastening her skirt. "Gee!" she said. "Am I excited!"

Sibyl didn't reply. Because their shoe sizes were different, Gloria Hays wore her own red slippers and her purse was identical to the one Sibyl laid on the washbowl. Their hairdos were duplicates, and if Gloria's hair was a shade yellower, it was not noticeable. Their faces were at sharp variance. Gloria's face was round, her nose upturned, and she had cheek dimples. Sibyl had a long oval face dominated by a

large red mouth and huge blue eyes.

THEY changed without fuss or hurry. Gloria glanced down at her low neckline and patted her hips. "Gee, it's—well, you know," she said, voice soft.

"That's the idea," Sibyl pointed out. "In that red eye-catcher, no man with a drop of blood in his veins will look above the neckline. The dizzy hat shades your face. Keep your chin tucked in to lengthen the shadow. Did you practice walking like I do? Short, choppy steps."

Gloria nodded. A hard glint came to her eyes as she fastened the bracelets around her wrists. "I got it down pat," she said. "I wouldn't dare take big steps in this dress." The bracelets fascinated her.

Sibyl said pointedly and emphatically, "Those bracelets are phony. They're not much better than dime-store junk. Think I want to risk a stickup?"

"Guess not," said Gloria Hays, her mouth sullen.

Sibyl took an envelope from her purse, opened it and slipped out the corners of a five-hundred-dollar bill and an airline ticket. "A reservation on the night plane to Los Angeles," she said. "Hollywood! The big time. Five hundred will set you up in style until you connect with something worthwhile."

Gloria's blue eyes glittered and her cheeks went feverish. A dream come true! Hollywood! The movies! She nodded furiously. "I go to the Strand," she recited. "I sit in back. It's a double feature. I see it all. Then I come back here."

"A cinch," said Sibyl. She took a deep breath and crossed her fingers. The motive for the impersonation was the shakiest part of the whole plan, and she had to sell Gloria a convincing bill of goods. "This is what will happen," she explained. "The detective will phone my husband. He knows I'm nuts about movies. So he'll phone my best girl friend to come up to his

studio. I want to catch them redhanded. It'll give me a decent alimony break at the divorce. Understand"

Gloria frowned, asked, "But what if you left the show early? I mean because of a fire or something."

Sibyl sighed in relief. "Why, honey," she said, "the detective would phone my husband and tip him off. It would take me half an hour to get home."

"Married men are heels," said Gloria angrily. "I know. They cheat. They're always on the make. And they don't tell a girl they're married until—"

"I know, I know," said Sibyl soothingly. "You didn't tell anybody about our deal, did you?"

"No. I said an aunt gave me some money. I quit my job. My bags are at the Airline Terminal."

Sibyl studied her double. The hat had been a brilliant inspiration. She'd simply told a milliner that her eyes were sensitive to light and to make her a hat that would shade her face and still be in style. For eighty dollars he had done nobly.

Gloria Hays confessed, "I'm sort of nervous."

Sibyl went to the door and cracked it open. The attendant was at the far end of the corridor sorting towels. She opened the door and signaled Gloria Hays with a jerk of the thumb. The blonde in the red dress tiptoed out. Sibyl watched the attendant. She did not turn around. Sibyl closed the door, turned off the water and tripped the release to the drain. She stood there a moment, then tucked the purse under her arm and left the room without any attempt at secretiveness. The purse was large enough to contain the black suit.

Sibyl hurried into the waiting room and went to a window overlooking the street. Gloria was a half a block away, walking toward the Strand with short, mincing steps. Sibyl sighed in relief when she saw Mister Blue Serge Suit trailing at a discreet distance.

AT FOUR minutes to four, Sibyl went to the Cherry Street ramp. There was a crowd there, red caps with the luggage of a dozen travelers. Cabs came up the ramp in a steady stream.

Carlos was early. His black convertible with the top up as she had requested, appeared at the bottom of the ramp. Sibyl hurried down the ramp. Carlos leaned across the seat and opened the door. Sibyl pressed her right forearm to the seat back and tilted it forward. She climbed into the gloomy rear seat of the convertible.

"I don't want to be seen," she explained icily.

Carlos closed the door. He turned around and grinned at her. He was a handsome devil. Small and dapper, his skin was a rich tan hue, his eyes black, his oily hair blue-black, a thin mustache so perfect that it looked painted.

"You have it, yes?" he asked. "The money?"

"I have it," she lied. "And you may as well drop that phony accent."

He laughed softly. "One must keep in practice."

"Where are the pictures?"

Carlos reached out and tapped the glove compartment. "Negatives and all," he said. "Ah, what one can do with invisible infra-red flashbulbs and a delayed shutter release!"

The traffic ahead cleared, and Carlos drove up the ramp and down the other side.

"Drive west on the boulevard," Sibyl ordered. "Slow."

"Of a certainty!" Carlos agreed mockingly.

She said, "I have found out that duplicate negatives can be made by printing a positive."

"Is that a fact?" he said. "My! My! I didn't know. One lives and learns, doesn't one?"

Sibyl fought down her inner fury. "I'm sure you have other negatives."

"You do me an injustice," he replied with a soft laugh.

"I'm also sure," she went on, "that you don't intend to pay income taxes on the fifty thousand."

Her guess hit home and Carlos shouldered stiffened. He said, "Why do you say that?" The sardonic humor was out of his voice.

"Don't try to bleed me for more money!" she warned. "If you do, I'll have a word with the treasury men."

She could almost hear him think. The remarks about negatives and income taxes were part of her act to convince him that the deal was sewed up solid. She sat sideways in the left corner of the car so she could watch out the rear window. They weren't followed. She was sure of it. Carlos Tuparo was rat enough to have a pal pull a fake holdup.

"Where do we make the deal?" he asked sullenly.

"The Glover Stove Works. I'll direct you."

"But why there?" he protested. "Grant Park would be—"

"Shut up!" she ordered. "I call the turn. I had half a notion to spill the whole thing to my husband. I can change my mind, little man. This ride's costing me fifty thousand, and I'll have it my way."

THE NORTH SIDE of the stove works faced a dead-end street. The diagonal parking spaces along the windowless wall of the assembly plant were allotted to company officials whose names were stenciled on the brick wall in white paint.

Sibyl said, "Park in the space for J. J. Stewart."

Carlos did so, switched off the motor and stretched his arms in a big yawn. J. J. Stewart, the sales manager of the outfit, was away on a three-day trip. Company officials, she had reasoned, would think Stewart had lent his space to someone in

the organization not important enough to rate special parking rights, Hazel Stewart was a friend of Sibyl's, and Sibyl had been to the plant often.

Sibyl said, "I'm ready for business."

Some quality to her voice made the hairs at the nape of Carlos Tuparo's neck stiffen. He lowered his arms and turned around. The muzzle of the silencer was aimed between his eyes. She held the gun in her right hand with her wrist tucked against her stomach. The hammer was cocked, and the finger crooked through the trigger guard was tight and white knuckled. He looked at her face. Greyness spread out from the corners of her mouth, but her blue eyes were cold and deadly.

"End of the line, stinker," she said, her voice bitter with contempt. "You tagged the wrong gal this time, little rat. I'm not a soft society dame. I wasn't brought up in a forty-room mansion on caviar and champagne. I'm a coal-regions blonde. Nine kids in the family. Five girls in one bedroom. I'm tough. I killed the chicken for the Sunday dinner. I stuck the family pig every fall. Think I'd let a greasy-haired perfumed monkey like you make a sucker out of me?"

Carlos' pasty face sheeted with sweat. He licked his icy lips and his Adam's apple bobbed. "You can't bluff me!" he blustered. "I got extra negatives, just like you said."

"Hold it!" she warned. "I'm not stupid. I thought this out. You wouldn't dare keep blackmail stuff at your apartment where a guy with a gun could sweat it out of your cowardly soul. I figure a safety-deposit box in a bank."

Carlos's teeth were chattering. "All right! All right!" he whispered. "Sure. Sure! What happens when I don't pay the rent?"

"What's in your box would be turned over to the police."

"Yeah! Yeah!" he agreed. "The cops

would tell your husband. Then what?"

"No, little man," she corrected. "The police destroy blackmail evidence and notify only the person involved. I read it in a detective novel. So I asked the district attorney at a dinner party one night. It's true."

Carlos was breathing hard and little beads of saliva flew from his pale lips. "Look!" he implored. "We go to the bank. You get everything. You wait in the lobby of the bank. You can trust me. . . ."

Her brittle laughter stopped him cold. The conversation was played out and it was the time for action. Sibyl was a resolute woman. But she couldn't kill a man without provocation.

She gave the purse in her lap a small push. It slid across her left thigh and struck the floor with a thud. She bent over as if to pick it up.

Carlos made a frantic grab for the gun. She shot him through the head. The .22 spat a jet of flame and gave forth a muffled cough. A red spot appeared on Carlos Tuparo's forehead above his right eye. Sibyl closed her eyes. The cordite fumes stung her nostrils. She opened her eyes. Carlos had sprawled across the front seat. The windshield was intact, therefore the bullet had ended up in his brain. She had bought cartridges with a light powder charge for that very reason.

The pictures were in a manila envelope which she transferred to her purse. She was in luck. Carlos' left jacket pocket held the key to the safety deposit box. The luck was phenomenal. The key was attached to a cardboard tag that read: "1st Nat. A. J. Grant." So he had more than one deposit box under phony names. Now all she had to do was go to the First National Bank and keep the box rent paid as A. J. Grant's secretary. Things were coming her way, they really were.

She pushed Carlos off the seat. He collapsed limply on the floor and was ob-

scured by shadows. There was no blood on the seat. Sibyl took a pair of fur-lined gloves and a rag from her bag. She put on the gloves and wiped everywhere within the convertible she might have touched. Then she settled back and waited. The craving for a cigarette grew intolerable. But she sweat it out.

AT EXACTLY one minute to five, she took the keys, got out and locked the car with the windows up tight. She removed the gloves and put them back in the purse, also the rag. The concrete apron wouldn't show footprints. She turned and walked slowly toward the corner of the building.

Although she was expecting it, the factory whistle frightened her somewhat. She stepped out on the sidewalk of a side street just as the doors to the office burst open and spewed out a chattering crowd of office girls. Sibyl stepped behind two matronly women bound for the bus stop and tagged along as if she was part of a threesome.

It was thirty-three blocks to the terminal. She walked the distance, slowly, like a woman early for a date. The sidewalks were crowded with men and women in a hurry to get home after the day's work. Sibyl felt sort of numb, but her nerves were steady. It had worked to perfection. Carlos Tuparo was dead. And every person he had blackmailed would be a prime

suspect. There must be many, many persons with a motive to kill Carlos Tuparo.

The Union Terminal was a madhouse of commuters. Sibyl was about to go into the newsreel theater, then decided against it. The commission of the murder had been an emotional shock that had numbed her nervous system. Now a reaction set in and she couldn't keep still. She walked the breadth of the train shed many times, smoking furiously and trying not to think of the hundred and one accidents that could befall Gloria Hays and the vital red dress.

Shortly before the zero hour, Sibyl went into the lobby of the ladies lounge. A glance into the bathroom section of the washrooms reassured her. A new attendant was on duty. The old lady went off at six, but there had been a risk that she might work overtime. Heartened, Sibyl sat in an armchair and managed to relax.

Gloria Hays came in at 7:32. Sibyl did a repeat act with the new attendant and they were again closeted in the bathroom.

Nerves tight, Sibyl asked, "Okay?"

"Like a dream," said Gloria Hays, smacking her gum juicily. "A cinch. The pictures weren't bad either. Gee, what a dress! I could have picked guys up right and left."

"You didn't?"

"Naw. But it gimme an idea. I'll latch on to a dress like this out on the coast," said Gloria with avid interest. Her eyes

*Wolf Shows
He is
Smart as a Fox*



SEATTLE, Wash.—Robert Wolf, service station owner here, has switched to Calvert Reserve. "It's the smart switch for any man," he says. "Calvert's lighter, smoother, a better buy."

CALVERT RESERVE BLENDED WHISKEY
86.8 PROOF—65% GRAIN NEUTRAL SPIRITS
CALVERT DISTILLERS CORP., N. Y. C.

glinted. "Look! Maybe I can have the phony bracelets, huh?"

"No!" Sibyl said. "The detective would notice."

"Just one from each wrist?"

Sibyl relented. "All right, take any two!"

They traded clothing. Sibyl adjusted the hat. Then she checked her purse. Accidentally switching purses had been a nightmare that had haunted her all week. She gave the bug-eyed Gloria Hays the five hundred dollars and the airline ticket.

"You're swell!" Gloria gushed. "You don't know how glad I am to get away from here. The men around here make me sick."

Sibyl said, "Give me a couple of minutes, then leave. Good luck, honey. You'll set Hollywood on its ear."

The rest was easy. Sibyl went out into the waiting room and was again conscious of being the target of masculine eyes. She stopped and admired a florist's display that used a big mirror as a back drop. Blue Serge stopped across the way and bought cigarettes.

She went out to the taxi ramp and waited her turn. When her cab arrived, she gave the driver her address loudly enough to be heard ten feet away.

JORGENSEN was the perfect butler. Tall, lean, always immaculate, he oozed self-confidence and had the deadpan expression of a professional gambler. Nothing short of an atomic bomb could have shaken his composure. He ignored the wicked red dress.

"Good-evening, Madame Van Arsdale," he said. "The master is dining with the board of directors this evening."

"I haven't forgotten," she said. "I'll dine on the terrace. In an hour."

"Very good, madame," said Jorgenson, and seemed to melt away like a genie.

Sibyl went into the redwood-paneled den. She placed the purse on the desk and

stood studying it moodily. Her next and final problem was to dispose of the kill gun and the pictures. Then she would relax.

Jorgenson announced his presence in the doorway by clearing his throat. "A man to see you, madame," he said. "He is most insistent."

Sibyl looked out the window so he wouldn't see the sudden fright in her eyes. Her knees went shaky and breathing became difficult—like the first time she'd done a strip at a stag beer bust.

"Show him in." Her voice was firm, though a trifle loud. She walked woodenly to the liquor cabinet and took a drink of brandy. The liquid heat ironed some of the kinks out of her insides. She assumed the facial expression she wore in the blue spotlight—remote, aloof, contemptuously hostile.

The man came in and closed the door. Tall, thin and stooped, he resembled a rat, with his sharp nose and close-set black eyes. His brown hair was slicked down and exposed areas of bare scalp. The grey suit had baggy knees and the coat cuffs were frayed. He rubbed his palms together.

"You do good in black," he said. "You really do. It took me a while to tumble to the clothes switch."

"Speak your piece!" she said, face impassive.

"Okay, baby, okay! I'm Nick Wyatt. I'm a private detective. I'm the crummy kind of private dick. I can be had. I don't turn down no chance to make a fast buck. A hat-check cutie named Gloria Hays has a fast-and-fancy twirl with a married guy, see! The ever-loving wife hires good old Nick to shadow the cutie and get the goods."

Sibyl pressed against the desk, and the beveled edge bit into her thighs. The irony of the situation did not escape her. Poetic justice. Birds of a feather. . . . She said wearily, "Get on with it."

Nick Wyatt settled himself in a red-leather armchair. "You're running a gravy train, honey, and I'm a passenger. So you killed a guy. So what? If the cops come close, we toss Gloria Hays to the dogs. A blonde dame in a back suit plows under a guy in a black convertible. That I can prove. So the hat-check cutie takes the rap."

"You put it beautifully," Sibyl agreed. "We can even alibi me by a high-class private detective my husband hired to trail me."

"Baby, now you're talking," said Nick Wyatt gleefully.

"But did it occur to you," she went on, "that I killed a man who was going to blackmail me over a sordid love affair?"

"So what?" he asked. "It's a different shake, honey. All the other guy could do was have your hubby heave you out. I can jockey you straight into the electric chair. Think it over."

Sibyl sighed, said, "An affectionate young woman marries a man forty years her senior. A trying situation, don't you think?"

"What are you yakkin' about?" he growled.

"Reducing the problem to its simplest equation," she said, "I'm thinking in terms of a jury, little man."

She slipped the revolver out of her purse, cocked it, aimed it at Nick Wyatt's midriff.

"I'm batting in the wrong league," she confessed. "Flying around here in the big time warped my judgment of people. I was wrong on Carlos. If I'd been my old self I'd have known a hat-check girl in a clip joint would be playing around with married men."

Nick Wyatt yawned. "Put the heater away, sis!" he ordered. "Don't try to scare a tough monkey like me. You're wasting your time."

She shot him three times—through the

chest. He never knew what hit him. He fell off the chair and curled up on the floor like a sleeping dog, his legs twitching slightly. Blood seeped into the dark carpeting.

SIBYL sat down at the desk. She placed the revolver in front of the ornate pen set. The room was very quiet. Blue smoke swirled ceilingward and was sucked into the ducts of the air-conditioning system. The push button was under the desk edge. She depressed it.

Jorgenson didn't bat an eye. He stepped into the room and glanced at the body on the floor with just the barest trace of disapproval.

"Yes, madame?" he asked.

She said, "I just killed the man on the floor. I killed that slimy Tuparo character earlier this afternoon. Tell my maid to get out a dress more suitable for the occasion. Something demure. Then phone the police."

"If I may be so bold, madame, I suggest that I call a lawyer before the police are notified."

"Of course!" she agreed. "Do you have anyone in mind?"

"I recommend a Mr. Ben Monkwitz, madame. In legal circles he is known as Quick-Acquittal Monkwitz."

"Tell him to hurry," said Sibyl, glancing at the purse. "I have some evidence he might want to use."

Jorgenson backed to the doorway. "Madame," he asked, "may I make a personal observation?"

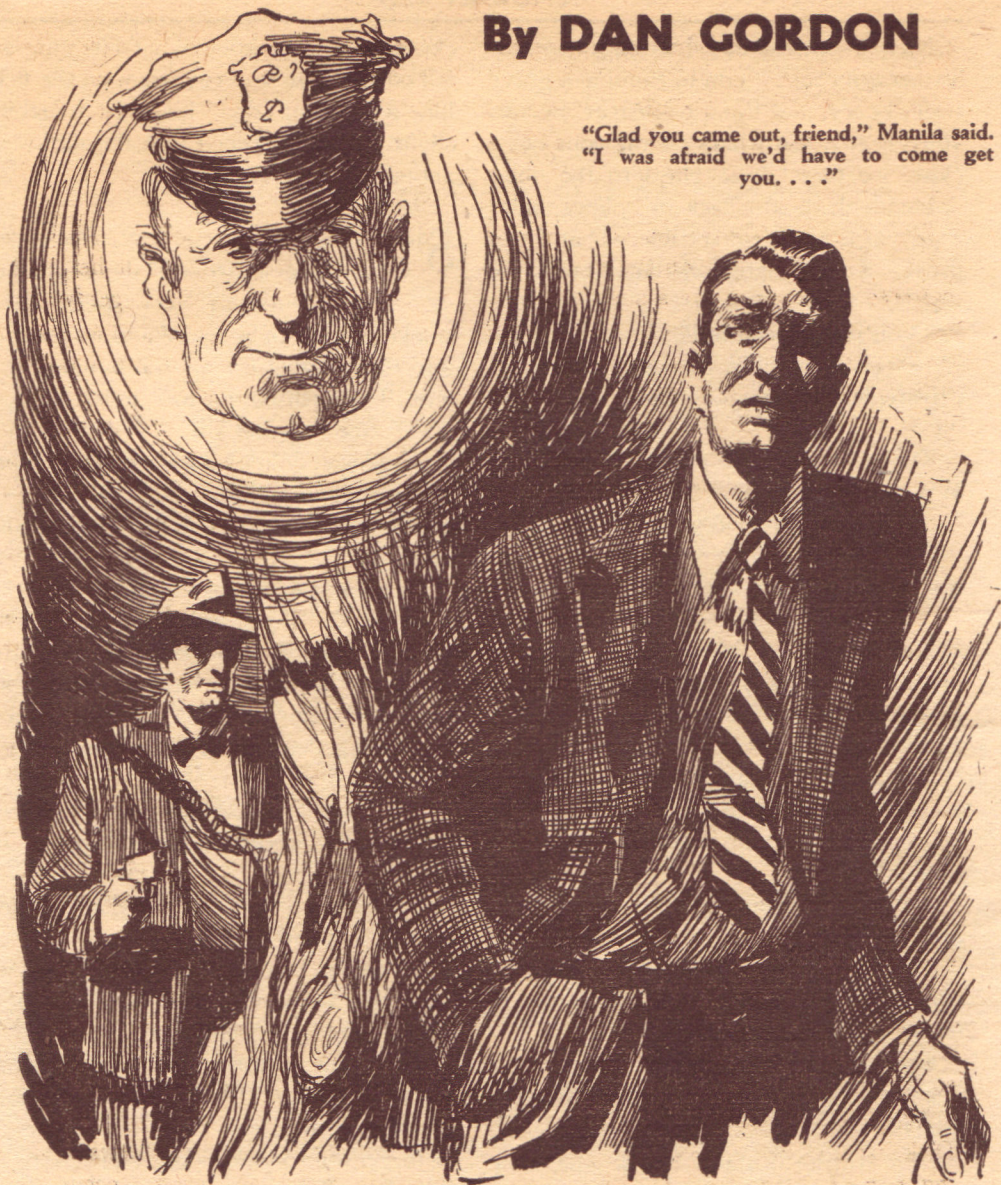
"Of course."

He looked her straight in the eye, and his face broke out of its mask of indifference to register prideful admiration and respect. "In the parlance of the underworld, madame," he said, "I am positive that you will beat the rap."

"Thank you, Jorgenson!" she cried. "Thank you very much."

By **DAN GORDON**

"Glad you came out, friend," Manila said.
"I was afraid we'd have to come get
you. . . ."



LONESOME ROAD

You can pound a beat all your life with the rest of the honest squares, or you can play it smart for one night and buy everything you've ever wanted—with your buddy's bullet-smashed body!

THE PROWL CAR seemed to turn by itself, like a horse that has been over the same route a number of times. It probed the dark corners of the retail clothing district, hesitated to make up its mind about a wobbly drunk, then

moved on, having decided the guy would probably make it home.

"Maybe," Tim Foley said, "we should have picked that lad up. He gets hit by a car or something, it'd be our fault, in a way."

Dick Mathews shifted his weight, trying for a comfortable spot on the prowler car's battered seat. He made a small, respectful grunting sound—small, because the conversation bored him and he cared nothing about drunks—respectful, because Foley was his senior, and Dick Mathews hadn't yet been on the force long enough to know how far you could go.

The one thing he did know was that you could go farther than his uncle or Tim Foley had gone. A small, unpaid-for house in the suburbs, a tacky little wife and a pair of sniveling kids—that was Tim Foley's setup, as told to Richard Mathews during those long night rides. Dick Mathews knew it wasn't for him.

He had a plan, and as he saw it, the business of getting on the force had been the toughest part. His uncle, Samuel Walton, had been most helpful. He had used his enormous political power to make sure his nephew got what he wanted. Dick Mathews was thoroughly familiar with the old man's ruthless honesty, and he wondered what old Sam Walton would say if he knew why his only nephew was so hell bent for the police force.

With the training period behind him, Dick had devoted several weeks to making a good impression on Foley. Now he was ready to start cashing in. His uncle had wound up at the age of sixty, very powerful, but fairly poor. Dick Mathews didn't care about power. What he wanted was dough. And for a man with his eye on the main chance, there would always be a fast buck.

THE CALL on the warehouse burglary came in as they turned into South Street. Dick Mathews leaned forward as

if to hear better. Tim Foley stayed slouched down, the way he was, but when the announcer gave the location, his foot came down on the gas.

"I know that joint," he said.

Dick Mathews answered, "Fine." He wanted to say "You ought to, you've been on this beat five years," but he let it go because those things don't get you anywhere, and there was no sense getting sore at Foley, just because the guy was a dope who didn't know better.

They went racing into the warehouse district, and Foley was staring ahead through the windshield at the looming black bulk of one building. He said heavily, "Here we are, partner," and came down hard on the brakes.

Dick Mathews pressed the door handle down and stepped out on the pavement. That "partner" routine made his stomach turn every time somebody used the word. They used it a lot on the force. If a guy walked a beat with you, or if the two of you were cooped up in the same prowler car for eight hours, that made the jerk your partner. Like a couple of men in the banking business, or members of a dance team.

They were facing the smooth brick face of the building, no windows on the ground floor. When the light flickered, they both saw it, up there above the white-lettered sign that said "Randall Jacobs, Furs."

"Still there," Dick Mathews said. He said it calmly, and it didn't occur to him that he might be frightened on this, his first assignment. A man who plans to make a fortune by becoming a grafting policeman has no business with jumpy nerves.

"Take the back," Tim Foley answered. "I'll give you time to get around there, then I'll hit them from the front."

Dick Mathews nodded and ran for the narrow alley that skirted one side of the building. Once in the shelter of its inky

maw, he slowed down and took his time. He went strolling along in the blackness, walking softly and without fear until he came to the rear of the warehouse.

Stopping, he leaned around the corner and saw the trucks. There were three of them—large, modern vans, backed up to the loading platform. It gave Dick a new interest in his work, seeing this evidence of a prosperous, organized gang. He had expected perhaps one hungry burglar. This job was more to his taste.

There were drivers on the trucks, and a small man who was walking about nervously, moving to the door of the warehouse, then pacing back to the trucks.

Other men staggered out, bearing heavy bundles. They threw their burdens on one of the trucks and turned back for another load.

The small man said, "That'll do it," and the other men halted and faced him. "Climb on," he ordered. "Let's roll it out of here."

Quietly, the men obeyed. Truck engines rumbled alive, filling the loading area with sudden, ear-splitting sound. The small man walked toward a nondescript coupé parked near Dick Mathew's alley.

When the man was near enough, Dick Mathews spoke from the shielding darkness, "Over this way, boy."

His voice was faint in all that thunder, but it stopped the gang boss cold.

"Keep walking," Dick Mathews said. "No—don't reach. I've got a gun on your head."

Someone yelled from one of the trucks, "What about it, Manila? Okay?"

The little man called Manila waved a careless hand. "Go ahead," he called. "Shove off."

"We got two guys still inside."

Dick Mathews didn't find out what Manila thought about the two inside. Muffled gunfire erupted inside the warehouse. Somehow they all heard it in spite of the noise of the trucks.

Everyone there except Dick Mathews swung around to face the wide door up on the loading platform. Dick stepped from the sheltering alley and pressed his gun gently against Manila's side. "Come on, little fellow," he said.

THEY stepped into the shadow. Behind them, quick steps thudded across the planking of the platform and ran toward the trucks. Dick Mathews, hearing them, wondered if Tim Foley were dead. But there wasn't time for that now.

He tried to see Manila's face, but there was nothing but a white blur. "Your job," he told the little gangster, "didn't come off very well. There was a cop went in the front way. Maybe your boys have killed him."

Manila said, "What's all this to you?"

"I'm a cop," Dick Mathews said, and waited for that to sink in. While he waited, he spun the little man and frisked him the way he'd been taught when he went through the training school. He came up with a gun and a wallet, and these he dropped in his pocket.

"So you're a cop," Manila said slowly. He seemed to be listening, and Dick listened, too, as the trucks backed out and took off. "You don't act like a cop," Manila said then. "But here we are. You call it. What happens now?"

"That would depend," Dick Mathews said softly, "on what you think you can pay."

There it was, the way he had thought it would be, and it was as good as if he had planned it—better, if anything. The man called Manila said nothing for a time. The noise of the trucks had faded, and no sound came from within the looted warehouse.

"I'd say," Manila said finally, "you've got us fairly cold. There's some dough in that wallet you took. Take out a couple of C's."

"Two hundred?" Dick Mathews said.

"You've got me confused with the small-time. I'm dealing myself in for a third."

"A third of the job?" asked Manila.

The dismay in the man's voice made Dick Mathews laugh. He said, "That's the way it is."

Manila said, "Look, fella. Why don't you play it smart? Take the two C's and be happy. We got an organization, and you can't cut yourself in. We exert a little pressure here, a little pressure there. First thing you know you're bucking an extortion rap—or else you walk around in the dark some night and somebody knocks you off."

"Ever hear of Sam Walton?" Dick kicked the name out casually.

"Yeah. What about him?"

"He wouldn't like it if anything happened to me."

Manila laughed nastily. "Walton worried about a crooked cop? He'd hate your guts, you chump."

"He would if he knew it," Dick Mathews said. "Only he'd never believe it. He'd think some of his enemies were framing me in order to smear his reputation. I'm his nephew, Manila. The only one he has. You begin to see why you pay?"

Manila's face was hidden in shadow. "You could be right," he said. "It'll take us some time to get rid of the stuff. Let's say we pay you a week from tonight. Make it six in the evening, in

front of the Blue Nightingale Club."

Dick Mathews took Manila's money from the wallet and handed the bills back to him. He stuck the wallet back in his pocket and said, "Make it General Delivery. They'll hold it for thirty days. Make the name James Meadows. I'll have somebody pick it up."

"Right," Manila said. "You want to give me my gun?"

"Some other time," Dick Mathews said. "So-long." He turned his back on the little hood and started back through the dark alley, prepared to feel Manila's weight piling onto his back. It wouldn't do, however, to have the little man think him afraid.

Nothing came but Manila's voice, calling softly after him: "Say, copper—what's your name?"

Dick Mathews hesitated. Then he said softly, but very distinctly, "Foley's the name. Tim Foley."

HE WENT back to the warehouse entrance with his story straight in his mind. He'd been running in pursuit of the gang when he'd heard the shots in front. He'd stopped his chase and gone back, thinking his partner needed help.

Tim Foley did need help. When Dick found him behind a counter, he was bleeding from two wounds—one high up in his chest, another in his thigh. Dick managed to control the bleeding, and some little

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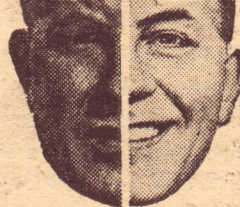
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time after that, he found a phone and called in.

The police cars came, sirens growling, into the quiet street. Dick Mathews gave an account to the captain, a carefully edited description of the way the thing had been. Tim Foley was conscious, and he nodded his head to confirm Dick's account when the captain glanced at him.

They took Tim Foley to the hospital, and Dick Mathews went along. While he was there, Tim's mousy little wife came in, and one of the Foley kids. There was a lot of quiet sobbing, and then the mousy wife's radiant smile when she learned that Tim was okay. When Dick Mathews walked out of the dressing room, she was prevailing upon the doctor to send Tim home the following day.

That was the week Tim and Dick were working the twelve-to-eight. Dick had arranged to buy dinner for a pleasing wren, and consequently he was annoyed when his phone rang in the late afternoon and Tim Foley asked for a favor.

Foley, it seemed, was at home, recovering from his wounds. He had been sitting at the living-room window to pass the time, and it could always be imagination, of course, but he thought he had seen some hard-looking lads casing his house from the other side of the street.

"You phoned the station?" asked Dick.

"No," Tim said. "I wasn't sure enough. These guys I saw could have been nothing more than a couple of nosy walkers. Only I'd feel better if I had some help out here when it gets dark."

It didn't add up for Dick Mathews. He thought again of his dinner date and said, "Hell, why don't you tell the captain?"

"Because," said Tim Foley patiently, "it's not enough to really pin down. Just because I saw a couple of tough lads, I can't ask them to send out a squad. But I figured if I told my partner . . ." His voice trailed off expectantly.

Dick Mathews thought about it. There

it was again, that partner routine. He was expected to chase clear out to the suburbs just because of that. The funny thing was, he knew he would go. Because it was important to maintain the trust and friendship of Tim Foley. If anything went wrong, any flaws came up in his account of the warehouse robbery, he'd need Tim Foley's confidence. Foley had been dazed and semi-conscious through most of the warehouse action. If he thought, for example, he'd heard three trucks start up, he could be made to change his mind if his story conflicted with that of a "partner" who had his trust.

"I'll be right out," Dick Mathews said. "Take it easy—partner."

THE FOLEY HOUSE was a dream cottage gone to seed. It sat lightly upon a small patch of battered lawn, and it looked to Dick Mathews as if a finance company could back a truck up and take house and all away.

He went along the narrow sidewalk, stumbling now and then when the concrete tilted up in mute salute to cheap and shallow pouring.

Mrs. Foley met him at the door. She smiled at him as if they were old friends, and he found this faintly embarrassing, since he hardly knew the woman at all. Tim was in the living room, still sitting by the window that faced out on the lawn. He put out a hand and Dick crossed to him and shook it. Dick said, "You're looking good, Tim," though he privately thought Foley looked like hell.

"Clean living," Foley answered. He twisted his head as if to make sure his wife had left the room. Then he said in a lowered voice, "I saw one of those guys again. If he's just taking a walk, he takes his exercise in large doses. He's been out there for maybe three hours."

Dick Mathews walked to the window and scanned the desolate street. "I don't see anything," he said. "Couple of kids

down near the corner. Otherwise nothing at all."

"Yeah," Tim agreed. "He's gone now. I'm sure glad you could come out, though. Makes me feel better with the wife and kids here. I got creepy, with night coming on."

They sat and talked about the department, and about other things that did not interest Dick Mathews. He was squirming restlessly by the time Mrs. Foley brought the coffee in. He would have preferred a drink, but she offered nothing but coffee, and he didn't feel free to refuse.

It was entirely possible that Foley had asked him out to discuss the warehouse robbery. Maybe the older man had noticed something phony and was choosing this roundabout approach in order to throw Dick off guard. Dick thought about this, and his eyes went hard. But when he looked at Tim Foley's round, red face, his suspicions went away.

No, there was nothing subtle about Tim Foley. If he said he was feeling jittery, you could bet he felt that way. Still, Dick felt he'd blow his top if he had to go on much longer just sitting here in this room. He put the coffee cup down on top of a very clean, very cheap table covering, and stood up and said, "Getting pretty dark out now. Maybe I'd turn up something if I took a look around."

"Good idea," Foley answered gratefully. "How's to lock the door behind you? And while you're gone, I'll ask the missus to stir up some food."

Dick said, "I don't think . . ." and then he let it go because it no longer made any difference whether or not he ate with the Foleys. He had to go to work at midnight, and here it was past six and him way out in the boondocks. The evening was shot anyhow.

He let himself out and stood for a moment on the top step, gratefully breathing the air. It was a quiet neighborhood, but the quiet seemed to give an impres-

sion of dullness rather than a feeling of peace. Dick Mathews walked aimlessly along the narrow sidewalks, looking without particular interest at the other bungalows. All were very much like Tim's.

Expecting to find no one, nothing, he was distinctly startled when he saw the man standing half hidden beside a straggling hedge.

He was a man of medium height. His suit was of some dark material. His face was all but hidden from Dick, because he kept his head bent forward while he fumbled in his coat pocket as if searching for cigarettes.

Probably somewhere in the city, at this very moment, a score of other men were doing precisely the same thing in exactly the same way. But—and the *but* loomed large in Dick Mathews' mind, there was no reason at all why anyone should be standing in this side street beside this particular hedge.

He stopped and faced the man. "Looking for something?" he asked.

THE MAN looked up, and Dick saw the face. It was that of an ex-prize fighter. The eyes were dull and forlorn. They flared briefly, but the man said without emotion, "I'm waiting for a guy."

Dick hesitated, adding it up in his mind. If this man was part of the warehouse gang, it meant that they had never intended to pay off. That guy, Manila, had been soft-talking him when he had agreed to the bribe. They were out to save themselves some money. And they thought the way to save it was to knock off a guy named Tim Foley, because Dick had given Tim's name.

"This guy you're looking for," Dick said, "would he be named Tim Foley?"

"He might be," said the man. "I kind of forget the name. That's why I stopped to figure things out."

Dick let one hand go down in his

pocket, let it fold over the butt of his gun. "My name's Foley," he said. In the dusk, he thought he saw the man's eyes go wide, but there wasn't light enough to be sure.

The man didn't move, though. He stood quietly and said, "There's a guy came out with me. He's the one who wants to see you."

Dick nodded. "Where's he now?"

"Down there, near your house." The man jerked his head toward Foley's, and in that brief instant Dick brought the gun from his pocket and slapped it flat against the side of the man's head.

The man buckled, and Dick Mathew's caught him and eased him down to the ground just beneath the hedge. Then he turned, and walked back toward the house. He didn't really believe there was another man, for he had passed that way as he came up from Foley's house. Even if there was a man, his presence would be somewhat incidental. For ideas that had never been there before were now spinning in Dick Mathew's mind.

It had seemed very simple all along, the business of the shakedown. You catch someone off base, and you do not arrest him. Instead, you take a bribe. He had rehearsed the possible situations, and always his dreams had ended with someone handing the money over.

Now, for the first time, he was beginning to see his own situation—really see it as it was. As he walked slowly down the street, someone switched on a light in the back of Foley's house and a warm yellow glow came out of a small, square window. If you were an honest cop, you were not alone. The department, with all its men and equipment, was right there to stand behind you.

Even if you were a criminal, there was some backing from your gang. Only the traitor to either side was condemned to walk alone.

Dick thought these things, but the thoughts were not clear and distinct.

They were vague and disturbing ideas that flitted in and out of his mind.

He had made but one wrong step, but it was already impossible to go back. You could tell the captain the truth about the robbery, but how explain the fact that you'd withheld evidence until now? Or you could merely keep quiet, as you had originally intended to do. Only that wouldn't work anymore. The gang would not be content to go along hoping you *wouldn't* talk. They had already begun to take action. They would continue to take action until they knew you *couldn't* talk. It was perfectly true that old Sam Walton would bring justice to bear on the men who killed his nephew. But Dick Mathews couldn't see that fact as a source of comfort now.

There was only one thing he could do, one clear, clean out. He could let them kill Tim Foley. And if they never learned they'd killed the wrong man, Dick Mathews would walk in safety.

The thought was a shattering one. Dick realized that he was cold-bloodedly considering the possibility of planning Tim Foley's murder. For it would be murder, if he let it happen. The things he thought he would do for money had never included that.

He was opposite Tim Foley's house now, and nothing had been decided. He had the feeling he couldn't face Foley until he'd worked the thing out.

Then a voice said, "Foley," sharply, and took matters out of his hands.

THE MAN called Manila came out from behind the tree and walked toward him over the lawn. Manila said, "Glad you came out, friend. I was afraid we'd have to come get you."

Dick's hand was in his pocket, touching the gun, but he knew it wouldn't help at all. Manila's gun was in his hand. There wasn't anything Dick wanted to say. He was alone in a world of his own making.

Having betrayed the men he worked with, he could not even say, as some householder might, "Go away, or I'll call the police." The house and Tim Foley across the street seemed unimportant and far away. He heard the crickets begin to chirp. It would soon be night.

Because he had to say something, he searched and found his voice. "Hello, Manila," he said. "You come to pay me off?"

"You guessed it," Manila answered. "I came to pay you off. You know why?"

"Sam Walton," Dick Mathews said, "will send you to the chair."

"He might," said Manila, "if you were his nephew. But when our boy asked Walton about Tim Foley, he said he never heard of you."

Dick said, "I..." and stopped. Manila was stepping backward. One shoulder was coming forward.

Dick tensed his muscles and clenched his teeth, and tried to draw his own gun. He had moved it not more than an inch when glass tinkled musically in back of him and something spat sharply in Manila's face. The little man spun around. The brittle crack of a rifle came from across the street.

The gun was in Dick's hand as he bent above the gangster. But there was no need for another shot. Manila was dead.

Dick Mathews walked across the street

and up to the broken window where Tim Foley still sat with the rifle on his knees. He stood quietly, looking up into Foley's face, and the word "partner" somehow came to his lips, and when it came out it didn't sound strange. "Partner," Dick Mathews said, "I would call that a mighty fine shot."

Foley grinned. "I wasn't sure he had a gun on you till he stepped back—and then I could see."

"There's another one," Dick told him, as he saw Foley reach for a phone. "I left him up the street alongside a hedge." It occurred to him that Manila might have told his boys about the promised payoff, but it no longer seemed to matter. He had the clean, unworried feeling a man has when his intentions are thoroughly honest.

It showed in the set of his shoulders and in the hard, firm rap of his heels on the sidewalk as he went back up the street. Manila was the only one who had seen him at the warehouse. If other gang members told their stories, who was going to take their word against that of an honest cop?

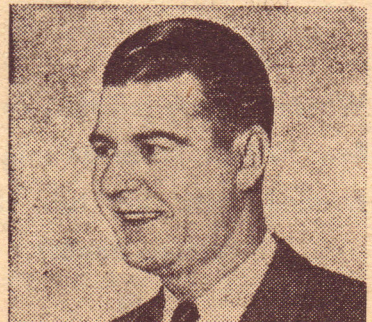
Dick Mathews began to whistle as he saw the unconscious man still lying by the hedge. He hoisted the man to his shoulders and bore him back toward the house. Mrs. Foley had been making coffee, and it ought to be done by now.

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"Come-in, jailbird,"
Carr said, waving
the revolver. "Come
in and set."



MAN- HUNT!

By **TALMAGE POWELL**

●
Where was the jail that could hold
Sam Wilson, when he might seize
freedom with his two shackled,
useless hands?
●

SAM WILSON was already running across the road into the pitch-dark Florida scrub as the prison-farm sirens began to wail.

He had to hold his hands out before him as he stumbled through the tangled undergrowth. A four-inch chain linked his manacled wrists. Jack oak limbs scratched him, sent him reeling.

Rolling half around to keep his balance, he blundered on into the empty blackness. Already he could smell the Cypress River, and beyond it the Big Scrub. He could smell freedom.

Every running step jarred all through him. Sirens screamed at him, and from behind him came the shouts of Deputy Cline Thompkins' guards and the mournful baying of bloodhounds.

His breathing was a gasping sob. He knew what Deputy Cline Thompkins did to a man who tried to escape.

Sam hurled a look across his shoulder. The lights of the road-gang camp were gone. He'd come a long way since he'd broken from the ten P.M. march from latrine to bunk cars. But he had a much longer way to go to the money and Peggy. He had to keep the picture of her in his mind. He had to remember. The money. Peggy. The money meant life to her, and he knew desperately that he would kill if it would give her life.

The wail of the hounds, the shouting of the guards, was nearer. Now Sam could hear the lumbering animals crashing through the palmettoes behind him.

They'd have him now. The dogs would be on him, and the guards would move in. Almost, Sam could see the leering face of Cline Thompkins. "All right, smart boy. This time we'll beat it out of you. I'm going to break you, Wilson. This time for good."

The anxious clamor of the hounds filled the swamp as the scent grew sharper. Even the yells of the men were stronger. They could all feel it, men and dogs alike. The big moment.

Sam stumbled over a burnt pine knot. Face tightening with resolve, he lost a precious moment gasping up the limb in his shackled hands. He was a fool and he knew it, but that knot was going to be his two-handed club. "The first hound that reaches me," he panted, "is going to be a dead hound."

The pine knot was heavy. And Sam knew a smarter man would carry less weight, not more. But that club made him feel better. He wasn't helpless as long as he could swing that club.

As the first baying hound closed in behind him, Sam heard the swirl and suck of the swift, dark river.

Sam tripped and sprawled out. The pine knot flew from his hands. One of the snarling dogs dove for him. Peggy, Sam thought wildly and scrambled forward. And the world dropped away from beneath him.

He landed hard, with a splash that jarred him. As he went under water as black as the heart of the cypress swamps that spewed it, he heard the hounds baying in agony and defeat at the river's edge.

THE CURRENT of the Cypress River was swift. By the time Sam fought, thrashing to the surface, he was thirty yards downstream from the sick moaning of the hounds.

But you couldn't fight against water like that. You couldn't even keep your head out of it, no matter how hard you kicked. Gasping for breath, he was hurtled along like a leaf in the darkness. His heavy prison shoes dragged at him. His clothes were soaked and water logged.

It grew very quiet away from the shouting and baying of the hunters. The stillness was immense and awful. Sam gagged on water, choked, spewed it out of his nose. More dead than alive, he fought his way against the fallen trunk of a tree. He was content to hang there a moment, sucking for breath.

Then he crabbed along the tree and pulled himself up on the bank. He knew he was across Cypress River now, and a feeble moon lighted the rolling waves of the dry scrub oaks. Silent and unbroken, the lifeless land looked good to Sam Wilson.

Somewhere out there, in an old shack

on the Salt Springs road, was the money Sam and Carr Dunway had stolen from old John Ellis. Money that Sam meant to have. Money that would buy everything Peggy needed.

As he plodded along in the direction he hoped was east, Sam remembered the last time he had seen Peggy. She had come to visit him on Visitor's Sunday at the road-gang camp.

The sight of Peggy had done to Sam what Deputy Thompkins' threats and lashing couldn't do. It had broken Sam. Down inside, he was crying at the paleness of her.

He had kept laughing, and he told her a dozen times he knew their baby was going to be as pretty as Peggy. And all the time he knew the truth. The baby was going to be dead, and with it, Peggy would be dead, too.

Sam began to run. The night dimmed, and the day came, and the sun climbed blisteringly over the scrub, and Sam didn't stop walking.

It was almost dusk when he saw the shack. Seeing it recalled the first night he had seen it, in Carr Dunway's old souped-up Cadillac.

They'd had the money, then. Old John Ellis' money. And there was no thought of being caught. They were hiding it under the floor of the shack until things were quieter. Only there was never a quiet time after that night.

Now, Sam thought exultantly, he was back here. He went across the sagging stoop. His half of the money, he thought. He'd get it to Peggy, in time!

He put his shoulder against the door of the deserted shack. It had been hard to open that night when Carr Dunway had brought him here. But it pushed open easily under Sam's hand.

He felt a wave of apprehension. Suppose the money was gone? Suppose someone had found it.

He stood there in the door a moment.

Then he saw Carr.

The lean, hard-faced backwoodsman was sitting on a crate, propped back against the far wall. In his hand was an old-fashioned, long-barreled revolver.

"Come on in, jailbird," Carr said. "And set."

Sam stepped inside and closed the door. He licked his tongue across his cracked lips. He hated the hawk-faced man across the room, hated him for the filthy lies Carr had told at the trial, lies that had sent Sam up the river. But he bit back his hatred, said, "Is there . . . any water, Carr?"

"No. The well's dry. Pump out back. But it's no good."

"How long you been here, Carr?"

"I got heah yestiday," Carr said. He didn't lower the gun.

"I thought you were in Raiford."

"I was. But I got out."

"You didn't break?"

CARR DUNWAY sneered at the manacles on Sam's wrists. He shook his head. "I served my time. I was a trusty. I got out on good behavior."

"Is—is the money still there?" Sam took another step into the room.

"It's still there. I looked at it. Nobody goofed on it, even. It ain't been touched."

"Why didn't you take it? Why didn't you take it and run?" Sam said. "That's what you meant to do, isn't it?"

"I still aim to."

"All of it?"

"All of it. It ain't going to do you no good. Five years—no time off now you've tried to break."

"Then what are you waiting for?" Sam laughed bitterly. "Why are you still here?"

Carr smiled enigmatically. "Stick around, jailbird. You'll see."

Sam went sick inside. "The posse? Are they this far already, Carr? Are you afraid they'll find you with the money—accidentally?"

"I don't know nawthin about a posse, Sam. I didn't even know you were out till I seen you comin' up the hill. I didn't know you broke. I didn't know you were that big a fool."

Sam went to each of the three windows, peered out for a long time, searching the darkening scrub. Eerie stillness was settling over the scrub oaks, stretching out into bleak eternity. Sam could see no sign of life beyond that clearing.

Carr was watching with a faint and derisive smile.

"Carr!" The voice came from outside, like the crack of old, hard leather.

Sam breathed, "That sounded like old man Ellis!"

Carr didn't even bother to answer him.

"Carr?" Ellis called with the patience of an old bull 'gator. "It'll be dark in an hour. I'll be just outside. If you strike a match, if you cough, if I can hear you breathe, I'm going to kill you. Do you want to come out, Carr, with your hands up? You're tuckered, Carr, you won't get through this night."

Carr sat up straight. The edge of the box struck the floor sharply. The grey-ness in the room was deepening so Sam could see only the outlines of Carr's gaunt face.

Sam thought he could see the whites of Carr's eyes. He stood there near the east window, watching the man hunkered on the packing crate.

"Are you asleep, Carr?" the voice taunted from the yard.

"I'm not asleep, Ellis," Carr called. "I warn you, keep away from here. I'm telling you. I almost killed you last night. Tonight, I'll do it."

Ellis laughed. "Don't go to sleep, Carr. Or you'll never wake up."

Carr stood up. Sam could see the gleam of the long barrel of the gun. Carr walked to the back door.

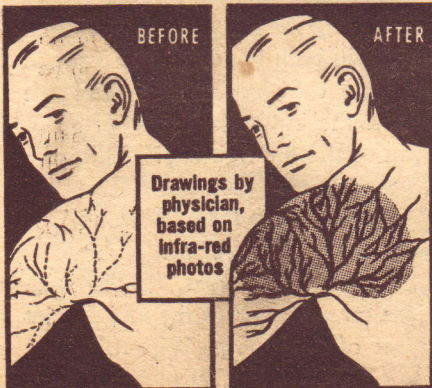
"There are two of us now, Ellis. We'll wait you out. Sam Wilson's here with me now."

Ellis' laughter was hoarse. "I saw him coming, Carr. I laughed when I saw him coming. You're in a hell of a fix now, ain't you, Carr? There are two of us now who'd kill you if you dare to wink one eye. You didn't think when you turned state's evidence and ratted on Wilson that he'd ever get a chance to get back at you, did you, Carr?"

Ellis' deep voice lifted. "Hey, Wilson, in that shack with you is the buzzard that sent you up for five years. The dirty skunk that whined in court that you forced him at gunpoint to drive him the night you slugged and robbed me.

"I know better, Wilson. But I didn't care enough in court to say so. I knew Carr Dunway hated my guts, and he alone knew I had the cattle money in my house. Knew where I kept it."

Ellis laughed at that.



HOW SLOAN'S LINIMENT AIDS ARTHRITIS PAINS

Working with infra-red photography, science has now demonstrated *why* Sloan's Liniment is so amazingly effective in helping to bring blessed relief from rheumatic pains and muscular aches. Infra-red photos (see illustration at left) disclose that, after Sloan's is applied to the skin, veins *below the surface* are expanded: . . . evidence that an *extra* supply of blood has been brought to the pain area, to revitalize the painful tissues and hasten the removal of waste matter and poisons.

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"You swore in court you'd get Carr Dunway, Wilson. Well, here's your chance. You've got him there with you. He let you take the five-year rap while he got off with six months.

"Why don't you kill him, Wilson? It's better than he deserves. Kill him, Wilson. Turn over my money to me and I'll let you walk out of there alive."

Carr snarled. "You're wastin' yore breath, Ellis. I still got my gun."

SAM'S laugh had a crazy note in it. Wise in the ways of the backwoods, old Ellis must have been doggedly watching Carr Dunway from the moment Carr walked out of prison. They were all three jokers from a stacked deck—but the prize Sam was playing for wasn't money, it was Peggy's life.

Sam's laugh had brought Carr's cold gaze to him. Sam said, "What difference does it make when I die? I want my half of that money, Carr."

Shadows flicked over Carr's face.

"All right," he agreed softly, "we got to take care of Ellis, then we can fix that up. I done what I had to do, Sam. It was me or you in thet court. Wasn't no use both of us takin' the rap. . . ."

For a moment Sam wanted to believe there might be a little honor left in Carr, a little something to trust. But he wouldn't play the same fool's part twice. Carr had lied from the beginning, let him go up. Carr had known about Peggy's trouble, the need for the specialists in Maryland, a Caesarean operation if she were to live. None of it had mattered to Carr, the grinding away of time that was so precious to Peggy. Now Sam knew that Carr meant to kill him for all the money, just as Carr would kill old Ellis.

Sam stood pressed against the wall without moving. It was completely dark now. He supposed it was imagination, but he was sure he could hear Ellis moving stealthily along the side of the shack.

A pebble struck the back door. Almost at once another came through the east window. Another rolled down the front pitch of the roof.

Carr stood close against the back door, listening. Holding his chained wrists far apart, Sam inched himself toward Dunway.

A pistol cracked in the yard and, swearing, Dunway leaped back away from the door.

As Dunway fell away from the door, Sam hurled himself across the floor upon him. He brought down his manacled wrists upon that gleaming-gun barrel. He felt the chain dig into Dunway's arm, and the gun clattered to the floor.

Gasping, Dunway dove for the gun. This time, Sam brought the chain upward. He caught Dunway under the chin.

Dunway grunted as he was dragged over backward away from the gun. Sam kept jabbing with the chained cuffs. Dunway fought back, but he kept moving away.

When Dunway tried to get to his feet, Sam hit him with both hands full in the face. Dunway reeled backward to the wall. He tried to leap out of Sam's reach, but Sam brought the chains down across the back of Dunway's head.

Dunway hit the floor, hard.

The backwoodsman lay still. Sam stood there over him. At that moment, he heard Ellis on the front stoop. Whirling, Sam scooped up the long-barreled gun.

The front door came open slowly.

Sam backed to the far wall. He held the old revolver in both hands out in front of him. Beyond the door, Sam could see nothing but the outer darkness.

"So you've stopped fighting?" Ellis said.

"We've stopped," Sam said.

"Did you beat him then, Wilson?"

"I beat him," Sam replied.

"What I told you goes," Ellis said.

"Turn the money over to me and I'll let you go out of here alive, Wilson."

"I don't live without that money," Sam

said huskily. "I robbed for it because I couldn't borrow it. They talk about loans, but you can't get 'em unless you don't need 'em. I went to prison for it, Ellis. And now it's mine. Once maybe it was yours. But not now. I'm going to take it all."

"What will it buy you? What you think it'll buy you?"

"It'll buy these chains off my hands, these stripes off my back. It'll take Peggy and me where they'll never find us."

"What about the doctors you need? Are you going to find your wife the doctors she needs where you run to? She's got to have specialists, and a fugitive can't buy specialists."

"She'll have them," Sam said. "Somehow, I'll buy 'em for her."

"No. No, you won't. You'll buy her fear. That's all that money will buy her, even if I let you take it away from here."

"Let me? You can't stop me, Ellis. And



you know it. I'll go through hell to get this money to Peggy. Nobody is going to stop me."

"Listen to me, Sam. And listen fast. More than ten minutes ago, I heard bloodhounds. They've crossed the river, Sam. They've got your scent. You might kill me. I wasn't afraid of Dunway. I knew I'd get him. But a man like you can do impossible things for the woman he loves,

the way you love your wife. So I tell you. Give that money back to me, Sam Wilson. I'll buy your wife the specialists she needs. She'll get all the care you could give her—and she'll be waiting for you when you get out of the prison, a free man."

THE GNARLED old man came into the shack then. "I'll keep my word. You've known me long enough to know that. I'm called a hard man, but I stick to my bargains. How about this bargain, Sam Wilson?"

Twenty minutes later, the guards came into the clearing before the shack, bloodhounds on leash.

Sam was standing, waiting for them at the foot of the steps, Deputy Cline Thompkins strode in upon him with double-barreled shotgun leveled.

"The smart boy!" Thompkins snarled. "So you thought you could get away from me, eh, Wilson? Did you think I was joking when I told you I'd beat your teeth in with a cuff chain?"

Sam's face went white with fear, but he kept his eyes level, doggedly.

Thompkins laughed at the whiteness of Sam's face. He hefted a short chain and backhanded Sam across the cheek.

The sharp, sickening click of chain against flesh went through every man there. Sam Wilson's cheek sprouted blood. The next blow knocked him to his knees. Like a man doing penance, Sam knew that Thompkins could never break him. There was one thing Thompkins could never understand, Sam thought: I'm just a cracker boy taking care of my wife. I'm doing it like this because it's the only way I can. I hate it and fear it, but every blow of Thompkins means life for Peggy, and one of these days for the two—three—of us together.

Overhead, a star winked on and as he raised his face and saw it, Sam had the feeling it was for him.

Smith vs. The Scandal Syndicate

*Thrilling Crime-Mystery
Novelette*

By
DONN MULLALLY

CHAPTER ONE

Shakedown

DAVE SMITH sat behind the huge, pickled-oak desk in his Beverly Hills office, solemnly regarding the material of his Donegal tweed jacket. He had no reason to doubt its pedigree, but it seemed easier to look at than the emaciated gentleman who stood across from him. Without lifting his eyes, Dave knew that Attorney T. J. Howe was buttoning his briefcase. The dark reflection in the rich wood and the sound of the snaps on Howe's briefcase supplied the detail.

Dave let his glance wander to the corner of the office, where his client, Jerome Jennings, was pressed deep into a red-leather chair. The actor looked like a man



Dave Smith, pudgy Hollywood flesh-peddler, wouldn't have made even a B-film hero. But you can push a man just so far—before he falls off the cliff!



He started to get to his feet, but only started. Because Pete had the gun up behind him and was bringing it down. . . .

being strangled; blood-vessels ridged his sun-bronzed forehead to the line of his coppery hair. Dave noticed Jennings' powerful hands clawing the arms of the chair.

T. J. Howe finished with the briefcase,

was simpering at Dave. "I had hoped, Mr. Smith," he said, "that we should be able to settle this matter without any untoward delay."

Dave nodded ponderously. "I'm sure you did," he said. "You'll hear from me as soon as we've decided one way or the other."

Howe's thin face set in a smirk. He patted the greased wave of hair combed over his bald spot. "If you will permit me to say so, gentlemen," he said, "there is very little for you to decide."

Dave cleared his throat. "We'll figure that out for ourselves, Howe. I'll give you a call."

Howe picked up his black Homburg from the corner of Dave's desk, said, "Thank you, gentlemen, and good-day." He marched his dark-blue, double-breasted suit out the door.

DAVE spun his chair enough to look at the Beverly Biltmore Hotel across the street. For a minute he studied its regimented rows of windows as though he expected to see Hedy Lamarr emerge from her bath. Then Dave smiled wearily at his client.

"Okay, Jennings, you can say it now."

As though Smith's words were a trigger that exploded a small bomb under him, Jennings rocketed out of the chair. "It's a lie, Dave! Every damn word!"

Dave Smith nodded. "Okay. Can we prove it?"

Jennings crashed a big fist on Dave's desk. "We've got to prove it! I'm not going to be framed by any lousy Hollywood tramp!"

Dave laced thick fingers behind his head. "Let's calm down," he told Jennings, "and clear away the part of Howe's story we can't deny. Two months ago, you did take a gang of kids from the studio to Catalina on your yacht."

He watched Jennings' lean six-foot-two wilt several inches as the actor sagged into

the leather-covered chair Howe had just vacated.

"That's true," Jennings admitted. "But the cruise wasn't my idea. The studio publicity department arranged the whole thing. There were only a couple of people in the group who I had even a nodding acquaintance with."

"This Helen Kaye was in the party," Dave continued.

"I suppose she was," Jennings sighed, "but you couldn't prove it by me."

"Unfortunately," Dave reminded him, "we don't have to. Howe has pictures of you and the girl posing together all over your yacht."

"Good Lord, Dave," Jennings said disgustedly. "You know that was strictly cheesecake for newspaper release. It doesn't mean I—"

Dave nodded. "I understand. But I'm trying to look at this affair through the eyes of an average, dimwitted jury."

"We can't let it go that far," Jennings insisted.

"We may have to," Dave said, "unless you want to pay Miss Kaye fifty grand right now."

"Do you think I should?" Jennings asked, slumping deeper into the chair.

Dave shook his head. "No, I don't, although it might be cheaper to pay her off than to fight her. If we could be sure fifty G's isn't just her opening tap."

"You mean she can...?"

Dave took a cigar case out of his coat pocket, tossed one of his specially made Havanas across to Jennings, clamped one in his own jaw. "Look, let's face it," he said. "From their pictures, the Kaye twins seem very healthy little guys. They're going to live a long time. If you give a dime toward their support now, it'll amount to some kind of an admission."

Jennings was pounding the desk again. "It's all a frameup, Dave. I swear it is!"

"Will you sit still for a few questions, Jerry?" Dave asked him softly.

"Certainly." The actor faded back to the chair.

"All right," Dave went on. "We accept the fact the two of you had some publicity pictures taken during a trip to Catalina. Now, level with me. Was there any drinking aboard the *Gull* on that weekend?"

Jennings shrugged. "I suppose there was. There usually is, on those outings."

"That isn't what I mean," Dave cut in. "Did you take part in it?"

"What are you getting at?" Jennings bridled.

"Exactly what happened," Dave told him. "After all, you're human. And, from her pictures, I'd say Miss Kaye isn't exactly an ogress. I want to know if maybe you got a little bit drunk and—"

"No, damn it, Dave!" Jennings roared indignantly. "I tell you, I didn't! Look. I remember the weekend perfectly. I should. Several things happened to fix it in my mind. When we got to Catalina, I left the *Gull* and went over to Larry Cohen's house on the beach. We'd been talking around the subject of my doing a semi-documentary on game fishing in the Gulf of California, as you know. Well, this weekend, Cohen finally put his deal on the line. I stayed for dinner and we talked about the story, the casting, until bedtime. I know I can get Cohen to back me up on this. I stayed at his house until the next morning."

"The studio kids were alone on the ship all night?"

"As far as I'm concerned," Jennings stated, "they were. I wasn't their chaperone."

"Who was?" Dave asked.

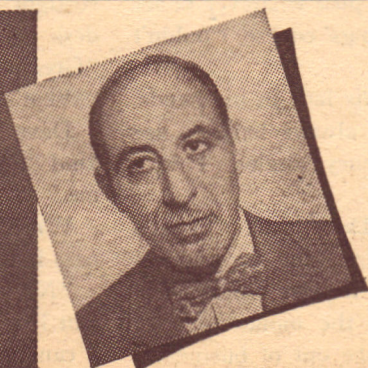
"I think a studio publicity man, Dixon Wraith, was in charge of the party," Jennings said. "I don't know how much of a chaperone he'd be, though."

DAVE rolled the cigar to the corner of his mouth. "Now, don't get the idea I'm needling you. I just want to cover every angle. You say Cohen put you up. In other words, he probably saw you go to your room. Now, is it possible you left your room, went back to the boat and joined in the party for a while? I suppose you had a few drinks with Cohen. Could you have forgotten. . .?"

"Dave, for the last time, I'll tell you this," Jennings said. "I did *not* have anything to do with Helen Kaye. I did *not* return to the ship until the next morning. When I did go aboard, I skippered the *Gull* to Pedro and put the kids ashore. That was the last I saw of any of them, and it's all I know about this whole business. You can believe me, or—"

"I believe you," Dave cut in. "But here's what we're up against. This Kaye girl has set out to frame you. She's hired a smart lawyer—which means she's smart, or is getting smart advice from somebody."

**BROKER
NO
JOKER**



EAST ST. LOUIS, Ill.—
"I mean it when I ask for Calvert," says Max Adelman, insurance broker of this city. "I switched to Calvert long ago, because I like its better taste. And with me it's the taste that counts."

Now, you say you went ashore, spent the night there. But just to take the dim view, suppose the girl produces someone who remembers seeing you come back aboard?"

"They'd be lying in their teeth!" Jennings stormed. "I—"

"Sure they would," Dave commented glumly. "But it might be just a little tough to prove."

"Dave," said Jennings, "whose side are you on?"

Dave Smith shook his head. "I don't know the exact figures, Jerry, but I'd say I've made close to seventy-five thousand dollars out of you in the last five years. I've another hundred grand in this fishing epic you've just completed. If Kaye drags us into court and louses up your career, I stand to lose quite a bundle. Even if I thought you were guilty as hell, I'd be on your side."

Jennings' hand trembled on the edge of Dave's desk. The actor's lips looked hot and dry. "I'm sorry, Dave. I—"

"Forget it," Dave said. "I know how you feel. And now, you know how it is with me. We're going to whip this thing, but I won't build you up that I expect it to be a pushover. Incidentally, pal—how do you think Wanda will take it?"

Jennings groaned at the mention of his wife.

"I was afraid of that," Dave nodded. "With the California community-property law, she'd just about pick whatever bones were left of the Jennings' corpse, wouldn't she?"

The actor buried his face in his hands. "Dave, why do you always have to see things from the money angle? I love Wanda! I—"

"Sure you do," Dave said. "That's why you're always breaking up and reconciling again. But if your Uncle Dave doesn't worry about the money side of these jams, we'll all be out of business."

The two men looked at each other for

several minutes without speaking. Then Jennings sighed. "Dave, what are we going to do about it?"

Dave Smith jacked his two hundred pounds out of his huge chair. "I think I better see some people," he said. "Find out what kind of a girl Helen Kaye is. In the meantime, you go home and stay near a telephone, where I can reach you."

Jennings rose wearily to his feet, his even, handsome features bleak, listless. "All right, Dave. You're the boss."

"And, Jerry," Dave said. "Before you get home, do something about that beat expression!"

DAVE SMITH drove out to Epic Enterprise Studios in the San Fernando Valley. He parked his car under a pepper tree in front of the studio and went into the publicity office. He found Dixon Wraith in a cell-like office overlooking the lot.

Wraith might have been a member of the working press at one time in his life, but in his Hollywood disguise it didn't show. He wore a loud plaid sport jacket, slacks and leather sandals, his sport shirt open at the throat. He wasn't a bad-looking guy, Dave conceded—somewhere in his middle thirties, but a little tired around the edges. Certainly over age for this Hollywood-juvenile wardrobe he affected.

He smiled at Dave, waving him to a straight chair beside the welled typing desk at which he had been working. "Greetings, flesh peddler," he chirped. "What's your pleasure?"

Dave smiled. "Dix," he said, "I'm in kind of a spot. I wonder if you can help me."

Wraith laughed. "Don't tell me business is that bad!"

"No," Dave said. "Business is fine. But I've got the inside track on a deal, and I can use a little help in making a contact."

"You know Dixon loves you, don't you, sweetheart?" Wraith grinned. "Anything you want, it's yours."

"Here's the deal," Dave explained. "I understand there was a girl here at the studio, had her option dropped a couple months or so ago. Calls herself Helen Kaye."

Wraith eyed him wisely, nodded. "Yeah, I remember. So?"

"So," Dave went on, "a producer at another studio was talking to me this morning about her. He'd seen some of the publicity stills you planted while she was under contract here, thought she might work out for small parts. He's talking contract, if she stands up to those publicity shots. Of course, I could go to the casting office—but you know how those guys are."

Wraith nodded. "Yeah."

"The thing is," Dave added, "I need her address—wondered if maybe you could help me."

Wraith smiled. "It's possible, Pappy." He took an address book out of his pocket, thumbed through it, said "Here we are. Helen Kaye. 1502 Grace Street. Do you want her telephone number also?"

Dave was writing the address in his notebook, glanced up. "Sure, if you have it."

"Okay," Wraith said. "It's Gladstone 2-7501."

Dave said, "Thanks—and tell me frankly, Dix, do you think this kid has any talent?"

Wraith smirked. "I never got around to finding out."

Dave stood up, pocketing his notebook. "Well, thanks for everything, pal. You're on Santa Claus' list for a case of Old Taylor."

"If it's all the same to you and Santa Claus," Wraith grinned, "make that Johnny Walker Black Label."

"It's done." Dave smiled and walked to the door.

CHAPTER TWO

Double Trouble

A GLOW of satisfaction sped Dave Smith away from Epic Enterprise Studios. Attorney Howe had displayed a reluctance to betray the whereabouts of Miss Kaye; and Dave's well-spent ten minutes with Dixon Wraith had disposed of this first small hurdle rather well, he thought.

The address Wraith had given him was in the Whitley Terrace section of Hollywood. Back in the Ramon Novarro era, this had been very swank, and the high-water mark of its social prestige was still evident in the Moorish-French Provincial-New Mexican adobe-pastel Mediterranean-type architecture. Miss Kaye lived in a whimsical little apartment house inspired by *Hansel and Gretel*. There were no cakes and pies on the shake roof, but pointed turrets, narrow leaded windows and heavy plank doors stripped with wrought iron.

Dave climbed a circular stairway to Miss Kaye's door and knocked, prepared to run if the hinges creaked and bats flew out when the door was opened. A good idea, he realized, when he saw the character who came to the door.

Not since the Swedish Angel started wrestling around Hollywood had Dave seen so much ugliness in one man. There was a lot to be ugly—gnarled and dark, with a domed forehead and very little hair, and undershot jaw. The man's close-set eyes scowled at Dave. He said, "Yeah? What do you want?"

Dave gripped his courage firmly in his hot little hands, replied, "Maybe I've got the wrong address. I'm looking for a Miss Kaye—Miss Helen Kaye."

"Whaddaya want with her?" the man growled.

Dave's teeth felt dry and sticky as he tried to smile. "Why... as a matter of

fact, I wanted to see her about . . .”

He was taken off the hook painlessly by the appearance of a girl he recognized from Howe's pictures. “What is it, Pete?” she asked.

“Ah, this guy's got some pitch,” the man answered sullenly. “Says he wants to see you.”

Miss Kaye peered around this large character at Dave and smiled. “Yes, what is it?”

Dave felt a lot better. Boys like Pete weren't in his line. He knew exactly how to handle Miss Kaye's type. He took a business card out of his wallet and handed it to her.

“I want to talk to you about a professional matter,” he told her. “If you have the time.”

Helen Kaye glanced at the card, seemed properly impressed by what she read. At least she'd done her homework, read enough *Hollywood Reporter* and *Variety* to recognize that she was being favored with a visit from one of the industry's leading managers.

“Why, yes, of course,” she gushed. “Won't you come in, Mr. Smith?”

Between the two of them they jimmied Dave past this goon, Pete.

The interior of the room was keyed to the fairy-book theme—heavy, old furniture, dark. The air in the room was dry, smelled of burning gas from a plate hissing in front of a prop fireplace. Dave sat down carefully in a blocky easy chair, ready to spring out if it was a trap.

Pete hung around like a threatening cloud in the dimmer corners of the room. Miss Kaye had taken her place on the edge of a straight, carved chair across from Dave.

His immediate interest, however, was centered on a double crib in which he had seen two small, red-headed parties sleeping when he came in. Exhibit A in Howe's case. He started to whisper, but Miss Kaye laughed. “You won't have to worry

about waking them, Mr. Smith. They're used to voices—I believe they can even sleep through a soap opera.”

Dave shook his head, smiling. “You mean they're critics already?”

Miss Kaye permitted herself to glow. “They're awfully good babies, Mr. Smith.”

Dave studied her features: small, pixy-pointed, beneath shiny black hair. She was a natural to be Miss Wabash Falls of any year she happened to compete, but he could imagine what the motion-picture camera did for her. A cute kid, she'd photograph like a slab of lemon chiffon pie.

He said, “You're wondering how I got your address, of course.”

She answered, “Well, I—”

“As a matter of fact, one of the publicity men at Epic Enterprise gave it to me,” he went on. “You see, Miss Kaye, I've been talking to a producer at one of the other studios. He's seen some publicity stills of you and believes he may have a part.”

Dave's eye had been caught by a large photograph, mounted in a Mexican-silver frame. Jerome Jennings' craggy profile stared intently at the gas plate. Dave could make out the scrawled inscription: “To Helen Kaye—a darn sweet kid.”

WITH the thousands of these photographs that are handed out by a star, this proved nothing—to Dave. But he could imagine it in the hands of a slick lawyer like T. J. Howe, the effect such an inscription would have on a jury recruited from the Iowa belt of Los Angeles.

He was almost afraid Miss Kaye was going to take his bait. At the mention of “producer” and “part” she'd begun to simper. Pete's rasp broke it up: “We're not interested, Mr. Smith.”

Dave looked at the girl, saw her face blanch. “That's right, Mr. Smith,” she said. “I'm sorry, but you see. . .” She

smiled bravely at her cubs. "I have other responsibilities now. I'm afraid my career will have to wait. I do appreciate your interest, though. . . ."

Dave managed to look disappointed as he struggled out of the deep chair. "You're probably right," he said. He went to the side of the crib, peered down at the two little guys asleep there. "I guess they do need a mother's care."

Miss Kaye had come to stand beside him. "For the time being, at least," she said. "Possibly, later, I can find a woman to come in and look after them."

"Of course," Dave nodded. "By the way, what are their names?"

"That one is Jerome," she replied, pointing to the character snoozing on the left of the crib. "The other is Jennings."

Dave didn't choke, but he had a small fight to keep from losing his bland expression. When this girl threw a harpoon she didn't fool around. He glanced from the crib to Miss Kaye, then at Pete glaring at him from across the room. "You certainly have a couple of fine youngsters there," he said to Pete.

"Oh!" gasped Miss Kaye. "I'm sorry, I didn't introduce you. Pete isn't the father of the boys. He's my brother, Mr. Kantowski."

It was Dave's turn to say, "Oh!" and scramble for the dialogue that would ease him out of the apartment without inquiring about the babies' father. He was afraid he'd blow the whole thing if she named Jerome Jennings. The trouble was, one look at the slumbering bricktops in that crib almost convinced him. They were two miniature dead-ringers for Dave's client.

He said all the *other* nice things he could think of about them, fumbling his way to the door.

DAVE SMITH had something to ponder over when he crawled behind the wheel of his Packard convertible. Assum-

ing his client's innocence, how come the Kaye twins were such images of Jerome Jennings? The resemblance, he realized, was the most damaging evidence in the case. Let old T. J. Howe get this sweet-faced girl and her red-headed babies into court, and Jennings could start listing his occupation as *ex*-actor.

Naturally, the thought occurred to Dave that Jennings was lying to him. If he was, it wouldn't be unique in Dave's experience as an agent. But this time it would certainly cost important money. Angrily he jammed a fat thumb on the starter button, put the thought out of his mind.

His next stop was the Hall of Records in downtown Los Angeles. A clerk checked the records of birth for Dave, and what he learned gave him no comfort. A girl named Helen Kaye (unmarried) had had twin boys about a month ago. The birth certificates seemed perfectly in order, signed by a Dr. Travis. Dave made a note of this name, figuring he might as well cover every angle, even the bad ones.

According to the Los Angeles phone book, Dr. Travis practiced medicine in the Westlake Park district. The address turned out to be an old, grey-stone mansion—one of those relics of the days when this was a class neighborhood. It had been converted into a lying-in home, and was labeled "The Stork."

A very dried-up-looking little nurse answered Dave's ring. As she showed him to the office, Dave tried to decide whether the rustling sound she made came from her white, starched uniform or could she really be that dry. There was no question about the woman behind the desk in the office—a large, well-larded lady with blue-dyed hair. If she rustled, it would be her foundation. The flesh on her face had run like tallow from a candle, hung in lumps under her chin. The nameplate on the desk said she was Mrs. Agatha

Costello, and the nurse who had brought Dave in confirmed it.

Dave gave her his business card. She smiled, fipping a little through her dentures, "What can we do for you, Mr. Smith?"

"I'd like to talk to Dr. Travis," he explained.

"Oh, yes. Dr. Travis is our resident physician. However, I am the director, Mr. Smith, and I'm sure anything you might wish to take up with the doctor—I mean, I'm in charge of making arrangements."

She smiled again, indulgently. Dave felt his face getting hot as he realized Mrs. Costello had already tabbed him for a prospective father.

"No," he stammered. "I... you see, I'm not here to... I just want to talk to the doctor."

Mrs. Costello eyed him suspiciously, then shrugged. "Very well." She sent the nurse with the whispering uniform after Dr. Travis and, in a few minutes, the physician entered the office. Mrs. Costello suggested perhaps Dave would prefer to talk with the doctor privately, but he assured her that she was welcome to stay.

THE RESIDENT PHYSICIAN at The Stork was an immaculate little man. A casting director would have loved him in the part—small, grey haired, with built-in bedside manner. Dave took his hand, found it soft and warm, and very quickly withdrawn, as though the doctor had suddenly realized he'd forgotten to wear sterilized gloves.

Dave said, "Doctor, I'm vague about the ethics involved here—so if you don't care to answer my questions, I'll understand perfectly."

The doctor looked perplexed, his eyes roaming to Mrs. Costello and back to Dave. "Of course," he said uncertainly. "If I can be of assistance..."

Dave nodded. "Thanks, Doctor. Here's my question. About a month ago a young lady named Helen Kaye was a patient of yours, I believe?"

Dr. Travis frowned. "That is true."

"As I understand it," Dave went on, "you delivered Miss Kaye of twin boys."

Before the doctor answered, he looked to Mrs. Costello for his cue. Dave didn't catch it; but apparently she gave him the sign, because Travis answered, "As a matter of fact, I did. A very fine young lady, Miss Kaye—and a lovely pair of youngsters. I hope they're all right. . .?" he added anxiously.

"They seem to be," Dave replied. "I just wanted to make certain there couldn't have been any mistake about—"

"Oh, my, no!" Dr. Travis asserted. "I can't imagine what kind of mistake you might be referring to, Mr. Smith, but I assure you—"

Dave stood up. "Well, I guess that's all," he said. "Thanks a lot, Doctor—Mrs. Costello—you've been very helpful."

Mrs. Costello had risen, too, looking at him warmly. "You're entirely welcome, I'm sure, Mr. Smith. Perhaps another time we can be of even greater service..."

Dave felt himself starting to flush again. "At my age, I hope not," he stammered, backing toward the door.

He stopped at the first filling station on his way to Beverly Hills, called his client from a pay phone. "Buster," he told Jennings, "I don't know. I've checked every angle I can think of, and everything's legitimate about those twins except one word on their birth certificates." He went into detail about his visit with Miss Kaye and her brother, the record clerk downtown, the doctor.

"I'm out of ideas," he confessed. "I don't know where we go from here."

There was a minute of silence on the wire. Then Jennings said, "Look, Dave—maybe this is nothing, but do you suppose

you could get me in to see this Kaye person? It's possible she might find it a little tougher to make her lie stick, if she had to tell it to me personally."

"What've we got to lose?" Dave asked. "Can you get out of the house?"

"Sure, Dave, right after dinner. I'll tell Wanda I'm meeting you to go over some business."

"Okay, pal. I'll be at my office," Dave said. "About seven-thirty."

CHAPTER THREE

Too Smart to Live

AT EIGHT O'CLOCK, Dave and his red-headed client, Jérôme Jennings, arrived at Helen Kaye's apartment. The air was cool, heavy with gumwood smoke from several dozen fireplaces. It was dark enough so that Dave was able to smuggle Jennings up the circular stairway to Miss Kaye's door and hide him in the shadows before knocking.

Pete Kantowski came to the door with the same threadbare line he'd used that afternoon: "Yeah, what do you want?" He recognized Dave Smith and didn't seem especially overjoyed to see him again.

"Look, I want to talk to your sister," Dave said. "Is that all right with you?"

He didn't wait for an answer but charged past Pete as interference for Jennings.

Dave thought Pete was going to make a fight of it when he saw Jennings. But Helen said, "Please, Pete, don't," and Kantowski slouched into a corner.

Dave said. "I don't imagine I have to introduce you two. . . ."

Miss Kaye said softly, embarrassed, "No. We've met."

Dave was particularly interested in the byplay between Jennings and Miss Kaye. The actor stared at her coldly; she tried to smile, cover her confusion. Up to this moment, Dave had seen nothing but evi-

dence against his client. But Helen Kaye's apologetic, foot-shuffling performance convinced him Jennings had a case.

The actor nodded curtly at Helen Kaye, walked purposefully to the side of the double crib to inspect his alleged offspring. Again, Dave thought, the principals in this scene were playing their roles in reverse. Jennings, after scowling down at the little guys for a minute, turned to Dave with a wide, boyish grin. "Hey," he said, "they're swell!"

Dave would have expected a guilty Jennings to immediately make some defensive move like pointing out how the two small redheads really didn't look like him at all.

Dave glanced at Helen Kaye. He saw a very worried young lady standing to one side, eyeing the floor. If anyone had snapped their fingers at her, she'd have burst into tears.

Jennings finally tore himself away from the crib, forced the Kaye girl to look at him. "All right, Mother," he said softly. "Let's get this over. Who's the father of the youngsters?"

"Y-you are," she stammered.

"You know you're lying, don't you, Helen?" said Jennings.

"No... no... I..."

"Look, honey." Jennings shook her shoulders gently. "I wish those little guys were mine. Believe me, you wouldn't have any trouble getting me to support them. You'd have to fight to keep me from taking them home with me."

Pete glowered out of his corner. "Let go of my sister!"

Jennings ignored him, went on talking to Helen. "You know what you're doing, the chance you're taking. In court, you'll have to swear to a lot of lies under oath. If my attorney trips you up, the judge will send you to jail. Then what will happen to these kids?"

Helen didn't answer. Her eyes, Dave saw, were filling. Her lower lip trembled.

If she had to answer Jennings, there'd be a cloudburst.

The doorbell spared them that. Pete was nearest to the door, opened it. When Dave saw who was there, he wanted to crawl under the rug.

Wanda Jennings, her red hair wind-blown, a nearly ankle-length mink coat bundled around her taut, long-limbed body, stood there.

Jennings' face lost color. "Wanda," he croaked, "what are you doing here?"

She brushed past Pete, green eyes flashing. "I watched you mope all afternoon," she said to her husband. "Then you get a phone call from Dave, and come up with a story about a business meeting. You're a lousy liar, my love. So I followed you. Now, will someone please tell me what is going on?"

Jennings dropped limply into a chair. Dave cleared his throat. "Wanda, it's like this—"

His client broke in. "No, Dave, I'd better tell her. Very simply, Wanda—Miss Kaye, here, for some misguided reason of her own, is trying to establish me as the father of these two youngsters." He indicated the crib with a tired gesture. "I don't expect you to believe me, of course, but there's not a vestige of truth—"

"Listen, Jennings. . . ." Pete dragged Dave's client to his feet. "You've called Sis a liar for the last time!" He wound up and swung from the floor.

THIS, Jennings could do something about. He made it look easy, blocked the blow, driving his own fist into Pete's middle. The big goof doubled, and Jennings rapped him on the jaw. Pete spun into the wall, slid to the floor and stayed there.

Wanda was already beside the double crib. Dave saw her eyes start to get moist; then she turned and ran out of the apartment, keeping her face hidden from her husband.

Dave and Jennings exchanged a bleak look. Helen Kaye had crumpled on the davenport, sobbing quietly.

"Come on," Jennings said, starting for the door. "I have to talk to Wanda."

But her car raced away from the curb before they got to the street. They watched its taillights disappear around a corner. Jennings scrubbed a hand across his face.

"That beats me, Dave," he said unhappily. "I knew Wanda wouldn't give me a break."

Dave leaned a fatherly hand on Jennings' shoulder. "Leave us not count ourselves out yet, pal," he said. "After she's thought about it, maybe. . . ."

Jennings shook his head. "You don't know Wanda."

It wasn't in their contract, but Dave realized his client was a man in need of moral support. Gently he guided Jennings to the car and drove him to Beverly Hills, Jennings' place in Coldwater Cañon.

He was glad he did. Not even a servant showed up when they clattered through the big, domed entrance hall. The house felt cold, deserted—a hell of a place for a man to walk into alone, particularly as alone as Dave knew Jennings felt.

It wasn't so bad in the actor's study. There was a fire laid out in the fireplace, which Dave saw to lighting while Jennings raided the bar for a fifth of Scotch and a seltzer bottle. Dave, warming the broad expanse of tweed between his hip pockets, remarked, "You know, pal, this house is large enough—she could be here and we'd never know it."

Jennings had just built two dark highballs, handed one to Dave, studied the rising bubbles in his own. "I'm afraid not," he said. "Her car would have been out front or in the driveway. No, Dave—I wish there was even an outside chance she'd come back to me."

Dave dropped into a heavy, green-leather chair beside the fire. "I don't

know how you can be so positive," he said. "Dames are always coming back to guys."

"Believe me, Dave, this one isn't. You, of all people, ought to understand that. You know what our married life has been."

Dave shrugged. "So you're a couple of high-strung people. You get on each other's nerves. But I notice that no matter how many times you break up, you always—"

"You're a sweet guy," Jennings said quietly. "I appreciate what you're trying to do. But those other times were different. I wasn't in the kind of a spot I'm in now. Nobody was claiming I'd sired their brood. No, this time is it, Dave. The end."

"Just before I went on location for that last picture, you remember, Wanda was raising a bit of hell with me. She didn't want me to go. Some silly idea she had. I think she said she dreamed I wouldn't come back. We had quite a scrap about it. I told her to stop being ridiculous—making pictures was the way I kept her in minks. But no. Wanda presented me with a big ultimatum. If I did go to Mexico, she wouldn't be here when I came back—that is, if her dream was wrong and I did come back."

Jennings stopped pacing the floor, finished his drink, returned to the bottle and made another. He gulped it down and resumed the pacing.

"Well," Dave said, "this may be a fairly obvious remark, old man, but she *was* here, wasn't she?"

Jennings nodded. "Yeah. She was here."

He added, "Dave, I'm probably a damn fool. In spite of all our snarling and clawing, Wanda's my girl. I want her, Dave. Do I sound crazy?"

Dave Smith nodded gently. "Frankly, yes—but like a lot of other married guys are crazy."

JENNINGS gazed deep into the center of the fire, his face an animated patchwork of hot red with black shadows. "I'm not going to give her up without a fight, Dave!"

Dave nodded again, held out his empty glass. The actor filled it, put the bottle down where Dave could reach it. "Why doesn't she give me a chance to explain—at least call me?"

"I wouldn't know," Dave said. "I don't set up as an expert on feminine behavior."

"She's probably checked into a hotel by now," Jennings remarked thoughtfully.

Dave shook his head. "I may be a dope about women, but I know better than that."

"What do you mean?"

"Look, chum," said Dave, "Wanda would never blow her beautiful red top, alone in a hotel room tonight. She's got to talk to somebody, tell them what a heel you are, how bad she's been treated. A girl friend. They're probably holding a pajama-party wake in your happy home right now."

Jennings studied his agent's round, bland face. He even managed a weak smile. "Dave," he said, "I knew I had a good reason for paying you ten percent. Just a minute." Dave heard him bounding up the steps to the second floor of the house. Jennings was back shortly, with a white-leather notebook in one hand and a telephone trailing a long extension cord in the other.

"This is Wanda's address book," Jennings explained. "She's got a memory like a butterfly, so she always writes every telephone number down in here."

Dave nodded. "Fine. But look, Jerry—as much as I hate to kick my own idea in the teeth, suppose she tips her girl friend to say she isn't there?"

Jennings groaned, dropping the phone and Wanda's address book on the end table beside Dave Smith's chair.

Dave cracked the address book to the last page. "Well, she can't hate you for trying. Just for luck, we'll start with this one. Marian York, Crestview. . ."

Dave glanced up to see his client giving him a negative shake. "No. Wanda would never never be at Marian's. She had a wild idea once about Marian and me. She wouldn't give her the satisfaction. No, let's have the next one."

"How about Kathleen Yancy?"

"Could be. Yeah, it could be. What's her number?"

So, they started working through the book. It was pretty rough on Jennings—none of the girls had seen Wanda; but some of them wanted to talk, and poor old Jerome had to do a lot of fancy verbal footwork to shut them off. It was during one of these bouts that Dave was reading ahead, looking for prospects, when his eye caught on "Dr. Travis," and a downtown number.

He didn't say anything to Jennings, but it bothered him. After a couple more no-success calls, he put the book down with a big yawn. "Kid," he said, "I'm afraid this is nothing. If you want to continue, okay, but I have to run."

Jennings looked a little hurt as he walked to the front door with Dave. "I'll get in touch first thing in the morning," promised Dave. "Try to catch some sleep."

The actor nodded. "Right. . ."

THE LATE show-break traffic didn't exist for Dave Smith as he rammed his Packard convertible down Wilshire Boulevard. The steady stream of westbound headlights dented his conscious mind only enough to keep him in the proper traffic lane. Already he'd leaped ahead to the place of business of Mrs. Costello and Dr. Travis.

He told himself there was probably a simple explanation for Wanda's listing the doctor's number in her address book—

and here he was trying to make something complicated of it. Maybe the drinks . . . Maybe this whole mad situation—he found himself half believing everybody's story, and they couldn't all be on the level. Someone had to be lying. Dave knew, unless he found out pretty soon who it was, he'd pop his cork.

He parked a short distance from the maternity mill, snapped off his lights and hustled the rest of the way on foot. When he saw Wanda's French-made sedan parked in front of The Stork, he began to warm to the hunch that had brought him down here. Maybe it'd pay off, after all. . . .

The dark street was quiet, unoccupied, as Dave scouted the front of the Costello establishment. He slipped into the shrubbery, worked his way stealthily to a lighted window. As with most houses of the period, the first-floor windows were more than six feet from the ground. But by chinning himself on the sill, he was able to see inside the office.

Wanda was there, with Mrs. Costello and Dr. Travis, her red hair disarrayed, wild. Her eyes looked hot, and Dave could see that she had chewed off her lipstick. On the strength of her barren expression, Dave guessed she was on the losing end of an argument—and not enjoying it, either.

Dave felt his grip slipping. It wasn't easy to hold his two hundred pounds in that position. He let himself down to the ground easily, worked his fingers to relieve muscular cramp. His mind was busy, too—how to get in the office and maybe, with luck, blow this rhubarb wide open?

He was too busy.

There was a sudden thrashing in the bushes behind him. Before he could untrack himself, a large fist spread all over his horizon. Dave felt the acid, electric shock of pain as he fell through darkness—down, down and out.

He came to, sprawled on a chair in Mrs. Costello's office. His face was puffed and sore. The light stung his eyes as he squinted at the other people in the room.

Wanda was still there, still desperately broken up—Dr. Travis and the blue-haired Mrs. Costello still smug. Dave heard Pete Kantowski's voice rasping, "So I see this character duck into the bushes by the window there. I think maybe he wants to know what goes on, I ought to bring him in."

Dave shook his head, trying to get the walls to stop waving at him. Wanda saw he was conscious, cried, "Dave, make them give back my babies!"

Dave Smith focused his eyes on Dr. Travis and the establishment's boss-lady. "So now it comes out!" he said.

"What comes out?" snapped the lady with the blue hair.

"Why the Kaye twins look so much like Jerome Jennings," Dave shrugged.

"They told me my baby was born dead," said Wanda, her voice shrill. "I believed them—until I saw those twins. They're mine; I know they're mine!"

"This is all very regrettable," little Dr. Travis said with a weary shake of his head. "It happens so frequently, too. . . ."

"You mean you people make a habit of snatching babies?" Dave asked.

"Of course not!" the doctor replied. "You see, Mr. Smith, motherhood is an extremely powerful psychological drive. When it's frustrated—as in the case of Mrs. Janney—it is not uncommon for the unfortunate woman to feel a great sense of loss, of having been robbed. She's tortured by this delusion. She honestly believes someone else got her baby. It's too bad, but—"

"I'd buy that," cracked Dave, "except the twins do look like Jerome Jennings."

Mrs. Costello's high, nasal whine broke into the conversation: "I believe Miss Kaye has named Jennings as their father, hasn't she?"

Dave nodded. "Just a minute. I want a review. Dr. Travis refers to Mrs. Jennings as *Mrs. Janney*."

"That was the name she gave when she came here," Mrs. Costello explained.

"I see." Dave nodded again. "Wanda, when was your baby born, the exact date?"

"August tenth."

Dave Smith smiled at Dr. Travis. "A tight coincidence, isn't it, Doc? That's when the Kaye twins were born."

DR TRAVIS sighed. "If you care to see them, my records are available—but the coincidence you mention is no more than the basis of Mrs. Jan—Mrs. Jennings' delusion. She and Miss Kaye became acquainted during their confinement here. Mrs. Jennings lost her child, while Miss Kaye was twice blessed. You can see how that would affect Mrs. Jennings, particularly—"

"I can see a sweet racket!" barked Dave. "The wife of a famous movie star checks in here under an assumed name. I don't know why, but she does. Her husband's on the Gulf of California, shooting a picture. He's been gone four months already, and will be gone another sixty days or so. Under those circumstances, it's a better-than-even-money bet he doesn't know he's about to be a father."

"At the same time, here's a girl who's had her picture taken with Jennings on his yacht. She also is in a delicate condition. The girls come down to the wire together, and somebody gets the bright idea that if their babies are switched, Jennings can be stuck for a whopping paternity suit!"

"You have a very vivid imagination, Mr. Smith," said Dr. Travis testily. "I'm glad you're exercising it in the presence of witnesses, because I mean to sue."

Dave waved at him in disgust. "I should live until you do!" he said. "But there's one thing I don't quite understand."

How did you people know about Miss Kaye being on that publicity junket with Jennings? There's a part missing here somewhere, but with this kind of a start I don't imagine it'll be too difficult to find."

"Dave, you're too smart a guy to be stuck with details." The voice came from behind Dave Smith. He strained to see who was speaking.

Dixon Wraith, the studio publicity character, had just sauntered into the office. He smirked at Dave. "You're too smart, period."

Dave nodded. "Okay. That does it."

"Yes," Wraith grinned, "it certainly does, Dave. I always liked you. For a flesh peddler, you're okay. I'll miss your case of booze every Christmas. A lot of people will." He handed a gun to Pete Kantowski, adding, "Sit on these two people for a few minutes, Pete."

He led Mrs. Costello and Dr. Travis out of the office. When they came back, they marched in like a jury with a guilty verdict. No one spoke.

Dave was watching the little medico open a glass case in the corner of the room, take out a hypo, fit a glittering needle to it and load the instrument from a small bottle. The doctor walked purposefully to where Dave was sitting. For once in his life, Dave Smith was sure the doctor didn't know best.

He started to get to his feet, but only started. Pete brought the butt of his gun down hard against the side of Dave's head. There wasn't enough hair in a mattress to deaden the blow—and on Dave's thinly thatched skull, the effect was sudden and complete.

CHAPTER FOUR

Grave for Two

THERE was nothing but sound inside Dave's head—first, like the roar of a jet engine. When it quieted to a gentle

purr, he began to be aware of his body again. It was packed tight against someone on his right. That was all the reminder he needed not to make a move.

He risked opening his eyes to mere slits. He was in a car—there was the rumble of an engine, the movement, and a faint glow from the dash panel. He could make out Wanda Jennings' profile. She'd apparently received some of the same treatment, was asleep on his shoulder. He didn't move his head to see who was driving.

Somone in the back seat rasped, "How much farther, Dix?"

Pete Kantowski.

Dixon Wraith's voice—he was at the wheel—said, "About a quarter of a mile."

There was silence after that for long enough, Dave thought, to go a hundred miles. Then the car stopped, the lights were doused. Dixon said, "You'll have to break the lock on the gate."

"Right," Pete answered, and a car door slammed. Dave heard a hammer beat on metal, and Pete came back. "Okay, take her through."

Dave Smith was now oriented completely. Wraith was driving from the right-hand side, which meant a foreign job, probably Wanda's. He held on, waiting for the next move. The car stopped.

The engine was revved up to about quarter speed. He heard Wraith's bantering, "Good-bye, kiddies," and they lurched forward crazily.

Dave opened his eyes, had a flash look at the car moving across a few bumpy feet of granite—far away, lights spread across the top of a towering dam. *Hollywood Reservoir*, chased through his mind as the car nosed over the embankment and plunged into the dark water.

Dave was already fighting the door, which opened from the front, and had just started to swing out when they struck. The force of the water jerked it the rest of the way, and Dave with it.

He tried to grab Wanda, and missed.

His clothes were momentarily buoyant but getting heavier. Cold. He broke water behind a large air-bubble from the car.

Dix and Pete, watching from the bank of the reservoir, wouldn't be able to see him in that churning, black water. Dave gulped air and dived, kicking off his shoes, fighting out of his jacket.

He went for the bottom, hoping to get Wanda out of the wreck. But there was no bottom, no wreck. . . .

Dave swam under water as far as he could, came up face down so there would be no white flash of his face to betray him. He floated on his side, breathing, trying to decide if Dix and Pete were waiting for him.

There was another car on the road, driving away from where Wanda's Delahaye had been ditched. Dave waited. No sound from the bank. He swam parallel to the shore, in a soundless breast stroke, until he was clear of that place. Then he came in and struggled up the almost sheer embankment, tearing his soft hands.

For several minutes he lay, chilled and shaken, on the rough, crushed granite. Houses rimmed the hills, overlooking the dam. Hollywood was ten minutes' drive from where he lay—and if he wasn't almost the luckiest guy in the world, he'd be with Wanda now at the bottom of the reservoir.

He thought about her. She'd never known what had happened. Dr. Travis, Dixon, Wraith and company were a humane bunch of killers.

He pulled himself painfully to his feet and began to mince over the sharp rocks to the road. His socks were in ribbons before he got to Cahuenga Boulevard and was able to hail a taxi.

Dave went home, dressed the cuts on his feet, had a stiff drink and fell across his bed. He died. Next morning he combed the papers. Nothing about a car being found in the Hollywood Reservoir; but there was a short, routine report of a suicide.

A Hollywood starlet had given up her battle for fame, taken the old tried-and-true way out—an overdose of sleeping pills. Helen Kaye.

Nothing was said about the little Kaye twins.

Dave called Jerome Jennings. The actor was frantic. Wanda hadn't come back—no word from her. Dave didn't explain why that would be.

Jennings was going on about the Kaye suicide. He'd heard from Mrs. Costello. Before Miss Kaye loaded herself with sleep drugs, she had turned her youngsters over to Mrs. C. Now the old bag was threatening to expose Jennings as their father—and therefore the real motive for Helen's suicide—unless he ponied up a fast hundred grand.



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JAYNE'S P-W (TRADE MARK) **PIN-WORMS** for

"Dave," wailed Jennings, "what'll I do?"

"I think we'd better pay her price."

"But, Dave, I haven't got—"

"Pick it up at my office this afternoon," Dave said.

"Dave, I don't know how I can pay you back. I—"

"I'm not counting on your paying me back," said Dave. "Look, how's your chauffeur with a gun?"

"All right, I guess. Why?"

"Then here's the pitch. Call Costello and tell her you'll have the hundred thousand for her tonight at ten o'clock, your place. Have your driver stand by with a car and a heater in the driveway, beside your house. After old lady Costello leaves, get out to the car on the double. I'll be there. Clear?"

"Yes, but—"

"Don't worry about a thing, pal," said Dave. "It's Dave's party. My secretary will have the money for you at two-thirty. And, Jerry—you haven't heard from me."

AT NINE-THIRTY, Dave stepped out of a cab a couple of blocks up the canyon from Jennings' place. He walked back gingerly, on his sore feet. He entered the well-barbered grounds of Jennings' place stealthily, keeping out of sight among the ornamental shrubs, worked his way past the empty swimming pool to where he'd have a view of the front door and the driveway.

At ten sharp, a sedan tooled in and stopped. Mrs. Costello and the doctor got out of the back seat and went to the door. Dave saw Jennings meet them. He made out two dark shapes remaining in the car—Pete and Dix? Dave was betting that way—a cool hundred grand.

Fifteen minutes later, the blue-haired old girl and her medico sidekick came back to the car. They got in and drove off. Dave leaped out of his hiding place,

breaking for the side of the house where Jennings was to have his car and chauffeur. It was there; and Jennings pounded up, waving a .45 service automatic, before the engine caught.

Dave told the driver to start rolling but keep his lights off. They got a break. A block from the house, they saw a car waiting at the intersection for the Costello car to clear. When it did, the other job pulled in behind it. Dave said they could turn on their lights now.

They followed Costello down Sunset Boulevard, the Strip; then a sudden left turn at Cahuenga. This mystified Jennings—but not Dave. He smiled quietly. He couldn't have planned it better, he said.

The Costello sedan went over the Pass toward San Fernando Valley, then up Dark Canyon Road, turned right on a side street. Dave's gang followed, dropping back now.

"They won't lose us," Dave assured Jennings, remembering his painful journey the previous night. "I know every rock and chuckhole on this road."

At the crest of the hill, Dave ordered lights out again and they crept after the taillights of the speeding sedan below them on the reservoir road.

Suddenly the taillights of the Costello car winked out, a quarter of a mile further up the road. Dave said, "Leave the bus here. We'll go the rest of the way on foot."

They pulled to the shoulder, got out, moving as fast and quietly as possible. Up ahead, they saw a flash illuminate the inside of the sedan. Another, and another.

On the first flash, Dave whispered, "That's for Pete. The other two are Mrs. Costello and the Doc. Come on."

They were almost to the gate with the broken lock when they heard a loud splash. They could make out a man silhouetted against the lights from the dam.

Dave deployed his army along the fence, crept ahead to the gate. "Dixon Wraith," he rumbled, "this is God. Aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

The figure on the reservoir bank stiffened.

"Drop your rod and that bag of loot," Dave said. "There are three guns covering you. Move, and we'll chop you down!"

The gun and money were dropped. Dave closed in, frisked Wraith. Jennings and his chauffeur came up.

"I knew there'd be no split of this hundred G's," Dave said to the praise-agent. "Either you or Pete was going to get it all, and I didn't figure Pete had enough on the ball."

"How did you know they were coming here?" Jennings asked.

"You tell him," Dave told Wraith, "about ditching Wanda and me here last night."

The meaning of what Dave had said broke over Jennings. "You mean Wanda . . .?"

"I'm sorry, pal," Dave said. "I tried to get her out of the car. They'd doped us. I was lucky—mine wore off about a minute before we hit the water. I tried to save Wanda, Jerry, but the force of hitting the water jerked her away from me."

The actor turned on Wraith, his fists crushing out the scared cry of the press-agent. Dave stopped his client before he'd torn Wraith apart.

"I want to kill him!" Jennings raved. "Let me alone, Dave!"

Smith enlisted the aid of Jennings' chauffeur, struggled to hold the actor back. "I can't let you do it," he said gently. "I have this boy booked for an important singing engagement with the Los Angeles police."

DAVE never stayed closer to a client than he did to Dixon Wraith while the press character was having his audi-

tion before the Homicide Squad at Hollywood Substation. He wasn't satisfied until he saw Wraith signed to a long-term contract with options—a quick trial and starring part in the lethal gas chamber.

It was a thoroughly bushed Dave Smith who drove up before Jerome Jennings' Georgian mansion in the dark pre-dawn hours. He'd promised Jennings he would report. The actor met him at the door, led Dave to the study and put a drink in his hand.

"Well," Jennings asked, "how did you make out?"

Dave wet his throat with almost half the drink before he answered, "Wraith's in."

He rubbed a moist spot on the bridge of his nose, settled back contentedly. "Our boy really yodeled. According to his story, Wraith arranged for Helen Kaye's confinement at The Stork. While he was visiting her, he recognized Wanda checking in under an assumed name, and dreamed up this perfect paternity squeeze. Of course, he had a lot of help from that larcenous old blister, Costello, who ran the joint.

"Wraith confessed all the murders—except the Kaye kill. That he blamed on Doc Travis. After they left Wanda and me in the reservoir last night, Costello, Travis, Pete and Wraith went to Helen's apartment. She was wanting out of the racket, nearly booted the whole thing when you called her hand. She had to be removed. They told her she was free to quit them; just sign papers on the kids, turning them over to Costello. She did this gladly. Then kind old Agatha Costello thought Helen looked nervous, suggested that Dr. Travis give her something to make her sleep. He did. The big sleep. . . ."

Jennings nodded when Dave finished. "I understand everything," he said, "except how Wanda ever got mixed up with

(Continued on page 128)

By **SCOTT
O'HARA**



"I wouldn't try anything," the man said softly. "Now back real slow against the wall. . . ."

Not all his Bureau training could prepare him for a woman like this, who could sell him out, make him forget his duty, and then—make him love her for it!

NIGHT WATCH

AT FIVE MINUTES of five the disc jockey topped off his program with a recording by the All Stars. Barney Bigard's clarinet was sweet and strong, to the counterpoint noodling of Fatha' Hines. He kept the car radio tuned so low that the rhythm was a whisper, the tune like a memory in the mind. As the piece ended he turned off the radio, cupped his hands around the lighter from

the dashboard as he lit another cigarette.

When it was finished he eased the car door open and stood out in the crisp, pre-dawn air, the wet spring-smell of the woods. Four months of waiting and watching. The tiredness was deep in him, and the boredom. A leaden-muscled, sag-nerved tiredness.

Behind the house three hundred feet away, the roosters screamed brassy de-

fiance at distant hen runs, and, lonesome through the dregs of night, came the far-off sigh and pant of a train.

Barry Raymes leaned against the side of the government sedan, sensing, for the hundredth time, his own unreality—neatly dressed, as the Bureau demanded, the regulation special making its familiar bulge, the regulation hammer on the regulation empty chamber, the entire picture anachronistic in the threat of dawn, in the sleepy peace of the Georgia countryside. In the war there had been the long time on the ship, so long that things that happened before faded away, and the future was immeasurably distant. This was not unlike that time on the ship. At eight Sturdevant would relieve him, to be relieved in turn at four in the afternoon by French, who would carry on until midnight, when once again Barry Raymes, with the thermos of coffee, the bundle of sandwiches from the hotel, would begin the vigil that had begun to seem pointless. But no agent of two years seniority can hope to point out to the Special Agent in Charge that the assignment, in his measured opinion, is of no value. Patience is a quality more precious than gold to the Bureau. A man without patience does not last long.

And so there has to be reconciliation to the night after night, the hundred and twenty-six nights thus spent, and the possible hundred and twenty-six yet to come. Even though each night added another cumulative factor to the deathly weariness. Weariness came from recurrent alertness, the adrenalin that came hard and fast into the blood whenever a car seemed to slow on the highway. Or there would be an unidentifiable sound that made necessary a cautious patrol of the grounds with the Bureau variation of the wartime, infra-red snooperscope.

All because the Bureau was gambling that Craik Lopat would return to see the girl he had intended to marry. . . .

AS DAWN paled the eastern sky, the kitchen lights went on, slanting yellow-orange oblongs out onto the packed dirt of the dooryard, and he could see her, tall, as she moved about in the kitchen, putting the coffee on before going back to her bedroom to exchange the robe for the cotton dress and sweater that she usually wore. The sweater was a heavy maroon cardigan, too large for her, and he suspected that it had belonged to Lopat. Somehow, this past month, when he thought of Marra Allen wearing Lopat's sweater, an ugly anger thickened within him. He recognized the potential danger of his attitude and sought to recover his original indifference, but without any particular success.

In the night watch you could think of taking this Marra Allen, with her ignorance and her superstitions and her unlettered tongue, and becoming Pygmalion, because there was no denying that her slim loveliness was more than just an attribute of youth. The bone structure was good and she would take beauty to her grave. And French told of the innate fastidiousness, the kitchen shades drawn, the water heated each night in the big tub in a countryside where Saturday baths were a mark of eccentricity.

And also, in the long night, you could think of her breathing softly in sleep on her bed and think of how her warm breath would come from lips parted just a bit, probably, and the golden hair spread over the pillow. She was three hundred feet away, and one night you quite calmly stepped over to the birch which was white in the starlight and clubbed it hard with your clenched fist, later sucking the swollen knuckles, but cured for the moment.

Barry Raymes had always been a quick and competent, though somewhat shy young man—with a wide, dark line in his mind separating right from wrong. The frequency with which his thoughts and his dreams turned to Marra Allen disturbed

him because he sensed wrongness in a Bureau agent involving himself personally with any female in any case, no matter what intrinsic worth said female seemed to possess.

Sturdevant and French both made the usual, the expected, jokes about the midnight-to-eight trick, and the obvious advantages pertaining to the hour, and in the beginning he had laughed in the expected way and hinted broadly of the mythical delights of such an assignment, but of late he had felt the flush on the back of his neck and laughter had not been as easy.

When she returned to the kitchen the dawn light was brighter, paling the artificial light from the kitchen. She opened the kitchen door and looked over toward the small side road where his car was hidden in the heavy brush. The light behind her outlined her and the morning wind caught at the hem of the cotton dress.

He had long since decided that there was no compromise of Bureau directives involved. The SAC—Special Agent in Charge—had made it quite clear that it would be impossible to carry out the assignment without tipping off the girl. And so his conscience had been made easy. And it had become a morning custom.

He came across the dooryard, taking out the Special when he was forty feet from her. She stepped aside, as usual, saying, "Morning, mister," that look of amusement on her face as though he were a small boy playing some absurd variation of cops-and-robbers.

He went through the house as he had been taught in the School. It did not take long. Four rooms, like small boxes, on one floor. Bedroom, sitting room, storeroom and kitchen.

When he came back into the kitchen she had put the coffee cups on the table, taking, as usual, as the one without the handle.

Without turning she said, "Find any crooks in my house?" She stood at the wood stove, turning the eggs.

"Not today."

"Gives me a funny feeling, kinda, mister. You don't trust me much, do you?"

"Of course I trust you, Marra. I just have to follow orders."

"Sure," she said, her tone weary. He sat down in his usual place, his back to the wall. She brought over the two plates of eggs, the thick-cut bacon, taking, as usual, the chipped plate for herself.

THEY ate in silence, and, as on every morning, she lowered her face almost to the plate for each forkful. In another woman it would have amused and partially revolted him. In Marra it seemed oddly pathetic. It seemed as though a girl of breeding sat there, intent, for some strange reason, on playing this part that had been given her. And in the depths of her grey-blue eyes he saw the deadness, a nothingness, as though a part of her had been dead—for four months.

They finished breakfast and he found the fifty-cent piece in his pocket. He slipped it under the edge of the plate, without her seeing him do it. They had never spoken of the fee he had arbitrarily selected as proper for the morning breakfast, and he knew that she would not take the plate away until he left.

"When you people goin' ta give up?" she asked.

"When we get Lopat."

"He hid good, eh?"

"He hid very good. Maybe we'll find him. Maybe he'll come back to be found."

She took one of his cigarettes. She sighed. "For me, mister, it might just as well be jail. When Craik was around I got to go jukin' once in a while. Now none of the boys'll ask me. Solly, or Tad or Jesse or any of 'em. They know there'll be you G's taggin' along."

"Are you in love with Craik Lopat?"

"Love is a big word, mister. Craik's always good for laughs. Big husky guy with a mean eye on him. Like a—well,

like one of them mountain cats. Mean. Big white teeth. See him work out once on one of them Turner boys from Patton Ridge. Gouged an eye out of him in about three seconds."

"Did he get into trouble just out of meanness, do you think, Marra?"

She frowned, took her time answering. "I can't say. He always wanted a big shiny car and money in his pocket. He got fired off the gas station and they wouldn't take him back in the mill again because of the trouble last time. I guess he was sore at the mill and that's why he done it."

Barry Raymes, thinking aloud, said, "And he had beginner's luck, all right. If they'd gotten the safe closed . . . if it hadn't been payday . . . if that guard hadn't lost his nerve. . . Lots of ifs. He got thirty-five thousand, in small bills and change, and drove off in the plant manager's car to boot and took that payroll clerk with him. That's how we come into the picture."

"Because of the state line?"

"He rolled the clerk out into the brush in Alabama, remember, and shot him through the stomach. The clerk didn't die easy, Marra."

"He was always wild-like," she said softly. "Even when he was just a kid."

"You were going to marry him," he said accusingly.

"Oh, I know what you mean. He'd have given me a bad time, that's for sure. Other women and getting likkered up and maybe slamming me around. He done that once, you know." She laughed, almost fondly. "Gee, did I have a fat eye on me!"

"After what's happened," he asked, "if you had a chance to go with him, would you?"

She regarded him steadily. "Mister, I couldn't rightly say."

"You would, wouldn't you?"

"I might."

He wanted to hurt her. He pushed his chair back and stood up. He said, "You'll find the half-buck under the plate."

She flushed. "That's all right."

Anger didn't fade entirely until he was back at the car. And then he was ashamed for speaking of the money, knowing that it would make a difference between them.

Sturdevant showed up a little before eight and Barry Raymes drove back to the small city eight miles away and went to bed.

He was up at five, had another breakfast and went to a movie. At eleven he finished his lunch, picked up the sandwiches and coffee and went out and relieved a bored and sleepy Paul French.

The long night hours went by without incident. She did not come to the kitchen door. He waited longer than usual and then went over.

"I want to search the house," he said harshly.

She stepped aside without a word. As before the house was empty.

He went back into the kitchen and said, "I could use some breakfast, Marra."

"I can sell you coffee, eggs and bacon for a half a buck, if you want it."

"I—I'm sorry I acted like I did yesterday, Marra."

She looked directly at him. "You was ugly."

"I had a reason."

"What reason?"

"You said you might go away with— with him. Marra, I don't know what's happened to me, but . . ."

She moved a half step closer to him and, with dignity, lifted her face to look directly up into his eyes. He felt the warmth of her breath against his chin. As he bent to kiss her, her hands fastened with hard force around his arms above the elbows. His reactions were delayed. He twisted away, reaching for the revolver.

"I wouldn't try that," a man said softly. The Army Colt in his hand was aimed at Barry's belt buckle. "You did right well, Marra, and I thank you for it. Back real slow against the wall next to the stove

there, mister. Hands way up. That's right. Go git me some cloth, Marra, a wad of it."

CRAIK LOPAT wore an expensive-looking suit, but the knees were stained with dirt and one button was missing from the suit coat. He wore no tie and his white shirt was open at the collar. He was thick in the shoulder, slim and flat in the belly and hips. Black eyebrows met over the bridge of his nose and the mouth was heavy with cruelty and sensuousness.

"A cop," he said, "tryin' to love up my woman! They musta got you outa the bottom of the barrel, sonny. I been here for two days, layin' up in the hills until I figured out your hours. When you looked around, I was outside the bedroom window. And it'll be nearly two hours before the next one shows up. You couldn't find me before, and you won't find the two of us, either. I got a good car stashed over beyond the grove."

Marra came back into the kitchen with a wad of sheeting.

"You want me to tear it into strips, Craik?" she asked.

"No. Give it here. I got to wad it around the end of this here .45 because it makes too damn much noise. You want to see me shoot him, you kin stand over there, f'you want. Sonny gets it low down in the gut. He woulda got it in the head except for what I see him trying to do to you."

Barry Raymes felt the sweat run down his ribs. His mouth was dry and he was dizzy. Some of it was genuine fear. More of it was anger and frustration that he should have been taken in so easily. He looked at Marra. Her face was pale and she moistened her lips.

"Right—right here in the kitchen?" she asked weakly.

"You got no more use for this little old shack, honey. You don't like it, go on in the next room."

"They'll never give up if you kill me, Lopat. Never," Barry said. He despised

the tremble that came into his voice.

"They got no pictures of me, sonny, and no prints. I got a nice new name and a lot of good neighbors in a place you'll never find. I told 'em all I was going back to pick up my wife." He wrapped the barrel in the sheeting. "Brace yourself, sonny."

"Craik," she said. "Wait a minute. Let me get my stuff together afore you kill him. It'll make some noise and I don't want to have to run for it without my things."

"I'm going to buy you new stuff, honey."

"After we get married?"

Craik Lopat frowned. "If we get time to make out the papers, honey. You'll get the new stuff anyway."

"I'll hurry. Don't shoot him yet. I want to see it, Craik. I never did see a man get hisself killed yet."

She smiled, quite merrily.

"Make it fast, baby," Craik growled.

She hurried out of the room. Craik stood, whistling tonelessly, the muzzle, shrouded in sheeting, steady as a boulder. Barry made his plans. They hadn't taken the revolver. That was an oversight. He'd watch Craik's eyes. They might flick over to the girl when she came back into the kitchen. At that moment he'd throw himself to the left, snatching the revolver as he fell, hoping to get in at least one shot.

He heard Marra's quick footsteps. She appeared in the bedroom door. She lifted the shotgun and the full blast at short range caught Craik Lopat in the back of his thick, tanned neck. The big man stumbled one step forward, his head nearly severed from his body, and fell heavily, full length, the .45 spinning out of his dead hand, his face smashing against the worn floor boards.

BARRY RAYMES bent stupidly and picked up the .45. Marra Allen knelt beside the body, picked up the dead hand,

sat back on her heels and crooned—a low, sad tone that was without tears.

"You were going to go with him."

"He was changed, mister. Changed. He was like a dog I see once in town, with suds on his mouth and his eyes crazy."

"Was it because he was going to kill me?" he asked softly.

She turned her head slowly and looked at the wall against which Barry had been standing. Her voice sounded far away. "You see that blue color, don't you? Last year I wanted to fix the place up. He bought the paint and painted it. I got those little red things. Funny little things. You wet the paper and then they slide right off onto the wall. He thought they were pretty. And we were going to live here, you know."

She still held the lifeless hand. He saw the expensive band of the watch, the black hair curling harshly on the back of the hand, between the knuckles of the fingers.

"That's where he was going to kill me, against that wall."

"It didn't mean anything to him, mister. It didn't mean a damn thing to him."

He shifted his weight uneasily and said,

with mock joviality, "Well, no matter why you felt you had to do it, I want you to know that I really feel . . ."

She wasn't listening. She had started that toneless crooning again, and he suddenly realized that it was the sound many women make when they wish to soothe infants, wish to send them off to sleep.

He walked out the open kitchen door, then turned, saying, "Did you say something?"

"I just said, mister, that it'll scrub off the floorboards. It sure would have messed up that wall."

He walked through the door yard and across the vegetable patch, careful not to step in the freshly planted rows. The night mist was drying on the hood and top of the black government sedan. When the sending set warmed up he lifted the hand mike off the prongs and said, knowing as he did so, that not only had Craik Lopat died, but also a girl who had existed almost entirely in his mind, "Raymes reporting, Raymes reporting in."

"Go ahead, Raymes."

He licked his lips and planned how he would phrase it.



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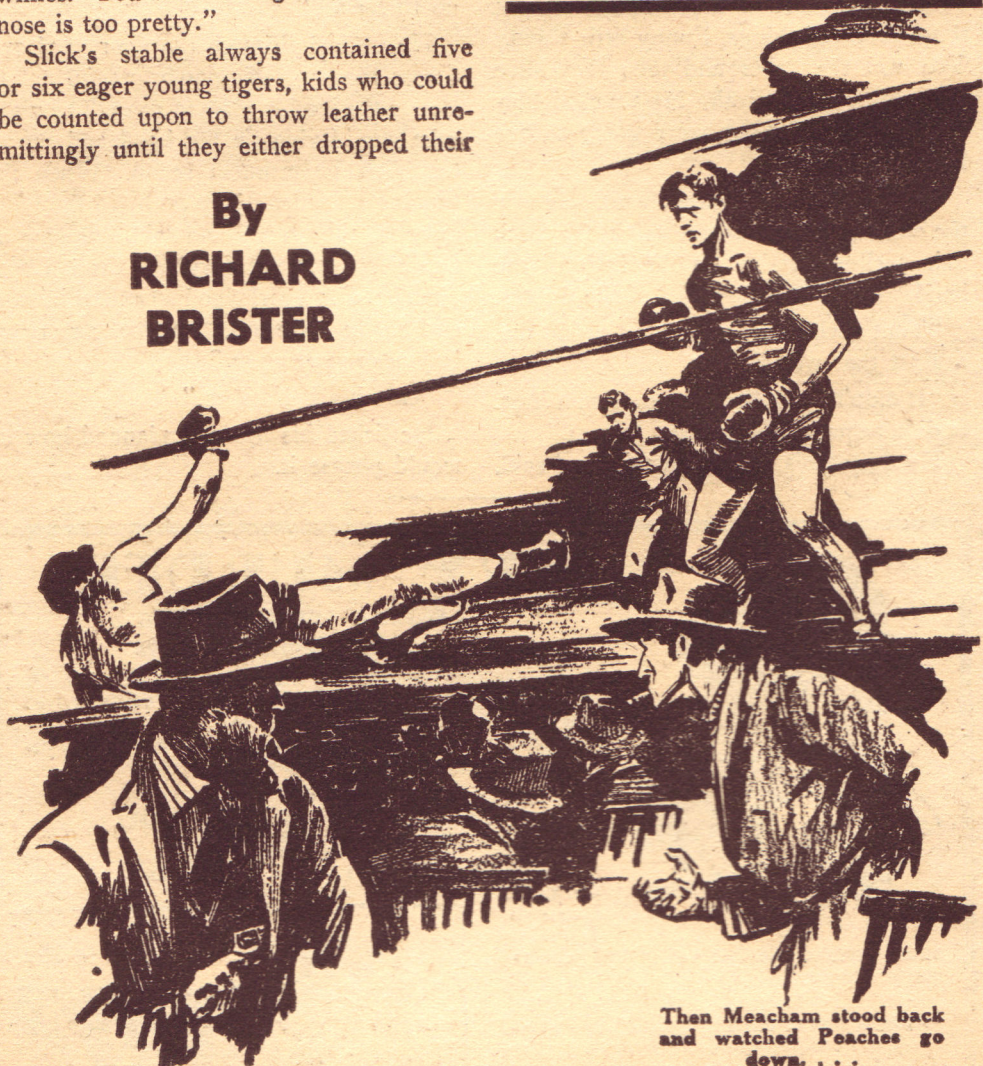
BY THE SKIN OF HIS TEETH

SLICK HAYDEN liked sluggers. He wouldn't handle a Fancy Dan, no matter how the boy might plead to be taken into Slick's stable. "G'wan, beat it," he'd growl over his mangled stogie, "you punch-and-run guys gimme the willies. You ain't no fighter, kid. Your nose is too pretty."

Slick's stable always contained five or six eager young tigers, kids who could be counted upon to throw leather unremittingly until they either dropped their

"Kill 'im! Kill 'im!" screamed the fans in the Garden. . . . And if Meacham won that fixed fight, there was a gunman in the crowd who'd be quick to oblige. . . .

By
**RICHARD
BRISTER**



Then Meacham stood back
and watched Peaches go
down. . . .

opponents or were themselves put down for the ten count.

Slick's boys didn't last long. Slick wasted no time in purging himself of a fighter who'd begun to slow down, or was showing signs of becoming punchy. And once in awhile he wasn't above pulling a fast one on a boy he had marked for the discard.

Robbie Meacham, for instance. Robbie Meacham was a heavy who'd shown promise when Slick signed him, seven years back, but now, at twenty-eight, he was wearing out prematurely. Slick knew it, and perhaps a couple of Robbie's stablemates had been able to read the forewarnings of exhaustion in the big fellow. But nobody else in the trade was onto the fact that Meacham was wearing out in his late twenties.

Slick rubbed his soft, fallow hands and paid a call upon Carlo Franchetti, a small, sharp-eyed, dark-chinned man with whom he had previously had private dealings. The meeting occurred in Franchetti's flashily decorated apartment.

Franchetti did not offer Slick a drink, although he was himself partaking of Scotch and soda. "Well," he said, regarding Slick with obvious loathing, "what kind of slime is it this time?"

"That ain't no way to talk, Mr. Franchetti," Slick whined ingratiatingly. "Maybe I better take this somewhere else. If you an't interested—"

"Siddown, you fat slob," said Franchetti. "And keep those rotten cigars in your pocket. Don't want you stinking up the upholstery with that crummy odor. Now, what're you selling?"

"Meacham."

Franchetti looked at him, shaking his dark little head. "The heavy," he said. "The guy with a wife and six kids, that you were going to do so much for. To hear you tell it."

"Lay off," Slick whined. His heart was working overtime, as it always did when

he was excited. And his gums hurt. He had false teeth which did not fit his mouth properly. He would have liked to remove the plate now, to relax his sore mouth. But with the teeth removed, he couldn't talk properly. And right now his well-known ability to talk was important.

"You asked me what I was selling, and I told you Meacham."

Franchetti looked shrewdly at him. "He isn't thirty yet. What've you done to the poor sucker? Most fighters are good for at least—"

"You asked me what I was selling," Slick said doggedly. "I'm still selling Meacham. Are you interested or ain't you, Franchetti?"

"This doesn't smell good," said Franchetti. "I've seen that kid fight three or four times. He's clean. He doesn't look like the type that'd go for a tumble."

"He ain't, Mr. Franchetti."

"Then what're you selling?"

"Meacham. Listen, don't you get it? That's the beauty of it. The kid's clean as a whistle. Everyone knows he'd never Brody. He's seven to three over Peaches right now, and he'll improve on that before he goes in there, Friday. It's a chance for a big take, Mr. Franchetti. The chumps'll go for it heavy. You'll clean up, betting on Peaches."

"I'll clean up on you, you fat slob, unless you quit double-talking and make sense. If he don't Brody, he wins. You're not figuring to dope him, or something corny like that?"

SLICK grinned. "I don't have to pull nothing corny. The kid's dumb, see?"

"Any kid's dumb that joins Slick Hayden's stables of fighters. So he's dumb. What about it?"

"He obeys orders. He don't know how to throw a left jab without me to tell him. He fights just like I tell him in there. He always has."

"He looks it, with his face all bashed

in like a hamburger. So he fights like you tell him. And you figure, with that, you can ice it for Peaches, working with your mouth in the corner. Is that it?"

"That's it, Mr. Franchetti. The beauty of it is, nobody but you and me has to know, see?"

"It stinks," said the gambler. "Forget it."

"But—"

"I said forget it. It's not sure enough. I'll admit it's a nice setup for a big take, but it's too risky. When I buy, I want a sure thing."

"But it is sure, Mr. Franchetti. Listen, I can personally guarantee this. That boy can't add up to three without me to tell him. It's his legs, see? He's burned out, sort of. He can make maybe six, moving fast, and then he's like a cripple."

"I tell him to stay away from this Peaches, the early rounds, to shell up, see? I scare him, Peaches has a dangerous left hook, which he knows to begin with. Comes number six and I wouldn't even have to be in the corner. A sitting duck, he'll be for that Peaches. He comes down off his toes and he's on crutches. I guarantee this, Mr. Franchetti."

"With what?"

"My word."

The gambler laughed. It was ugly, guttural laughter. "Your word. You slime. You fat double-crosser. Coming here with an offer like this, and bleating about your word."

"I still say it's the best chance for a big take you'll see in years, Mr. Franchetti."

The gambler sipped his Scotch and soda, staring obliquely at Slick over the rim of his glass. "How much?"

"A—a couple grand. You'll make fifty."

"I'll give fifteen hundred."

"Oh, no," said Slick. "That's not enough. It's not worth it. The risk is too big."

"Fifteen hundred. And—uh—if anything was to go wrong on this, Slick—"

"Oh, nothing could go wrong, Mr. Franchetti." His false teeth were rattling, his heart was pounding, and his gums ached. "I won't let it."

"I won't either," said the gambler. "I usually get what I buy, kid. If I don't get what I buy, I always get the guy who sold me something and didn't deliver. Can you swim, kid?"

"Swim?" said Slick, his plates rattling harder than ever. "Fat guys swim easy."

"I wonder how you'd swim with a rock tied on to you," said Franchetti. "Okay, now get out."

"The money," Slick said.

"After," said Franchetti.

I WONDER how you'd swim with a rock tied on to you. That night he dreamed of being hurled off a dark pier into slimy water, of striking out furiously, only to feel the heavy, implacable tug of the rock, pulling him under. He woke up crying out sharply, his soft body clammy with perspiration.

He worked with Robbie Meacham up in Stillman's, the final workout. The kid handled himself pretty good in there. It worried Slick. His mouth began to hurt, and he took his plates out, watching the kid pummel his spar mate.

Georgia Rayburn, a Negro rubber, watched with him.

"Wha's a matter, Slick? Y'all lookin' peaked. Teeth hurtin'?"

He had to put them back in before he could answer the question. It was one more irritation. "My teeth always hurt, Georgia."

"Why'n't y'all get 'um fixed?"

"I still owe the damn dentist."

Georgia gaped at him. "Man, you had them teeth for months. You makin' money. Why'n't y'all pay 'um?"

"Why'n't y'all get off my damn' ear?" Slick raged. Georgia retreated.

Meacham came down, his heavy-weight's body glistening from the workout.

"That it, Mr. Hayden?" Slick had them all call him "Mister." Kept them in line. Kept them from trying to put the arm on him for advances.

"Yeah, you're set, kid. Now just take it easy. You'll murder the bum."

"I hope so," said Meacham. He was wistful. Probably thinking of his wife and six kids, the meatball, Slick thought with disgust. He got out of Stillman's and walked down the street. He took out his plates and gave his gums a rest. That damn dentist. One of these days he'd go to a real dentist and get a real job done.

This Peaches was a youngster, a farm boy from the peach country in Jersey. His hands were both peaches, rights and lefts, hooks and leads, and straight stuff with his weight solid behind it.

Slick looked him over while they were out there getting the guff from the ref. The kid looked sharp for this go, sharp and eager. It was going to be all right. He'd murder Meacham, after the sixth. And Slick meant to see to it that it went six or more.

The kid came back to him, in the corner, and he talked, thinking, fifteen hundred dollars, and can a man swim with a rock tied to him? He said, "This kid is murder when he hits hooking, Robbie. Now, you remember what I told you?"

"Sure, Mr. Hayden. Stay away from him. Jab him. Cut him if I can. Wear him down."

"Good."

"I hope so," the kid grinned. "I—uh—I feel kinda funny about this one, Mr. Hayden."

"Funny? How?"

"Well, it's not your usual orders. You always used to tell me, go in and slug. Slug away, and bust through their guard, and dump 'em. You come up with a big change, for this one."

"You got to change your tactics with your opponents, kid. You know that. You put your trust in Slick Hayden, and you won't have nothing to worry about, kid."

"Sure, Mr. Hayden," Meacham said obediently.

He went out there, as the bell called him. Slick stood down by the apron, watching nervously. He was doing just as Slick had told him. He was standing away, holding the kid off with long lefts, shelling up when the kid from Jersey tried to crowd in there.

ALL RIGHT. He turned and found Franchetti's small, dark eyes, four rows back, behind the press section, and smiled with his eyes. It was going to be all right, and now, relaxing, he took the plates out, sighing, as his gums got an inning, a chance to relax from that nagging torment perpetrated upon them by a bungling dentist.

He put them back in just before the three minutes expired, and worked over his boy in the corner. He completely ignored the other man working the corner, just some punk he'd hired for a fiver, some meatball who'd once had it and been punched loose from his buttons.

"Okay, kid. You're doin' nice. No change for this next one."

"All right." When he came back after the second. "Keep it up."

And for the third. And the fourth. Meacham came back looking worried, after five.

"I'm gettin' tired. It's my legs, Mr. Hayden. Can I start sluggin' with him?"

"Just you keep shellin' up in there. He ain't ripe for it yet."

"But—"

"You hear me talk, kid?"

"Yes, sir."

He was slower, there in the sixth. Beginning to come down off his toes a little. Not yet the sitting duck target Slick had

promised to make of him, in return for Franchetti's promise of fifteen hundred dollars. But getting there. Getting there. Slick grinned comfortably and took his plates out, relaxing. The bell rang soon thereafter, and he put them back in.

"Mr. Hayden, sir, can't I go after him now? My wife and family's watching on television. I told my little boy I'd take him quick, and—"

"Not yet, kid."

The boy didn't argue. He went out there, and now he was getting into trouble. Peaches began to pepper him with the one-two's, bulled him into a corner, and sliced away at his battered face, then sank one in his ribs.

He was hurt, gasping. He clinched, shot a look down at Slick, asking his question. Slick shook his head from left to right, yelled through the noise of the mob, "Hang on, kid."

He hung on, till the ref separated them. He tried to backtrack, bicycle out of harm's way. He got one on the eye that half blinded him. He took some more trouble in the body. Slick shrugged his shoulders and stood there, trying hard not to grin, trying to look full of managerial concern as the tide turned against his fighter.

Whumppp! It was Peaches' right, landing hard against Meacham's jawbone. The kid went down like a stone, lay twitching, staring glassy-eyed at the television camera above and to the right of him.

A long count might save him. If he got right up now, he'd stay on his feet about two seconds, and then go down listening to the birdies. Now ice it, Slick thought, cupping his fat, fallow hands, and roaring at the youngster.

"Get up, kid. Get up! Slug with him!"

Meacham looked up at the television camera, probably picturing the wife and kids tensely watching. He got up, a spring released, and began to crowd it with

Peaches. The Jersey farm boy pounded him on the head twice, then to the heart.

Meacham staggered, looked open for the finisher. Slick was excited. His pulse was pounding in his aching gums. He took out his plates. It was all over but the pay-off punch to the button.

IT CAME. The boy went down and lay there. He was not out yet. He looked as if he might make it. Holding the plates in one pudgy hand, Slick waved at him, making wild upward gestures. "Guff. Guff," was the best he could manage vocally, with no teeth to help him in articulation.

He lost his grip on the teeth. They went arcing out into the ring just as Meacham came erect. He tried to clinch with Peaches. The ref came between them. He was a fat ref, and his big foot came down squarely upon Slick's false teeth. There was a crunching sound. The ref looked down, kicked the mangled plate off the ring toward the reporters.

And the two fighters were slugging. Meacham was standing toe to toe with his man now, doing what he did best, what Slick had taught him to do, slug it out with his man and either knock down or go down.

The crowd filled the Arena with wild applause as the pair slammed the punishment into each other. It seemed incredible that Meacham was still on his feet after fifteen seconds of this terrific melee. But he was giving plenty of what he was taking. One of his flying gloves landed solidly on the chin of the boy from Jersey. Peaches went back on his heels, stunned, hurt, surprised beyond reason.

Meacham kept throwing leather at him, crowded him into a corner, eager to pull this one out of the fire. And Slick was feeling what he had felt in a dream, feeling himself hurled bodily into dirty tide water, feeling the insistent, terrifying tug

(Continued on page 127)

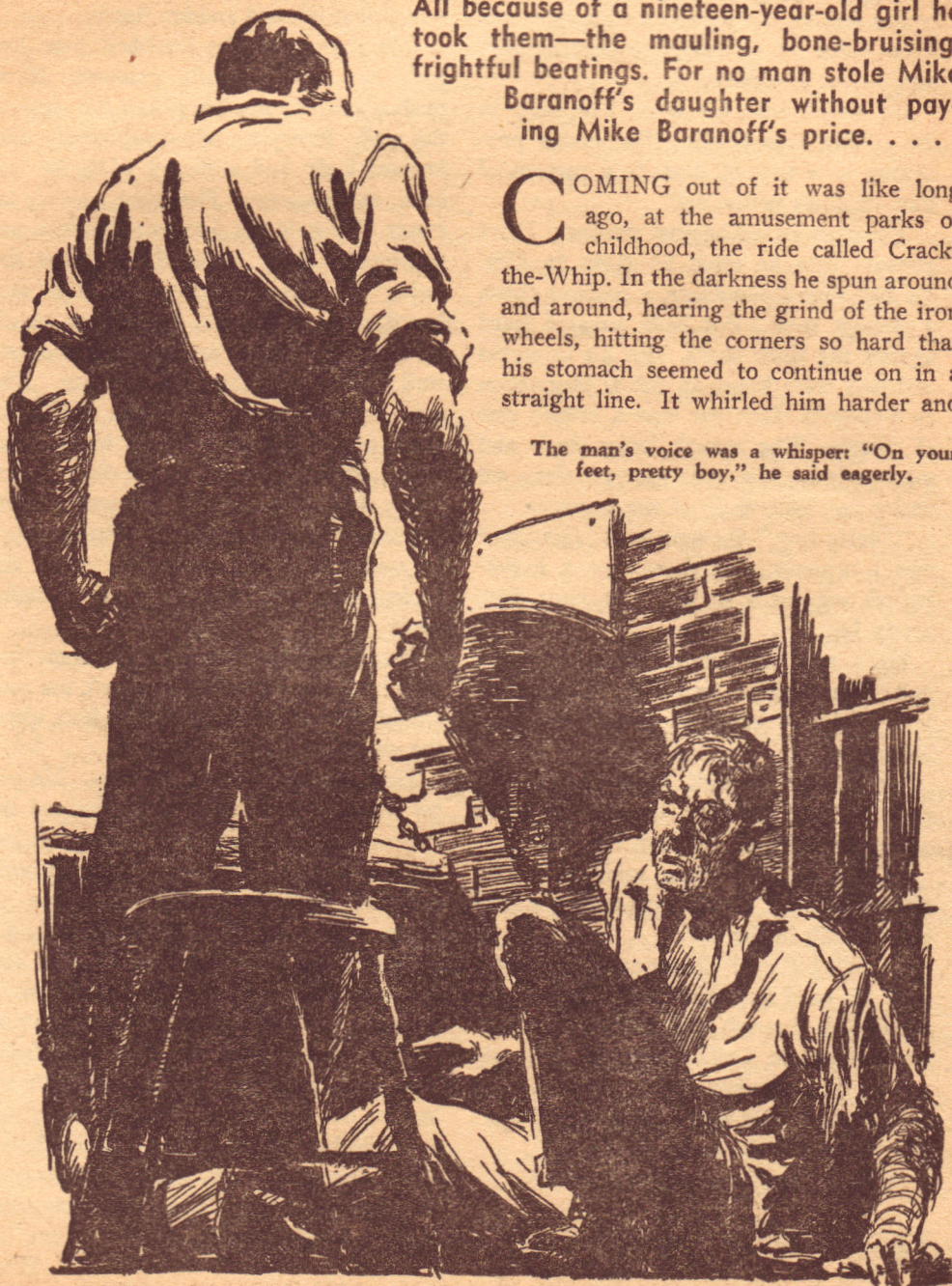
The Long, Red Night

By JOHN LANE

All because of a nineteen-year-old girl he took them—the mauling, bone-bruising, frightful beatings. For no man stole Mike Baranoff's daughter without paying Mike Baranoff's price. . . .

COMING out of it was like long ago, at the amusement parks of childhood, the ride called Crack-the-Whip. In the darkness he spun around and around, hearing the grind of the iron wheels, hitting the corners so hard that his stomach seemed to continue on in a straight line. It whirled him harder and

The man's voice was a whisper: "On your feet, pretty boy," he said eagerly.



harder and threw him off in a long, straight, sickening plunge.

He awoke on the cell floor. Dried blood pasted his cheek to the concrete. He pulled it free. His body was one vast pulsating bruise and as the pain came stronger his knees came up as though protecting him against the blackness.

He rolled onto his side. The bulb in the ceiling was bright. The heavy protecting wire around it made a pattern of thin shadows in the cell.

The man leaned against the bars. Hunt guessed that he must be close to fifty. He had sloped shoulders, a concave chest, a stringy neck. Pot belly pressed hard against the work pants. But his forearms and fists were huge, as out of proportion as Popeye's. One ear was a button nub of gristle. The mouth hung slack and meaningless. His eyes glowed, deep set under the bone shelf of the brow.

"Pretty boy," the man said. His voice was a whisper, but there was a pathological eagerness in it. "On your feet, pretty boy."

Hunt ran his tongue across his torn lips. They blurred his voice. "Look, mister! Take it easy! I never saw you before!"

He pushed himself back against the wall, pushed hard as though he could make himself melt through the wall.

"Come on," the man said. His tone was wheedling. An old man asking a little girl to walk in the park.

"You'll kill me!" Hunt said. He threw back his head and screamed. The scream resounded through the cell block. Saturday night in Collier Station, Pennsylvania. The turnkey slept, his cheek on the oak table, his snore thick with liquor. The drunks in the tanks yowled.

"Pretty boy," the man whispered.

HE SHUFFLED across the cell. The first time it had happened Hunt had tried to fight back and explain at the same

time. When he had regained consciousness the man had battered him back into darkness. This was the third time. There was no use in screaming. This was a bit of jungle in the middle of the city. This was naked life and sudden death.

The man held the knobbed fists low and the loose mouth grinned. Hunt pushed himself up, his palms flat against the wall. Every muscle complained. His bruised body had stiffened while he had been unconscious. The man moved in, faster. He held his fists low, his face unprotected. Hunt watched the right fist swing up. He lunged to one side and heard, close to his ear, the sodden smack of flesh and bone against the concrete wall. He spun away, staggering. The man turned slowly. A white bone-spur stuck out of the back of his hand at an angle. Blood dripped to the floor, black under the garish light. There was a faintly puzzled look on his face. "Pretty boy," he said softly. He moved in again, the broken hand low, clenched, ready to strike again.

Hunt's mouth went dry. He knew that with both arms and legs smashed, the man would still inch his way toward him, along the concrete floor.

Hunt backed against the bars. He put his hands over his head and grasped the cold metal. He swung both feet up against the man's chest. The man staggered back, coughed, smiled damply and came on again. The next time Hunt kicked, the man grabbed his right foot by heel and toe, twisted it violently. Hunt fell heavily onto the small of his back, his head striking the bars so hard that they rang dully. The man hit him in the mouth with the broken hand, whimpering softly as he did so. The blow lacked force. Emboldened, Hunt lunged upward, got an arm around the stringy neck. The man staggered back, pulling Hunt to his feet. One big fist was punishing Hunt's kidneys. Hunt braced himself. He had the man's head

in the crook of his arm. He stopped the backward progress, lunged forward. As the man stumbled they picked up momentum. Hunt ran the head directly into the bars with all his strength. The metal rang again. The man sagged. Hunt let go of him. The man dropped onto his face. His knees were under him, his backside ridiculously up in the air. He sighed very gently and toppled over onto his side.

Hunt staggered to the bunk. He sat down and the tears, hot against his flesh, ran through his fingers and down his wrists into his sleeves. He cried like a child, articulating the sobs. There was a soft scraping sound. He looked up. The man had one hand up grasping the bars. He pulled himself slowly to his feet. He coughed, swayed and went over backwards, full length, like a falling tree. His head rebounded from the concrete floor. He lay still and blood ran out of the button of gristle that was his right ear.

Hunt took off one shoe. There was a metal cleat set into the leather heel. He stood and began to pound the bars as hard as he could.

BARANOFF stood by the fireplace and watched his daughter. He was a slim-hipped, barrel-chested man nearing sixty, with power and decision and sureness in his heavy features.

She stood by the wide windows, closed against the crisp slanting rain. She was tall, as her mother had been. Tall and too proud and warm and too giving, not to be hurt by life. There was defeat in the line of her shoulders. He had watched it for six days.

"Your mother would bring home stray dogs," he said.

She turned quickly. Olive complexion, mouth that was alive, dark eyes subtly slanted under the wing-black brows.

"Why do you say that?"

He shrugged. She had his directness. "We could not keep them. Each time I

would have to drive to the pound. Each time she would cry." His voice grew harsher. "Like you cry now!"

She came to him in four long strides, the full skirt swirling around slim valves. He caught her wrist when her palm was inches from his face.

Baranoff smiled. "Spitfire! Tanya, the spitfire!"

The fire went out of her. She sank into a deep chair near him.

"Look," he said. "There are men in the world. I am a man. Why should you pick a puppy for your love. A puppy that cries and runs and tucks its ratty little tail between its legs. Forget puppies like Hunt, Tanya."

"He'll come back."

"Never!"

"He'll run until he finds that running isn't an answer and then he'll come back."

He sat on the wide arm of her chair and took her hand in both of his. Together they looked into the fire. He spoke as though he were telling a story to a child. "Michael Baranoff watched his daughter grow up. He kept her apart from the way he earns his living. Some people think that it is a dirty living. They say my cards are marked, my wheels crooked, my dice loaded. They aren't. The honest percentage is good enough. For twenty-five years I watch their eyes and their mouths while they gamble. I pray that my Tanya will never lose her heart to one of them. But she does. I learn to know him. I think maybe it is all right, that this one can take losses like a man should. He won. He won a great deal. And then he started to lose. He lost it all, then his savings, and always he remembered winning. At last he lost money that was entrusted to him."

"You don't know that!" she said, lifting her head proudly.

He laughed. "My dear, why else would he disappear?"

"You made him lose!"

He pursed his lips. "The implication is that I am a crooked gambler. The last person who implied that regretted it, Tanya. Luck made him lose. Luck turned her pretty back to him. And, I am afraid, to you also, unless you can make yourself forget him. Me, I find it remarkably easy to forget weak people."

She said softly, "He said it was for us. Enough money for us to get started well."

He looked at his watch. "Time to make the midnight round. I'll be downstairs if you want me."

He stood up and she looked at him, all pride gone for the moment, her face so young and so vulnerable that his breath caught in his throat.

"Bring him back to me," she said. "Please. Bring him back."

MICHAEL BARANOFF walked through the connecting lounges. He stopped at one of the bars for a Spanish brandy. Haidy, the floor man, came over and murmured, "Mrs. Donaldson is light again. Fifty-five hundred on the crap table."

Baranoff turned casually. Mrs. Donaldson was a brunette with a face so deeply lined that it gave her a simian appearance. Her cheeks were flushed. Her dress was extreme.

"Bring her back up to a one thousand loss and do it slow enough to last for the rest of the play."

He sipped the brandy and watched the floor man walk by the table, saw the subtle signal, the barely perceptible nod of understanding from the croupier. In the next room the floor man said, "Red face over at blackjack. Recommended. Charlie thinks he's a pro. I've been waiting for the word."

"What do you think?"

"Could be."

"Tell Charlie to keep it clean and don't lift the limit."

He carried the glass into his office off

the entrance lounge, sat behind the empire desk. For a moment his face was a mask of grey weariness. Tanya was like her mother had been. There was a fanatic loyalty about her, a strong sense of honor. And, should she ever learn the facts, her loyalty to him would change in a single moment. As her mother's had. It was most difficult to live up to Tanya's mental picture of her father. He sighed. He should have seen the danger Hunt represented sooner.

He called an unlisted number. A woman answered.

"Carol?" he said. "Michael. Is Harry there?"

Harry came on the line. "I've been waiting for you to call, Mike. My friends cooperated, but it isn't enough. They held him at the cabin for five days and worked him over. He wouldn't break. Then they ran him down to Collier Station and had him picked up. We have a friend there. He got him put in a cell with a local psycho. I just got the word. He turned the psycho into a hospital case. I don't know how."

"Got any ideas?"

"They'll have to release him in the morning. I can have the boys pick him up again. I don't know how far you want to go."

Baranoff thought of Tanya. He thought of the long years of her childhood, of her small hand in his on the walks they had taken. "Go all the way," he said huskily.

"But look, Mike! What can the guy do that's so important that—"

"You heard me, Harry."

"Okay, okay." Harry slammed the phone onto the cradle. He glared at it.

Carol said, "What's the matter, honey?"

"Baranoff. He's soft in the head."

Carol was blonde and tall and slim, with melted-butter eyes and a mouth as hard as an animal trap. "What is it this time?"

"That precious wonderful daughter has

to be protected from the facts of life. The kid we've been working on managed to prove to himself that Baranoff runs a bust-out house. We can't break him. So Baranoff says kill him."

Her voice sharpened. She snapped her fingers and whistled between her teeth. "Here, Harry, Harry, Harry. Nice doggy. Your master calls. Come a-running, doggy."

"Knock it off!"

"Nice doggies take orders like good little doggies. Maybe the kind master will throw you a bone."

He reached her in two steps. He hit her along the jaw with the heel of his hand, knocking her off the couch. She smiled up at him. "Poor doggy!"

"What the hell do you want me to do?"

"You've been doing his dirty work for years, Harry. You're as smart as he is. Wouldn't that precious daughter own the place if anything happened to Mike? Would she be hard to handle?"

A slow change came over Harry's face. He looked at her thoughtfully.

"A girl like that. No, she wouldn't be hard to handle."

"You'll have to keep that kid out of circulation. He might be a problem. Mike might come up to the cabin, if you needed his advice."

THEY let him go. From the police station door there were three steps up to the sidewalk. He went up them like an old man. A girl looked at him. Her eyes widened and she moved over to the far edge of the sidewalk to pass him. He looked down the street. The drugstore would have phones. Tanya would accept a collect call.

He walked to the corner. A car slowly turned the corner. The back door swung open. He tried to move back. They caught his wrist and pulled him in. He fell face down on the floor. The car picked up speed.

"Okay," a familiar voice said. "Get up on the seat."

He pulled himself up. "Haven't you done enough?" he asked mildly.

The one they had called Harry sat beside the driver. He was turned in the seat to look into the back. He smiled. "Maybe we have, kid."

Hunt stretched his broken lips in a painful grin. "The same thing holds true. The same thing I told you that first day. You wanted me to promise to go away and never see the girl again. I told you you'd have to kill me. Now I'll tell you something else. You got awful close to making me promise. You'll never get that close again. Right now there's nothing in the world that scares me. As long as I can talk and breathe I'm going to try to get back to Tanya and I'm going to tell her that the father she idealizes is a crook who hires cheap thugs like you and your friends. A kidnaper, a racketeer."

Harry frowned. He said, "This is just idle curiosity, kid. What keeps you going? You don't look like you had much guts. We've broken harder citizens than you'll ever be."

"You could call it pride, but you wouldn't understand that, would you?"

The man on his right slapped him, open-handed, across the mouth. It opened old cuts. "Watch how you talk, kid," he said mildly.

Harry sighed. "He wouldn't take the five grand and clear out. He'd rather take beatings. All on account of a nineteen-year-old girl. Five grand would have bought you anything you can get off her, kid."

Harry's elbow was over the edge of the back of the seat. Hunt kicked hard. Harry gasped with pain. His face grew pale and dangerous as he rubbed his elbow. The man beside Hunt hammered twice on the vast pulpy bruise that had closed his right eye. He felt the broken cheekbone grate and he fainted with the pain.

They were back at the cabin when he came out of it. There was a stranger there, a tall blonde girl. Hunt was tied to a kitchen chair, his arms pulled painfully around the back. There was no feeling in his hands. There was a turn of the rope around his middle, and his ankles were lashed to the chair legs. From the feel of his mouth he guessed that wide bands of adhesive tape had been criss-crossed over it.

He and the girl were alone in the room. "Harry says you've got guts," she said, conversationally. She laughed. "What does it get you? It's got you a face that only a mother could love, angel."

Harry appeared in the kitchen doorway. "Lay off him, Carol."

Harry walked over, his suit coat open. A thin leather strap ran across the white shirt. "This has required a lot of thought, kid," he said. "As long as we couldn't break you, you can make a lot of trouble for us. But Carol here has figured out a way to make everything come out nice and clean. We thought you might appreciate it. You're going to murder your gal friend's father."

Carol laughed. "My God, look at that one eye of his! Expressive, isn't it?"

"Shut up!" Harry went over and leaned his haunches against the kitchen table. "It'll be neat. We'll be witnesses. When they take a nitrate test on your hand, they'll be able to prove that you fired the gun." He suddenly cocked his head on one side. "A car! We got company."

CAROL left the kitchen quickly. Harry pulled the kitchen door shut. Hunt could hear the murmur of voices. Carol, Harry and the other two were speaking.

"Well, what is it?" Baranoff said loudly. "You know that I shouldn't come here."

"A little problem, Mike," Harry said. "We did like you said. We wired a cinder block to his feet and sunk him in forty

feet of water. I don't go along with why you think it had to be done, but—"

"It had to be done," Baranoff said heavily. "He was going to take away something of great value to me."

"Well, Al here handled it. Al isn't too bright, Mike. Maybe I should have done it myself. Al says that the kid, before he died, made some crack about having mailed a letter to the authorities."

Baranoff cursed. He paused for breath and said, "You fools! You utter fools!"

Hunt strained against the slack in the rope around his middle. It gave a little and he was able to push his back several more inches away from the back of the chair. He slammed himself back. The chair teetered a bit on its legs.

"I don't know what we can do," Harry said. "You come outside and I'll show you where we dumped him."

Hunt began to throw himself back against the back of the chair in rhythm. The chair rocked farther and farther. Finally it balanced on the back legs for what seemed like long seconds and then went over with a crash.

The door swung open suddenly and Baranoff stared in at him, his eyes widening, his hand, fingers curled so that it looked like a plump white spider, reaching inside the left lapel of the tailored suit.

The shot was deafening. Baranoff lurched forward and went down onto one knee. The gun was now in his hand. He fell to one side, turning so that he could fire back into the other room. He shot three times so rapidly that the explosions almost ran together. Beyond him Hunt saw Harry push back against the outside door frame. He panted like a man who had run a long distance. He slid down into a sitting position and went over onto his side like a rag doll. The blonde girl ran into Hunt's line of vision, bending to snatch up Harry's gun. She missed it, overran it, and turned to try again. As she straightened up with it, Baranoff shot her

in the mouth. She fell onto Harry's body. Hunt heard the sound of a window being opened, a screen kicked out. Then the whine of a starter, the roar of a motor, the skid of tires on the gravel.

Baranoff laid his forehead on his gun wrist and breathed deeply. He breathed three times, exhaled and did not breath again.

The fall had broken the back of the chair. After five minutes of writhing, Hunt managed to slide the back down from his arms. That loosened the bonds by reason of the new position of his wrists. Feeling seeped back into his hands, tingling like chill needles.

He guessed that it was mid-afternoon. By dusk he was free.

TANYA sat by the hospital bed, his bruised hand in both of hers.

"You didn't run!" she whispered. "You didn't! I know it." She reached out. Her hand was cool on his unbandaged forehead. "My poor Hunt! The police are coming to talk to you. About . . ." Her voice broke. "About my father."

Her eyes brimmed and glistened with

tears. Hunt organized the words in his mind, planning how to tell her. The words would be brutal. She could not be permitted to retain childish illusions of her father's decency.

"He was good," she said softly. "Good."

"He was . . ."

Hunt looked into her eyes. He swallowed. "A—a business rival kidnaped me. They thought it would be a hold over him because of you and me. They wanted to make a deal. Your father came, bravely and alone, to rescue me. He did, but they killed him." He shut his free hand tightly. "Yes, he was a good man."

Her lips touched his, softly. "Get well soon, darling. Soon. I need you."

The nurse spoke quietly to her. She stood, tall and grave and proud, and she turned and walked to the door.

"A Lieutenant Banks and a Sergeant Fuller are coming up in the elevator."

"Thank you," Hunt said.

They would be harder to convince. But he thought he could do it. He would try to do it.

It could almost be called . . . a present for the bride.

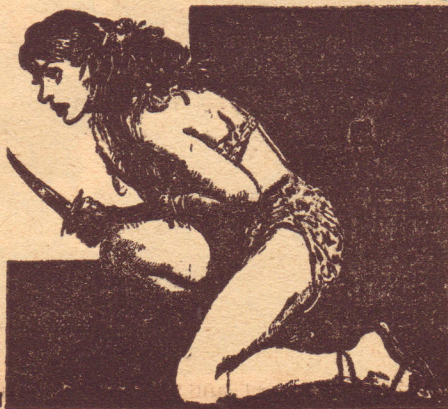
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By LAWRENCE LARIAR

Max sat forward now, tense, gripping his automatic in a white-knuckled hand. We watched Ferango enter the building. . . .



The lady wanted her husband found, she told MacAndrews. But she forgot to make clear how she wanted him—dead or alive!

Now You See Me . . .

CHAPTER ONE

The Lady is Dynamite

THE GIRL in the reception room buzzed me.

"There's a Mr. Kellins out here to see you," she said. "Mr. Arthur Kellins. Are you in or out, Mr. MacAndrews?"

"Have Mr. Kellins rest his legal seat in our softest chair," I told her. "Give

Mr. Kellins to understand that I am a very busy operator."

I made myself busy at the window. I counted the women on Fifth Avenue who wore green coats. I switched to the men and took a short survey of the light-grey felts. Then the pigeons fascinated me. A flock of them rose from the sidewalks and soared into the sun to disappear behind a neighboring tower. I waited for them to skim into sight, float against the sky and

roost, finally, on a high ledge across the street.

While observing the birds, I pondered the presence of Arthur Kellins in my reception room. Lawyers were uncommon visitors in my mouse-nest office. Once in a great while a call came in from some worried attorney, a paper to serve, or a simple locate. But my day-to-day customers were routine stuff, credit agencies, banks, department stores and sundry others in search of the jittery deadbeat. Arthur Kellins belonged in some other skip-trace waiting room—Charley Tripp, maybe, because Charley was fancy.

I told the girl to let Kellins in and he burst through the door with his well-advertised drive, a little man with a big smile, a halfmoon of bridgework—the best artificial merriment in jurisprudence.

"This is Mrs. Carroll," Kellins said. "Mrs. Alice Carroll."

He was using his formal delivery, laying it on for the blonde. I took my feet off the blotter and nodded to her. She returned the nod with interest. She had a ripe mouth, and when she smiled her teeth were a glistening white against her tanned face. She stepped forward gracefully and slid into the brown-leather chair and busied herself with a gold cigarette case, making a production of it. When she smoked, she dragged hard, hard enough to promote her nervousness. And hard enough to hold my eyes at the movement of her shapely torso.

ARTHUR KELLINS said, "I told Mrs. Carroll that what she had was really a tough locate. I can't do anything for her until she tracks down her husband. Naturally, I wanted to put her next to the best man in town for the job."

"Since when have I been best?" I asked, not looking at him. Alice Carroll had chorus-girl legs. Her heels were very high. She had her nylons crossed and swung her fancy shoes in a slow arc.

"You've always been top man for my money," Arthur Kellins said cordially.

"Maybe so. But you've been using Charley Tripp for years. He advertises it. Why the switcheroo, suddenly?"

"Charley Tripp is a good routine man, but he has no imagination. I've used him on a few deadbeat cases and occasionally for serving a summons. But he wouldn't get to first base with Mrs. Carroll's problem. This is a divorce deal."

I wanted to ask him why he was fiddling with a divorce case. Arthur Kellins had legal glamour for a limited trade. He was top man in the criminal end of the business. He had saved Rocky Frachetto from the chair only a month ago. His roster of clients made their bread and butter and caviar in the borderland rackets of vice and gambling and plain and fancy mayhem. But you don't play detective the way you see it in the movies. You don't look a fat fee in the mouth. You play hard to get until the chips are down. It was really none of my business why Arthur Kellins suddenly favored worried blondes. It could be that Alice Carroll had enough to pay him off. Even in money. I measured her again and studied the mink jacket and the two large diamonds on her cigarette hand.

I said, "I'm pretty busy these days, Kellins."

"Mrs. Carroll is willing to pay you well for your effort."

"It'll run into a time bill. You know the skip-trace business, Kellins. It takes a lot of hoofing to make a locate on a cagey man, a hideout fiend. New York is a crowded town, loaded with quiet corners. It may take weeks."

Alice Carroll came to life and worked me over with her soft eyes. "This is terribly important to me, Mr. MacAndrews. I'm prepared to pay anything to find Frank."

"It'll cost at least fifty a day," I said. Kellins whistled. "You don't look that

busy, MacAndrews, or that hard to get."

"Plus expenses," I added.

"You're squeezing us."

"Plus a bonus for the locate."

Kellins slid his eyes her way and I saw the spark light between them. "Why a bonus?" Kellins stalled.

"Why not? You get what you pay for. I figure the subject is worth half a grand bonus."

"You're a robber, but we'll buy it," Kellins said. All of a sudden he was brisk and hurried and businesslike, pausing on his way out to pat her hands. "You've got nothing to worry about, my dear—MacAndrews is very efficient. Just tell him your story, the way you told it to me in Miami."

I LET her talk. She unraveled her domestic scenario with a fine show of nerves, punctuated by quick and birdlike gestures with her cigarette case. Boiled down, the plot was of the standard brand. Her husband, Frank, had walked out of their Miami nest about a month ago for the usual reason—a catalogue type of vixen he had picked up at a local bistro. First time for Frankie? No, indeed, for Frankie was a galloping roué, racing from one conquest to the next. He had left home after the last brawl. But Alice Carroll had prepared herself for his exit. She had assigned a private eye to tail him to New York. Frank came north alone and holed up in a back-street hotel called the Linton, an ancient place on the east side and downtown.

I asked her for a picture of her wandering spouse and she obligingly plucked a small snapshot out of her handbag. Frank Carroll had an ordinary face, and was maybe forty, maybe older. He had tired eyes, well bagged and heavy lidded, the eyes of a turtle on a log for a siesta. His mouth was surly and his smile was cracked and forced.

I said, "How tall is he?"

"He's just average," said Alice Carroll.

"Your size?"

"A bit shorter."

"Fortyish?"

"You're a good guesser," she said. "Frank is forty-three."

"Business man?"

Alice Carroll stirred in her chair. She fiddled with her cigarette case. The rings on her fingers caught the light and broke it into a thousand pinpoints of sparkle. When she spoke, her voice came nervously. "I know nothing about Frank's business. He told me he was retired."

"Retired from what?"

"I don't know."

She was slamming the door in my face. You don't ferret out a man without leads, small clues to his background and habits. The odds pile up on the big towns, and in New York they could be eight million to one, unless you put your finger on a thread of information, a crumb of direction that might lead to the wanderer.

I said, "How about his friends?"

"He had no friends in New York. Unless . . ." Alice Carroll began to sob gently, not out of control, but in quiet gasps. The histrionics didn't suit her. She was out of character, too suddenly soft, too quickly emotional. She encouraged a manly hand on the shoulder. She had the shoulders for manly hands. I started for them but detoured to the bottom drawer and hauled out the bourbon and poured her a hooker. She took it falteringly, her fingers unsteady on the glass. She sipped with tentative, dignified gulps. When it was all gone she wiped her eyes and showed me a face full of confusion. I filled her glass again.

I said, "You'd better tell me all about it. I can't find your husband unless you help me with everything you've got. Maybe that means more than what you handed our friend Arthur Kellins?"

"I couldn't tell him," she said.

"Why did you go to him?"

"I met him in Miami. He was very nice to me. He said he'd arrange everything, just as soon as we could locate Frank." She gave me her wide-open eyes, loaded with sincerity. She was twisting a small lace handkerchief now, mangling it. "You see, Mr. Kellins was a stranger, after all. Perhaps I've led him on a wild-goose chase."

"Mr. Kellins doesn't enjoy goose hunts. What did you leave out?"

SHE wouldn't say until after the fourth bourbon. Then she told me about little Frankie. Frank had left Miami under a cloud, a dark black nimbus that marked him lousy with the Miami police. Just about the time he left, a hue and cry went up for the mysterious heist man who managed to burgle the richest jewelry emporium in Florida. Missing were a sock full of baubles, reputedly worth half a million dollars. She was convinced that her husband was involved in the theft. She had been aware of his evil companions for months before the crime. Frank had appeared worried and jittery, and he had taken to drink.

"Who were his friends?" I asked.

"I only remember one—Nick Ferango."

I whistled. Nick Ferango was a kingpin in the world of scientific larceny, a strategist who planned but never sweated. The long finger of the law had pointed at him often—but never touched him. Suddenly Frank Carroll became a sympathetic character, a stooge, a fall guy, a little man on a string.

I said, "What about Ferango? Did you see him?"

"He came to me," she shivered. "He wanted to know where Frank was. Of course, I didn't know. He threatened me. He's the most frightful man I've ever met in my life. He told me he'd kill Frank when he got him. That's why I'm here. Unless I can find my husband before Ferango, he'll have him murdered."

"And Kellins knows none of this?"

"I didn't dare tell him," she said. "Arthur wouldn't have understood."

"You're not supposed to keep secrets from your lawyer."

"Arthur is a little more than a lawyer to me. We're—well, good friends."

I shook my head at it. I went to the window and said, "I'm afraid this is out of my line, Mrs. Carroll. Private detectives don't stay in business long when they interfere in police business. There's only one way to locate your husband—by way of a visit to the local precinct office. They'll let you know when he's taken."

I was enlarging my theme when I felt her alongside me. Up close she was much taller than I imagined, tall enough so that I could see her face and measure her trembling lips and catch the full tremor of her voice. She had my hands and worked them over.

She said, "I can't do that. I want to save Frank. If I can get to him, he'll return those jewels, I know he will. You must help me. There's no one else in town as good as you at finding missing persons."

She kept talking that way, flattering, pleading, fighting to win me with her husky voice. I thought of my business and my reputation. I thought of the size of the time bill, the bonus for the locate. I balanced one against the other. But Alice Carroll tipped the scales. She leaned into me and when I faced her I knew that it wouldn't take much more from her to sell me.

It didn't. . . .

CHAPTER TWO

On the Trail of Trouble

SAM FLACK heard me out down in the police commissioner's office. I gave it to him ungarnished. I made it a bull session, the type of gabfest we had enjoyed not too long ago when Sam and

I had worked together in Naval Intelligence. I told him everything but the size of the fee and the details of Alice Carroll. Sam checked it through for me, gathering the threads of information relayed to the New York Police from Miami. He sat there, making faces at the cards and sheets.

He said, "We had a few wires from Miami on Frank Carroll. According to their records, it was a fabulous deal. Carroll is hiding out in some dark corner with a bundle worth half a million."

"How far did your boys get?"

"The Linton. I have a report from one of our detectives on a man named Fred Cole, who registered at the Linton about ten days ago. He smells like Carroll—amateur hideouts always like to hang on to their original initials. But Fred Cole faded at the street door. We weren't able to make the locate on him."

"Suppose I find him?"

"You'll earn your fee," said Sam. "You want a deal on him?"

"My client says she'll return the ice."

Sam got out of his chair, bothered a bit. He played with his chin and worried his crew cut. He was working hard to make it legal for me.

I said, "You don't want the ice without Frankie?"

"Frankie belongs to the state of Florida, Steve. I'm not too worried about him. But the case itself—it could kill you off in your business if it gets out of hand." He came over to me and made a playful pass at my chin. "What's the gimmick for you, Steve? The lady?"

"I'm a sucker for worried blondes," I said. "And the fee doesn't annoy me, either."

"Can you guarantee the return of the loot?"

"If I get Frankie."

"But you won't give us a lead to him, is that it?"

"I can't. His wife's my client."

He gave me the nod, but he wasn't happy. He brought me the file on Frank Carroll and left me alone while I studied it. There was little background on the apprentice burglar. He had a record of minor thievery in Milwaukee, where he was known as Frederick Carlson. His picture tallied with his wife's photo, but he was much younger in the police files. I pondered his last job, a department store larceny in 1937, and meditated for a while about the gap of years during which he might have made a play at going straight. I couldn't work off the feeling of sloppy sentiment for the little man. But that could have been because of Alice Carroll.

I went to the Linton, a dilapidated hotel that squatted between office buildings and dreamed of its once-gay past. Now it housed the borderline theatrical trade, the traveling burlesque girls, the dog acts, and a spattering of low-class bookies. The lobby had been redecorated, but the smell of age hung in the air. A weak-chinned clerk relaxed at the desk, thumbing his way over the next eight races at Belmont. I checked the register and noted the dates of Fred Cole's entrance and exit.

The clerk said, "Who is this guy Cole, anyway? He's more popular than Louie the trackman."

"My long-lost brother," I said. "Who else came to find him?"

"You're the third. What's he wanted for? For my money he looked like a plumber."

"For your money he is a plumber. Who was the last to ask about him?"

"He didn't leave his name."

"What did he look like?"

"I got a bad memory for faces," he clucked. "Very bad."

I put a fin on his *Racing Form*. I said, "Think hard."

He shook his head at the money sadly. "It just don't come back to me, mister. I got a bad memory."

I made it ten. "How does it look now?"

He palmed the bills. "A big man. Yesterday. Dark. Very big and pretty fat, around the face, especially. But tough. When he talked he sort of coughed. He had plenty of salt. He dropped a fifty where you laid your ten, mister. He was plenty burned when I couldn't give him anything."

I let him palm another five and milked him dry on Nick Ferango. He gave me everything I needed, including the Ferango trade mark, the gold-filled uppers and the Fancy Dan tweeds. He added nothing of importance about Fred Cole. Cole had been in and out, out early and in after midnight, for two nights. He had carried only a small black suitcase. He had checked out on the morning of the third day, ten-thirty on the fifteenth of June. Taxi? There were no cruising taxis on the street because business traffic, trucks and vans glutted the curbsings all day long.

I CHECKED the hackstand at the end of the block. There were two cabs there. Neither driver remembered the subject. I spent half an hour flashing his photo in the local eateries. A locate can build itself on tiny leads, crumbs from restaurants, from newsstand vendors, from shoe shine emporiums. But the subject had not tarried downtown for long enough to be identified. The trail to Fred Cole fogged at the Linton. Everything canceled out, just the way Sam Flack had reported.

I stood on the corner, scratching my head and staring into traffic. A skip-trace hound is a doctor. You stop to think before you make a diagnosis. You scratch your head and pull at your chin and build your case out of experience. You work the deal over in your mind and strain for the memory of a similar problem, somewhere in the dim past. You bring the subject into focus by making compari-

sons. I had tracked down another little man, not too long ago, by following one thin thread of direction. I had tightroped that thread until I was dizzy. But the subject was waiting for me. And in the damndest place.

When I left the corner, I was aware of the tail. He was an average-sized character, dressed in simple blue and wearing a brown felt. He had been watching me from across the street, leaning against a shaded door, pretending to read a newspaper. He now gave me my head. I caught the quick drop of the tabloid when I walked away. I laughed at him, enjoying the turnabout, guessing him as a Ferango man, wondering whether he had started behind me at the Linton. I flagged a cab and watched him follow. I led him into midtown traffic and made his driver sweat to catch us crossing Park Avenue. Approaching Madison, I skipped my cab, ran to the next block and boarded another taxi on Fifth, aimed uptown. When we skimmed away, there was nobody behind us.

The dusk was hanging over Seventy-eighth Street when I reached Nick Ferango's address, an apartment hotel. A phone call to the desk told me that he was in. I stood across from the lobby, now gleaming with light against the haze of evening.

He came out in forty minutes, sporting his usual tweeds, a raglan coat hanging loosely on his giant frame. He walked quickly for a big man. At Broadway he boarded a cab and I followed him across town and then down along Lexington to a brownstone hole on the far east side. He got out but did not pay his cabby. He walked up the stone steps and stood there for a moment and then disappeared. I waltzed down the block in his wake, assuming the casual lope of a neighborhood resident. I followed Ferango's route into the dim hall. The bell buzzer read Herman O. Fluegel.

Across the street, on the far corner, a drugstore shot feeble neon flickers into the night. I phoned the Linton.

The nasal twang of the desk clerk announced, "Linton Hotel."

I said, "This is Fred Cole talking. I want the same room I had before. I'll check in tonight."

"Mr. Cole," he said. And then, "Mr. Cole!"

"I'll check in tonight at about nine," I said, and hung up.

I ambled down the block again, on a slow parade, making the tour three times before Ferango came out. He stood for a brief pause, lighting a cigar before boarding his cab. In the quick flash of light he was frowning mightily. I watched his cab spurt down the block and turn uptown at the corner. Then I crossed and climbed the steps and pressed the bell buzzer.

HERMAN FLUEGEL came to the door. He was a short item, as dumpy as the pictures I had seen of him when he arrived out of Germany not too long ago. The little gem expert wore the kind of lenses that make a man's eyes bung. He had on a black vest, in the European refugee tradition, complete with dangling chain and ornament. He sported a wide-striped shirt and a heavy stickpin in his tie. His cow-eyed stare was not mean, only curious.

"Yes?" he said.

"Hello, Herman," I began. "You busy?"

"What is it that you want?" He eyed me curiously, in the manner of a college professor examining a rare beetle. "Do I know you? I am afraid I do not know you, sir."

"Ah, but I know you, Herman. The name of Fluegel is world famous. I'd like to talk to you a bit—about some precious stones."

His European dialogue seemed made to

order for his living room. Herman had assembled a galaxy of foreign-looking furniture, complete with mossbacked chairs and dust to match. The curtains at the windows were filigreed lace, probably unwashed since the little man had abandoned his gem business in Berlin. I wondered whether he had lived this way when he was top man in the jewelry trade in Germany. Once, on a clean-up mission in Hamburg, I had wandered through a living room like this, an upper-class menage that belonged to a Nazi tool tycoon. And here was part of it again, the same bulging furniture that suggested early American Grand Rapids, the same dirty-patterned wallpaper. A small oval table, glass topped, sat in the dead center of the odds and ends. On the glass was a bottle of good wine, Port, and featuring a Sanish label.

Herman poured two beakers and held one my way, as gracious as a Southern colonel and twice as sly. I caught the glint of a high-powered diamond on his lifting hand.

Herman said, "You have something for me?"

"Maybe," I said. "Maybe not. I might be bad news for you, Herman."

He had a quick face, over expressive and adjusted to complement his stilted manners. "Bad news? But, *nein*—I do not think so."

"You keep your door wide open. A man could walk in and rob you easily."

"Rob me?" He threw out his hands and closed his eyes. "But what is there to rob here?"

"You're a jewelry man, aren't you?"

"But is this a jewelry store, I ask you?"

"If I had your reputation as a fence, I'd check my visitors more carefully, Herman. I might be a cop."

"I am not unfriendly with the police." He smacked his lips over the Port. "And moreover, you are not a policeman."

"Good guess. You could be a detec-

tive, Herman. You're smart enough."

"You, too, could be a detective. Else, why were you marching across the street while I spoke to my visitor a while ago?" He wagged a finger at me. "I saw you through the window, *nein*?"

"Yes."

"And you were interested in my visitor, *nein*?"

"No. Ferango doesn't interest me, Herman. You can understand why I waited for him to leave when I tell you who sent me." I watched him over the rim of my glass, counting the wrinkles as they climbed his brow. I had hit him where it mattered, but he wasn't ready to play. I helped myself to more Port, letting the silence grow. He followed my lead and waited for me. I said, "Frank Carroll sent me, Herman."

HE BLEW through his teeth at me, a toneless whistle. "How very interesting. And who is Frank Carroll?"

"Fred Cole."

"I see," he said, and then again, with a drop in his voice, "I see. Mr. Cole is ready to do business, is that it?"

"He wants to see you, Herman."

"He likes my price now, *nein*?"

I shook my head sadly. "I wouldn't know. He wants to talk."

"Tonight?" Fluegel smacked his lips happily and put down the Port. He leaned my way now, so that I could see the dirty teeth in his wide smile. "That is very good, very good. Mr. Cole's stones are, as you know, worth a great fortune. But, as I told him, he will have to entrust me with them and allow me some time. It will not be easy to dispose of them through ordinary channels. The gems are too—how do you say it?—too celebrated. Mr. Cole must have confidence in me, otherwise I can do him no good, no good at all."

"Mr. Cole is cautious. That's why he sent me here."

"You followed Ferango?"

"Mr. Cole is a bit afraid of Mr. Ferango."

Herman Fluegel sighed sympathetically. "For this I do not blame him. Mr. Cole was quite nervous when I saw him last. This I could understand, for I have done business with Mr. Ferango before—a vicious man, indeed. Mr. Cole explained his difficulty to me. He told me of his great fear of Mr. Ferango." He rubbed his hands together and then dropped them smartly to his knees. "That is why I have sent Mr. Ferango away again just now—for the third time. He would pay quite a sum of money to know the address of Mr. Cole." He got up and fiddled with a cigarette, watching me through the cloud of smoke as he lit up. "You, sir, are a brave man to visit me in this fashion. You are not afraid of being caught by Mr. Ferango, then?"

"Scared to death. But Ferango doesn't know me, and that's an advantage, isn't it? I waited for his refrigerated smile. 'We're not going to breathe a word of this to Nick Ferango, are we, Herman?'"

"But naturally, *nein*."

"Because if Ferango does find out I've called, I'll know who tipped him off and come down here. I'll get nasty, Herman."

Herman waved it away. "Why should I bother myself with Ferango, my friend? I am interested only in the gems."

"You can have them—tonight."

"Mr. Cole will come here?"

"*Nein*. You will visit Mr. Cole."

"I see," he said, and leaned forward. "And where is he?"

"Mr. Cole is back at the Linton Hotel."

"How clever!" His face exploded into mirth. "How really clever! Nobody would imagine that he would return there."

"He's a smart boy," I said. "You'll be there at nine?"

"But of course." He had a hand on my shoulder and was tapping me lightly, chuckling as he walked me to the door,

brimming over with foreign fervor. "Until nine, then." He beamed and stood on the stone steps waving, to me as I moved down the block.

CHAPTER THREE

No Deal

A LEAD is a lead. You make it move and then stand by to watch. Sometimes you stand for hours waiting for the cat-and-mouse play to begin. Sometimes you wait for minutes, even seconds. I returned to the drugstore and called the Linton.

"This is Fred Cole again," I said. "Any messages for me?"

"You just this minute got a phone call."

"Who called?"

"Didn't leave his name," said my nasal friend. "Sounded like a foreigner."

"You told him I'd be there?"

"At nine, like you said."

From where I stood, in the phone booth, I could see straight down the concrete pavement that passed Herman Fluegel's dusty steps. There was no movement on the sidewalk. I waited. The business of skip-tracing is compounded of long and watchful gaps, moments when the eye takes up the sentinel watch while the brain is lost in theory and speculation. The street before me was a black-walled canyon, punctuated by an occasional oblong of light. Now, in the onrushing night, the single street lamp shining in the gloom lit the curbing with a stage-set aura, and beyond the glow Herman Fluegel's establishment lay in deep shadow.

Herman came out in a rush, tugging up his collar, moving fast toward my corner. I gave him his head across the street and then left the drugstore. He did not turn uptown. He strode energetically toward the river, at a lively clip. He paused only

once, to light a cigarette, puff it and bounce off on his merry way. He did not look back. He led me through a variety of streets, he took me on a tour of Second Avenue and Chinatown and the lower regions of the warehouse area. He piloted me teasingly along the sidewalks of the Bowery jewelry mart. He slowed here. And as I adjusted my pace to the sudden letdown, I felt the short hairs rise behind my ears.

The prickle of unease caught at my throat, an upsurge of annoyance and confusion and doubt. It was an effort to continue my little pastime with Fluegel. It was an effort to hold my eyes his way. My head felt a jittery pressure, the tickling fear of a man who is hunted. I fought to kill off the urge to turn quickly and search the crowds for the man in the brown hat. Reason told me my impulse was crazy. Reason held my head in line. But the nerve-end vibrations of some buried instinct buzzed at my brain and I turned to stare behind me. I saw nothing but the pedestrian ebb and flow, too deep to measure, too thick to plumb. I shook away my qualms and continued after Fluegel.

He turned left and strolled down a darkened side street, lined with an assortment of tenements and warehouses. Here he slowed and approached the grimy entrance to a squat building. Over the broad doorway a cracked sign bore the legend: "Eureka Tin Plate Company," lettered in faint white against a crumbling background. Underneath, in smaller type, on a smaller sign: "Trans-Atlantic Novelty Company, Export and Import."

I allowed him to enter the hallway and caught him there, under a sign marked "Stairway."

I put a hand on him and said, "Not now, Herman."

He gulped his surprise and covered it with his refrigerated grin, a little sick now. "What is the meaning of this?"

"Out," I said.

"I am here to visit a customer of mine, a client."

"Out."

He trembled under my hand, moved by the pressure. I heard him suck in a breath of nervous torment. On the street, he shook his head sadly. "I do not understand this. What do you want of me?"

"Not a thing. We'll just take a little walk together. You like walking, don't you? How would you like to stroll over to the nearest precinct?"

HE SHOOK his head sadly. "*Ach*, I am stupid, stupid. I should have known. But the hotel? How clever of you. The clerk told me—"

I said, "Relax, Herman. I'm no cop. How long has Cole been hiding out in that dump?"

He stiffened and stopped walking. Under his thick glasses, his eyes were glazed and bright with tension. "But, certainly, you are not with Ferango?"

"How long has Cole been there?"

"Since he left the Lintón."

"You put him there?"

"I suggested it. The man was desperate. He promised me much if I would help him hide from Ferango. Have you ever seen a man consumed with terror? Frank Carroll came to me in mortal fear, I tell you. I had to help him."

I said, "Fine and dandy. You're a solid citizen, Herman. But you're finished with him now. Is that clear?"

"I understand."

"Do you? It means that the deal is dead with him."

"Dead?"

"As a herring. You're turning the gems over to me. Now."

He began to tremble again. He grabbed me with both hands and held me at a dead stop. His voice, shaken by terror, came with a rasp. "*Nein*—you are wrong about the jewelry. I have not got it."

"Don't play with me, Herman."

"I have not got it, I tell you. He never gave it to me. Why would he hand over almost a half-million dollars in my care? Carroll is a shrewd man. I examined his stones, yes. But that is all. That is all, believe me."

He was working hard to sell me. It came through as an honest effort, aided and abetted by his quivering lips and his wet hands on my wrists. I said, "You'd better not play games with me, Herman. I'll have two men on that warehouse in a little while. They're going to sit there and watch your friend Carroll. They're going to watch for you, too. If anything happens, if anyone enters that building, you'll lose your good health."

He sighed wearily. "You have nothing to fear from me. I am finished, of course. But it is too bad, my friend, not so much for me, but for Carroll. I do not like to see a man die. I have seen too much of it in the past. That is why I befriended him. I assume Ferango pays you well to track down a man? To corner a man like an animal, so that he may be killed?"

"I'm not working for Ferango."

"I do not understand," said Herman. "Is it that you yourself want the gems?"

"Carroll's wife wants them. She wants to return them to their owner."

"His wife? That is strange. Carroll did not tell me he was married."

This time I froze. I pulled him up short and held him there. "He must have mentioned her. Alice? Alice Carroll?"

"*Nein*," said Herman. "*Nein*."

Making a locate is more than a business. There is the challenge of the hunt, the battle for clues, the odds and ends of frustration and dead-end bafflement, the slow build to the climax when the subject is found and delivered. It is a game, played with the intellect and rewarded by the inward surge of satisfaction that comes with a solved puzzle. But all of this was dead now. I moved uptown filled with a queasy restlessness. A few dozen questions

were buzzing around in my brain. I catalogued them and plucked the most important into my consciousness. I toyed with it, analyzed it and then swallowed it. I meditated upon the middle-aged face of Frank Carroll. I followed him down the line of his retreat from Ferango. I set him up against the backdrop of Herman Fluegel's living room, a frightened little man befriended by a refugee fence. If Herman Fluegel knew Carroll's address, he must have had his confidence—all the way. Yet Fluegel did not remember any mention of Alice Carroll.

I STOPPED the cab on Broadway and entered the lobby of Alice Carroll's hotel. There was a bellhop resting his spine against a marbelized pillar. I whistled him to the door, showed him my card and oiled him with a fin.

"Alice Carroll," I said. "In?"

"In."

"When did she arrive?"

"Maybe an hour ago."

"Alone?"

"Not quite," he grinned. "She had a gent in tow."

"Upstairs?"

"He left her at the elevator."

"Give him to me."

"He's easy," and the bellhop closed his eyes. "Little guy, well dressed, flashy and sporty looking. He had—"

"Big smile? Full of false teeth? Mustache? Adolph Menjou type?"

"You got him."

It was Kellins. I let the boy finish him off before I asked him for more. There were no other men. Kellins had the inside track to her flat, and ran the course often.

Alice Carroll's suite was on the ninth floor, a deluxe layout, including a view of the city from a trick terrace. She took my arm and piloted me to a chrome chair near the parapet. She skittered about me, as anxious to please as a cigarette girl

at a night club, plying me with drink and fast talk.

"I didn't expect to see you so soon," she said. "I've got a feeling that you're up here because you found something—something important. Is that it?"

She sat herself beside me on the tufted mattress covering the chrome. She was dressed for an evening at home, in yellow pajamas, sashed with a broad red belt that bound her slim waist. She was at a loss without a handkerchief to twist. Her lean hands knotted around her knees.

I said, "You want to relax. Frank isn't that easy."

"You haven't found him."

"I'm no miracle man. I have a few leads, but they won't pan out for some time."

She sighed and let the good humor run out of her face. "What's holding you up?"

"Maybe it's just business. I work fast, sometimes too fast for my own good."

"What does that mean?"

"You're paying me for my time. If I make the locate too soon, I lose fifty smackers a day."

She aimed her eyes at me and held them there in a long, incredulous stare. "I don't understand. You know where he is, but you won't deliver him because of your fee?"

"You're getting warmer."

She began to freeze. "I see. You want to be paid extra money? I think that can be arranged."

"Can it? I haven't told you how much I want."

"Why not tell me and get it over with?"

"I was coming to that. I want ten grand for your husband."

"Ten thousand dollars?" Now she was rolling into the soprano notes of shocked despair. She got up and walked to the edge of the terrace. She showed me the fine lines of her back while nibbling her fingernails. Then she turned and came

toward me. I liked her fine in perspective. Looking up at her was a photographer's dream, an angle shot of soft and desperate womanhood. But in the close-up her expression came through to me as phony as a movie still. She was working too hard for the mood. "But that's impossible. Mr. Kellins won't pay it. You can't—"

"Ten grand, or no Frankie," I said.

"Please." She sank to her knees and put her hands on me. She had expressive fingers.

"Give me some time," she sobbed. "When will you call?"

"You've got an hour," I said, and marched down the hall to the elevator.

CHAPTER FOUR

Dead End

I SAT on a bench opposite the hotel, playing poker with the passing license plates. I had found nothing better than two pair, NC 34 643, when Alice came out in a rush. She skipped along the curbing, holding up a delicate arm to flag a passing cab. She moved him eastward, through Central Park and across Fifth Avenue to the smell of the river and Sutton Place. She climbed out at a modern three-story edifice.

This was the Arthur Kellins town house. I knew it from the great flood of publicity launched when Kellins had hired the greatest *avant garde* architect in the city to transform an ancient hole into the most modern front on Sutton Place. I sat there, leaning back against the leather, admiring the fancy fretwork. I allowed Alice Carroll over fifteen minutes alone with Kellins and then paid off the cabbie and skipped across the street and rang the bell.

A Chinese house boy, fresh out of a dignified murder novel, opened the door and smiled me into the vestibule.

Kellins himself appeared out of the cor-

ridor on my left and surveyed me, as jovial as a fixed judge.

"Well, MacAndrews," he said, working on his hairline mustache. "You're an eager man for the buck, is that it?"

I said, "I'm an eager man."

He ushered me into the gigantic living room, a symphony in striated plywood and assorted shadow boxes, buff and dark blue, against which a series of original water colors stood out in a variety of raw colors.

Alice Carroll relaxed on a fancy chair. She showed me her company smile, as brittle as a model on a magazine cover, and just as remote. For a flickering second she held me with her eyes. But after that I saw the man at the window, his broad back clad in tweeds, his fat hands clasped behind his back. And before he turned I knew he was Nick Ferango.

Arthur Kellins said, "This is the man I was telling you about, Nick. MacAndrews, the best ferret in the city. Get him a drink, Alice, we want to make him feel like one of the family.

"He can go to hell," Alice said.

I bowed her way. Ferango came away from a window and stood beside her. His larded face was deadpan. He had animal eyes that glowed with a menacing spark, dead black with a pinpoint highlight.

"The big-time eye, eh?" he said. "The ten-grand expert. Ten grand for a half day's work. Once I paid a man more than that for less time, MacAndrews, but he didn't live to buy beer with it. Ten grand is too much dough for a man your size."

I said, "I'm a big boy now, Ferango. And I like pretty things. Maybe the ten grand isn't enough now. Maybe it's only five percent of the ice Frankie has hidden away. I'm not in a five-percent business on deals like this." I pointed at Kellins. "I'm as talented as your legal-aid department, Ferango, and twice as important at this moment. I was conned into this be-

cause you needed the best locator in the trade. Well, you've got him now—all the way. I know all about the mechanics of your swindle. Frank Carroll never had a wife. You brought your manhunt to Kellins and he set it up so that I'd go for the blonde's story. You figured you'd buy me cheap that way—fifty a day and a small bonus for the locate on half a million in gems. I want my pay, all of it, and ten grand is small change compared to what you three will net on this one."

KELLINS was listening in his best courtroom style, smiling his tintype grin, the little gears in his brain well screened by his polite nods and his perpetual good humor. "Clever boy," he said, and nodded pertly to Ferango. "He's got us over a barrel, Nick. I'm afraid we'll have to pay him off. Will fifteen do it, MacAndrews?"

"I'll struggle along with it," I said.

"I don't see any barrel," said Ferango. "I can sweat it out of him if you say the word."

"No horseplay," said Kellins, leveling his voice to a new hardness.

The tableau was something out of a cheap melodrama, a silence built of secret thoughts, the combined scheming of the three partners. And I was outside it, watching Ferango count out the small pile of bills on the kidney-shaped coffee table near Alice. They were all watching me as I stuffed the money away. Alice Carroll was smiling like a cat. And I was the canary.

Ferango said, "Let's go, expert."

Kellins followed us to the door. "I admire your talent, MacAndrews. I'll be sure to recommend you to my clients."

"Don't bother," I said, and walked out in front of Ferango.

Ferango had a car at the curb, a long black job, complete with driver and an extra passenger, a broken-nosed lout who sat on my right side. He radiated the

flat and greasy smell of badly cooked dog-cart menus. His right hand was clamped around a small automatic, and as we started away the streetlamps lit the barrel and made it shine.

Ferango said, "Where is he, MacAndrews?"

"A side street near the Manhattan Bridge," I told him. "Near the Bowery. I think it's Dock Street."

We skimmed downtown and the tires hissed and the city sped by, asleep now, a concrete corridor, a one-way route to the cemetery. We turned into the Bowery and made another turn into Dock Street.

"Where now?" asked Ferango.

"This is it," I said. "Carroll is in that dump across the street, the Eureka Tin Plate Company."

Ferango took his time. He told the driver to circle the block and park at the corner, near the Bowery. When we stopped, Ferango tapped the chauffeur

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on the shoulder. "You and me will go up there, Ace. Max, you stay here with the expert. If he moves, show him how to lay quiet."

Max grunted and sat back. In a tense moment, I measured him for size and found him wanting. He was the welter-weight type, thin in the frame and lean in the hands, a typical gun pusher, worth the chance at a quick spill and infighting. Max sat forward now, a little tight, gripping his automatic in a white-knuckled hand. He was aware of my stare. I turned my head away and counted to ten and watched Ferango and his driver enter the doorway under the Eureka sign.

Then I jumped. I leaned into him, smashing down on his gun hand as I fell. Max was surprisingly agile, and much more muscular than I imagined. He came at me from his crouch and caught me high on the head with a fist. I heard the gun fall with a bounce and pulled him down and over me as I reached for it. But he had the advantage and pressed it. He hit me with a rabbit punch and the car spun as I sank and scrambled for the elusive gun. Our hands met for an instant and I felt his knee in my ribs and heard my own quick suck of astonishment as he kicked again. From somewhere in another county the thin wail of a police car filtered through to me. And then another siren, this time louder, but fading fast as I caught the quick shock of the gun butt above my right ear. The sirens rose to a devilish pitch, closer and closer, until they screamed high and clear against the inner ear of my brain. And in the welter of noise, blackness closed in on me.

SAM FLACK fanned me with his open hand, hard slaps. I opened my eyes and swung at him in a reflex of my dream sequence. He caught my fist and put it down and said, "Don't hit me, Stevie boy. This is Sam, remember?"

I was on the pavement, on the corner of Dock Street. Three big cops were shooing away a curious group of Bowery residents. Up the street, two squad cars stood before the Eureka Tin Plate Company.

I said, "Did you get them all? They went in there."

"We got everybody but Kellins and his blonde," said Sam. "There's no hurry about those two. We'll pick them up at our leisure. Kellins will have to talk smooth and fast to beat this rap." He punched me playfully. "You put the whole crew away, Steve. I'm proud of you."

He gave me a small bottle and I drank a bit and stood still until the wooden pegs that held me blossomed into legs again.

I said, "Stop salving me, mister. You had a tail on me, wasn't that it? Man in a blue suit and brown hat?"

Sam smiled apologetically. "I had to cover you, Steve, for your own good. We'd been watching Kellins, but he kept himself clean on the Ferango angle. I figured that you were the lad to make the locate for us, so I gave you your head and assigned our best man to keep you in sight. You could have been hurt, and I didn't want that. The idea worked fine, right down the line. We nabbed Ferango just as he cornered Carroll. We clipped him with the hot gems in his hand. Of course, Ferango won't talk, I suppose. But you will—won't you?"

"I love to talk about my clients," I said. "Especially when they don't pay their bills."

Sam clucked sympathetically. "You got nothing from the legal brain?"

"Not a dime. Mr. Nicholas Ferango gave me a small sum of money, but it was only a last-minute gesture—a token of his good will. I suppose I should keep it to pay for my lacerations, shouldn't I?"

"By all means," winked Sam. "Provided you got nothing from the blonde."

"I'll keep it," I said.

By **STUART
FRIEDMAN**



Down the beach he ran,
wildly, desperately. . . .

He was like a mad dog, to be killed on sight. But the trouble was—he was the one who had the gun. . . .

I FELT very weak. I tried to focus my eyes on the detective beside my hospital bed, but his face kept blurring. His flat, impersonal voice kept saying, "Why? Why did you shoot yourself, Field?"

"Accident." It must have been. Jack couldn't have meant to shoot. He'd be tearing himself to pieces with remorse. "Going to clean my gun. I didn't know it was loaded."

He made a derisive sound. "Was it because your wife was leaving you?" I must

Killer Unleashed

have grinned because he said irritably, "What's funny, Field?"

"Nothing's funny," I mumbled, closing my eyes tiredly. "Estelle wouldn't leave me." My voice faded out so that he didn't hear. I used to grin like that back in grade school when I was called on. It would terrify me to stand up and have everybody look at me. The grin would come. They called me "Simp." That was better than "Ox Face."

The detective was gone the next time I opened my eyes. There was a scalding pain in my shoulder, as if the bullet was still there. I had a vague impression of the doctor giving me an injection, then pain and consciousness numbed away. For a long time everything was chaos, and the hours, drugged and awake, were full of nightmare.

In a sense Jack Courtney's shooting me had been like shooting myself. Throughout our boyhood he had been like an inner part of me made visible, the part I wanted people to see instead of my homeliness. People took to him instantly, and his personality and good looks deflected their dislike from me. Jack was welcome everywhere, but he went nowhere I wasn't wanted.

I'd had a trust fund instead of parents, my father having died before I was born, and my mother at my birth. I hadn't known what a home was until Jack took me to his house when we were eight. He and his sister, who was three years older, and his parents had banished my sense of hopeless aloneness. When they looked at me I wasn't ugly, and the world was no longer filled with strangers and enemies. It was their warmth that had gradually dissolved my deep fear. I've always thought that without them I wouldn't have learned until too late that life was worth living. I'd have given my life for them. But when they'd been evicted from their home out on the west side during my teens I hadn't been able to touch my trust fund to help

them. I had never quite gotten over that.

Talking to the detective, I'd protected Jack instinctively and I didn't regret it. But I didn't see how the detective had figured out that I shot myself unless Jack had carefully wiped the gun and then put my fingerprints on it. Jack was impulsive, but always sensitive and sympathetic. Surely when he realized he had shot me he'd have thought about getting a doctor. To think of Jack calculatingly extricating himself while I might be dying was worse than knowing he'd shot me.

AT LAST I woke, feeling stronger. The nurse took my pulse and temperature and told me I had a visitor. It was Louise Courtney, Jack's sister. She looked expensive in her bell-shaped fur coat and matching toque. She'd kept her figure and much of the softness of feature that had made her an irresistibly pretty girl in her teens. Louise didn't live according to the copy books; her way of life had included several wealthy men, but no husbands. I thought, as she came to the bed, a look of pale tension on her pretty face, that the word "bad" never fitted anyone you loved.

"Cam, I'm so glad you're better," she said quietly, her cold fingers pressing my hand. "We thought we were going to lose you, dear."

"It's wonderful to see you, Louise." It was so damned wonderful that I choked up for seconds. "Have you seen Estelle?"

"Cam, please be calm and listen, dear. Estelle's gone. She'll be all right, I swear. But . . . I don't know how to tell you!" She caught her breath. "Jack phoned and said to tell you Estelle's with him and if we set the police on him you'll never see her alive. What's come over him?"

"He's scared," I said. "Louise, he shot me."

She groped back of her, found the chair and sank onto it, staring numbly. "He's really turned dangerous!" Her face crumpled. She covered it with both hands and

doubled forward, crying. Then she composed herself. "You mustn't tell the police. Cam, I think he's got her at my summer place on Lake Michigan. Let me go up there and handle him; I could always handle Jack."

"I know. You do it, Louise. Tell him it's all right. He needn't be scared. Just get Estelle away from him."

"I will, Cam. I will. Trust me. How did it happen?"

"He came over to borrow five thousand dollars. You remember on my birthday a few weeks ago my trust fund was released to me. There was six thousand two hundred. I paid off debts and still had over five thousand. My law practice is beginning to meet expenses, so Estelle and I decided to use that money as down payment on a house and furniture. We'd planned it all out. But I couldn't just say no, not to Jack."

"Oh, Cam, why not? He put on long pants the day you did. You talk about *me* spoiling him!"

"Anyway, I asked why he needed it. That offended him. I was either his friend or I wasn't. Finally he said he had a sure-thing bet. Tiger Boy Jimson was taking a dive in the Jimson-Wheeler fight this Friday—tomorrow night, I guess."

"This is Friday, dear. The fight's tonight. Go on."

"I offered to stake him a thousand. That infuriated Estelle. She said he shouldn't have a penny. The two of them demanded I decide right that instant, and my bristles went up. I just sat down, shut my mouth and lighted a smoke. That made Estelle madder. She flung out of the room and telephoned somebody. When she came back Jack was sprawled in a chair, reading the paper. She stopped in her tracks and said, 'Of all the damned nerve!' He cocked an eyebrow and told her when she understood me better she'd know I was in a Major Sulk and pressure only prolonged it. She said she'd spend the eve-

ning with *her* friends and left the house. Estelle's not like that, but Jack can be pretty damned arrogant."

"I always kick him out. He comes around lecturing me while he's borrowing a hundred. I literally kick him out."

"**H**E STAYED after Estelle left. I really gave him hell. I told him it was beneath him to use a woman's wiles, appealing to people's weakness for him. He said he'd planned to surprise me by winning a couple thousand for me as well as staking himself on the Jimson-Wheeler fight. But he said I couldn't force the loan on him, then. I see now, Louise, that he was playing a card when he said he wouldn't take a loan." I stared at her. While she had always shielded Jack, she'd dominated him. Her method was to threaten to be "off of him." Jack had used the same tactics on me. "He meant it as a threat of withdrawal of his friendship. It had always worked on me. Suddenly it didn't work. I didn't try to force the loan on him."

"He ran to my desk and got out my gun and aimed it at me. I said: 'Oh, hell, put that down, Jack. You wouldn't shoot.' He said, 'You *too* think I'm not a man.' I told him nobody thought that, they could check his war record if they did. Jack said, 'I don't give a damn about the Army's opinion. You know what my world is, who my world is. Ten million people shouting don't mean as much as a whisper from the important people. Louise called me yellow, tonight. Now you.'"

"I did," Louise murmured. "He tried me till my patience broke. I told him if he'd had your manhood and the strength to force me to do what he claimed he wanted, then he wouldn't have any reason to complain about my way of life. But, Cam, he couldn't just have shot you coldly!"

"Not cold. He was anguished. He kept talking and holding that gun, and suddenly

he was a stranger. Jack! A stranger and an enemy. It was as if twenty-five years had been yanked from under me and I was alone and scared like a kid. An old habit came back. It used to be that a grin would automatically cover up when I was scared. I couldn't help it. I grinned. Jack must have thought it was contempt. He fired."

The pain sharpened in my shoulder. I shut my eyes, trying to relax. Feeling Louise's cold fingers on my forehead I looked up into her level grey-green eyes.

"Louise, I'll write a check for the five thousand. You get that bet placed on the fight for Jack. That's the best way to protect Estelle, don't you think?" I said, searching her face.

Her eyes shifted. Then she drew a long breath through taut, fine nostrils and met my gaze. "Let's face it—the word for that money is ransom. All right, when I come back from seeing Jack, I intend to have Estelle with me. After that—well, Cam, it will be up to you if you want him arrested."

THE DETECTIVE came in the afternoon, hours after Louise had got my check cashed and gone to the lake. He thought Louise was patching a rift between Estelle and me, so he was certain I'd tried suicide. However he was willing to accept my claim of accident.

It was almost eleven at night, nearly fourteen hours after she left, when Louise returned, without Estelle.

"Cam, I placed the bet, took him the receipt. He wants me to bring the winnings, if there are any. I couldn't handle him. He wouldn't even let me see Estelle. You'll have to go up there with me. I've talked to the doctors. You can leave here by noon tomorrow. I'll see you then."

Just before midnight a nurse told me the fight results. Jimson had won. The bet had been lost. I couldn't have slept without sedatives.

Louise didn't seem to have slept at all next morning. During the delays in the hospital offices while I was getting released, she smoked incessantly and ticked off an impatient rhythm with the toe of one and then the other trimly shod foot, her glance moving in aimless, nervous darts. But once we were in the car some of her tension seemed to flow into the vibrant hum of the engine. On the open highway under the clear cold of a winter sky, she drove with her usual relaxed competence, her graceful white hands resting easily on the wheel as she held the speedometer at seventy.

"Cam, you remember the party celebrating your passing the Bar exams last year when Jack got tight?" she said, voice barely audible above the powerful engine. "He told me he might have been in your shoes, amounting to something, if only he had had the sense to hate me instead of loving me and letting me dominate the manhood out of him."

"I remember that," I said. She'd laughed and kissed him and told him he was still her beautiful baby.

"He meant it. I think he feels that hate is the only defense he has against me, the only thing he can use to force me to take him seriously. Maybe he hates us both, Cam. Your becoming a lawyer made it scaldingly clear to him that you had cashed in on the promise he always seemed to have."

"The irony! Do you know, Louise, it's Jack who had the real handicap? I had to improve myself to gain acceptance. He didn't; he was tops already. Nobody ever thought he was stupid, so he didn't have to barrel into his studies to prove himself the way I did. I had to fight to overcome everything and I gained by it. That ugly-duckling boyhood made me stronger as a man. It's as if I robbed Jack's strength."

It was Jack who had started me building my body so I wouldn't be scared when he found kid scraps for us. Pride in my

body had helped me forget my face. With that start from Jack I'd gone on to win an amateur heavyweight title in college; then with Jack as manager, I'd fought pro until we went into the Army. After the war, I'd quit to study law after a couple of fights. That might have seemed to Jack like a desertion after I'd got all I could out of the strength he'd given me. I could see that he might hate me. For the first time I thought he might really have intended to murder me when he shot. Before, it had seemed logical to believe he'd have fired more bullets and made sure I was dead if he'd wanted to kill. But something—maybe Estelle's return—had prevented his firing again, maybe. Something outside himself.

THE SKY was the deep grey of approaching night as we went through the town of Lake Haven, near Louise's summer place. A mile past the town, Louise slowed and turned into a pair of tire ruts spanning the winter-killed weed growth on the little road leading to the lakeside house. The place was half a mile off the highway and within a hundred feet of the lake. Louise switched on the long, bright headlight beams. The road curved down a shallow hill through a pine woods, and she sat erect, gripping the wheel, driving at a crawl, jogging the big car across pocks in the road as gently as a baby carriage.

We left the woods. A strip of daylight above the lake outlined the house unforgettably; the point of the roof seemed to hold up the lowering dark of the night sky. Our headlights brightened steadily against the white clapboard and closed green shutters of the back of the house as we rolled nearer. Louise winked the lights on and off several times, then signaled with a tattoo of sound from the horn. She drew to a stop alongside the garage, cut the ignition, removed key and keycase.

"He's gone," she whispered. "His bold

play didn't even win money and he can't endure looking like a fool."

We walked to the back door. She fumbled with the key and I took it from her and unlocked the back door.

"Estelle!" I yelled, going up the pair of steps to the kitchen. "Jack!"

No answer. I snapped on the kitchen light, crossed to the dining room. Louise followed closely through the downstairs, calling Jack's and Estelle's names shrilly. Then we heard several quick thumping sounds upstairs. I sped up the stairs.

Estelle was bound and gagged on the floor of the front bedroom closet. Her dark eyes bulged in terror; then as she recognized me the tears welled and spilled down the soft contours of her cheeks. I got my good arm locked around her slight body and carried her out into the room, feeling the convulsive tightening and relaxing of muscle and flesh of her body under her wool dress. Louise was working at the knot of the gag as I put Estelle on the bed. I loosened her wrists.

"Cam! Cam! I thought you were dead," she cried, and locked her arms around me. I kissed her and kept running my hands gently over her face, caressing and soothing her. She babbled half-sobbing endearments, trembling all over. I could feel the frightened race of her heart.

Louise, sitting there, broke in abruptly, "Where's Jack, Estelle?"

"I don't know," Estelle said. "He just tied me up a few minutes before you came." She sat erect, shook her dark, shoulder-length mass of hair back from her face, stared numbly at me. "He's held me prisoner. I didn't really leave the house that night. I eavesdropped. I heard you arguing. Then the shot. I ran into the room. Jack ran at me and struck me with his fist and knocked me out. The next I knew we were driving in the middle of the night. He kept me prisoner here because I wouldn't promise, after we found

(Continued on page 125)

HERE COME THE MUSCLES!

It took a girl who hated his guts to turn that no-good, blackmailing Red into a real, live YMCA-type hero—with a hole in his head!

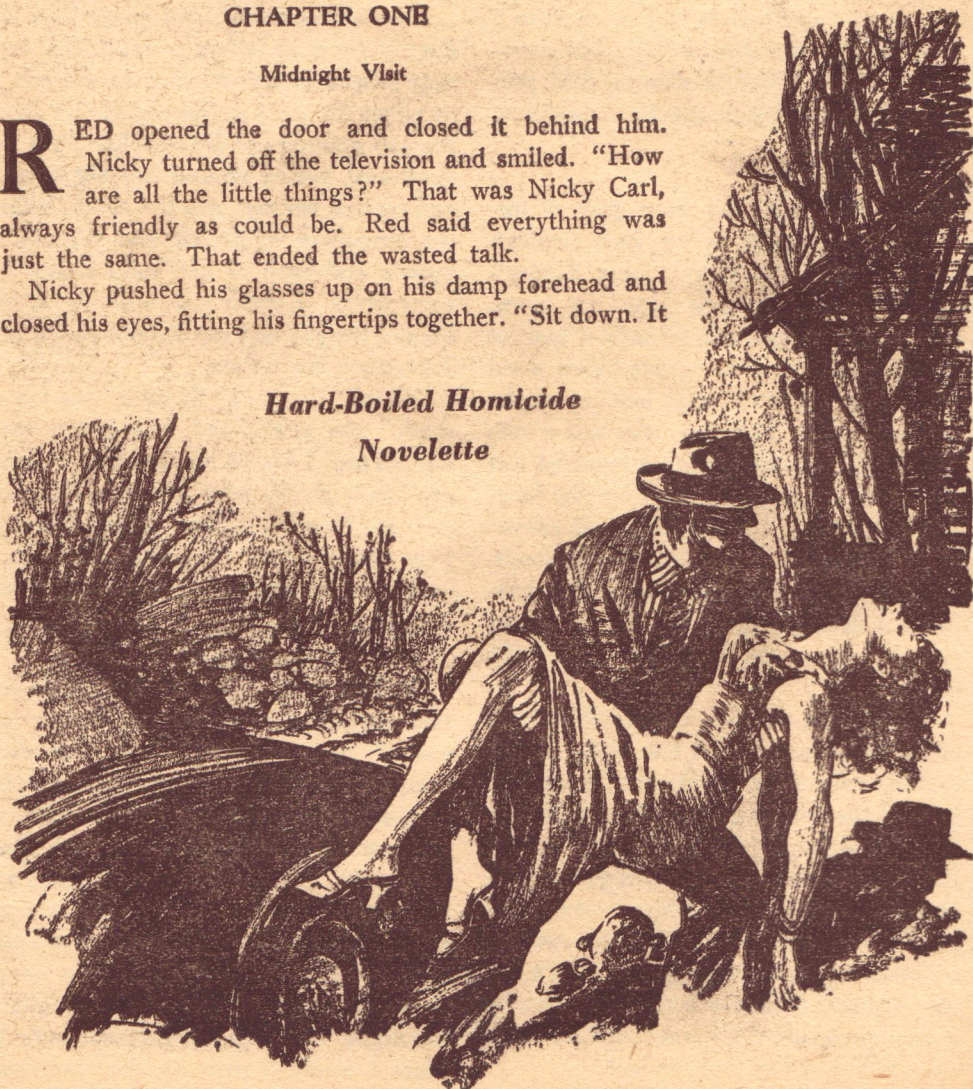
CHAPTER ONE

Midnight Visit

RED opened the door and closed it behind him. Nicky turned off the television and smiled. "How are all the little things?" That was Nicky Carl, always friendly as could be. Red said everything was just the same. That ended the wasted talk.

Nicky pushed his glasses up on his damp forehead and closed his eyes, fitting his fingertips together. "Sit down. It

Hard-Boiled Homicide Novelette



By
FRANCIS K.
ALLAN



goes like this," he said. "Her name is Patricia Warren DeFalvo. DeFalvo Creations of Fifth Avenue—dresses, you know, Red. During the week she lives at the Graylon House on Central Park South. Weekends she spends at her country place at Harrowick-on-Hudson. That's your spot. No dogs. She keeps a car. Two old servants. They stay in the apartment over the garages. The place is a quarter of a mile from anywhere else."

The untidy apartment was hot and Nicky's voice droned like a fly, drowsily. "She's been married, divorced, no kids. Gives a few parties. Stays up late sometimes. Thirty years old. Inherited the business from her mamma. May be smart, may be dumb. It won't matter, will it?" He smiled faintly, and Red wondered how Nicky had escaped the name of Toad or Toady. He was short, fat, soft, brown, puffy, and very very smart. Maybe toads weren't smart; maybe that was why.

Nicky pulled a snapshot from under the desk blotter and passed it across. The girl in the photo was slender and nicely curved. Her hair was dark and curly. That was about all the snapshot told. "Let's move this along in a hurry," Nicky was saying. "Tomorrow is Saturday. She'll be at the country place, likely. Let's get started tomorrow, Red."

Red shrugged. "Anything else?"

There was nothing else. Nothing he didn't know, anyway. "Just do a nice job," Nicky said. Red grunted drily. He didn't like Nicky. Both of them knew it. But it had simplified things at times.

"I wish you'd stick to men," Red said. "Women make it gushy." Then he closed the door behind him. Nicholas Carl, theatrical agent . . . Red wondered what would happen if an actor ever got lost and wandered in here.

ONE flight down in Forty-fourth Street was the sickly-sweet odor of hot candv and the beat of a tango, coming from

a dance school. It was August, and at least the hottest day of the year. The girl in the theater ticket window smiled faintly at Red, half as if she remembered him, half as if she wished she did.

Many girls smiled at Red Fowler. He was tall, bronze haired and brown eyed. His hips were thin and his hands were long and lean. He was just like something from the movies, a girl had told him once. But that was where Red fooled girls. He laughed wryly and that was all. Girls made things gushy. He knew it. Maybe some day . . .

That was Friday afternoon.

It was late Saturday afternoon when, from a wooded hill behind the DeFalvo estate, Red saw cars coming up the driveway. He heard laughter and saw the people drinking cocktails. Night came. The lights shone at the windows and music rippled from a piano. Then it was one in the morning. The cars were gone. Finally the lights went on in the servant's quarters over the garages, and at last Red watched the last light in the house go off. He sighed patiently and rose and went down the hill toward the house. The time for waiting was over.

Doors were easy for Red, even when they were locked. This one wasn't. He took swift looks with his fountain-pen flashlight as, following his memory, he climbed the stairs toward the corner room where the last light had burned. He listened at the door. The breathing was audible at last, slow and steady. He opened the door silently and took one more look with the light.

Patricia DeFalvo was sleeping on her side, one arm over her head, her lips slightly parted, her dark hair slightly tumbled. Red turned out his light and moved with a cat-like grace in the darkness. He reached the bed. One hand came down on the girl's lips. The other circled her shoulders and pinned her arms. She came awake with a violent shudder and tried

to scream. The sound was lost behind Red's pressing fingers.

She fought. She kicked and struggled. Red held her. Suddenly she was still and Red smiled in the darkness. This was the possum act. Patty was smart, after all, wasn't she? . . . Then she realized it wasn't going to work. She began to fight again, wildly, more desperately. But her strength was ebbing. Red managed to work the cap off the tiny bottle in his left hand. He moved the bottle near her nostrils. The fight came back in frenzy. Red held on patiently, and finally it was ended. She was asleep.

It was not yet one-thirty. Car keys were in her purse on the dresser. He tied and gagged her with towels from the bathroom, pulled a dress—any dress—from the closet. He added a toothbrush and comb and a pair of house shoes. All the conveniences of home, he mused. And only one-forty. They'd be at the Happy Hour by three. Not even Nicky could kick about that. . . .

Red turned on Patty's car radio and sang as he crossed the Bear Mountain Bridge. A pale moon came up over his shoulder as he followed the highway. Then the trees grew shadowy as he turned into a rutted lane where a faded sign pointed crookedly and said, "Happy Hour Lodge, Day or Weeks, Meals and . . ." The rest of the sign was rained out. Red remembered the day, years before, when Nicky had noticed the sign.

"Just turn in there," Nicky had said abruptly. "We might find something we could use." And they'd found the old lodge, for sale for sixteen hundred dollars. The next week it had been Nicky's. "Just a quiet place for a tired business man to get away from the city, Red." He'd laughed. Nicky seldom laughed, and never at anything funny.

At the end of the rutted lane, Red drove past the decaying lodge with its sagging veranda and vacant-eyed win-

dows. He put the car in the old stable beside the battered Ford that Nicky kept here. He carried Patricia DeFalvo through the moonlight to the lodge. Inside, the air was hot and musty, but in the basement, with its thick stone walls, the air was cool and ancient. Red hated the clammy feel of the basement. He despised the lodge and the solitude of his "business trips" here. Sometimes he toyed with the idea of burning the whole damned thing to the ground—perhaps with Nicky snoring inside.

HE SNAPPED on the light and opened a final door in the basement. Here was a small room without windows. There were a cot, a chair and a crude bathroom off the room. He put the girl on the couch, locked the door and untied the towels that bound and gagged her. Her eyes were open and she was watching him intently. As he loosened the gag, she choked.

"Damn you!" She slapped him with every ounce of her strength, then tried it again. Red gripped her wrists. She kicked him. Calmly he stepped on her bare toes. She screamed, more in rage than pain.

"Now cut out the brawl and listen, Patty," he told her patiently. "Fighting won't win the bouquet for you. Screaming won't, either. You may as well learn to like the simple life for a few days. If you're good, nothing happens to you. You'll get fed. You'll even get a drink at cocktail time. If," he repeated, "you're very good."

Her blue eyes blazed at him. She was quite a looker, Red decided, particularly when she was mad. Maybe she wouldn't be the crying kind.

"Just what is the idea?" she demanded. "Who suggested this little trip?"

"The idea is money," Red said. "You have some—we want some."

"How much?"

"I wouldn't know the details. That's not my end of the business. All the details will be clear later. The front office does the paper work. . . ." He released her arms and stepped back. "That's all for now. I brought your toothbrush and comb and a pretty dress with red flowers. I'll drop in later and—"

"Don't bother," she snapped. Red shrugged and opened the door. "Wait!" She bit her lips. "Listen, why can't we talk this over and make a—"

Red shook his head slowly and grinned. "That would be cheating, honey." Then he pulled a pack of cigarettes from his pocket and tossed them to her. Abruptly she hurled them back. He grinned again and put them back in his pocket. She bit at her lip again. He closed and locked the door and listened. She did not scream. She did not cry. He breathed a sigh of relief. She was better than most. Most of them were a mess.

He went back up the stairs to the kitchen and took a bottle of beer from the refrigerator. He walked through the hall and into the long game room. A sagging, moth-eaten pool table remained from better days. The warped floor groaned beneath his feet. Outside the windows, the moonlight seemed cold and restless on the rocks and misshapen trees.

He undressed and crawled into a bunk in one of the bedrooms. The bedcovers felt sticky and wet. The wind kept beating a tree against the cornice. A rat gnawed in the attic. Red turned and turned and kicked at the cover.

This would be his last time up here, he told himself. Nicky could be the hermit next time. Money wasn't worth it. A guy could go crazy on this pile of rocks. . . . At last he fell asleep.

When he awoke at ten in the morning, a steady rain was falling. Red swore dismally and cooked breakfast. "No cream for the coffee," he said to Patricia when he entered her room. He put the tray down,

and she decided to eat. Then she decided she wanted the cigarettes, after all. She lit one and looked at him thoughtfully. Some of the kick-and-slap fury was gone now.

"What makes you tick the way you do? Like this." She gestured.

"Money, as I said. Money, the answer to everything."

"How do you know I won't see you again some day and yell for the cops? If I'm around to do any seeing, I mean?"

"The front office will have reasons. It always does. Once I ran into a former client in a bar. Know what? He said, Let's have a drink on it."

"The guy in your front office must be a sweetheart on brains."

"He gets along. Through eating?" He reached for the tray.

"Wait." She stood up and reached out, then stopped. "Nothing. I was just going to test you with some lovely talk about turning over a new leaf and giving a break to a poor little girl whose mamma made dresses for a living. But I'll save my breath," she said. "Bring me a drink some time."

"Why not?" He started toward the door, then turned quickly. "Oh, no! Never try to pick up a chair behind me. I'm nice; you be nice too."

"Go to hell!"

Red sighed and locked the door behind him.

CHAPTER TWO

The Gorillas

IT WAS still raining at noon. There was too much static to get the New York radio stations. He played solitaire until he discovered that the jack of spades was missing. He walked through the lodge restlessly and swore again at the rain, at the stink, at the silence, at Nicky. He needed a vacation; he was getting

tired of it, he told himself. He stopped and stared out the window; then his nerves relaxed. Nicky's sedan was wallowing up the muddy lane. Nicky came in like a big flabby bear, shaking the rain off his jowls.

"Lousy day. Smells like a dead rat in here," he said.

"Did I say I liked it much?" Red retorted.

"Give me the key. How is she?"

"She wants to play tricks with chairs. Watch her."

Nicky grunted and went away. He returned presently and took a bottle of beer from the refrigerator before he sat down. "She was very nice and she was glad to write some nice letters for me, when I explained the situation. Everything will be settled in a couple of days."

"I'm in a hurry. This place gives me the itch." Red stared at Nicky. "What axe have you got on her to keep her sweet?"

Nicky sighed complacently. "Her daddy. Worthless old rummy. That's where the DeFalvo stuff comes from. He's one of those fifth-rate dukes that got kicked out of Europe with nothing but his monocle on. He married her mamma and mamma started a dressmaking shop. Smart gal, her mamma. Built it up into the champagne district. Papa just leaned over dice tables or took himself a drink. Finally he disappeared with a sack of her cash one night." Nicky went out for another beer. "Must be a dead rat somewhere around here, Red."

"You said that before. Go on about papa and mamma."

"Mamma died a couple of years back and the girl took the business. Nobody had heard of papa in years, when all of a sudden he busted into the New York papers. Drunk and broke, found in the Bowery, tossed into jail. Then the reporters found out who he was. Next came the pictures of Patricia and papa leaving

the jail, arm in arm, papa in a new suit and shave, ready to give life another whirl. It was a very nice interesting story, Red."

"I begin to understand. It made you want to talk to papa."

"Quietly, over a drink. He likes it better with a drink. I explained how tough life had been on him. How he'd been kicked around. How he ought to get a better break on the money. Then I wondered to him, privately, if maybe folks weren't greasing the skids to send him to the crazy hatch. The girl, see, had been sending him to a doc to try to fix the heavy drinking. Well, papa got worried very fast about going to the crazy hatch. Naturally he could see that I had his interest at heart. So I spoke with him frankly about the money he ought to get while he could. So, to put it one way, papa is going to be our contact man. Nobody but papa."

"I see," Red said softly. "Yes. Smart, Nicky."

"The girl took it very calm and solemn. She won't ever open her mouth. We could step up to her place for cocktails of an evening; she wouldn't open her mouth. And there is one more card on papa. One day over a drink, he mentioned how people were looking for him in California for lifting a widow's insurance money, or something; also, some bad checks. So papa will take his slice of pie. We will escort him to the pier. He will go back to the lovely sidewalk cafés of Paris, and it he ever thinks of coming back, we will remind him of the cops in California."

"I don't know," Red said uneasily. "A drunk will fool you. He'll blow his top some day and babble the whole thing out."

"So what?" Nicky asked calmly. "The girl will hide from the whole mess and keep her mouth shut. Too sordid, too shameful. Take it away. The hundred grand is forgotten, so take it all away. That's what she'll think. Just like the guy she was married to. He wasn't a lily.

When they finally called it off, she paid his bad bills, gave him a fat check and kept her mouth shut. What I mean to say, Red, is this: Always deal with a high-class client, then you don't have to worry about a big mess." He winked. "Also, a rich client who can pay and forget it and still drink champagne tomorrow. A high-class, rich client. . . . Remember what I say." He rose. "It won't take long. I'll be phoning you now and then." He departed clumsily.

IT WAS still raining when night came and Red carried the dinner tray down with a bottle of rye and some ice water. He wanted to talk to somebody, to hear something besides the relentless splashing of the rain. Patricia was sitting on the side of the bed.

"I'm not hungry," she said. Her eyes were faded and tired.

"I know. Nicky has that effect on people. Have a drink," he said.

She watched him as he filled the glasses. "Thanks," she said quietly. He watched her fingers as they trembled. He got to thinking about her old man, then about the guy she'd paid good-bye. He shook his shoulders and made another drink for himself. It wasn't his sob story. She had dough, and dough bought everything. Then he noticed her eyes. They were studying him strangely.

"I still can't understand," she said slowly. "You stand there. You have two eyes, two ears. You talk like other people. It's just a business with you, isn't it?"

"Everybody has to do something." He grinned. "I never was much of an insurance salesman, either."

"Too bad," she tried to retort; then suddenly tears came into her eyes. Not loud tears with sobs; silent, helpless tears. "If it just . . . It wouldn't hurt so much if . . ." She choked. "Mother wasn't pretty. She was so homely. And he used to be so handsome. That's why she mar-

ried him. He made her feel beautiful, even if she knew she was kidding herself. People have to kid themselves. And now he . . . Oh, God," she sobbed hopelessly. "I feel so lonely."

"Yes. Yes, sure," Red said uncomfortably. "I know how it is, a little bit, anyway." He paused at the door. "Don't get too drunk, Patty." He locked the door behind him and went slowly up the stairs. He stared at the night. He felt lousy. This was definitely the last one. He didn't want any more. Nicky could find somebody else.

The rain ended at midnight, and Red stayed awake until almost three o'clock, listening to an all-night disc jockey and drinking beer. On the news report at five minutes to three, the bulletin was read. Patricia DeFalvo, wealthy heiress of a dressmaking fortune, was reported missing from her estate at Harrowick-on-Hudson. It was believed that Miss DeFalvo had vanished during the pre-dawn hours of Sunday. Only within the last hour had police made public the disappearance. No statements had been forthcoming. . . .

Red turned off the radio and went to bed. The wind kept slamming the tree against the cornice. Left-over rain dripped through the gutters. This was worse than the night before. It made Red think of the stories of driving people crazy by making them listen to the drip of water. He reached out in the darkness and pulled a cigarette from his pack. He struck a match. For an instant the flame rose brightly, then wavered and went out. He struck a second match. Again the flame rose, then ripped wildly and went out. The third match burned evenly and gently. Red moved it toward his cigarette; then his muscles, his nerves, his brain jerked into focus.

Just as if a door had been opened somewhere. . . . Just as if . . .

He blew the match out and listened. The tree banged and hammered. The rain

dripped. Sweat felt cool across his shoulders. Nerves . . . Nothing but nerves, that was it. Or was it? . . . A creaking sound . . . Just the same sound that the door in the kitchen made, the door going down to the basement.

He stuck out a foot and stood up. In the darkness he went down the hall and into the kitchen. The moon was out again. A pale rectangle shone through the window and across the worn floor. He touched the wall and the basement door. The door was open. It had not been open before. . . .

He started to move back, feeling himself caught in the moonlight as by a spotlight.

"Be still, Red," a voice ordered softly. "Stand still."

He turned his head slowly, hunting for the speaker in the darkness. His fingers slipped along the cabinet toward the drawer that held the knives.

"Don't, Red!"

A fragment of shadow flashed through the moonlight and collided with Red's skull. He almost grasped the knife; then it dissolved beneath his fingers as his knees dissolved beneath him. Clearly, yet faintly, he heard a voice shouting from the basement:

"Hey! Sam, what is it, Sam? What is—"

"It's all right now," a voice called back. But it wasn't all right, Red thought childishly. It was all wrong. Dumb. Cockeyed. It was not all right. . . .

THE sleep didn't take long. The windows were still grey with moonlight when Red opened his eyes. His head ached and he wanted a drink of water. He was in the game room and the lights were on. His legs ached, too, and then he discovered why. They were doubled sharply under the chair and something was holding them there. Something was also holding his hands to the chair arms. He took

a closer look then. They were handcuffs.

The police. The F.B.I. The party was over forever. That was it. One job too many, and this was the end of the trip. . . .

Then the frantic race of his thoughts halted. He stared across the room to the chair beside the radio and telephone. And there was Sam Bondy, smiling at him and sucking softly at his gold tooth in front.

"In the dark you should stand still when people say so, Red," he said.

"What? Oh. Oh, yes. It all comes back to me now." A flood of relief poured through him. It was only Sam Bondy, not the F.B.I. *Only* . . . Then Red blinked and wet his lips and tried to decide what the *only* meant.

Until this minute Sam Bondy had been just a big-faced, slump-shouldered man who lived across the hall at Red's hotel on West Fifty-fourth Street. A couple of months before he'd come over to borrow forty dollars. A few other times he'd borrowed cigarettes. Once Sam had been a cop, Red remembered. Then he'd started a private detective agency and gone broke. People were always kicking him down. The world was full of rats, but if Red would only let him have the forty bucks until tomorrow . . . That was Sam Bondy. But now he was sitting here. He was grinning. There was a slow-motion stupidity mingled with animal cunning in the grin. His eyes were brown, his stubble of beard was brown, and his hair was thick and straw-like.

"I guess you didn't think we knew each other this well," he said; then he laughed loudly to let Red know it was a big joke.

"Not exactly," Red agreed. Then he heard the sound of snoring coming from the bedroom. So Sam had a friend. The friend was taking a nap. His must have been the voice from the basement. . . .

"Now, Red, I'm telling you how it's going to be," Sam said slowly. He liked telling people how it would be; he hadn't done it often, and it felt fine. "Nicky

might phone to see how things are going. Now, in this pocket I've got this." He laid out a .32. It looked like a toy in his big hand. "When the phone rings, I'll hold it for you. You'll be friendly to Nicky and tell him things are just fine. Won't you?"

Red smiled without wanting to. "Naturally, Sam." He hesitated. "I'm always curious, however. What kind of a party is this going to be."

"Just like you started, only with different folks running it. Meaning me. I'm running it, and that's something to remember, Red." He sucked at his gold front tooth and went back to the kitchen for a bottle of beer. "You'll be listening to me from now on," he said, sitting down again.

"You said that before." Red wanted a cigarette. He wanted a drink of the beer. He wondered if Patty knew things had gone off the rail. He wondered what Sam would do when he "ran things." The idea started him sweating. A clean intelligent kidnaping was straight business. But Sam . . . It was like giving a good watch to a gorilla, then handing him a hammer, too.

Sam stared at Red's face, knowing Red was thinking. His thick features struggled to imagine what was in Red's mind. Half uneasiness, half defiance labored on the face. He *was* a gorilla, Red realized. How do you handle a gorilla? And his pal? And his gun?

Then the telephone rang three times. That was Nicky. Sam fondled his gun against the bottom of Red's skull. "Talk nice to him, and remember what he says," he whispered. He put the phone against Red's ear.

"Red?" It was Nicky, all right. Red swallowed. How close and how far away things could be. A voice here, Nicky himself was safe in New York. Damn Nicky!

"Yes, Nicky," Red said. "Yes, just the

same. Everything's fine. . . ." When it was over, Sam took the phone away and looked at him.

"Tell me what he said."

"He told me to take it easy. He said a couple of days, at the latest. He just wanted to say hello."

"He didn't say he was coming out here again?"

"No, he didn't say that," Red said. Sam's face showed that he was chewing it all over; then he swallowed it. Then the snoring stopped. The bed groaned in the next room and footsteps crossed the floor. Red looked as a thin, tense-faced man with oily black hair came into the light. It was Duke, the part-time bookie who'd once run the elevator in the hotel on Fifty-fourth. He was a whiny, sunken-cheeked man who'd had more hard luck stories than Sam. There was a constant look of fear on his face—fear of sounds, of people, fear of himself. And here was Duke. Duke and Sam. That was a team, Red reflected. Two healthy smart snakes would have been better.

"Everything all right?" Duke asked jerkily. "Nothing went wrong while I was asleep?"

"I told you I'd take care of things. Quit whimpering," Sam boomed.

"You heard anything from Jimmie yet?" Duke was still uneasy.

"He'll be calling us when it's time. Wipe your nose and be still. Everything's all right."

So there was somebody named Jimmie. Lots of Jimmies in the world. Maybe he was the New York representative of this little party.

"You looked at the girl lately? You sure she's still there?" Duke worried.

"Sit down!" Sam raged. "Are you getting the shakes?"

"I just want a drink, that's all. I never had the shakes in my life," Duke retorted with empty bravo. Sam watched him going toward the kitchen; there was con-

tempt and irritation in Sam's eyes. Red made a mental note of it. If there was nothing else to do, he might try stirring Sam and Duke together and maybe something would break. He let his gaze wander across the room to the old writing desk. There, so far and so near, a .38 revolver rested in the bottom drawer, wrapped in newspapers. But that was a long way from here.

CHAPTER THREE

Lighting the Fuse

"LOOKING for something you want?" Sam asked softly. Red's eyes jerked back. He remembered to smile wryly.

"No, just wondering, Sam. Where did you find the leak? What told you I'd be out here?"

"Easy. Easy, but *smart*, Red. That day I asked for a little loan—"

"Sam, listen, be careful!" Duke warned sharply. "You start telling—"

"I'm running this. What does it matter how much I tell him?" He stuck out his chin. Duke only waved his hands nervously. But Red felt cool and tight in the stomach. *What did it matter?* It didn't. They could tell him anything, because Sam planned to kill him. And the girl? Yes, and the girl. This was Sam's kind of a party now. This was brute force, where it had been brains. This was a gorilla, where there had been business men. Red felt sorry for Patty. She'd been doing all right until he'd come along. . . .

"That day I came to your room, asking for a little loan, remember?" Sam was saying. "You said no. Well, that hurt my feelings. I knew you had enough dough to play at the Maple Club dice game. But you never went to an office. You had nice clothes; you never went to work. I got to wondering, What is Red doing that I might be doing, too? See?"

he said. Red nodded and Sam went on.

"And then I had a little luck that night." Sam reached over and pulled Red's watch from his pocket. "This little thing. . . ." He rubbed a thumb across the four-leaf clover fob, made of gold set with four small diamonds. He looked up and grinned. "Remember where you got it? Think hard, Red. I know."

Red knew. He'd liked it when he'd seen it on Charles Bronson, the broker who'd been a "client" a couple of years ago. Bronson had lost it in the room downstairs where Patty was. Red had found it and kept it.

"I guess you remember," Sam said gently. "Well, it was on your dresser that night. But the time I saw it before, Bronson had been wearing it in his office, the day he told me to get enough information for him to get a divorce on . . . Well, I started wondering how you'd got it, and how you'd met Bronson. Then it just drifted across my mind how there'd been a lot of hushed talk about Bronson being kidnaped a couple of years ago. It was just a little something to think about, see?"

"And you kept right on thinking about it. I see."

"Well, I phoned Bronson and when I said kidnaping, I knew I was right. He clammed up very fast and said to stick my nose somewhere else. After that, Red, it was just a matter of following you a few weeks and seeing what you did. That's how I found out about Nicky Carl. When you left the hotel last Saturday and didn't come back, I figured you were on a job. So I watched Nicky. I followed him out here in a rented car. I stood close to a window, and here was Red in here. I looked in the stable, and there was a car with Patricia DeFalvo's car registration in the glove compartment." The glint of animal cunning came back in his eyes. "Just like I'd figured, see? And I had my organization ready and all. Being a

private dick once gave me some angles, see?" He kept grinning, and Red felt that he was listening to a crude comedy by kids. Duke and some guy named Jimmie and Sam—a beautiful organization! And some angles. The only angle would be, Get the dough and then kill the people who knew who got it.

"Listen, Sam," Duke said jerkily, "don't the radio give you a headache, going so loud. Why don't we just—"

"Take your hand off that radio!" Sam growled. "You and your headaches, or your bellyaches, or your nerves." He looked at Duke scornfully. "Maybe you should have stayed on Fifty-fourth Street."

"Listen. Now, listen," Duke began nervously. "I only mentioned—"

"Well, quit mentioning. You were the guy with the contacts. If—" Sam stopped talking as a name slid out of the radio and seemed to hang in the hot room. The name was Nicholas Carl.

Then time jerked itself up and rushed on. The news report continued. Duke made a whimpering sound, and Sam stared at the radio.

". . . less than half an hour ago," the announcer was saying. "Carl was shot to death in his apartment-office suite, just off Times Square. It is believed that the murdered man was killed when he surprised a thief in the act of ransacking his office. A substantial sum of money was found on the floor and on the stairway leading to the street. Police believe that the killer was seriously wounded when Carl . . ." Static crackled through the words. Sam snatched at the radio and shook it furiously. The static departed. The calm voice of the announcer was saying, ". . . and for tomorrow, fair and still hot, with rain late at night and—"

SAM swore and spun the dial to other stations. Music came into the room and he swore again.

"Sam, listen, listen, what do you think—" Duke bleated.

"Shut up!" Sam shouted, and kept tuning the radio. Red began to breathe softly. His cheeks felt thin and stiff. Nicky. Dead. Shot to death. And not an hour ago. . . .

"Sam, give me a cigarette, for God's sake," Red said. Nobody heard him.

"Jimmie did it!" Duke wailed. "Jimmie got drunk, just like always! He was going to double-cross us—"

"Shut up and let me listen to—"

"You shouldn't of told him about Carl keeping money at his office! I told you that was dumb! I told you Jimmie was a rat! He was trying to double-cross us, and now he's got himself shot!" Duke was almost screaming, his face drenched with sweat. Sam stared at him, chewing his lip tensely, his big hands gripping the arms of his chair. Duke kept screaming.

"The cops will find him because he's shot, and then he'll spill the works and we'll— I told you Jimmie was no good and you didn't listen to—"

Something snapped inside Sam. He lunged from his chair. His fist crashed into Duke's mouth with a soggy smack and Duke spun into the wall and went down, bleeding at the mouth and unconscious. "Yellow. Nothing but yellow," Sam panted, standing over him. Red made not a sound. The next fist would be for his mouth, he knew.

Sam turned and snatched up the telephone. The call was to New York City. The back of Sam's shirt was wet. His chest heaved. He was asking for Jimmie Nance. Nance. It was probably a hotel; he kept telling them to ring the room again, keep trying. Finally he slammed down the phone and glared at Red. Fury and bewilderment and fear tangled in his eyes. "You look like you want to laugh," he said softly. He slapped Red across the eyes hard. Red clenched his teeth and remained silent. Sam got an-

other idea. He rushed toward the kitchen and down the stairs to the basement.

Nerves with Sam too, now, Red reflected. He lunged at the chair and skidded it an inch toward the writing desk and the revolver in the drawer. He tried again. It made a lot of noise. Sam was charging back up the stairs.

"What're you doing? What're you bumping for?" he demanded.

"Sam, listen, I've got to have a cigarette, that's all. Just one cigarette is all," Red said. Sam told him to go to hell. Duke moaned and put a shaky hand to his lips as he sat up on the floor.

"Damn it, you busted my teeth, Sam," he whispered. "Don't hit me again, Sam."

Sam was phoning New York once more, asking them to try Jimmie's room again.

"Sam, is he gone?" Duke whispered. "If he won't answer, then it *was* him! It was him, and he's shot, and they'll find him and he'll tell!" Duke's voice strangled on its fear. Sam started toward him again, and Duke covered his head with his hands and huddled down. Sam kicked at him and told him to shut up.

Dawn was filling the windows—a grey, foggy dawn. It seemed like an eternity since yesterday to Red. What had actually happened? Had Jimmie really tried to double-cross Sam and Duke, or had it been just a stray thief? Nicky was always flashing a roll. People knew he kept cash and wore diamonds. Once before Nicky's place had been prowled.

The music stopped on the radio. Now for the six o'clock news, said a cheery voice. Sam and Duke and Red all stared at the unseen speaker. It was the fourth bulletin: Nicholas Carl, gambler and Broadway personality who had once been linked with Small Si Ellis in the narcotics traffic, had been shot to death just before dawn in his apartment-office, just a stone's throw from Times Square. Carl, clad in pajamas, had been found dying on the

floor when a patrolman investigated the sound of gunfire. More than fifteen thousand dollars was also found on the floor. Police were now seeking Jimmie Nance, alias James Dance, one-time private detective and known to be a steady user of narcotics. A hat with Nance's name in the band had been found amid a trail of blood on the stairs leading from Carl's apartment. . . .

DUKE scrambled to his feet, his face stained with fear. "It was Jimmie, see, just like I said! They know it's Jimmie, and a hundred people can tell 'em where he lives! And then . . ." His words sank into a terrified whimper as Sam turned on him and gripped his throat, lifting him off the floor and shaking him savagely. Then Sam hurled Duke into a chair where the frightened bookie cringed like a limp doll.

From Duke, Sam's eyes swung to Red. Here comes the gun! Here comes the kill and run, Red realized. Here was a fear-crazed gorilla!

The gun came out of Sam's pocket and he stared at it. He was trying to think, trying to decide. This moment was the balance of life and death, Red knew. And Red laughed harshly, scornfully. He was astounded that it sounded as good as it did.

"Sam, did anybody ever call you a bull in a china shop?" he wondered. While Sam stared at him, Red rushed on, snatching at any word that raced across his mind. "You need a new vice-president for your business. You know what dumb guys do? They make a big noise with a gun and think they're being smart. But did you ever think of one simple fact: A corpse is no insurance, it's a liability. In the kidnaping business, you keep your insurance alive. You might need Patricia's voice on a telephone to bail you out. Ever think of that? Or," he added softly, "you might need me to think you out." He

pulled out another laugh and tilted his head at Duke. "Or maybe you like his ideas better? Ask him what he thinks."

Duke peered at Red. He didn't understand, but suspicion filled his eyes. "He's starting something, Sam! You better be careful, he'll—"

"What were you starting out to say about *your* ideas?" Sam asked slowly.

"If I were the new vice-president," Red said slowly, "I wouldn't be standing where you are, waiting for the cops to find Jimmie and take his death-bed dictation. You've been calling his room. You know he's not there. Where else did he go? Think about it. Be smart, Sam. Jimmie's shot and he knows he's hurt. He knows his hat is gone. He knows they'll find out where he lives and they'll look there. So he's smart enough to go somewhere else. Where? Maybe to your room. Maybe to Duke's. Maybe some other place. Can't you guess where he'd go?"

Sam was chewing at something in his mouth as he watched Red. "Yes, go on and explain the rest of the ideas," he said.

"What am I getting out of it?" Red asked softly. There was no answer. Maybe he'd pushed too fast on that. He hurried on, "I would look at it this way. Jimmie got drunk or jazzy on dope. The kidnaping ransom wasn't enough. He wanted a chunk that was all his, no splits, and he was itchy enough to try to get it last night. So he smashed up the whole tea set. Now he's a stick of dynamite if they find him. And they will. Unless you get on your horse and get into New York and find him first. And *that*, Sam, is when you'll want a gun. See?"

Red watched and waited for Sam to start seeing. It took a long time. The big face struggled beneath the surface, hunting for what must surely be wrong. Red threw more words out before Sam made up his mind.

"Think about it. Jimmie will be shut

up. The cops would say he died from Nicky's bullets. Open and shut: Jimmie tried a robbery, now he's dead. The snatch is nowhere in the picture. Your name is nowhere on the page. You've still got Patricia, who's good for a hundred grand in ransom. And, Sam," he added softly, "I'm the guy who knows how to get that hundred grand. I know the guy Nicky was going to use as a contact. I can tell you, as we say privately, that it can be a nice deal. Now . . ." He watched Sam desperately. "Can we make a deal? I started out looking for money. So did you. The cards are waiting to be played. But you've got to hurry. You can't stand here and wait for Jimmie to be found. Take that old Ford of Nicky's in the stable and get started for New York. Hurry!" Sam's eyes were beginning to glisten. He was getting the picture. His eyes were like dirty mirrors that, nevertheless, revealed his thoughts. There was something in what Red was saying, he was obviously thinking. Why not? You didn't have to pay. You could just promise to pay. That was what Sam was thinking in the dirty mirrors of his eyes. Red frantically threw on more persuasion.

"You don't have to trust me until I show you the jackpot, Sam. Leave Duke with the gun and leave me tied. Get rid of Jimmie and come back. Then I'll give you the setup on the ransom. All I'll want is Jimmie's part of the split. Is that fair or not?"

Sam rubbed at his jaw. "Maybe," he began slowly. "Maybe so."

"You better hurry. They're hunting Jimmie. You better hurry."

"Yeah." Then Sam turned on Duke. "You think you could hold a gun for a few hours?" he demanded. And Red felt his stomach caving in with the desperate weakness of relief. Duke was yellow, and Duke was only one man instead of two. Whatever the chances, they were better

than they had been with Sam here.

Just a game. A game of murder and maniacs, Red thought. How had it started? Long ago when he'd calmly entered Patty's bedroom. Long ago. . .

He heard the Ford roaring, coughing. Then he saw it flash past the window and disappear into the fog. Duke wet his lips and moved the gun gingerly from his right hand to his left. The room seemed empty and very quiet, now that Sam had gone. Duke worked with the radio and kept glancing sharply at Red. For a while Red was too tired to start playing the game again.

CHAPTER FOUR

Killer on the Loose!

HIS MIND kept going back to Patricia and to his part in the affair. It seemed a long time ago now. That feeling of strictly business—she had the dough, so you took some. All very quiet and intelligent; no gorillas or rough stuff. When you'd thought about it that way, it was just a way of making a living.

Yet now, and for perhaps the first time in his life, Red's brain was struggling with a stubborn truth that had been born in the fear of death within this last hour. The truth went something like this in his clumsy thinking: Patty was decent. She'd been living a decent life until he'd walked in. To her, he must have been a gorilla. She must have hated him as much as he hated Sam. And if it hadn't been for him, none of this would have happened. So what was the answer? The answer was that the racket would always get ugly, some day, at some time. Some day the big dumb brute force of people like Sam would catch the scent and try to move in. They were stupid, yet they were deadly in their stupidity. But most of all, they stripped the veil off the game and made it just what it was. . .

"Would you mind lighting a cigarette for me, Duke?" he asked quietly.

"What's the idea?" The little eyes narrowed. "You can't kid me. Sam's big and dumb, but I'm smart enough to know a couple of things. What're you figuring on?"

"I don't know. He'll kill us when he's through. You know that, don't you?"

"Nobody's going to kill me!" Duke retorted sharply.

"Don't bet on it. Nobody was going to bust your teeth, but they're busted now. Nobody was going to slap you, but you got slapped and thrown around," Red said softly, playing on the fear that he knew had shadowed Duke's entire life. Duke was afraid, afraid of everything, anything. That was the key. Never forget it; never let Duke forget what he had to fear. . .

"Nobody's killing me, see," Duke said again. "Not while I've got this gun."

"There are other guns in the world. Sam will probably have one when he comes back." Red raised his brows. "Have you ever killed anything, Duke? How do you know you could do it. Suppose you knew there was going to be trouble. Do you actually think you could point that gun and pull the trigger?"

Duke wet his lips. "I can do it," he muttered. "Don't worry about me." He stared at the gun and continued to lick at his lips.

"I hope Sam doesn't run into a storm in New York," Red said uneasily.

"What do you mean?" Duke asked suddenly.

"A trap, a cop, anything. Better keep that radio on for the news. Sam may find him, or he may not. If he finds him, he may make a mess of the killing; then you'll need to know before Sam talks."

"What did you send him for, if you thought there'd be a mess? It was your idea. Listen," Duke said in tense suspicion, "what's the angle? Have you got

somebody in New York who knows—”

“No. Don’t be so jumpy. I was only thinking. Things can always go wrong. Maybe Sam will get there too late. Maybe the cops already have Jimmie. I’m just thinking of all the sides of the deal. We could get blown up in a million places. We’d never know until we saw a cop stick his head in that window.”

Instinctively Duke stared at the window and wet his lips again. “The hell with it,” he whispered. “I’ve got this gun in my hand, see.”

Then he went back to the kitchen and Red heard him opening the basement door. Looking down just to see, to quiet his nerves, Red realized. Then he heard the cork snapping out of a bottle. A drink, also for the nerves. . . .

Red heaved his chair and skidded it a few more inches toward the desk. Duke came leaping back into the room, his eyes wide, his face white.

“What was that? What was that noise?” he demanded.

“I wouldn’t know. Something in one of the bedrooms, wasn’t it? Like a window going up.”

Duke charged halfway across the room, then stopped and his throat worked tightly. He began to tiptoe. Red heard him going up the stairs slowly. Again Red lurched against the chair.

Duke came racing back down the stairs. “It’s down here! You’re doing it!”

“You tell me how, and you win the ribbon,” Red snapped. Duke looked out the windows, then tested the lock at the front door. Finally he closed all the doors that led into the room.

“Hell of a place to spend your time,” he said.

He needs to talk. He can’t stand the silence, Red mused. He can’t keep his mind on the radio. He needs *somebody*. He’s afraid of being by himself.

“What’re you staring at me about?” Duke demanded jerkily.

“Just thinking. How far do you trust Sam?”

“That’s my business.” He blinked. “Why?”

“You better think about it.”

DUKE scratched at his chin, then tiptoed back to the kitchen for another drink. Red strained at the handcuffs, which were locked to the chair arms. On the last lurch it had seemed to him that the arm had moved. Now he was sure. He wiggled. He slowly put all his pressure against it until the cuff cut at his wrist. Then a sharp splintering sound came. The arm was almost loose.

Duke ran back into the room and stared around wildly. “Just the tree hitting the roof and cracking a limb,” Red said wearily. “You should stay here for a whole week. You might go crazy.”

Duke looked out the window again. “I don’t see any cracked tree limb,” he said faintly. Sweat shone in beads on the back of his neck. His sunken chest heaved and fell with his fast breathing. He dialed the radio and chewed his fingernails during the news report. There was no further mention of the Carl shooting.

At last, after an eternity, it seemed, Duke needed another drink and went back to the kitchen. Red gave a final wrench. The arm came loose and dangled to his wrist, locked there by the cuff. One hand against a gun and a jumpy fool. He didn’t like to think about that, either. Swiftly he braced the arm back into position and held it there as Duke returned.

Then the rain began to fall again. Duke prowled to the windows and cursed. It was rather like a child whining. Then an hour was over, because the news report came on again. There was a special bulletin. Jimmie Nance, sought in the slaying of Nicholas Carl, had just been found in a dying condition.

"They've got him and he'll talk!" Duke screamed. "I told Sam not to bring him in! I said so and said so! Jimmie always gets drunk and talks, but Sam wouldn't listen to me!" His pinched little face was grey with terror. His voice rose another shrill notch. "The police'll catch us, they'll catch us!"

Red swore to himself. Duke was right, and the police were going to catch them. There wasn't time to wait for a sure play now. He had to be moving fast.

"Duke, do you see anything down that road?" he asked sharply. Duke spun.

"Where? Where?" he chattered.

"Back to the left. Here, step back here and look where I'm pointing. You'll see what—" Duke obeyed instinctively, then caught himself. In that moment when Duke glared swiftly at him, Red swung wild and hard, bringing the heavy chair arm down in a flailing blow. It struck Duke's temple and slammed him to the floor. But it didn't knock him out.

He let out an agonized bawl and dragged out the gun. His lips flared back from his teeth. The gun roared as Red clutched the chair arm and brought it down on the open mouth. The bullet and the chair arm struck at the same instant. Red felt the small stinging impact against his chest, followed by a sudden fire in his ribs. Simultaneously the arm of the chair broke through the teeth, through the lips, and split the cheeks. Duke crumpled and Red tried to swing again, but weakness prevented him. The chair arm slid from his hand and he fell to the floor.

A LOVE SONG was pouring out of the radio as Red coughed and spat blood.

He tried to stand up. Half erect, he collapsed. He tried to breathe past the fire in his chest. He swallowed away the salty tast of blood. The blood came back. And then Red had the strangely serene sensation of floating. Nothing in the room

was real. He was drifting, and there were clouds above and below him.

This was the way people died, he thought. Was he going to die? After all the talking, all the work. He didn't want to die. . . . The thought came and departed. It left him with a feeling of terrible desperation. He must move, must escape, must live!

At last he stood up and held to the wall. Slowly he edged his way toward the kitchen, falling, gathering his strength to rise again. He would take Patty's car. But where would he go? Doctors asked questions when they looked at bullet holes. They . . .

His thoughts clashed to a halt as a roar came up the hill. The Ford skidded around the corner of the house and lurched to a stop. Sam leaped out and came charging toward the kitchen. Sam must have had the car radio on. He'd heard the news. This was when the gorilla started killing!

In that same instant, Red thought of Patty. She was here, and she was going to die. She wouldn't be here if it had not been for him.

He lay there on the cool stone floor for what seemed like forever. Then he began to crawl across the floor. He reached up, strained, and then Patty's door was open. She was standing across the room, her hand at her throat, her eyes wide with terror. Sam was hammering at the bolted door.

"Listen, listen," Red said thickly. "Listen, please . . . You've got to hurry." She started toward him slowly; then his eyes must have told her what she needed to know. She swept to him and knelt down. "Get out. Go out the window. Window over there. Get out and run while he's trying to get in here. You hear?"

"I hear. But you—you're hurt! You—"

"Plans changed. Even good plans . . .

mice and men. Or rats, remember. But get out. Hide in the woods. Go to the highway. Don't let him find you. Hurry. Listen." He looked at her steadily. "This wasn't so good. I'm sorry. You hurry." Sam was beating at the door with something heavy.

"But you can't stay here! If they shot you, they'll shoot you again and you'll—" She shook his shoulders frantically. "Don't you have a gun?"

"No gun. Forgot it upstairs. Not very smart." He was very sleepy now, and very tired of talking. He'd done his part. Why didn't she go?

"Wake up, wake up!" she begged. Again she shook him, then tried to drag him. "Damn, oh damn," she sobbed. The door began to splinter. Her fingers slid away from Red and he sighed. That was better. She was going now. She ought to hurry. He'd told her that, hadn't he. Now he could go to sleep.

With a crash the door split apart. Red could see the dim shape of Sam's body, swaying up there with a hammer in one hand. But it wasn't going to hurt, whatever Sam did with the hammer now.

"Smart," he was saying. "Smart boy, Red. Too smart."

Now, prayed Red, let me go to sleep. . . . He went to sleep.

WHEN he awoke the sun was shining, and a nurse said, "Oh, there you are. Hello."

"Hello," he whispered. Then he closed his eyes and struggled with memory. It was later that day when Patricia came in, lovely and suntanned. She closed the door behind her and sat down on the side of the bed.

"You look like a man who's trying to think," she said. "Don't worry." She lit two cigarettes and handed him one. "I'll tell you the story, so you can tell it later," she said quietly. "Sam is dead.

I found the gun. He'd hit you once before I got there. That's why you've had such a long nap. But Sam is dead and the little guy they call Duke is dead. Everybody's dead, they tell me. Everybody but my bodyguard. That's you. You're a hero."

Red looked at her a long time. "That's the way you told it to them." He took a soft breath. "Why?"

She frowned at the tip of her cigarette. "Why did you come down the steps to help me get away?"

Red shrugged. "I don't know. Some day I'll ask myself and see what I say."

"Well, I've asked myself, too." She rose and walked around the room. "I don't know, either. I . . . Oh, I'm not kidding myself. You were crooked. You were a rat. Maybe you'll go right back to the same old stand. But—well, when you came down those stairs, it was almost the first time in my life that anybody did something for me without sending a big bill. I—do you see what I mean?"

"I think I see," he said.

"It's better than some things I've got to remember." Her face was lonely as she looked out the window. "But let's stop talking about it. I'm going back to New York tonight. The reporters will be seeing you. Give them a wonderful story." She looked at him steadily. "And where will you go, what will you do when you leave here?"

"Oh, I haven't completed my plans," he said ironically. "I've been busy. Do you have any ideas?"

She looked at him a long time, and some of the loneliness had left her eyes. "I don't know," she said. "If you should ever be walking down Fifth Avenue and passing a dress shop, you might stop in and ask if they need a man who—well, wants to try another line of business."

Red wet his lips. "Thanks," he said softly. "I might be coming in some day."

(Continued from page 27)

at how dead she looks when you use a glass on the print."

BRANNECK clenched his fists and studied his pink knuckles. He spoke without looking up. "You're smart, Taffy. I knew that right away. A smart girl. Smart girls don't get too greedy. They stay reasonable. They don't ask for too much."

"Isn't murder worth quite a lot?"

"Damn it, don't raise your voice like that!"

"Don't tell me I used the wrong word." Her tone was mocking.

"Okay. The word was right. I killed her because she wasn't smart, because she wasn't going to take a cut and shut up. She wanted the whole works. You can call that a warning."

"Don't scare me to death, Carl. Did she die easily?"

"You saw her. It didn't take long. It was too easy. What do you want for the negative?"

"Oh, I'm keeping the negative. I put it in a safety-deposit box in a Tampa bank today, along with a little note explaining what it is. I opened an account there, too. I think you ought to fatten it up for me. Say fifty thousand?"

"Say twenty."

"Thirty-five."

"Thirty-two thousand five hundred. And not another damn dime."

"A deal, Carl."

He stood up slowly and wearily, but the moment he was balanced on the balls of his feet he moved with the deceptive speed of most fat men. His hard-swinging hand hit her over the ear and she slammed back against the closet door, shutting it. He stood with the recaptured photograph in his hand. He gave her an evil smile.

"For this, honey, you don't even get thirty-two cents. I thought something was wrong with it. If it was me and Laura,

there'd be a towel tied around my neck. Very clever stuff, but no damn good."

Taffy, realizing that the closet couldn't be opened from the inside, reached casually for the knob. Branneck, alert as any animal, tensed.

"Get away from that door!"

She twisted the knob. Park started to force his way out as Branneck hit the outside of the door, slamming it shut again. He caught Taffy when she was still four steps from the room door. He held her with her back to him. A small keen point dug into her flesh and she gasped with the unexpected pain.

"Now walk out. Keep smiling and keep talking. This is only a pocket knife, but I keep it like a razor and I can do a job on that body beautiful before you can take two steps."

Park put his back against the back wall of the closet and braced both feet against the door. His muscles popped and cracked. There was a thin splintering sound and then the door tore open so quickly that he fell heavily to the closet floor. There was an alarm bell in Taffy's room. He pushed it, raced to the side terrace in time to see Mick run out from the kitchens, a carbine in his hand, looking back over his shoulder. The causeway was blocked. Taffy appeared on the sand strip, Branneck a pace behind her, the sunset glinting on the small blade in his hand. Taffy stopped. He kept her in front of him and backed slowly out of sight.

Park cursed softly and raced from the terrace across the house. With a rifle he might have managed it. But the .38 didn't have a high enough degree of accuracy. Branneck pushed Taffy roughly down onto the cabin floor of the small twenty-one-foot cabin cruiser. As he ran to the bow to free the rope, Park risked a shot. Branneck flinched and scrambled aboard. The marine engine roared into life and Branneck swung it around in the small basin, crouching behind the wheel as he piloted

it down the narrow mouth, dangerously close to the causeway where Mick stood. Mick leveled the carbine but did not dare risk a shot. The cruiser sped out in a wide curve in the quiet water between the island and the mainland.

Park gave a shout as Taffy jumped up and went over the side in a long, slanting dive. The cruiser swung back and Branneck stood at the rail, the light glinting blood red on the polished metal of the gaff. Park's fingernails bit into his palm. Branneck raced to the wheel, adjusted the path of the cruiser and hurried back to the rail. Taffy turned in the water. Branneck lunged for her with the gaff. Even at that distance, Park saw her hand reach up and grasp the shaft above the cruel hooks. Branneck tottered for a moment, his arms waving wildly. Park heard his hoarse cry as he went overboard. Two heads bobbed in the water in the wake of the cruiser. Taffy's arms began to lift in her rhythmic, powerful crawl. Branneck turned and began to plow toward the mainland.

Park ran down and out the back of the house, across the patio to meet Taffy. Mick already had one of the cars started. He spun the tires as he yanked it around to head over the causeway and cut Branneck off.

The cruiser, with no hand at the wheel, came about in a wide curve. Park watched it. He saw what would happen. It swept on—and Taffy was the only swimmer. Mick stopped the car and backed off the causeway and parked it again. The cruiser continued on, missed the far shore, swung back and grounded itself at the very end of Grouper Island.

Park went down into the water over his ankles. Taffy came out, the powder-blue dress molded to every curve. She shivered against him.

"He—he's swimming to the mainland."

"He was. Not any more. The *Nancy*

swung back and took care of that little detail."

"He tried to gaff me," she whispered.

"Come on. I'll get you a drink."

As they walked up to the house she smiled up at him. Her smile was weak. "The next time you get me to help in any of your little games . . ."

"Branneck had a capacity for pulling off the unexpected."

"What will you do?"

"Accidental death. That widow he married may be a nice gal."

O'DAY had left to accompany the girl's body back to Chicago. Park sat on his private terrace, with Taffy sharing the extra-wide chaise longue.

Townsend came out and said, "Not that I want to be a boor, people, but it is nearly midnight and I've got to mark this case off my books and get back to work."

"Sorry it didn't work out," Park said.

"Better luck on the next one. 'Night."

He left and Taffy asked, "Who *was* that man?"

"Department of Internal Revenue. He helped my investigator get a line on Branneck. You see, when Branneck was calling himself by his right name—Krindall—he forgot to declare the money he squeezed out of Cauldfeldt as income during the year 1942. Branneck didn't know it, but all we were going to do was get satisfactory proof that he was Krindall. Penalties, back taxes and interest would have added up to six hundred thousand."

"But Branneck had his own answer."

After the house was silent Park Falkner took the woman's bathing suit, the dozen pictures, the permanent tape off the recorder and put them neatly and gently into a steel file box in the cabinet behind his book shelves. Once the sticker with the date had been applied to the end of the box it looked like all the others.

Falkner slept like a tired child.

THE END

(Continued from page 105)

out you were alive, not to go and tell the police about everything. I threatened to tell about that crooked fight, so he said I'd have to stay till it was over. But all day today he was drinking and threatening me. I kept promising I'd keep my mouth shut about everything, but he didn't trust me."

Estelle gasped suddenly. I turned and saw Jack in the doorway with a rifle. He just stood staring at us, his handsome, boyish face flat and expressionless. He wet his lips and swallowed, and his blue eyes blinked once. I started toward him.

"Cam, you stand where you're at. I don't have to knock women out to get them, you ought to know that. She's lying. She hasn't been any damn prisoner."

"Cam!" Estelle cried. "Don't believe him!"

Louise was standing facing Jack, in front of me. She waved me back and said coldly, "Jack, nobody believes that. You're contemptible! Now, you listen to me. Put that rifle down, and stand up there and admit you're a liar."

He winced. "No," he said faintly. Louise moved rapidly toward him. There was a crack of sound as she slapped his face. He stood there, clenching his jaw, his face paling around the pink imprint of her palm. She grabbed at the gun, but he wrenched it away and stepped back.

"Give me that gun, Jack!"

"Louise, now don't! Get away from me. I'm handling my own life. Stop bossing me. Damn it, I've got a gun!"

THERE was a flurry of motion, the crack of the rifle. Louise fell backward to the floor, blood pouring from her face. The rifle hit the floor and there was an inarticulate bellow from Jack. He dashed out of the room. Louise's hands went toward her face and then fell inert, one across her coat, the other on the floor. She lay motionless, her eyes staring out

of the bloody mask across the lower half of her face. I knelt beside her a moment. There was no breath, no pulse. I rose slowly, staring blindly into Estelle's horrified face. I picked up the rifle and put it in Estelle's hands.

"Stay here. Shoot him if he comes. Don't talk, just shoot."

I'd left the keys in the back door. I heard Jack racing the engine. He backed, turning the wheels and ran off the road into the sand. The tires began to dig and struggle in the sand and the engine whined and growled powerlessly; he saw me coming and flung out of the car and ran wildly down the beach.

I went after him. I had never been a good fighter. The killer instinct had been locked too deep, it had been a part of the nightmare darkness of my earliest life, and I wouldn't tap it of my own will. Opponents had had to hurt me to bring it out. I was hurt now. I could see him dimly, running ahead of me along the hard-packed sand at the water's edge. The waves roared angrily toward the beach, and far out was the ominous, deep thunder of the breakers. The beauty of the stars, like diamond chips against the blackness, had never been so remote.

I don't think he knew I was near enough to see that he turned out along the breakwater. The big concrete structure thrust straight out into the lake for a quarter-mile, then turned at a forty-five-degree angle and extended to the massive lighthouse at the mouth of the harbor. At the turn I saw Jack go down the slope from the top walk to the narrow ledge running just above water line along the inside edge of the structure. Waves crashed intermittently against the outside of the breakwater, throwing long fans of water and spray on the upper walk, but I stayed up there anyway, mistrusting my footing. I was breathing hard, my bandages had pulled loose and I could feel a warm ooze of blood. I hadn't realized the exhaustion

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DETECTIVE TALES

of the run I'd already had. I slowed to a fast walk, peering closely so as to avoid cracking my shin on one of the low iron ventilators at intervals along the middle of the walk.

A sudden heavy wave broke against the lower wall just before it crested. The water burst upward in a high sheet, some of it slicing furiously up the slope. The water collapsed with a tremendous slap of sound just ahead. I tried to back away. The water sped across the top three inches deep and kicked my feet from under me. I went down with a jolt that sent a lance of pain through my bullet wound. As the water drained swiftly away I got to my feet, feeling light-headed and weak.

Then I saw Jack. He'd backtracked. He came at a racing crouch up the concrete slope. I lurched unsteadily backward as he hurtled toward me. He tried to turn sharply and his foot slipped on the wet surface. He toppled and went off balance. He slid, writhing and twisting, down the outer apron, trying to dig his fingers into the unyielding concrete. He hit the narrow outer ledge, and I stood braced, waiting for him to start up after me. Then I saw the deep trough that had formed in the wake of the last big wave and I knew the next one was going to be enormous. I saw the beginning massive dark roll of the rising wave and heard it crash at the far end of its length, and then speed toward us with a running hiss, lifting a moving jagged wall of water. I spun and ran back, and I heard the sudden raw terror of Jack's voice as the water caught him there on the slope. I didn't hear him again. I didn't see him.

Reaching the house with the sheriff I took Estelle in my arms. "He's dead. I couldn't have saved him—not even if I'd wanted to." I looked at Louise's body, then shut my eyes. No, I couldn't have saved him. Nobody could.

BY THE SKIN OF HIS TEETH

(Continued from page 78)

of a stone's weight, fastened around his helpless neck.

He cupped his hands again, tried to yell, "Back, kid. Get away from him." What came out was unrecognizable. "Baa, baa, gwewumim." If Meacham heard at all, above the crowd thunder, he could only interpret the gibberish in his own way. He seemed to think that Slick was telling him to put the finisher on his man.

He brought a left hook into Peaches' middle, crossed the right to the jaw, and Peaches was down, groveling on the rosin.

He tried to stand up at "... five ...". He never made it. Slick stood there, stricken, white-faced, his toothless mouth working. With the fascination of a man confronting a deadly snake, about to strike at him, he let his eyes swivel toward where Franchetti was sitting.

The gambler was already clambering over seats to be near him. Franchetti said in a hiss, "Be seein' you later, kid."

Listen, Mr. Franchetti, I can explain. It was an accident, see? Just one o' them freaks o' fate. It was my teeth, see? I was tellin' my bum to get up fast, so he'd get flattened, and lost my teeth.

That's it, explain. If he understands, he'll get a laugh out of it, maybe. Go easy on you. Explain, Slick. Make him understand.

He opened his mouth and he talked very fast, trying to make Franchetti understand. He had always been a slick guy for talk. But it was no good, now. He felt like a kid up there in the ring, fighting hard, but going down under superior fire.

The harder he struggled to make himself understood, the more the words seemed to garble together. Incomprehensible. Like a man—and this thought made him shudder—trying to talk under water.

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DETECTIVE TALES

(Continued from page 67)

those people. Why would she do a thing like that, Dave?"

Dave Smith shrugged his heavy shoulders. "We'll never know," he replied, "for sure. I can guess, of course. Remember, you told me about the battle she gave you over your going down to Mexico?"

"Yeah."

"Well, naturally she knew about her condition. That's probably why she didn't want you to go. But she was too proud to hold it over your head. When you went, she felt deserted. She knew if she checked into a legitimate hospital, under her right name, Winchell would scream the item on the radio, and you'd learn about it and come running home. She didn't want any part of you—so she made her arrangements with Dr. Travis. I'll admit it isn't very rational, Jerry, but I understand women in her condition can get some pretty screwy ideas."

"I suppose you're right," Jennings said bleakly. "And that makes it my fault—everything—doesn't it?"

"Only if you're determined to drive yourself nuts thinking about it," said Dave. "Come on, let's look in on those men of yours."

Jennings had moved his sons' crib into his bedroom. He and Dave tiptoed in, peered down at them.

"How about these little characters?" Jennings said with fatherly pride. "They've slept right through the whole mess."

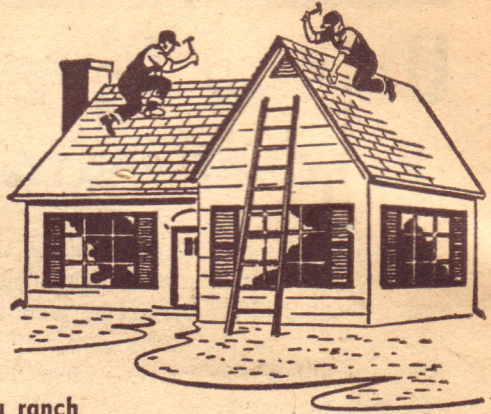
Dave grinned. "Know something?" he sighed. "They've given me an idea."

He stopped at the door of Jennings' bedroom. "Good-night, Pop." He waved his hat at the tall man standing beside the double crib. "Remember, I'm free for baby-sitting on Tuesdays and Thursdays. A buck an hour."

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