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DETECTIVE TALES

**15
STORIES**

**25
CENTS**



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MULLALLY
JAMES
STRATTON**

MURDER HAS A FRIENDLY FACE!

by **FRANK WARD**



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TALES

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VOL. FORTY-SIX

AUGUST, 1950

NUMBER ONE

Dramatic Murder Novel

1. **MURDER HAS A FRIENDLY FACE!**.....*Frank Ward* 10
—but the eyes behind that lovely mask were a lethal giveaway. . . .

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September Issue Published



July 26th!

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THE CRIME CLINIC

EVER since we discovered that Shakespeare didn't invent the phrase, "I need it like I need a hole in the head," we've been pretty leary about ascribing authorship to the Bard. However, for all we know he might have coined the expression that "Truth is stranger than fiction," and if he did it just shows how right the old boy was. If he didn't say it first, then he should have.

At any rate, we've just been socked in the teeth by a little news item that shows how strange the truth can get. What started all his was a story we got from an aspiring author a long time ago, in which the gimmick was a set of false teeth. Seems as though a murderer, in a tussle with his prospective corpse, had bitten that unfortunate gent and buried his false teeth in his victim's body. When the cops came, all they had to do was track down the owner of the store-bought ivories. We had a good laugh at that yarn. Silly, eh?

But now the newspapers have come along and crossed us up. The real-life gimmick isn't exactly like the one we had, but it's not far off. It all happened when

(Continued on page 8)

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ANY MORE?

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WHEN A FORD HAS AS
MANY MILES AND
YEARS ON IT AS
OURS HAS, IT NEEDS
REPOWERING

I FIGURE THERE'S
NO SENSE IN NOT
GETTING THE BEST—
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HERE TO GET AN
AUTHORIZED
RECONDITIONED
ENGINE FOR MY
FORD

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DETECTIVE TALES

(Continued from page 6)

a Mrs. Mary E. Brown was killed by a hit-and-run driver in Great Neck, Long Island. The cops didn't have to organize any dragnets for that one. Acting on a tip, county police went to a tavern a half-mile from the scene of the accident, and there, waiting for them, was the evidence they needed.

Resting on an automobile in front of the tavern was the upper plate of the dead woman's dentures.

All the cops had to do was walk inside the saloon and pick up the owner of the car. Unfortunately, that gent had a lapse of memory about hitting anyone, but the cops are wondering how he's going to explain away the dents and other signs of an accident on his car. If he can.

Moral of that story is: If you're going to knock anyone off with your car, be sure to check for teethmarks afterwards. Or the cops are likely to put the bite on you.

Well, for those of you who want to get your teeth into some red-hot murder melodrama, instead of somebody's Chevrolet, good old DETECTIVE TALES has the answer in next month's issue. Because, leading the corpse parade, will be a smashing detective thriller by none other than John D. MacDonald, the gent you've been praising so highly in your letters. The title is: "The Lady Is A Corpse!" and by the time you're done reading it you'll probably be all set for a shroud yourself—just from sheer emotional exhaustion.

We've also got a novel by Alan Ritner Anderson in the mill, featuring some of the wackiest, kill-craziest characters outside the death house; and there will be short stories and crime features by Francis K. Allan, Don James, Ben Nelson, Ejler Jakobsson and many others.

Okay? See you next month, then, on July 26th.

—The Editor

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• • MURDER HAS

By **FRANK WARD**

For lips like lovely Lissa Dexter's, a man might be excused for forgetting a lot of things. But not Mike Walker. Because the figure of a hanging man swung between them—a ghastly pendulum that ticked off the few remaining seconds allotted to his life.

Lissa was poised at the far end of the pool, a tanned, golden nymph. . .



*Hard-Boiled
Murder Novel*

A FRIENDLY FACE!

CHAPTER ONE

Case of the Nervous Barber

FOR a barber, he was as nervous as a cat on the edge of a fight. The back of my neck felt raw and taut where his razor had lingered, and his breath ruffled my hair like a harsh autumn wind. I got out of the chair, yawning, gave him a dime tip and sauntered toward the door.

There was a folded newspaper on a small table by the waiting bench. It was called the Fairmont *Chronicle-Times*, circulation 25,000. I picked it up and



riffled through it idly. It was dated four days previously, and there was a small clipping missing from the births, deaths and marriages section, this one under deaths. For a moment or two I stood staring at the blank space where the clipping had been, and then I yawned again and stepped out onto the sidewalk, regretting the taste the last two cigarettes and the one I was smoking had left on an empty stomach.

The street was clean and quiet, a gentle breeze drifting lazily along the block, pausing to ruffle a neat green hedge or flutter a morning paper on a neat front porch. I walked over to the Dodge and got in behind the wheel, dropping the paper on the seat. Casually I let my head swing around. There was a flash of white and black in the window just behind the striped pole—white face, black hair, black eyes, peering out at me. Sullen eyes, worried eyes. I twisted a wisp of a grin and winked at the section of thin, worried face I could see. The section of face vanished.

HE COULD have let it go at that. If he had let it go, I might have gone back to International Indemnity and turned in my report to Jordan, the divisional manager, and tucked myself away behind my desk and gone to sleep. But he had to play it smart. He came out after me, trying to look like a man who would appreciate early-morning sunlight on a quiet street. He came over to the car, the metal card holder over his breast pocket glinting in the sun, the fresh, stiff card white and new, the printed name "Eddie" bright and fresh.

He said, "If you're looking for a good place to eat, there's a pretty decent joint just around the corner. Only place around here that's open Sundays."

"Except for you," I said.

"Huh?" He jerked his head at that and gave me a quick, hard stare.

"I said, you're open on Sundays. Not many barber shops are. Anything wrong with saying that?"

His long nose twitched. "Look," he said harshly, "I don't know your angle, mister, but I don't want any of it. Not any. Why don't you just ruffle your wings and drift away from here? You hear me?"

"You can probably be heard two blocks away," I said mildly.

"All right," he said defiantly. "All right." He gnawed a scrap out of his lower lip and stood there mangling it between his teeth. His eyes were a little wild and his face glistened moistly. He looked over his shoulder toward the expanse of modern apartment house over the district savings bank next to the barber shop.

"You need your valves ground, Eddie," I told him. "A guy comes in here a couple of times, has a shave, tries to be friendly, asks you why you stay open on Sundays—and you start climbing walls."

"All right," he said again. "So I got nerves. So I stay open today because I need the dough. Any law against that? You know of any law says I can't do that?"

"Not even a bylaw," I admitted. I flipped my cigarette butt out the window, reached over and touched the starter button. The motor caught and idled. Eddie reached his hand inside the car and made a pass at the folded paper on the seat. I took his thin wrist and held it tightly, like an ardent high-school boy with his best girl. I could feel his pulse fluttering under my fingers, hard and fast. He seemed to grow smaller. A bead of perspiration traced its lonely path down his long, thin nose, hesitated at the brink, took the long plunge to the front of his white jacket and lost itself, like a mountain-climber falling into a deep drift. His mouth opened slightly, the lower lip quivering. He leaned back away from me.

"You worry too much," I said gently. "What's a little thing like a missing death notice between haircuts, Eddie? What's a little thing like a dead man named Latimer to a business man like you?"

"Let go," he whispered tightly.

"Presently," I said. "All in good time. This man Latimer, for instance. He came here a lot, didn't he? He must have thought you were a good barber. Or did he have some other ideas in mind?"

"Look," he said hoarsely, "I don't know no Latimers. You let me go, buddy, or..."

A MAN came out of the entrance leading to the apartment house over the bank, swinging a thin malacca stick from one hand, batting a pair of grey kid gloves against the trousers of his faultless midnight-blue suit. On the steps he hesitated, seeing us. A grey Homburg hat was set jauntily on a neat, rakish head, showing just the proper amount of polished silver hair. Eddie began making grating animal sounds through his teeth. The fashionplate lifted one eyebrow just enough to sneak out a fast glance at us, then frowned and turned and walked away down the block toward a parked Buick convertible. He got into the Buick and purred quietly down the street past us. His profile was stiff and disinterested as he went by, but I caught his eye in the rear-view mirror before the car made a sharp left turn at the next corner and murmured away out of sight.

I let go of Eddie's wrist. He pulled it back through the window and shoved his hand into his pocket, and started to backpedal away from the car. I let him go. He faced back into the barber shop and slammed the door, and the blinds came down with a clatter and a lock clicked. I shook my head and blew my breath at the windshield, put the Dodge in gear and went as far as the corner, pulling up at a stop sign. Then I drove around the

block and parked beside a driveway a few hundred feet away from the barber shop, and waited.

A little time sifted by, quiet time. A milk truck trundled along the block. A curious Boston bull pup padded off a front porch and sniffed his way over to my tires and explored around. I looked at my wristwatch, stifling another yawn. I was full of them that morning. The time was 8:30. Presently the barber shop door opened, hesitantly, and a thin, black-thatched head stuck itself out into the air and swiveled this way and that.

Then Eddie came out, hustling, jerking on a suit coat, and started off down the block, flipping his head from left to right and almost tripping over his feet in his hurry. He went around the corner in high gear, his coat-tails flapping.

I said, "Ha," and started the car and drifted it down the block after him, parking it around the corner. I wasn't worried about Eddie or where he was going. I got out and walked up the block to the drugstore that was open Sundays, and went inside and sat down at a table near the wall. The place was cool and dim, holding the early sun at arm's length. I ordered ham and eggs, toast and coffee, with the coffee to come first, and sat chewing moodily on the rim of the cup, thinking about Latimer and about Eddie, who was probably shilling for some small-time pink-tea-and-naughty-postcard outfit. Thinking about death. It was the wrong morning for that and I didn't get very far with it. There was a nice long chance I never would.

CHAPTER TWO

Double Indemnity

I DROVE west on Pine and started up the first of a series of steeply winding narrow roads until all I could hear was the laboring of the motor and the thrum-

ming of tires on macadam. It grew gradually cooler. The houses became fewer but more expensive.

Summit Crescent, where Ralph Dexter lived, broke away sharply from the main road through a pair of sandstone columns, complete with couchant lions, and became a quiet backwater, a long sweeping arc of road that cut around a dip in the mountain for about a mile. On the lip of a shallow valley I put the Dodge out of gear and floated down the smooth stretch of concrete road toward a compact pile of vine-covered stone and stained and leaded glass, very English, very much a man's castle. A semicircular driveway led in a gracious curve around a statue of Psyche holding a satyr at bay. On the front lawn a water sprayer swished unevenly. There were lawn chairs, small stone-topped tables, a sun dial whose polished copper top glistened in the sun. There was a dog, not much bigger than a Shetland pony.

The dog got to his feet as I pulled into the graveled drive, and splayed his legs and hung his head at me, looking mean. He could have been part race horse and part Great Dane. His tail hung straight down and when he opened his mouth to yawn his teeth were as big as pointed road markers.

I rolled a cigarette around thoughtfully between my lips and stared at him. He stared back, almost disinterested, but not quite disinterested enough for me to get out of the car and stick my head in his mouth.

I was sitting there waiting for him to make the first move when a woman came along a flagstone path from around behind the house. The dog wagged his tail and whined eagerly. I could see what he meant. She was tall and she walked with a pronounced accent. When she saw me she paused and flicked the black rubber bathing cap from her head. She shook her head to fan out her hair, long, honey-

blonde hair as warm and soft as a caress in the sun. She was wearing a loose beach robe the color of claret, and under it a black bathing suit, very much two piece, that would have made the handkerchief in my breast pocket look like a Boy Scout's pup tent.

I leaned my head out the window and pointed a finger at the tail-wagging monster and said pleasantly, "Is he bluffing, or should I come back another time?"

She laughed. It was a nice, healthy laugh, full-bodied to go with the rest of her, and not at all sultry or standard beach-house equipment. She said, "Panchito? He eats vegetables and drinks milk by the gallon. He hasn't touched human meat since he was a puppy." She bent over and picked up a stick and threw it across the lawn. The dog cocked an ear as if he had gone through all this before, and wearily turned himself around and went loping dutifully after the stick.

The girl came over and leaned on the car door, squinting her eyes against the sun. Her arms on the window-ledge were brown and smooth. There was more laughter in the golden-brown depths of her eyes, but a trace of caution, too, as if she had majored in male psychology. She regarded me frankly. "You can come out now, if you like. I hope you aren't collecting taxes, or anything like that."

I laughed and said, "It's an ungodly time to be calling on anyone, but I would like a word with Mr. Dexter. Could that be arranged?"

"I think so," she said. She stepped back and her gaze went over the car and over me. "You aren't selling anything, are you?"

"Not a dime's worth. My name is Walker, Michael Walker. I represent an insurance company, International Indemnity." I grinned at her. "And I'm not trying to push it down anybody's throat. But I have business with Mr. Dexter and the sooner I complete it the

sooner I can go somewhere and lie on my back and stare up at the sun."

"Okay, then. I'll see if he's awake enough to be legal with you, Mr. Walker. Just make yourself at home, won't you?"

She turned and sauntered off toward the house, the beach robe swirling around long, tanned legs, and disappeared into the house. I stepped from the car and looked around for some place to be at home in, plumped for one of the garden chairs and sat down in it and lighted my cigarette. The dog came back dispiritedly with the stick in his mouth, looked hurt when no one bothered to take it from him, dropped it on the lawn and fell down on top of it and let his tongue unravel. His breathing made a noise like a tractor warming up.

FIVE minutes passed, shielded in warmth and sun and surroundings, before Dexter came down off the porch toward me, moving like an animated smile. He was shaved, cropped, plump and massaged, but there were dark circles under his eyes and I could almost smell the after-breakfast pick-me-up on his cultured breath.

"Lissa tells me you have business on your mind," he said in a rich, full baritone. He shook my hand firmly, cocked his head to one side and squinted up at the sky. "Bad morning for business. Come around the back and have a drink, old man."

"Thanks," I said. I fell into his wake and followed him around the side of the house to a small but luxurious clearing, centered by a sparkly swimming pool with mosaic tile aprons around its edge, dotted with gay canvas deck chairs and round tables. Lissa was poised on the diving board at the far end of the pool, tanned a nymph, and as we came into sight she arched, brown and full and smooth, into the water.

"Handsome wench," Dexter said, his voice no longer smooth. "Gives a man

ideas, just watching her, doesn't it?" His eyes were on the widening ripples that lapped against the side of the pool—cool, hard eyes, machine-gunner's eyes.

"I wouldn't put it just like that," I said.

"No? Well, forget about it. Have a drink with me?"

"Dealer's choice," I said, and his head snapped around and he gave a short violent snort. His face lost some of its ruddy color. "What? Eh? Oh, I see. Of course." We sat down at one of the tables and Dexter touched a button that brought a tall, lean, handsome lad, who might have been a Filipino, coasting silently out of the house. "Brandy," Dexter said thickly. "For two."

The Filipino smiled a beautiful smile and drifted off. Dexter turned to me.

"Now, sir, what can I do for you?"

"That rests with you," I said. "I'd like to ask some questions. Whether or not you answer them is your business, of course. I'd like to talk about a man named Charlie Latimer."

"Latimer," Dexter murmured coolly. He stared out over the pool, where Lissa was paddling lazily in the green water. "What's your interest in him, Walker?"

"Financial. I've been in Fairmont three days, and in that time I've moved around a little, talking to various people, learning various things. Latimer had a policy with International Indemnity, my firm. Double-indemnity life, one-year suicide clause, the usual. The policy was only nine months old last week, when Latimer was found in the basement of your bank, hanging from a beam. Not old enough for his wife to collect anything on it, because the verdict of Latimer's peers was suicide while of unsound mind. Unsound mind, I gather, meaning that no one could find any reason for a man to go down into the cellar of the bank where he worked and choke himself to death from a beam that was barely five feet from the floor."

"What has that to do with me?" Dexter asked.

"His wife, in coming to see us, used the term murder," I said. The word grated on the soft stillness, like steel on slate. I scraped my cigarette across the saucer on the table, watching Dexter's face. "Naturally," I went on carefully, "if the word became a fact, we would have cause to pay Mrs. Latimer ten thousand dollars, because she would have a legitimate claim on us. If he killed himself, which I somehow doubt, then we stand pat. But we have a reputable name to maintain. We'd like to be reasonably certain."

"There was no reason for anyone to wish Latimer harm," Dexter said. "No reason." He reached into the breast pocket of his purple sports shirt and drew out a silver cigar case, proffered it to me, and when I shook my head, selected a panetella and began chewing moodily on one end of it. His bushy grey brows were drawn low over his eyes.

"And just what no reasons are there?" I asked.

"Look here," Dexter said, almost impatiently. "You're talking about a man who spent all his life in Fairmont, and fifteen years of that life working in my bank. He was a good cashier. There has never been any doubt about his honesty. But there may have been debts, family disorder, anything that would prey on his mind. How can you judge the actions of a dead man?"

"His books were in order when he kicked off?"

"Of course. Naturally, there was an immediate audit. Everything balanced. His reasons were undoubtedly personal. He wasn't living with his wife, although the fact wasn't generally known. There may be a connection there." He flung the cigar on the table. It rolled across and fell to the tiles. I bent over and put it in the saucer on the table.

Dexter grunted and closed his hand around a tall gold-banded amber glass the Filipino had placed before him, and eyed the mixture thoughtfully. The Filipino slid a similar glass under my nose, set a bottle of soda on the table, and hovered. Dexter blew him away with a careless gesture of his hand.

"The point I came here to make," I said, "is this. Sometimes an investigation of this sort disturbs things, lifts dust that someone forgot to sweep up. I wanted you to know that International hasn't any other interests except learning just why Latimer killed himself or, as an alternative, was killed.

"The facts I have may be wrong. I may be looking at this from the bias. But take it from our viewpoint. A man in good health, with no apparent worries except a transient wife, leaves his home eight blocks from your bank on a Monday morning and walks four blocks to a small coffee shop. He arrives there at five minutes to eight. He leaves the shop at eight o'clock and walks another four blocks to the bank, opens up, gets his books out of the vault and opens them up in his cage. There's a gun in the cage, under the cash drawer. He must have taken it from the vault, downstairs in the basement, when he got the books. The gun is loaded. Judging from what happened a few minutes later, this man is intent on killing himself; yet he passes up the most obvious means of doing himself in, the gun, and instead goes downstairs at approximately ten minutes after eight and proceeds to hang himself from a beam so low that a man his height couldn't even stand upright in the place. When he was found his knees were almost touching the floor. That's item one.

"Item two is equally strange, to me. Upstairs from the bank and just to the left is a barber shop run by a nervous barber named Eddie. Eddie came in that morning at 8:10, the approximate time

Latimer was on his way down to the cellar with the rope in his hand, and opened up his shop. At the inquest Eddie said he could hear every sound from either his own or the adjoining cellar. Yet, from 8:10 until this girl, the other bank teller, found Latimer at 8:30, he says he didn't hear an echo. It's none too easy to hang yourself in a confined space like that without kicking around, gasping, making some indentifying noise. Tough, that is, unless you're unconscious when the rope starts to tighten around your neck. And if you're unconscious, then someone helped you get that way. Do you see what I mean?"

There was a splash from the pool. Dexter turned his head sharply, almost as if he were glad for the interruption. I followed his stare. Lissa was rising long and glistening above the tiled edge of the pool, shaking herself, flicking off the cap, fanning out her hair. She was laughing silently. Dexter breathed hard through his nostrils. He said, "There's time enough to talk about this, Mr. Walker. But not now. Tomorrow morning in my office would be more appropriate, I think. About ten."

"Ten o'clock," I said. "I'll be there, Mr. Dexter."

"Any time around then will do. Sorry to rush you along, but you know how it is. My wife and I are having guests today. I'm certain you understand." He stood up abruptly.

His grip wasn't quite so firm now, or so dry and hearty. I let his hand go and waved my hand to Lissa, just to be polite, and walked around the house and back toward the car and Pancho, who was now sleeping muzzle deep in the grass. I got into the car and started the motor, with part of my mind still back at the pool. Then I shrugged and backed the car down the drive, turned on the road and started back toward Fairmont and a long talk with Mrs. Charlie Latimer.

CHAPTER THREE

A Bier for the Lady

SURROUNDED by broken glass and bits of seaweed and pink and yellow pieces of sea shell, an old green turtle sat hunched under his shell in the middle of the drab living-room rug. He had probably been sitting there for some time. His shell was cocked jauntily to one side on his back, and his small, beady, rapidly winking eyes watched me carefully. There were faded chipped letters on the shell, but time and water had worn them away until only flecks of paint remained. He looked sad and wise and infinitely resigned, as a turtle should, and his thick pulsing neck swiveled as I walked around him and stood in the porticoed entrance to the dining room.

The place was warm and silent, too silent, even for ten o'clock on a Sunday morning in Fairmont, and in the rays of sun coming in through the dining-room window the dust motes danced sluggishly. I stood with my mouth slightly open and my hands in my pockets, jingling the ring of master keys that had passed me in here, and waited for something to happen.

An alarm clock went off. It started on a high, shrill note, designed, for eighty-nine cents, to get you down to the office with both shoes on the wrong feet and a piece of toast in your mouth. It went on breaking up the quiet for almost a minute, growing weaker and more distressed toward the end, getting ready to give up, tinkling finally into fretful silence. I thought Mrs. Charlie Latimer must be a mighty sound sleeper.

I closed my mouth and drifted across the dining room and stuck my head into the kitchenette. Flies sang merrily over a mess of dirty dishes in the sink. A thin stream of water lapped at the top-most plate, almost without sound. A pack of cigarettes lay open on the oilcloth-

covered table. One that had been lighted had burned its way down to the edge of the table and smoldered out, but there was no reek of burned varnish or seared cloth. It was just a dead cigarette, and it had died a long time ago. There were two cups with rings of scummy coffee in them on the table.

The hair at the base of my skull moved a little at that. I turned off the water, took a peek out the back door and across a dreary little snip of land that would be the back yard, ending in the brick wall of a big service garage. I went back and jacked a cigarette out of the pack on the table and rolled it around in my fingers, watching the stale tobacco trickle through both ends at once. I lit one of my own and walked back through the dining room into the parlor, where the turtle sat calmly waiting.

He was in for a long wait. I picked him up by the edges of his shell and carried him into the kitchen and put him in a saucer full of water, which did nothing to alter his expression, and made some noise walking back the way I had come and into the bedroom. Enough noise to wake you up in time for church, but not enough noise to wake the dead.

It was a small room, shrouded in mustiness and the smell of stale cigarette smoke and the smell of darkness some rooms have. It took me a little while to adjust my eyes to the gloom, a little while to focus them on the bed and what it held. It took me a little while to get my breath back.

She lay calm and serene on her back with the sheets wadded under her and her hands folded peacefully over her stomach. She was wearing a pair of cerise-colored pajamas, and one bare shoulder gleamed dull creamy-white where the material had been ripped away, almost to the waist. I had seen her once before, in Jordan's office in the Frisco branch. She had been a good-looking

woman then. Now she looked dull and helpless, with her loose brown hair spread out on the pillow. She had died hard.

I tiptoed across the room and tugged gently at the window-shade cord and let the blind run up and the sun come flooding in. I could see my car parked directly across the street, and beyond it another row of identical small frame houses and one with an imitation stucco front and a tiled roof that shone bitter blue in the sun. I turned my back on that and went over to the bed.

Around her throat, where the flesh had already begun to sag, was a thick blue welt like a great raised vein, showing through the skin. There was a little blood, a congested patch, and written on her face all the last gasping efforts of the strangled, all the ghastliness of the last struggling breath and the wildly fluttering hands and the knowledge of death. I had never seen it quite like that before. I looked at it coldly and then I went out into the living room, closing the bedroom door behind me, and picked up the phone directory and began riffling through it until I found the number you call.

I called it.

WHILE they were oiling up their thumb-screws I sat in a fly-specked office on the top floor of the Fairmont City Hall, longing for a tall cool drink and a dog to kick, watched by a sad-faced, sharp-eyed lieutenant of detectives whose name was Josef Kindler. He sat quietly on the windowsill with his back propped up against the lower half of the sash and spun his hat slowly on the end of one long forefinger.

When they figured I had had enough time to work up a good sweat they could wipe off my face with a length of rubber hose, they came back into the office, loud angry feet vibrating on the floor, two huskies and a short, dumpy, grey-haired man with an empty pipe stuck out of one

side of his thick, heavy mouth. His name was Kramer. He sat down behind his desk and clamped his eyes on my face as if he thought he might have to spend a lot of time looking at me.

"Okay," he said brusquely, "a guy named Jordan in your Frisco office checks you out. They tell us you got a reputation as high as the big blue mountains." He hoisted a pudgy finger and waved it under my nose. "And we believe them, see? We think you're okay too, but to keep us thinking that way, you got questions to answer. Hours and hours of questions. Maybe days. You got that straight?"

"Like a ruler," I said.

"Okay," he said. He took the pipe out of his mouth and stared at it with a dull anger, coughed and put the pipe back between his teeth and clamped down on it viciously, as if he liked to punish things. "No reason why we can't get along, you and I. Eh, fellas?"

The two knucklewits behind me made agreeable noises in their throats. Kramer nodded his head. Kindler yawned and reached into his pocket and took out a gold cigarette case and eyed it moodily.

"You see how the boys feel about it, Walker. Just a few questions, and that's all. First, how come you were snooping around this dame's house on a Sunday morning? How'd you get in?"

"First," I said, "I was looking for a reason why a man named Charlie Latimer, the dead woman's husband, would commit suicide in a bank vault when he didn't have any cause to. I didn't find any. I thought maybe Mrs. Latimer would know, even if she wasn't living with her husband. I thought she might help me. I went around to her house and rang, but nobody answered." I glanced down at the pile of personal belongings they had taken from me when they brought me in. I said, "Call it a hunch. I keyed my way inside and found her as you did, on the bed with the life strangled out of her."

Kramer blew air through his nostrils. "You keyed your way in," he said reflectively. "And you found her on the bed, the way we did. And how long between the time you found her and the time we found her?"

"How long did it take you to get there, plus a couple of minutes while I was in the bedroom?"

"Uh," he said. He looked over at Kindler. "What'd you find in the room, Joe?"

"The dead woman," Kindler said in a soft, pleasant voice. "Strangled. Not with a pair of hands, however, or with a rope. Something more rigid, I would say. No murder weapon in the house. There were a few chips of sea shell in the bed, under her. Her pajama jacket was torn badly, as if perhaps she had struggled a little. But there were no indications of blood or flesh under her fingernails, as there might have been if she had scratched her killer."

Kramer whistled through his pipe stem. "Sea shells," he said. He looked at me. "Pipe that one, Walker. What do you make of that?"

"As Kindler here said, a struggle of some sort. I think she was killed last night. I think she was washing up the after-dinner mess and smoking a cigarette when the back doorbell rang. She left the water running in the sink, put the cigarette down on the kitchen table and answered the door. She was taken there, by the throat, but she was a fighter and she waltzed him back as far as the parlor, where they knocked the turtle bowl off a table. The bowl smashed. There were little pink and yellow and white chips of sea shell in with the turtle. When she fell some of them stuck to her pajamas. Then she was picked up and carried into the bedroom and dumped on the bed. Just then the alarm clock went off. All of a sudden. I think the killer got the hell scared out of him at that, jumped to turn it off. On that type of clock you push

the button down to stop it. Then he reset the hands, pulled up the button and went away."

KINDLER glanced at me and a tiny smile touched his sensitive lips. Kramer propped his bulldog jaw on the fleshy palm of one hand and pursed his lips.

"That could figure," he admitted. "Now maybe you can tell me why some guy would kill her like that? The doc don't make it a sex kill, so that's out, and nothing was stolen that we could see. Maybe you can type that?"

"Not for you," I said.

He jerked his head back and flared out his nostrils and waved his right hand abruptly. "Yeah?" he snapped. "Why not? Why not for me?"

"Because we disagree on one vital point. I've looked at your records. You say Charles Latimer killed himself. I say he didn't. And to follow that up, I say that Mrs. Latimer was killed by the same person who finished Charlie, because she knew something about it."

Kindler said smoothly, "That is an interesting thought, Mr. Walker. And just why was this Latimer murdered?"

I looked at him. I told him what I had told Dexter earlier that morning. I timed it out for him. I talked about Eddie, who shook while he shaved, and talked too much and laughed too much. "As I see it," I said, "as long as that verdict of suicide stuck, the woman was safe enough. But when I came into town and started picking holes in that theory, she became a danger to someone. I wouldn't know why. Maybe Charlie talked to his wife about things he shouldn't have known. Maybe she was in on something with him. Or maybe whoever killed Charlie just didn't like people named Latimer. But once the word got around that Charlie's death was due for a ceremonial smelling-out, the woman was dangerous."

Kramer rolled his fingers around the bowl of the pipe and yanked it out of his wide mouth and sneered at it. He got up and went to the door and opened it and said to the two cops, "Go find yourselves some place else to sleep," and slammed it after them. He looked at Kindler as if he was thinking about throwing him out, too, but changed his mind. He sat down and said sharply, "Joe, who handled the Latimer suicide?"

"DeBreyen."

"That button brain," Kramer said disgustedly. He leaned back in his chair and let his face become amiable. I was about to become a friend of his. I was right on the brink of scratching his back and calling him pal. He smiled expansively and patted his belly.

"You know how it is, Walker. You go out of town for a few days and you come back to this sort of thing." His greenish eyes narrowed a trifle. "You go tell DeBreyen I want to see him as soon as I'm through here, Joe. You let him know how I feel about this."

"How do you feel about it?" Kindler asked quietly. He got up and sauntered across the room and out through the door, shutting it easily behind him.

Kramer watched the door for a moment after Kindler had gone. Then he tossed the pipe into an out-going mail box and leaned his elbow on the desk. "Let's understand each other, Walker," he said. "You got power behind you. I can see that. International doesn't sell peanuts. Okay. Well, we here in Fairmont like to cooperate when we got the right people to cooperate with. Now I'll tell you what I'm going to do. You say, from what you seen, that this character Latimer maybe was knocked off, eh? Okay, that's your opinion, and if that's right, we aren't the ones to cover up. We like everything out in the open in Fairmont. So how's about this? You go back to your hotel, and when you get some spare

time you write me out a full report on what you think. I know that's going out of your way, but as a favor to us." He leaned back and rubbed his palms together, just another little cherub in a creased linen suit, turning up for choir practice.

"Sure," I agreed, very pleasantly. I stared him in the eye and smiled my deep secretive smile. I got up and shook hands with him, and at the door I said, "I'm glad we understand each other, Captain." Then I closed the door behind me and took the elevator down and out.

On the steps outside the Hall, Kindler was idly watching a red-breasted robin loitering on the lawn beside a "Keep Off" sign. His lean, handsome face was unconcerned, his eyes deep and expressionless.

On a thought I stopped beside him and said, "Lieutenant, something's been bothering me all morning. Maybe you

can help get me straightened out on it."

He turned his head, smiling, and politely nodded.

I said, "This morning I was sitting in my car just outside the bank where Ralph Dexter is manager. There's an apartment house over the bank. You know it?"

"I know it."

"While I was sitting there, talking to a friend, a man came out of the apartment house and got into a Buick convertible and drove away. A distinguished-looking man, silver-haired, very well dressed, carrying a malacca stick and a pair of grey kid gloves. Would that ring any bells?"

He turned back to the robin and for a time we both watched it hopping around on the lawn, and then he said softly, "That would be a man named Pardee, what you might call a straight gambler. Take some advice, Walker, and go back to your company. The Latimers had no relatives here.

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I doubt very much that any distant connections they have will press a claim on you. I doubt very much that you will be particularly happy if you stay here."

He nodded pleasantly and went back through the swinging doors, his narrow shoulders stiff and straight. I cocked my head to one side and said, "Oh?" and walked as far as the parking lot beside the Hall, where my car was cached, before looking back. Then I drove the Dodge away from there and went back to my hotel for lunch.

CHAPTER FOUR

This Way to the Morgue

I SPENT the afternoon in the park with my thoughts and a million squalling kids, and dozed on a bench like any substantial citizen digesting his lunch and wondering how he can make an honest buck on the morrow without getting caught at it. While I dozed I kept one eye cocked toward the entrance of an apartment-hotel across the street where Leslie Raines, the girl teller who had found Charlie Latimer's body, lived.

A little after four she came out, running a pint-sized spaniel on the end of a red leash. Her coffee-colored suit fitted where it touched, and it was keeping in close contact with her, all the way. She walked over to the curb and looked up and down the street at the desultory traffic and came across, taking short, brisk strides, and smiling quietly to herself, as if life was at its best and all was well with the world. Perhaps in her world it was.

I loitered to my feet and drifted in the same direction until I was level with her. Then I tipped my hat gravely to the dog and said, "I'm a dog fancier working my way through veterinary school. That's a remarkable specimen of cocker spaniel you have there."

The girl turned and smiled kindly at

me and said gently, "For the middle of a hot afternoon, not a bad try. Except that he's an English springer, not a cocker, and there's nothing particularly remarkable about him."

I closed my mouth, shook my head sadly and said, "Well, what do you know about that? Maybe I'd better go back and run through my dog book again."

"You do that," said Leslie Raines, smiling sweetly. "In your bare feet, if you like. Now do you mind if I take this remarkable dog for a walk? All by my lonesome?"

I sighed and shoved my hat back on my head, to show I was perplexed. "Look, Miss Raines," I said. "I've never met you and at this rate I never will, but I know of you. Perhaps I should have gone about this the ordinary way, but I thought I might be able to get a more unbiased version if I talked to you—well, more or less without formality."

"I'm a great one for formality," she said. She wasn't smiling now. "How do you know my name?"

I showed her my identification. "About Charlie Latimer," I told her gravely.

The sun went out of her eyes leaving them cold and thoughtful, and none too friendly.

"I've been over that at least eight times," she said tightly. "With Mr. Dexter, with a policeman named DeBreyen, with God knows how many people. And I didn't come out here to go over it again with anyone, and that includes insurance investigators."

"You make a strong point," I said. "But you can't avoid talking to people about a thing like that. All I want is half an hour of your time, no more. After that I'll go back to my sewing club and leave you alone."

She gazed at me pensively, her mouth small and still tight. Finally she shrugged.

"Is that a promise?"

"It's a promise."

"All right, then. Tonight, any time

after nine-thirty, and I'll talk to you about Charlie. But he's too long dead to stand in the way of my social life. I'm in Apartment 5-C across the street, in case you didn't already know. I'll be in and waiting for you." She nodded coolly and walked off, dragging the springer spaniel who looked like a cocker after her while he made vague passes at the base of a drinking fountain. I chewed my lower lip and waited until she had disappeared into the woods along a footpath in the center of the park.

Then I set out slowly to follow her.

I came out of the small copse on the other side, near a parking lot where a big Buick convertible sat plushly in the sun. Leslie Raines was just getting into it, smiling, stooping to catch up the dog and stow him away in the rear seat. The man at the wheel, smiling a smooth, expansive smile and reaching out his gloved hand to help her in, was a man named Pardee. The Buick swung out of the lot and whisked itself neatly through the early-evening traffic toward the outskirts of town.

I STOOD on the edge of the parking lot, looking after the Buick and wondering what Pardee had to do with the pattern of Charlie Latimer's death, if he fitted in at all. I was still standing there when Lissa Dexter stepped lightly from a sleek Jaguar sports car parked some twenty yards down the lot, and came toward me. She was grinning a little.

"At your age, too," she said chidingly. "Chasing girls through the park. Really, Mr. Walker, can't you do better than that?"

"If I could do better than that, I'd be doing it," I said moodily. "I suppose your husband would get out his trusty twelve-gauge if I suggested we go some place and have a long, cold drink? Or do I appeal to you that way?"

She said, "Mmm," and cocked her head

to one side appraisingly. "Are you contemplating business or pleasure?"

"Pleasure," I said. "The kind you can put on an expense account."

She laughed at that. "That sounds safe enough. But I have to pick up Ralph at seven, and that gives us only a couple of hours. He wouldn't be happy about it if I were late. He doesn't drive a car, you know."

"He has good taste in chauffeurs," I said.

"He has good taste in everything."

I let that one hang itself on a ray of hot summer sun and helped her into the Jaguar. She drove easily, giving me most of her attention but keeping enough on her work to hold the big car firmly on the road. We purred out of town and she let her foot down a notch and the car picked up the hint along the river road with a wicked burble of exhaust. At a rusty hinged sign she swung the car into a dirt road and drifted along that for half a mile, then swung left again and we were coasting along a wide oval driveway toward a large, Southern-style house with a long, sweeping verandah where the mint juleps grew and the Southern accents would have been as thick as afternoon flies if there had been any Southern gentlemen on hand.

Instead, there was a Buick convertible, parked at an angle with its chrome bumpers almost touching the white rocks that lined the drive. The car was empty, except for a dog that whined a little when he saw me. Lissa stopped the Jaguar and got out quickly and was up on the porch before I had left the car.

I followed her up on the porch, wondering why she had brought me here, where we'd run into Leslie Raines and Pardee, and walked around to the side of the house, where there were tables and people and drinks, and the low murmur of intimate voices planning the night ahead and the nights after that. We sat down

and a huge Negro asked us our pleasure in a low respectful voice. His white jacket bulged over his muscled arms. He looked as if he could take Joe Louis with one arm tied behind his back and his mind on something else.

Lissa leaned forward over her Collins. She said, "It's a shame to watch a serious-minded man wasting his time the way you are, Mike. Following that cashier girl through the park, for instance. You were following her, weren't you?"

"Like a leech," I admitted. I chewed on a portion of bourbon. "It was her legs that got me going. Every time I see a pair of legs like that I start bubbling over."

"What do you do with a pair of legs like mine?" she asked softly.

I grinned at her, very wickedly. "Oh, pooh," I said. "You're a married woman."

She gave me a sardonic glance. "A man with a conscience?"

"I don't get very much chance to use it," I said. "But there's always the odd time when I may. You wouldn't have an ulterior motive in dragging me out here, would you? Like perhaps the Buick in the driveway and the tall noble Roman-senator type who owns it? Pardee? And the girl? You wouldn't be twisting me around your cute little finger, by any foul chance?"

"Why should I? And would I have to try very hard?" she asked.

"Why do anything? Why bring me here at all? What does the senator do around here anyway, baby?"

"He owns it," she said. "He gambles. An honest one, I'm told. I know he's taken enough of my money without blushing to be a good one, anyhow." She looked up abruptly. The tall Negro with the bulging arms was standing just to my left and slightly behind me. He said in a musical voice, "Will there be anything else sir? Another drink, perhaps?"

"Yes, and doubles," I said. He went away.

"Are you going to get drunk?" Lissa asked coldly.

I THOUGHT about that for a while and couldn't make up my mind. "Look," I said. "I like sitting here in this pseudo-Southern mansion of honest vice, lapping up Bourbon at a dollar a shot and making wise, dark-eyed remarks with a beautiful blonde who has a dull, stodgy bank manager for a husband. I'd like to sit here and discuss your legs with you, and later on go for a stroll in the moonlight, if that's the way you happen to feel about it. But there's no future in it, and I'm a man with his future at heart. Maybe we'd better finish off these drinks and go back to town?"

"All right," she said quietly. "You'll pardon me." She stood up abruptly and went in through a pair of tall French doors.

I was sitting there, being cynical about life, when the man who could have faded Joe Louis came back and slid another drink under my nose. I said, "By the way, where could I find Mr. Pardee?"

He showed his teeth in a brief smile and his soft, gentle eyes became thoughtful. Then he murmured, "Right this way, sir."

We went down off the porch and around the back where a slice of lake, shining bright and hard and blue through the trees in the fading rays of sun, cut the monotony of green and brown. Ahead of me the Negro's shoulders looked like the back of a milk truck. We came to a short, steep flight of steps leading up to a closed door, on a higher level than the verandah.

"After you, sir," he murmured courteously. He was so polite I almost bowed to him. I almost fell flat on my face trying to be as polite as he was. He helped me along. His hands closed over the back of my neck, tightly, lovingly. He squeezed. I put one hand out and took hold of the wooden stair railing and tried to tear part of it

loose, but they were using long nails that year. The bourbon exploded in my stomach and sent fragments whirling up into my head. I heard his strong, quiet chuckle. I felt the gentle caress of his hand, at my hip, under my armpits, at my belly. A careful man. A thoughtful man. If I had been wearing a gun I wouldn't have been wearing it after his hand went away. He shook me a little, not quite enough to toss my head into the lake, but enough.

A door opened somewhere. A man came quickly down the stairs. Through the haze in front of my eyes I could see him. He looked very much like Eddie, the nervous barber who seemed to be something entirely different in his spare time. I thought he might be something like a shill for the gambling den over Dexter's bank. I thought he might be a very in-different cog in the Pardee organization. He had something in his hand. He was smacking it lovingly against the palm of his other hand. When he got through smacking it against his palm he smacked it against my head.

CHAPTER FIVE

Outline of Murder

A SOLITARY shaded light burned in the paneled ceiling above me. It was moving in ever-widening circles, as if on a pivot, and at times it would go off entirely and leave me in darkness.

I was lying on a leather studio couch. A distinguished face and a pair of completely expressionless eyes moved into the circle of light, watching me. A hand held out a glass of water. I reached out to steady the hand and took a long drink. It made me feel a little better. It made me feel like rushing right out and getting my skull in the way of another black-jack.

After a time I put my legs shakily over the side of the couch and rested my aching

head between my hands and stared down at the carpet. "Too big," I said in a voice that should have been returned to the boy soprano who had loaned it to me. "Very much too damn big."

"He'll be sick in a little while," a quiet voice said clinically. I moved one eyebrow out of my line of vision and sighted blearily at the owner of the voice. I remembered him. I'd talked dead bodies with him only that morning. His name was Josef Kindler. He stood with his hands behind his back, near the man called Pardee, the man who was either there or was just arriving, no matter where I went. Pardee looked vaguely chagrined, distinguished, esthetic. But mostly worried. He held my card case in his hand.

He said, "I don't like my people making mistakes like this one. It was a very bad mistake."

"Practically everything is," Windler said. "Depending on where you stand."

Pardee glanced at him as if he had just discovered Kindler's presence in the room. He took a long step toward me. He murmured, "It is difficult to explain a happening such as this, Walker. We've had trouble out here, you know. My men are inclined to be overly suspicious of strangers."

"Even when they arrive with the socially select?"

"One does not have to be a first-grade detective to be socially select, my friend. Even the socially select make mistakes. We thought you might be one. You seemed too anxious."

I had a word for that, a short, pithy one. I gave it away for free. His flush grew deeper. He stood tapping my wallet against his thigh, as he had tapped his gloves that morning when Eddie and I were having our friendly little cracker-box session. He made me think of Eddie. I sat staring down at the rug, thinking about Eddie and about the whole setup and about how much chance I had out

here, with the local law next to Pardee.

"There's no need to feel like that about it, Mr. Walker," Pardee said. He seemed to be upset. "I'm willing to make it up to you, in any reasonable way. I don't want you entertaining any mistaken conceptions."

"What difference would it make?" I said wearily. I got up, swaying, and got my wallet back. I looked at Kindler. He didn't seem like the kind of a cop who would carry a blackjack, but you never can tell.

I said, "Hello, Joe, old pal, old friend."

He dipped his head curtly, his eyes half lidded, half amused. I took an untidy step toward him, and laid a long forefinger on his chest. I said, "Just one thing I want now. I want Eddie. I want him in here."

"Ah," Pardee sighed. He eyed me for a level moment, then shrugged and touched a button under the rim of his rosewood desk. I held out my hand. It shook. Kindler's face tightened.

"The mace," I whispered throatily. "Or do I have to do it with the desk lamp?"

Kindler's hand moved, dipped under the tail of his coat, came up with a short, braided, shot-filled cap. Pardee sat down slowly in his chair and arched his fingers at the bridge of his nose. I smiled a soft, secret smile and swished the sap once and waited for Eddie.

HE CAME in big as life, grinning cockily, licking his lips. I hit him across the throat with the jack, just hard enough to peel his Adam's apple. His long, lean face went suddenly round, suddenly red, suddenly blue. He coughed. His hands made vague, frantic motions. I chuckled. I said, "Hello, Eddie, old pal, old barber." I hit him again across the nose, harder now, and bone gave and the blood came. Then I got sick of it, very sick of it indeed. I threw the blackjack on the floor and walked out through the door

past him, where he was making horrible gurgling sounds in his throat and spraying blood over his suit coat.

I went out and down a long flight of winding stairs into a lodge-type lounge. Leslie Raines was sitting alone at a small table near the fireplace, fiddling with a Planter's Punch and looking unhappy about it. She glanced up and saw me and her mouth opened a little, to join the other open mouths and shocked stares. I was making a big hit that night. I gave her a sour glance and went out onto the porch where it was dark and found the rail.

I was sick enough to last until next time.

When I was through with that I went down to the parking lot and began stumbling around in the dark, looking for Lissa Dexter's Jaguar. It had been there once, but it was gone now, and I stopped to look at my watch. The luminous hands pointed to nine-thirty.

Leslie Raines came out through the door to the verandah, her feet scurrying on the old planking, and walked rapidly down the wide steps. She stopped a scant arm's length away and whispered urgently, "Mr. Walker?"

I said, "Here."

She let out her breath in a hurry, as if it had been bothering her. Her hand reached out to touch my face. "You're hurt," she whispered.

"You should see the other guy," I told her wearily. "You should see all the other guys. Look, if you're getting out of this flatrap, how about a paying passenger? I've had enough of this joint to last me until forever."

"The car's over here," she said. We walked over to the Buick and she got in behind the wheel. The spaniel whined eagerly. Keys jingled in the darkness and then the motor caught and lights flared whitely against the verandah of the house.

"You drive in style," I said. "Or did Pardee hire you to ferry me back?"

"Something like that," she said coolly. "You couldn't walk. And I know Peter pretty well. Would you have any objections to that?"

"I haven't got anything left in the world," I complained mournfully. I wanted to put my head in her lap and go to sleep. The Buick made a sweeping turn in the drive, its lights picking out the markers at the main gate, and we whispered out onto the side road and began the long journey back to Fairmont.

I woke up at her front door with the spaniel's head on my shoulder and his long wet tongue in my ear, and got blearily out and stood combing my hair with my fingers. She looked at me and shook her head pityingly. "I've taken some pretty grim specimens home in my time," she said appraisingly, "but this is a new low. Could you go for some coffee?"

"I'd walk a mile," I said.

"I can do better for you than that."

She did better for me than that. She had a two-room apartment on the fifth floor, at the end of a long hall, a clean little place where you could spend a lot of time if you knew the right words to go with it. She went out in the kitchenette and made pleasant homy sounds with glass and water and the coffee tin, and after a while she came back and sat down on the couch beside me and lit cigarettes for both of us.

"You must have an awfully strong head," she said candidly. "But they have pretty thick walls in Fairmont, too, my friend. How long do you think you're going to last, batting your skull against them?"

"You're one hell of a funny bank teller," I said. I sighed and leaned my head on her shoulder.

"A girl has to do something. You wouldn't expect me to work out with Dad, would you? Around a town this size?"

"Huh?" I said stupidly.

"The man you call Pardee."

I took that one in and chewed it around for a little while. And then I said "Nuts."

"All right," she said. "He owns half of Fairmont, the respectable half, too. He's chairman of the city council. He owns part of Ralph, Dexter's bank, and he's built playgrounds and helped build that park you were in this afternoon. He runs a straight house out there in the glen. Do you think Joe Kindler would be hanging around out there with Dad if the setup wasn't on the level? He's a straight cop, mister. A lot straighter than they've got in your town."

"Kiss me," I said softly. Her hair was tickling my nose. I didn't care if her father was the Sultan of Persia. I didn't care if he ran all the gambling in the Western U.S.A.

"You're crazy!" she said.

"Go on," I said dreamily. "I'm not that crazy."

She started to pull herself away. "The coffee's starting to boil . . ." she said in a small voice.

"I like strong coffee," I whispered.

We had strong coffee.

AT TEN the next morning I walked down the lane behind Mrs. Charlie Latimer's silent little house, dusting my hands, and carrying something in a paper bag under one arm. I put the package in the Dodge and drove over to Ralph Dexter's bank and sat around there reading a pamphlet urging me to take out a nice big loan with the Fairmont City and District Savings Bank, easy terms, low interest, and all my life to pay it back. They didn't ask me how long I thought I could stay alive in Fairmont City.

At ten-thirty Dexter came in, almost running, his round, benign face puffy, his eyes mudholes in his face. It had obviously been a long, hard weekend for him. You could have chopped ten feet off his hangover and still have had enough left for an Elks' convention.

He glared at me distractedly and slumped down behind his desk with a shiver and fumbled at a bottom drawer and pulled out a bottle of Vat 69. He poured most of it down his trouser leg before hitting the glass, bounced his teeth off the rim of it, gasped, and shook himself.

"God!" he said numbly.

"I know how you feel. You lose much money at it?"

"Hah? Eh?" He leaped back, rattling his chair, and glared balefully at me down his short span of nose.

"Poker," I explained. "Cards. Dice. Baby needs a new pair of shoes. All that vulgar stuff. Or did you get that hang-over walking a sick aunt?"

"Look here, Walker," he brayed. "You've got your nerve with you, barging in here—"

"Oh, fudge," I said. "What goes on in that flashy brick-and-chrome palace over this bank, Dexter? A neat flip of the pasteboards for men who can't afford to be seen out at Pardee's country place, perhaps? A brief go at chemin-de-fer? A trick or two at the bridge table, at five cents a point?"

He paled. He pulled out a flowered silk handkerchief and mopped his face and made another dive at the bottle. He poured out a heavy slug.

"Now look here, old man," he stuttered. "Now look here. After all, you can't go around saying things like that about me, you know. Ridiculous. Absolute trash."

"I'm not going around saying things like that about you," I pointed out. "I'm saying them to you. I said them to you yesterday morning, out at your house. And I can go right on saying them, because you haven't got the guts, apart from your customary blow and brag, to do anything that would stop me. I could blow you over with one small breath. I could push you over with a soda straw. And I'm pointing out to you now that unless I get

the straight lowdown on Latimer and on Latimer's wife, people in this town will start a run on your bank that will make Cimarron look like a foot race at a ladies' finishing school."

"Have a drink," he said. He flailed one hand at the inter-office com on his desk and told his secretary he was out until after lunch, got to his feet and locked the door and came back to sit down and sweat and watch me with frightened eyes. I was glad I wasn't the boy on the receiving end of this. I was glad I didn't have any Ralph Dexters behind me, or beside me or anywhere near me. He was going to bray loud and long.

I pushed the glass of Scotch he offered me to one side and lit a cigarette.

"You're right," he said, finally with great weariness. "Peter owns this building. He has a place upstairs—just a small place, you understand." He paused and ran a finger around the inside of his starched collar. "Look here, Walker," he said weakly, "how do I know you won't repeat this outside? How do I know I can trust you?"

"You don't know anything," I said softly. "You don't know what I'm going to do, but you know what I can do."

HE LICKED his full pale lips and cast a hungry eye at the bottle. "Go ahead," he said harshly. "What do you want from me?"

"Not much," I said. "Not enough, really. But I'll give you something. Somebody was waiting for Charlie Latimer when he came into this bank last week. Somebody talked him into going downstairs into the cellar to put his neck out, and when he did, Charlie developed a bad case of lack of breath. With these." I put the paper-wrapped parcel on his desk. "I picked up these in Mrs. Latimer's back yard, under a pile of old weeds and trash. They killed Charlie. They killed his wife. Maybe the murderer went back for them and found

the law there. Maybe he thought they couldn't be traced. Hell," I shrugged, "you can trace practically anything these days, if you really try. I haven't worked on it yet. I will presently.

"That brings us to Eddie, the barber with the failing ears. Eddie was contact man for Pardee, a shill, which showed a sad lack of judgment on Pardee's part. Eddie had a good setup. A lot of people get haircuts, and this is a good section of town. Eddie could always help out when someone started looking for a casual little fling with no one to watch. And Eddie was in his shop the morning Latimer died. Because he was in there early he heard something he wasn't supposed to hear. He heard Latimer dying, he heard voices, not loud ones, but maybe loud enough for him to make a pretty good guess. He told Pardee about that, but not right away. Not right after it happened, because he was probably pretty busy digging up angles to work and people to milk. He had visions of the big time."

Dexter's hand, on the edge of the desk, had stopped shaking now and he was growing cooler by the minute, but he would never become an iceberg, no matter how big a start he had.

"When Pardee heard about this he probably thought about two things. He probably thought about turning Eddie over to the cops and having him attend a singfest down in Captain Kramer's saloon of swat

in the City Hall. He probably thought about that because he's a straight man, or so I'm told by people who should know, and because Eddie was working for him. Then he must have realized the obvious point. You can run along pretty smoothly in that kind of business in a town like this, a nice little town where the vice is harder to get than it in a big city, but there are always people who will break out the axe when a probe comes up, even if they're the same people who like an occasional whisper with the goddess of chance themselves. And if Eddie went to the law, the axe would have to come out, no matter how many wires were pulled. So Pardee clammed up, and he saw to it that Eddie clammed up. He put Eddie on his personal payroll, moved him outside the city limits where I ran into him last night. By this time I would say Eddie is on his way toward the Arctic Circle for a nice long vacation. But he can be brought back."

I crushed out my cigarette and blew the last of the smoke at him. It rolled against his face and spread around his head, but he didn't blink.

"I don't think it will be necessary to bring him back," I said slowly. "I've got what I want, more or less, or I will have, before the day is out." I stood up, picked up the parcel and stood looking down at him. At another time I might have felt just a little sorry for him, one way or the other. I said, "Your type is always alike.

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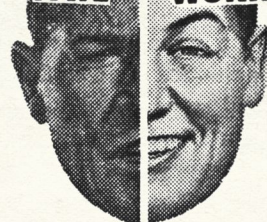
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CHAPTER SIX

Blackmail Payoff

I NODDED to Dexter politely and picked up my hat and went out and leaned on the desk near the cashier's cage to light another cigarette. Leslie Raines looked up from her ledger and wrinkled the tip of her nose. "You've been drinking," she said critically.

"I'm a bum," I admitted. "Look, I'd like to go downstairs and take a peak around in the cellar. You want to show me the way?"

She glanced at Dexter's office door.

"It's fine by the boss," I said. "He's practically carrying me around on his head like a mattress."

She said, "Just a minute, Mike. I'll get a flashlight and the keys," and left her cage. The other clerks were watching us with interest, thinly disguised if at all. We went out through the vaults in back and down a flight of cement steps that ended abruptly in a heavy steel door painted battleship grey. She pulled back the heavy oiled bolt, inserted a key and turned it. Then she used another key on the lower lock, leaned on the bar handle, and the door swung easily on greased, ball-bearing hinges. I took the flashlight from her and stooped over and went inside. The place had a damp, musty smell and my shoes grated on gritty cement. Overhead were heavy beams, set about two inches below the surface of the ceil-

ing. The place was empty except for some old cartons and the smell of molded vegetables and fruit. Set in one wall, so near I could almost touch it with my hand, was another door, steel lined on this side and bolted into place. Under it I could see light, nearly an inch of it.

"Which beam?" I asked. My voice echoed strangely.

Leslie's face was strained and white. She pointed to one near where I was crouched down. I swung the flash on it. There were still fine pieces of hemp caught in the old ragged wood. The thick dust on the floor had been scuffed up under the beam, but that could have been done later, by inquisitive feet.

"What kind of a guy was he, Les?"

She started and jerked her head. "Charlie? A big handsome lug. I suppose some women would find him attractive. He liked to drink and play around, but he was smart enough usually to do it on his off hours. He was all right around the bank, I guess. He never bothered me much."

"What kind of a man would bother you much?"

"Not that kind," was all she said. She turned her back on me and made her way back to the door. That gave me time. I kicked the old boxes and trash over the parcel, yanked the bag away and crumpled that up and threw it in one corner. Then I followed her up the stairs. I went out of the bank and stood on the front steps in the sunlight, breathing the dustiness of the cellar out of my lungs. Then I drove down to the railway station and bought myself a ticket and sent a wire to Jordan in Frisco.

When I came out of the station Josef Kindler was leaning against the hood of the Dodge, smoking a long delicately tinted brown cigarette that smelled Egyptian. His thin, ascetic face was drawn a little more than usual.

"Are you leaving so soon?" he asked.

"Sooner than you think, Kindler," I answered. "Too early in the day for you to hoist one or two with me?"

"Lager," he said. "I know a place."

WE DROVE over to a little biergarten on Gatewood Avenue and sat at a small rickety table in a cool leafy garden and ordered German seidel beer. Finally Kindler said, "I suppose you think Fairmont is a pretty dirty little place, eh, Walker?"

"You can stir up any stream and get mud," I said. "It doesn't prove a thing."

He flashed me a grateful glance. "Look here," he said abruptly. "Last night you saw me out at Pardee's place, at a very awkward time. I want to explain that to you, before you go."

"You don't have to," I said. "I know how it is. I was talking to his daughter last night. She said you were a straight cop. I didn't have any reason not to believe her." I slid my empty glass across the table and said, "How's our old friend Kramer these days?"

Kindler chuckled. "Off on another short trip. This time it's the mountains, I think." He picked up the small silver bell on the table and shook it. A heavy-set blonde girl came out and collected our glasses and smiled cheerily upon us and went away. Kindler's eyes followed her.

"So I sit here with you drinking beer and wondering how I'm going to pump you," he confessed, "when you ask all the questions. How could I go about it?"

"You wouldn't last two months in Frisco," I told him. "Not with that naive approach. But it strikes a tender spot, and I've got a lot of them this morning. I'm pretty sure I know who killed Latimer, and why. The same applies to Mrs. Latimer."

"Ah," he said thoughtfully. "Mrs. Latimer. The coroner will be glad to know. He says she was strangled with a piece of bent steel or iron, a semi-hoop, perhaps,

that did not quite meet at the back of her neck. She was attacked from the front."

"Sure she was. Our killer follows a pattern. No sneaking up behind in the dark. No whispering footsteps when the lights are low. Just a big, friendly approach, all smiles and kind words, all death and destruction." I paused while the girl set our glasses down again and brought a little basket of pretzels over.

I drew my lips tight over my teeth. "Look, Joe. I'm going to ask you to do me a favor, the same favor Kramer asked of me yesterday, although he didn't mean it. I'm all through here. I've been raising a lot of welts on people I don't even know, and don't want to. But I have what I came to get, in its raw form. Ironing out the details is a job for somebody else. All I want now is an official report, for the files. From you, from Kramer, from anybody in authority who wants to give it to me. Will you send one down to the head office in Frisco? You can address it either to Alec Jordan or to me. When you get the details all ironed out?"

"All ironed out," he murmured slowly. "And what is all ironed out? And when is it?"

"By late this afternoon. There are one or two things I want to do myself first. Then it will be all yours. Maybe it'll do you some good around here. Maybe it will give Kramer a kick in the pants. I don't like Kramer very well."

"You wouldn't be alone," he said. He put his glass down and stood up, stretching himself. He leaned forward over the table. "How and why?" he asked gently, his fine, wise eyes smoky. "Give me the lowdown, Walker."

I told him how. I told him who. I told him where to look in the bank cellar for the weapon. And then I paid for the beer and left him standing there, looking morosely down at the table and at the empty glasses.

THEY were draining the swimming pool that afternoon, the Filipino with the smile and a short chunky gardener who looked as if he had never smiled in his life. No one answered the bell. I stepped down to the flagstone walk and followed it around to the other side of the place. It wound off to a small clearing, sparsely screened by trees, where there was a gaily colored, waterproofed, silk-and-pine frame cubicle, about ten feet by five, with no top. You could see shadows through the silk. Pancho lay on his belly outside the door of the cubicle, not paying any attention to the shadows, because he was merely a dog, with his mind on higher levels.

I lit a cigarette and called softly, "Mrs. Dexter?"

There was a short silence and then the sound of a robe being hurriedly pulled on and a latch being unlatched, and the door swung open. She stood in the opening. "How long have you been standing there?" she said.

"Not long enough."

"Too long," she corrected. "After the way you behaved last night, any time is too long. I don't like being stood up, Mr. Walker. Not by any one."

"Sure not," I said. I leaned against a tree and sucked on my cigarette and stared at her. I said, "I was in to see your husband this morning, Mrs. Dexter. He was in a bad mood, too. I don't think his mind will be on business today. Has he phoned you?"

She watched me narrowly. "I wouldn't know. I've been out here since nine."

"About last night," I went on doggedly. "I was spirited away by a geni in a white coat. I wasn't able to return, and where I was, there were no messenger boys. Otherwise I would have let you know. When I woke up it was after nine-thirty."

"I'm awake at nine-thirty," she said crisply. "I can be phoned at nine-thirty."

"Sure you can," I said. "But I was all

mixed up. You know how it is. Things happen and they throw you off. I was so mixed up I didn't have time to think, not even about good old Charlie Latimer, rest his soul."

She made an impatient gesture. I lifted one eyebrow and let it drop again. It dropped without a sound. She pulled the robe tighter about her, still watching me with those sun-flecked eyes, her face taut but gradually relaxing.

"All right," she said at last. "I'll take that explanation."

"I'll trade it to you for a drink," I said, looking thirsty.

"Wait for me at the house."

I nodded and stood there for a moment, then grinned and started back up the path to the house. The frame-and-silk door slammed with a sharp bang. I went up on the porch and sat down in the chair and waited. In a little while she came out wearing a sun suit that was even better than the robe had been.

"You know," I said, when the glasses were making moist rings on the table, "I think you'll do all right, no matter where you go. You have the class, the looks, the attitude. You've got self-confidence, all you'll ever need, even enough to inject some spine into your husband, who is, in my opinion, a weak-willed slob. But you're going to need it a lot very soon. I don't think the thing is going to touch you very hard, not in a court, nor in your own mind. I haven't been around long enough to know just what kind of a mind you have under that pleasant exterior, or what your emotions are, or how much love you could ever hold for anyone. Nor will I be around long enough to find out. I'm all through here this afternoon."

I picked up my drink and squinted at the sun through it and put it down again without drinking any of it. I went on somberly, "I don't suppose I'll ever know for sure just whose idea it really was. The impression I was given when I came here

was that Latimer was a chaser. One of those smooth, suave, Saturday-night types, one of the roving-hands-in-the-moonlight types, a guy who would expect you to climb under his vest when you were dancing with him. I never knew him personally."

SHE sat very quietly in the wicker chair, not saying anything, not looking directly at me.

"I never knew Mrs. Latimer, either. I guess I must move in the wrong circles. Most of the people I meet are already gone. And because I didn't know her, I was thrown off. I thought she had been sleeping that day, Saturday afternoon, and that her killer had set the alarm clock for ten the next morning, just to confuse the police. I was wrong there. She hadn't been sleeping that afternoon, because she wasn't alone. She was killed around ten that night, by the person who spent the afternoon and evening with her."

Lissa moved her lips and made sounds, stiff, lonesome little words. "What has my husband—"

"Your husband killed her," I said. "He was there that day, with a pair of cut-down ice-tongs which he left on the back porch. When he got up to go, he went out on the back porch, picked them up and came back into the kitchen, where Mrs. Latimer was just cleaning up the dirty dishes. He put the tongs around her-neck and closed the handles, and together they waltzed back into the parlor, where she died."

I tasted the drink and found it sour and sat there holding the cool glass in my hand and staring off across the lawn, where the dog, Pancho, lay like a fallen monument.

"He had so much to lose by one indiscretion," I went on slowly, "that it is hard to believe he could commit it in the first place. He fell for Charlie's wife. Charlie found out about it, as some husbands are

wont to do, but unlike most, he saw a good chance to make himself a cushy living. After all, why not? What's a little thing like a shared wife between friends, providing the friend is willing to kick through? Charlie wasn't living with her; but he was willing to live off her. He told your husband this; he told him, 'Think it over, Ralph old man. Think of the nice house in the country, think of the power you have here in this fine little city, think of your wife and the disgrace.'"

I dropped my glass on the stone porch and it shattered with a sudden loud, hard sound.

"But Ralph was a man of the world. He knew that a blackmailer never stops. He could see himself being gradually bled white, losing this house, his big car, his beautiful wife, and always with the threat of Charlie Latimer over his head. If Charlie lost heavily to Pardee, Ralph would foot the bill. If Charlie wanted a long weekend in Frisco, Ralph would pay off the chorus girls. Ralph was it, all the way down the line. And you know what he did?"

She was staring at me numbly. Now she licked her lips and opened them and clamped her teeth on the soft flesh. Blood welled up and moved lazily in a thin trickle down her chin.

"I'll tell you," I said. "He came home to momma and cried in your lap. I said before that he was a weak-willed slob. I still think so. He didn't have the guts to kill without some backing. He found it right where he'd never expected to find it, at home. He found somebody who would lure Charlie down in the cellar at the bank, who would distract Charlie long enough for the deed to be completed. And that would be all the distraction Charlie would ever need. A chance like that?" I chuckled a dry, coarse chuckle. "Charlie would kick a hole in the ceiling for a chance like that."

She moved her long legs and seemed

about to get up. Then she leaned back again in the chair.

"You saw all your life here shot to hell," I continued. My voice was getting hoarse. "You didn't give a damn if Ralph played in greener pastures, but you didn't like the idea of having to pay for it. The solution was obvious. Kill Charlie. But when you both had killed him, you found another snag. Charlie's wife. She was no fool. She came to us deliberately, saying that her husband had been murdered, but not giving any reason. That was her personal insurance, but she underestimated you. She dealt you short. Ralph killed her Saturday night, before she could talk to me, or to anyone else, and once he had her silenced, he had all the silence he would ever need."

I SAID all this unhappily, and out beyond the house I could hear the rush of water going into the swimming pool, and the wood sounds, the vigor of a jay scolding in his tree. I put a cigarette in my mouth with a hand that shook, and lighted it with a match that trembled, too, and blew smoke that tasted stale.

"She fooled you both. She called in the boy scouts first, and you killed her too late. You should have paid her off, Mrs. Dexter. You could wrap a man named Kramer around your exclusive finger, but you can't do the same thing with a big

company like mine, even if I wanted you to. Your husband knows all this. I think he will crack before they get to him. I think you will be hearing from his office any time now, with the news. He won't run, because he can't run that far. And that leaves him just one out."

I stood up. "Thanks for the drink, Mrs. Dexter," I said. "Thanks for the ride. A man named Josef Kindler from the police department will be out to see you, but he won't be able to touch you in this town, or probably in any other town. But the word will get around. It always does, one way or another."

She opened her mouth and breathed a name at me.

I turned my back on her and walked down the steps and out along the drive toward the car. In the house a phone began to ring shrilly. As I started the motor I wondered if Dexter had taken the easy way, and drove away without really caring whether he had or not. Lissa Dexter's liquor tasted dull and sour in my mouth. I thought perhaps I might stop by at the bank on my way to the hotel and see if I could interest one of the staff in a glass of cold beer at the German place over on Gatewood. I thought probably she would be the type of girl who would like a glass of cold beer. As I swung out the drive I thought I could still hear the phone ringing persistently back at the big house.

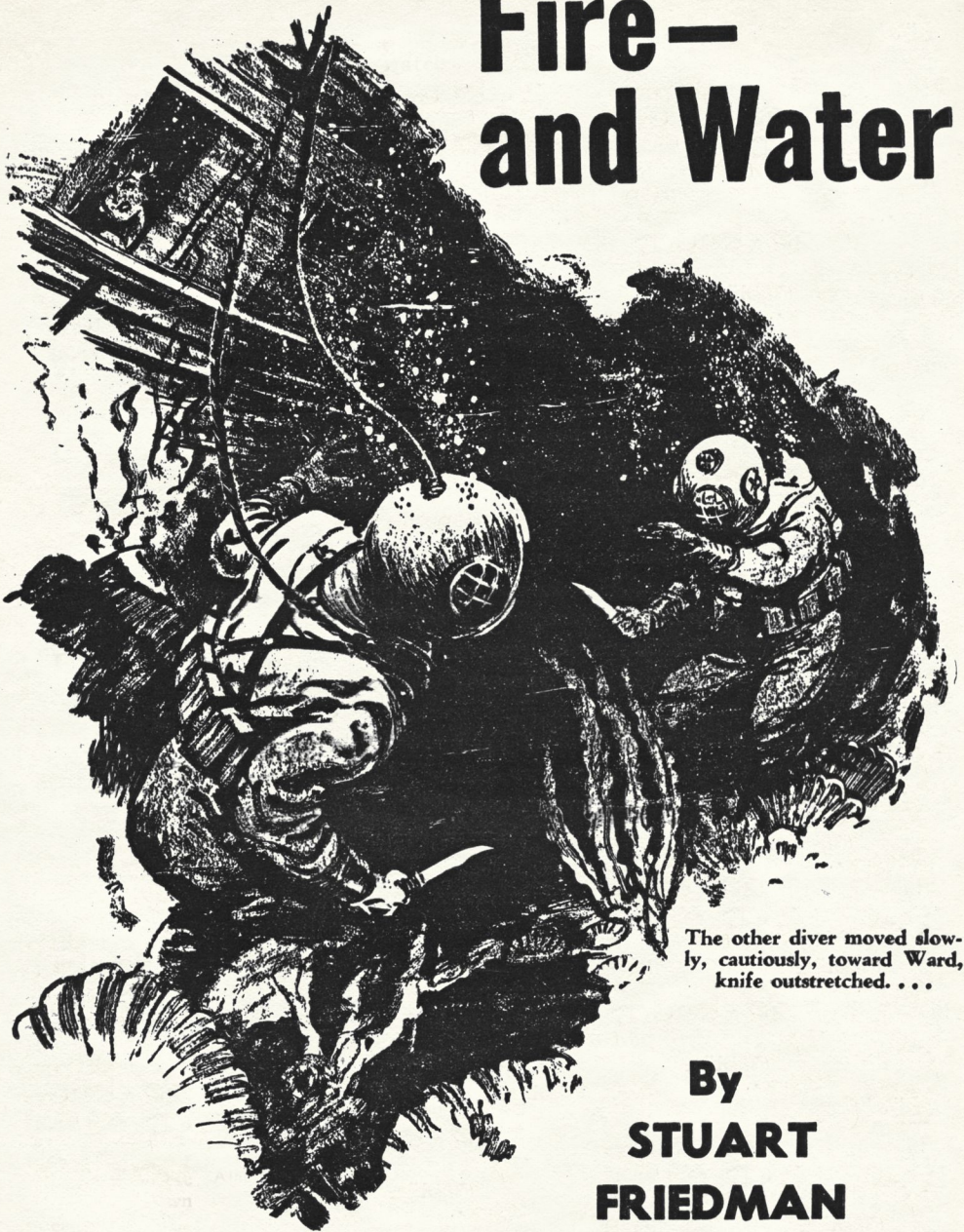
THE END

CAN'T KILL ATMA!

WHEN a high court in Shanghai condemned Atma Singh, a Hindu, to death for killing a man who'd bothered his wife, Atma's friends said confidently that he wouldn't die. He was a good man, and Providence would protect him. When, at the hanging, the rope broke inexplicably, they weren't surprised at all. Confused police commuted his sentence to life imprisonment. The Sikhs shrugged—jail wouldn't hold Atma long, they said.

They were right. A stray bomb among the many that have recently rent China inadvertently razed Atma's jail, killing all other inmates but permitting Atma to walk out of the rubble unharmed. He's been free since!—*Lauri Wirta.*

Fire— and Water



The other diver moved slowly, cautiously, toward Ward, knife outstretched. . . .

By
**STUART
FRIEDMAN**

Two hundred feet under the surface of the sea, Ward and the strange diver fought for their murdered blonde prize.

FOR a moment Ward thought the redhead getting out of the flashy convertible was naked. It seemed logical in a girl who drove like a hurricane and parked like a bull hitting a stone wall. But she was strategically covered by swim briefs and bandeau that

cunningly matched her creamy butter-scotch tan. She came across the yard toward him, legs flashing with the early-morning Miami sun, her dark red hair stirring gently with the motion of her supple young body.

A dark-haired man in T-shirt and white ducks, Ward stood in his side yard stowing his diving gear in the back seat of his car. His mouth tightened with annoyance, and his vivid blue eyes narrowed to strips of color, sharp against the weathered brown of his face. He was making a two-hundred-foot dive today in strange waters. The pressure of that depth would put a severe strain on the nerves; he didn't want them frazzled in advance by an encounter with this pampered nitwit.

"Are you Ward Claiborne?" she called. A lace pattern of shadow ran lightly over her body as she moved under the green fronds of the royal poinciana tree, ablaze with scarlet flowers.

"Yes," Ward said when she reached him.

"I'm Terry Duquesne," she said, her pretty oval face dimpling in a smile. "I'm Junior Stockton's fiancée. Junior phoned me from New York to tell you not to make that dive down to the Stockton yacht till tomorrow."

"What's the trouble?"

"It's just that Junior's father wants to talk to you before you dive."

Ward got matches and cigarettes from his white ducks, lighted and inhaled. He blew smoke out of pursed lips, regarding her speculatively. "When Mr. Stockton, senior, phoned me from New York yesterday, the understanding was that I go down to the wreck today. I spent half of yesterday studying the reports of that wreck, then chartering a boat to locate it exactly. I've got that boat chartered for today. I've notified my tender to be at the dock, and I'm all ready to go. I have another job to see about tomorrow. I'm sorry. Mr. Stockton told me he was ar-

riving in Miami by train tonight and would expect my report on the salvage possibilities when he saw me."

"Oh, please, Mr. Claiborne, don't make that dive today." Her brown eyes blinked nervously and she began to jiggle one hand, tinkling the bracelets on her arm. "I'm going to meet Dad Stockton tonight for the very first time. I'm already in dutch with him on account of Junior buying me that big car. Now, if I've messed this up, he'll never let Junior marry me. Please?"

WARD took a drag from his cigarette, flicked the ash irritably. "Without direct notification from the man I'm dealing with, I can't change my plans. If Junior's handling this for his father, why didn't he phone me direct?"

"Well, I'll tell you. You see, since Junior was on the yacht when it was rammed and sunk coming up from Havana last year, his father blames him. Especially since Junior gambled away the money he was supposed to have paid the insurance with. Junior is so broke he can't even afford to call me. So when his father authorized him to charge a call to Miami, he just called me, free. See?"

Ward laughed humorlessly. "He's broke and buys a three-thousand-dollar convertible?"

"But he is, I swear!" Terry Duquesne said.

"I weep. Junior was the lad who got the captain and crew and all the guests on the yacht drunk, the way I understand it. The other vessel had the right of way in the collision. It's only freak chance that nobody's dead. I'd go out of my way to keep from doing Junior any favors, believe me, Miss Duquesne."

"But won't you give me a chance?" She looked pleadingly at him. "If you dive today Dad Stockton will find out Junior phoned me instead of you. He'll think I can't even deliver a simple mes-

sage. I'll be in a mess the very first time I meet him!"

"Tell you what," he said, relenting. "It'll leave you out of it. I'll tell Stockton tonight that Junior phoned me himself. But on my own responsibility, I'm diving today. I'll battle that out with Stockton. You don't need to worry. Okay?"

"Well," she said uncertainly. "Yes. Thanks. Uh—could I please use your phone?"

He nodded, flipped his cigarette away and took her in the bright airy front room of the stucco bungalow. She posed at the phone, without calling. He eyed her, realizing almost at once that she'd come into the house to throw her charm at him.

Her hip tilted as she put her weight on one leg and slid the other indolently forward, gold anklet and red toenails glinting. Sunlight through the venetian blinds laid warm stripes across her smooth bare skin, and the fine curve line of her back showed in profile. She looked provocatively across her shoulder at him, arm moving subtly to indent a dimple in the round of her pretty shoulder. He grinned mockingly at her. But her glance went to the base of his throat to his visible pulse, rapid in spite of himself.

There was a sort of slack, half stupor to her face as she came silently to him. Her arms slid around his neck, locked; her body formed a taut arch against him, and her lips seemed to soften and swell as she lifted them to his. Suddenly his hands pressed into the warm flesh of her back. Her lips mashed hot and moist against his. He was trembling and breathing hard as they drew apart.

"Ward," she whispered, "don't be mean to me and go out to that yacht today."

He took a long breath. "I told you what I'd do," he said slowly. "I'm taking you off the spot completely. And *still* you don't want me to go out to that wreck.

Why don't you want me to do it?"

"Go tomorrow," she said, pressing against him.

He gritted his teeth. "Does Junior know how much you're doing for him?"

"Yes," she said softly. "It's vital to him, Ward. Ward, spend the day with me. Let's go over to the beach or down fishing on one of the Keys. Don't you like me?"

"Don't ask stupid questions. But right now I'd make that dive free just for the pleasure of getting Junior in more hot water with his father."

Terry Duquesne stepped back. "All right. If you won't be soft, how about one thousand dollars?"

"From broke Junior?" he asked mockingly.

"I'll sign over that car!"

"Half the day would be over before we could get the deal through. Be too late then to dive. You're a cutie, all right."

"Oh, damn!" Terry cried. She took a breath, her brown eyes glistening widely. "Ward, I'm desperate! I have to stop you. He ordered me to."

"I can just imagine a babe like you taking Junior's orders."

HER bracelets fell clinking to the bend of her arm as she raised her right hand solemnly. There was a note of huskiness in her clear young voice as she spoke, staring at him. "I swear to you. He ordered me. He's desperate. Ward, I'm out of tricks. All I could think of now would be tearing my hair and screaming out the window, and have you arrested for bothering me. I admit I thought of it. I admit I set out deliberately to marry the Stockton mint. But I got a bear by the tail. He's half crazy with drink and gambling and even dope, I think. I've seen him drive; I was in a plane with him before he lost his pilot's license. He's wild. I know how cold and mean he can get. It's not Dad Stockton I'm afraid

of. He'd settle for almost any girl he thought could tame Junior. It's Junior I'm scared of. He told me he'd get me sure as hell if I didn't manage this. He'd do it. He would, Ward. He'd kill me!"

Ward might have doubted the impassioned intensity of the outburst, but not the starkness in her eyes. "Look, why didn't you call the police? You couldn't still be planning to marry a man you believe capable of murdering you."

"I was on that yacht when it sank. It was night. Everybody was high, singing and dancing. Then someone screamed!" An involuntary shudder ran through her. She shut her eyes, remembering. She stared, drew several breaths through her mouth. Her voice was a strange, toneless drone.

"We saw this huge tower looming in the dark above us. It was bearing down. The bells and the whistles and the fog-horns of both boats were clamoring. We could hear them shouting down from the freighter at us. There was the awful sound of the freighter's engine trying to stop her. Some of us were screaming and sobbing. Then it struck. We were hurled to the decks. Everything was chaos. We thought it was the end!" She paused, shook her head. "Anything could have happened on that yacht, then. Anything! Something did. I don't know what. But it implicates me. Junior made that clear on the phone."

"I see," Ward said. "Junior must plan to get a diver out there ahead of me to get rid of something he's afraid of. But he knew yesterday, surely, that his father hired me. Why is he still in New York?"

"Maybe he isn't! It was a station-to-station call. No long-distance operator said anything. I didn't give it a thought, because lots of times that happens on station-to-station long distance."

"I know," Ward said. "Well, it'll take a pretty fast boat, and a faster diver than any I've heard about to get out

there and away before me, even if Junior is in Miami. I think you'd better go to the police."

"But until we find out what's back of it, shouldn't I wait? Mightn't my story about Junior's threats sound flimsy? Can't I go along with you?"

"Well—you'll need more clothes out on the ocean in this sun."

"I've got some in my car. I'll get them."

"Good." When she went out Ward went to the bedroom, got his .45 automatic, concealed it with a sport shirt. Then he got the half-gallon thermos of coffee from the kitchen, went out, locking the house. He slid under the wheel, gun bundled in the shirt between his leg and the door, waited for her.

COTTON WILLIAMS, his tender, a lanky towhead in dungarees and undershirt, came to the car as Ward parked at the little Biscayne Bay fishing dock north of the Pan-American Clipper base.

"Hi, Cotton," Ward said, getting out. "Cap ready?"

"Hello, Mr. Claiborne. Yeah, Cap's ready to shove off the minute we get the gear aboard. Another passenger?" he said, eyeing Terry appreciatively as she got out, slacks and yellow beach coat under-arm.

"This is Miss Duquesne," Ward said affably. "Terry, this is my understudy, Mr. Williams." He went casually around the car, took her rolled slacks and beach coat quickly. Adding his own sportshirt, with gun, he thrust the lot into Cotton's arms. "Terry, see that hideous, stupid-looking old sea dog coming?" he said loudly. "That's Captain Jorgenssen, skipper of our sturdy craft, famed for his dauntless seamanship throughout Biscayne Bay and the far waters of Central Park Lake in New York. Cap, Miss Duquesne."

As they met, Ward said quietly to Cotton. "My .45 is here. Hang onto it.

Take her stuff aboard; see if there's a gun in it. If so, leave it—unloaded."

Cap, habitual scowl on his leathery face, yachting cap set rakishly back on his iron-grey hair, was telling Terry, "... always had sense enough in my time to stay on top the water. Ward, have you strutted your octopus scar to the lady yet?"

"I've been too busy telling her about you."

"Well, let's get it done. Yank up your skivvy and show that big scar," Cap said out of the side of his mouth. "He makes me fight it out of him before the ladies, like he's real, real reluctant to show off. He won't pay me for the boat 'less I go through this."

Terry giggled. Cap took her aboard. Cotton returned to the car. "No gun in her stuff."

Within five minutes Ward and Cotton got the diving suit, lines and air compressor aboard. With a woman aboard, Cap made a great to-do of ordering Jake, his mate-engineer-crew, to cast off, then played the grizzled seaman at the wheel as they put out across the placid bay.

"Do you really have a scar, Ward?" Terry said.

He nodded, avoiding her eyes. "Cap, seriously, I want to make it out there as soon as possible."

"We'll have the anchor down in three hours."

"I'll help Cotton get set up," Ward said leaving the wheelhouse.

Two and a half hours later Ward struggled into his diving suit. The deep scar, which ran jaggedly from the left side of his chest to below his waist on the right, twinged with pain. It always did before a dive, briefly and faintly like the quick brush of death. This time the pain was sharp. It kept coming back at intervals like a slow pulse.

"Talk about something, Cotton. Anything," he said.

Cotton's face was startled for an instant. "My Prof in Marine Biology was telling us—"

"No. Not that. How much you lose at Jai Alai the other night?"

"First game, Jane and I had a buck going between us. Number One. Javarez I think was in the first game. Odds were . . ."

COTTON talked fast, brightly. Nice kid, nice laugh. But it was no good, not against the terror that had burst out raw and alive again for the first time since he'd got that scar. He'd been in the Pacific, off the Mexican coast. He had mistaken the exploratory tentacle feeling his ankle for kelp. Otherwise he'd have stood motionless till the creature had discovered that canvas wasn't edible, and probably the tentacle would have withdrawn. But he had kicked. The octopus had been full

AMAZING THING! *By Cooper*

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grown, a rarity in such comparatively shallow water. The big tentacles, each with some two hundred sixty suction cups had begun to whip around his body one after another. He had closed his exhaust valve, managing to inflate his suit, shooting to the surface, hacking wildly with his knife as the unanchored creature hung on. The tentacles had gripped tighter and tighter and the hideous thick body had closed in on him. And then that huge, parrot-like beak had started to slash him to bits. That was all Ward remembered. When he'd surfaced, one of the deck crew had driven a harpoon through the creature, and it had taken half an hour to kill it and disengage it. Ward had been in the hospital a month.

"... then on the last game we played the Quieniella; teams one and eight. It was surefire. Jane had got weighed that afternoon. She was 108," Cotton said. "So after we clicked right in the bullseye between the one and eight—the zero—we walked home. Her aunt was waiting up—"

Ward shook his head impatiently. "Hold it, Cotton... What's wrong, Cap?"

"Look for yourself," Cap said, striding toward him with binoculars. "Right over there, east south east. Seaplane floating there. Smack dab where we're headed for!"

Ward focused the glasses, hearing Terry cry excitedly, "I see it."

Jake called from the wheelhouse, "It's starting to take off."

It was true, Ward saw. In the glasses he saw the aluminum-colored, twin-engine two-seater tilt back on its pontoons. He could hear the engines faintly as it roared away, streaking the tropic-blue flat surface of the water white. Then the lengthening white streak faded abruptly as the pontoons were airborne. The little seaplane climbed a long, shallow spiral away from them, gained altitude, and after a while it was only a speck and the faint

hoarse buzz was lost in the fresh, warm south wind. He handed the binoculars back to Cap, reseated himself on the low dressing stool, wagging his fingers to Cotton for a cigarette while he looked steadily, impassively at Terry.

She stood before him, face tilted down to meet his gaze, hands jammed in the pockets of her yellow, hip-length beach coat, her trim bare legs braced apart against the gentle roll of the deck. Her hair was loose now, dropping from the crown of her head back across her shoulders, shimmering with the motion of the breeze, like dark flame under the high sun. He could see the subtle straightening of her upper lids in a slight squint before the stabbing white brilliance of his canvas suit, bleached by salt water and sun. Otherwise the highlight revealed no sign of flinching, and he regretted a little having told Cap, Jake and Cotton he didn't trust her.

"Are you still going down?" she said at last.

"Why not? If that was Junior, we chased him away," Ward said, taking the lighted cigarette Cotton gave him.

"I'm radioing ashore about that plane, Ward," Cap called. "Did you make out its number?"

TERRY'S head snapped sideward when Cap spoke, as though she'd been so engrossed with Ward she was startled to realize they weren't alone.

Ward shook his head regretfully, drawing a deep inhale. "Maybe Miss Duquesne can help."

"I can't. Really, I can't. So far as I know Junior never had a seaplane, even while he was licensed." She broke off and glanced sharply at Cap, then Cotton. "I don't like the feeling here," she cried. "You all look at me, like—like—"

"Forget it," Ward said. "They know I can't quite trust you, that's all. Cotton's got a big responsibility to see that nothing

happens to my air while I'm down."

"And this .45 says nothing will happen," Cotton said casually. Her chin began to quiver.

"Nothing personal," Ward said as she walked away.

They had dropped anchor at the wreck. Ward sat on the low dressing stool, smoking a final cigarette, silent and withdrawn, as though already detached from the surface world. The pain of his scar had stopped. Under the suit of unwieldy tight-woven inner and outer layers of canvas with a rubber layer between, he was dressed heavily. Long wool underwear, two sweaters, two pairs of long, thick wool socks, protected him from chill, absorbing the moisture from his breath that condensed in the airtight enclosure. The heavy metal shoulder and breast plates were secure, metal straps and bolts tight. He was ready to go except for fastening on the lead-weighted belt and knife, putting on a knit cap, and screwing his helmet into place. Cotton was crouched beside the chugging air compressor, rubbing tobacco inside the glass window of the seventy-pound brass helmet to prevent fogging. Cap scanned the horizon with binoculars. Terry watched forlornly from a distance down the rail, while Jake stood by the winch waiting to help Cotton set the helmet on Ward's shoulders.

Then his helmet was on, life and air lines secured around his body and convenient to his grasp. They helped him up and over the side in the clumsy lead-weighted shoes, thirty-five pounds to the foot. In all there was some two hundred and fifty pounds added to his own one hundred seventy to get overside and down the short ladder.

He was in the water, going down. The keel of the boat slid away above him. An involuntary thrill tingled across his upper body as he entered once again into the strange and compelling world below. A deep, satisfying sense of aloneness with

awesome mystery, with eternity itself, pervaded him as it always did. The waters were unusually clear, shot through with the diffused rays of sun. Fish swarmed in the bright fluid medium much as birds and insects in a thinner atmosphere, their motions effortless as in the soars and glides and turns of flight; their colors endless and nameless, forming flowing patterns more spectacular than the flagrant bursts of tropical colors.

And then, at thirty or forty feet below, the sun rays weakened, and the more brilliant hues bled away. The fish were not so profuse, or so small or so bright, though they came by the score, slicing across the rising plume of bubbles from the exhaust valve in his helmet, snapping at the strange moving stream. Others, vastly curious, came to stare in his window, undulating their bodies and waving feathery fins to hold position while they investigated such a strange specimen.

It was very dim at a hundred feet. An ugly baby fully twenty feet long swooped diagonally upward in front of him and struck hard at the bubbles somewhere above, jolting his lines. Another fifty feet down and all of the vanishing light seemed to have fled, but as he went on down his eyes adjusted and it wasn't so dark. But he was beginning to sweat under the pressure. The pressure of the air cushion between his body and the suit had to match the enormity of that from the water. Crushing tons. Divers subjected to its sudden impact, through gashed suits, had had their whole bodies literally rammed into squash upward into the metal of shoulder plates and helmet.

WITH a slight jolt his weighted shoes touched hard bottom, and he bounced a little, weightless in the inflated suit. He stood taking his bearings, awesomely aware of the vast and relentless power of this world, where he was a stranger. The sound of the hissing, hoarse intake

and outlet valves seemed enormous now. The sound of his own breathing was heavy. Inside the suit he was drenched with sweat, but his hands were cold in the icy water. The dim, distant rhythm of the air compressor came comforting as he moved forward in the overpowering silence. He could see as on a dark night, thanks to the clarity of the water, but there was no glimpse of the remote faint light at the surface when he was upright. He saw the dark hull of the yacht, twenty feet ahead, he judged.

Holding his lines carefully against fouling on the vessel, he reached the far side. The boat was on its side, the deck at a seventy-degree angle. He inflated his suit a little, and went up. He opened a companionway door easily—and a girl floated out.

He reeled at the shock. There was a hole in the center of her forehead, another in her cheek, he discovered after a few seconds. Bullet holes. Then he saw she only had one eye. The other had been shot out. She had been young.

He wasn't prepared to take her up, without some sort of sack. Under this pressure, and after six or seven months, she couldn't survive the surface. She might remain preserved here almost forever, but above, at the lower pressure, she would literally burst open.

He couldn't decide what to do. He scarcely thought of the original reason for this dive, inspecting the boat for salvage possibilities. He went back down to the floor of the ocean.

Then suddenly he thought he had lost his senses. He thought he saw the figure of another diver coming toward him. It was impossible. He peered above the helmet and he saw there were no lines attached. Ward was utterly paralyzed for seconds—the impact of that dead woman, and now this hallucination. A fire of pain began to lace terribly up and down his scar. The sound of his valves seemed deaf-

ening, and the pulse of his own body seemed to be in some sort of a mad race with the faint pulse of the air compressor. He had had too much pressure too many times. Somehow the constant pressure on his nervous system and arterial system had broken him. He'd missed the dreaded bends, but perhaps this was a form of them, after all.

The figure was moving. Very slowly, very cautiously. Coming toward him. Ward got out his knife, grasping it tightly. Man or hallucination, he was going to kill that moving figure. It was only a few feet from him, and it clutched a knife, too. Then he saw the odd difference between his suit and the other. Two small protuberances rose above the shoulder plates. Then he knew!

The protuberances were the rounded tops of oxygen tanks attached to the back of the breast plate. The figure without lines had a self-contained suit with several hours' oxygen supply. It was Junior Stockton. The seaplane had brought him, and could pick him up. Junior had come to free that body, get it away from the wreck and maybe surface it somewhere to burst and be consumed by the sharks at sea. Now he was intent on killing Ward.

Junior was within three feet and Ward saw his knees flex and knew it was the crouch preceding the attack. One good slash with that knife into his suit and it would be all over.

Ward jerked his head sideward, striking the outlet valve, shutting it, his free hand unlocking his belt. He went up like a bullet. He kicked forward with all his strength, and the weight of that shoe clunking into Junior's breastplate knocked him on his back. Ward had hold of his weighed belt in his left hand, so that when he shot up, his left arm dragged. His body was in a slanting position several feet above Junior. He opened his outlet valve, sank a little, and swung the weighted belt at the figure on the floor.

But Junior was out of action on his back. Ward groped around, found his knife and threw it out of reach. Then he crouched by Junior's head and helped lift him upright. He wanted Junior alive.

Ward grasped him around the body from behind, yanked the emergency signal on his line, and started up with Junior. Fast. He might kill himself, and Junior too, with a swift ascent; he shouldn't have gone up in less than an hour. But he was on top within minutes. There were many strange hands lifting them out of the water. Ward passed out, in agony.

HE WAS on the deck of a Coast Guard cutter speeding shoreward toward a hospital. He was in his diving gear. Terry and Cotton were looking through the window at him. They'd inflated the suit, to give him the high pressure until they could get him into a recompression chamber. After several minutes he felt all right and signaled for them to let him out. He was leery of taking off the helmet, releasing the reviving pressure. But he didn't pass out again.

"What about Stockton? Is he alive?"

"Yes. But he thought he was dying. He confessed," Terry said. "He killed the girl, who was his fiancée till a week before that party. She had reason to try to force him to marry her. He killed her and took her aboard the yacht before any of the passengers who were listed came aboard. He planned to throw her in the sea during the night. But the wreck made it impossible."

"He could have implicated you, Terry. You were her successor."

"He took it all on himself," the Coast Guard skipper assured him. "Now, fellow, I think you better play safe and get back in the suit and under pressure till we can get you thoroughly checked."

"You mind what he says," Cotton insisted. "Get back in there. I'll hold onto this gal for you."

"You don't have to," she said softly, looking at Ward. "I'll be harder to shake than that octopus, darling. And not half as dangerous."

"Not quite." He grinned. "I'm debating whether to put on my hat and take the pressure by air or get it from one of your kisses, baby."

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ALBERT AND THE SELF-MADE WIDOW

Constable Albert Souza didn't have much training in police work, but that didn't stop him from doing plenty of spadework—in Mrs. Henry Pairr's sinister garden!

CONSTABLE ALBERT SOUZA of the town of Baywater was worried. He couldn't find the gun that Henry Pairr, the building contractor, had shot himself with. Neither could he find

the long, white envelope with the thousand dollars in cash in it, which was supposed to be right there.

Constable Souza rubbed his jaw, looking down at Henry Pairr's dead body. He

By
LUKE
FAUST



'By gosh, I believe there's something there, all right,' said the trooper.

told the body, "With a wife like yours, I wouldn't have blamed you if you did shoot yourself. But nothing here looks like you did. Somebody shot you, my friend, and took the thousand dollars, envelope and all!" Constable Souza had to step across the body to get to the telephone.

"Elvira," he addressed the telephone operator, "I'd like to get hold of Judge Hull. I believe he'll still be up at the John Alden Inn."

"All right, Albert," Elvira, the telephone operator, replied.

Albert gulped while Elvira was ringing the inn.

Judge Hull wasn't really a judge. That was just his courtesy title, which everybody had given him in honor of the fact that he was boss of the town.

It was Judge Hull who had called up Constable Souza an hour before and sent him over to the Henry Pairr house, saying "I'm up at the John Alden Inn with Mrs. Henry Pairr. It seems that Henry has shot himself. He's in the dining room. The doctor's on his way over there now. Now, you take charge over there, and I'll be over later. Oh yes, and there's an envelope with a thousand dollars in it on the dining-room table. Take charge of that. I'll be over in a short while, as soon as Mrs. Pairr is a little more herself. Mrs. Green is here helping me with her."

Mrs. Green was the manager of the John Alden Inn.

Constable Souza had been pretty shocked to hear all this, but he hadn't been able to help thinking to himself, "Well, Mrs. Henry Pairr has finally succeeded in driving Henry to it, and she's free to grab off Judge Hull for herself whenever she's ready to."

Everybody in town knew that Mrs. Henry Pairr had an influence over the judge—a thing which she herself would have righteously denied. But in a town the size of Baywater everyone knows you

much better than you can know yourself.

CONSTABLE SOUZA had arrived at the same time as the doctor. He had been unable from the start to find either the money or the gun. After the doctor had left, he had hunted high and low again, but still with no results; except that the idea of anybody in Baywater doing a thing like this was making Souza feel bad, and this was why he gulped while waiting for Elvira to get Judge Hull on the phone.

"Yes?" said Judge Hull.

"There isn't any gun, Judge Hull, and there isn't a sign of any money either, unless somebody took them after she ran out of the house for help. Maybe you could ask her on this again, Judge, just to make sure. Is she sure that she didn't move any gun, and that there was this money?"

"I see. Well, hold the wire a minute, Albert," the judge said.

"I've looked every place," Souza said.

"All right," said Judge Hull.

Albert Souza had only recently been named constable of Baywater by the town selectmen, and this shooting of Henry Pairr at the Henry Pairr house was the first thing to happen since his appointment. It was the first thing that had happened in Baywater since a long time before he was appointed, too, but Souza didn't think about that. What he thought about was, what a terrible thing this was to have happen in the town of Baywater.

When Judge Hull had gotten the selectmen to make Albert constable in place of old retiring Emmett Spearing, he had felt grateful to Judge Hull for the appointment. It was not so much the \$666.66 a year extra that the job of constable paid. It was that with this \$666.66 extra coming in, Albert could now start planning on some serious courting. And he already had a pretty clear idea of whom he wanted to start this serious courting with.

He also suspected that she had a pretty clear idea of it, too.

The judge was back on the wire.

"Henry Pairr had the gun, and the envelope with the money in it, with some blueprints, on the table in front of him when Mrs. Pairr went upstairs for the night. She's quite sure of it," Judge Hull said. "When she heard the shot she ran downstairs, and seeing him down, she just ran down here to the inn for help. I think, Albert, that you had better get hold of the state police."

"Yes, it looks like you're right."

"This one thousand dollars," Judge Hull said, "according to Mrs. Pairr, belonged to Joseph Yser. It was to pay Mr. Pairr to finish the house that Yser's been building. Now, it was brought over to Henry Pairr's at suppertime tonight by Jackie Coombs."

"I see."

"But what you'd better do," Judge Hull instructed him, "is get hold of the state police and meanwhile, so long as they'll be taking over, if anybody wants me for anything they can reach me at my home."

"I hate to think that anybody in Baywater would do a thing like this!" Constable Souza exclaimed.

"Well," said the judge, "it wasn't necessarily anybody in town. You just get hold of the state police." The judge hung up.

FOR a moment the telephone was quiet in Albert's hands.

"Shall I connect to the state police for you?" the operator asked him.

"Not right now, Elvira," Constable Souza thoughtfully told her, and hung up himself. After he hung up, he rang off.

This meant that he spun the handle on the side of the telephone box to let Elvira know that he was through using the phone for the time being. Baywater was just a

small place, and they didn't have dial telephones. They just had Elvira, and at night the part-time janitor. They didn't have a town water supply; everybody had his own individual well, most of them with electric pumps. They hadn't a town sewerage system, either; everybody had his own cesspool. The fire department was all volunteer. For a police force they used to have old Emmett Spearing, and right now they had Albert Souza.

Constable Souza put the phone down, stepped back across the body, went out of the living room, and sat down on a chair in the hall. He sat in the chair for quite a while, feeling low in his mind. He felt low in his mind because now it looked as if somebody in Baywater was a murdering robber, and he didn't feel able to picture it. He felt that he knew everybody in Baywater, and had always known them except for the time he went to Europe with the Army and got promoted to pfc.

Albert finally got up out of the chair and went out of the house, into his car and off.

When he pulled up in front of Jackie Coomb's place, one of the bedrooms in the back was still lighted, and shortly after he knocked the kitchen light went on and Jackie was answering the door.

"Hello, Albert," Jackie said.

Jackie didn't invite Albert in. Before Albert had been named constable, Jackie would have; but as it was Jackie just stood there, in the doorway of his kitchen, his hair all mussed, a topcoat on over his long jeans, his feet bare, a comic magazine held open with the thumb of one hand and the knob of the kitchen door grasped in the other.

"You took a thousand dollars in cash over to Henry Pairr's for Joe Yser tonight?" Albert asked him.

"Yes," Jackie replied. "Why? What's the matter?"

"Somebody shot and killed him with his own gun and took the thousand dollars."

"Good Lord!" Jackie exclaimed. Then he said, "Well, you don't think for a minute that Joe Yser ever did a thing like that, do you?"

"No," said Albert, "I certainly don't."

"He's started fishing now with Manuel O'Neill," Jackie told him. "He didn't even know that tonight we were delivering the money. My brother and I have been saving it up for quite a while, and we bought Joe Yser's boat with it. Step inside will you, Albert, so I can shut the door? My feet are getting chilly."

"All right," said Albert. He was satisfied with Jackie's story. He had known that the Coombs angle would be satisfactorily accounted for.

"Joe just wanted us to pay it straight to Henry Pairr as soon as we had it," Jackie said. "He didn't care to see the money. All that he wanted to see was his receipt. He was in love with that boat of his. But he needs his house finished up."

"Nobody knew that you brought the money over to Henry Pairr, then," Albert said.

"That's right," said Jackie Coombs. He added, "But that thousand dollars will have to be made good on. We have his receipt." And he went into another room for a moment and returned with a piece of paper, which he handed to the constable.

Received of Jackie and Archie Coombs one thousand dollars (\$1,000) for Joe Yser of this town.

Henry Pairr

"If you were going on to Joe Yser's now I'd trust you to deliver it to him," Jackie said.

The two men stood in the kitchen without saying anything for a moment, and then Jackie said, "I'm sorry to hear that Henry Pairr has passed away." His

big toes stuck up in the air as the constable went out to his auto and drove away.

JOE YSER had fixed the unfinished house into a temporary dwelling for his family with tarpaulins from government surplus. There was no door, just a tent flap. Albert knocked on the siding next to where the door would go some day.

When Joe's wife looked out of the tent flap the constable handed her the receipt. She said, "Joe's asleep. He got in from fishing only a little while ago, and they're going off again at half-past three."

"That's Joe's receipt," Constable Souza said, "for the thousand dollars that the Coombs brothers just paid to Henry Pairr to finish up your place here with."

"Oh," she said, and started looking at the piece of paper in the tent flap. "Is there anything wrong? Why didn't Jackie and Archie bring it over?"

Albert went back down the hill to his car. He felt so uncertain what to do that he sat at the wheel for nearly half an hour without even starting up the engine. He could go over and wake Manuel O'Neill, and get confirmation from him as to the hour Yser had come in from fishing. After that, he could go over and tell Judge Hull that nobody could have committed this murder. The only other thing left outside of that was to do as he'd been told and get the state police. They didn't know the people in town as Albert knew them, and wouldn't mind suspecting anybody whose name could possibly be mentioned. Albert looked at his watch, and seeing that it was already after one o'clock in the morning started up the engine.

He parked in the judge's driveway. He had to use Judge Hull's door knocker a number of times before waking up the old man.

Each time he found that the judge hadn't awakened yet Albert swallowed a little. He couldn't help thinking, each time, that he could just as easily not use the judge's door knocker again but turn around, go wake up the night janitor over in the telephone office and get the state police. But each time, although he swallowed, he lifted up his hand again, and knocked on the door again.

The judge, in slippers, pajamas and dressing gown, looked grey. He said in a scratchy voice, "Well, come in, Albert."

Albert stepped into the hallway. He held onto his hat. He said, "I didn't telephone the state police yet."

"Why not?" asked the judge, and sat down in a rocking chair.

Albert shrugged his shoulders. He didn't know why not. He drew a deep breath, and then held onto it as if he was glad of something to hold onto. When he felt himself getting red in the face he let his breath out, saying, "I don't know that I'm cut out to be town constable, Judge Hull."

"Nonsense," said the judge, and got up and went over to his telephone. The telephone was chest high on the front-hall wall, where it had been since the judge was a small boy. The judge spun the handle on the side of the box, and held the receiver up to his ear to see if he had happened to wake the janitor up on the first try.

Then he pressed the telephone hook down again, and spun the handle again. But before he could let the hook up again to see if the janitor had awakened this time, Albert was beside him, holding the telephone hook in place with his own fingers.

"Now, just a minute here, Albert," the judge chided him.

"What I wanted to ask you," said Albert, "was to come with me to talk to Mrs. Pairr first, before calling the state

police in. I'd like to talk to her before calling them."

"I don't see why, Albert," the judge replied. "I talked to her myself quite enough, I think, for just at this particular time."

ALBERT had no reply, though he still held onto the telephone hook.

"Now, if you'll just stand back, Albert," said the judge, still patiently, "I'll use the telephone."

The judge then began trying to get Albert's fingers off the hook. He then put a hand on Albert's chest and tried to push him aside. Succeeding in neither, he asked Albert, "Well, do you want to be constable, or not?" Albert picked the judge up off the floor and carried him away from his telephone to the foot of his own front-hall stairs, and sat him down on the next to the bottom stair, where the judge sat with his jaw hanging, staring at Albert.

"Don't call in the state police yet," Albert said. "I'll be back in a little while, and then we'll call in the state police."

"I hope you liked being town constable," Judge Hull told him.

Albert took a set of handcuffs from a back pocket and handcuffed the judge to the judge's own banister rail.

The judge started trembling then, and he commanded, "You let me loose from here!" He tugged at the banister, but this hurt his wrist. "Have you gone out of your head, Souza?"

"The minute I went out of here you'd send for the state police and I don't want them sent for just yet," explained Albert calmly.

The judge tugged at the banister again, winced, and then started pulling at the handcuffs with his other hand. Albert hung the judge's phone up and left the house.

Albert was perspiring as he fumbled toward the judge's driveway. His fore-

head was in a knot. His hair stood on end. He told himself, "I should have done a better job of convincing him to come with me. Well, good-bye to that \$666.66. The way things are today, marriage is just a luxury anyway, probably." Then he was driving along the way to the John Alden Inn. He still had the badge pinned to his vest, but he knew that his short term as town constable was probably as good as all over.

MRS. GREEN breathed grumpily out of the inn's front door, in response to Constable Souza's ring. She was all done up for the night, and looked as if she would have resented being disturbed at such an hour, except for the fact that here was another first-hand experience that could prove useful in conversational victories later.

"Well," she said. "Now what's up, Constable Souza?"

"I'd like to speak to Mrs. Henry Pairr for a few minutes, if you don't mind," he told her.

"Well," said Mrs. Green, "it must be something important, to wake people up in the middle of the night about it. Not that I've gotten any sleep yet. She's still awake, and I just a short while ago managed to get her to take a plain cup of tea."

"Upstairs?" said Souza. He followed Mrs. Green toward the second floor.

"Rear," said Mrs. Green. "She told me," the innkeeper went on in a loud whisper, "that Henry Pairr had been playing around with Mrs. Joseph Yser, if you get the drift, and that one of the Coombs fellows has also been sweet on Mrs. Yser, if you get what she means."

"I wouldn't put any stock in any of that," said Souza.

"Oh, you don't think so?" asked Mrs. Green.

"No," said Souza. "Is this her door?"

Mrs. Pairr opened it for them a mo-

ment after Mrs. Green's knock. She had not been sleeping, but just lying fully dressed on the bed, with the light on and a comforter over her. She had obviously been very pretty when she was younger. With her severe, thin lips she invited them in.

"What I wanted to ask was, just how it did happen over there tonight," Constable Souza said, as Mrs. Pairr seated herself weakly on the bedside.

"I believe I already told all about that to Judge Hull," she replied.

"Well, when you last saw him, he had an envelope with a thousand dollars in it, and a gun, on the table in front of him?"

"Yes. That is, before he was . . . shot. I guess now that I didn't really see them, afterwards."

"Why did he have the gun there?"

"I don't know. I suppose because of the thousand dollars."

"What happened?"

"I was upstairs and had decided to prepare for bed. I heard the shot, and then I ran downstairs. I was quite frightened, and I ran over here for help. Mrs. Green telephoned for Judge Hull and the doctor."

"The gun and the money were gone when you came down?"

"Yes, I recall that they were."

While showing Constable Souza back downstairs to the inn's front door, Mrs. Green told him, "Watch your step, young man."

"Well," said Constable Souza, "if she thought that he had shot himself, why didn't she phone for a doctor right there? If she thought that a robber had shot him, why did she run outside, where the robber had gone. She acted like she was more afraid of the body than of a robber, and like she was more afraid of the body than she was sorry for it, too. Also, why would he keep the gun and the money right there in front of him like that?"

"Albert, watch your step," repeated Mrs. Green as she left him out the door.

Constable Souza went to his own house to get the spade.

HE BEGAN digging with it in the late Henry Pairr's side yard just at daybreak, and he had gotten down to the hardwood planks before sunrise.

Just at sunrise old Emmett Spearing came around the corner of the house, and Emmett had on his old town constable badge. He had a state trooper with him, with violet and grey riding breeches on. The trooper had a revolver held up before him like a lollipop, with a stick up its barrel. As soon as Emmett and the state policeman saw Albert digging they came over and started to watch him. They didn't say anything.

By this time Albert's spade was sliding along the length of the hardwood. When he had the soil all cleared off of the first three of the planks he slowly straightened his back.

"Well, Albert," old Emmett Spearing began, "the judge finally managed to kick the banister loose enough from his staircase to reach the telephone and call me."

"I can see that he must have," Albert replied, laying the spade to one side and wiping his forehead in the early slanting sunlight.

"I still had an extra handcuff key, in back of my parlor clock. So I was able to set him loose," said Emmett. "And I calmed him sufficiently so that he agreed to go back to bed. However, I believe that if I was you, Albert, I would have left town by now."

Albert moved his feet out of the way, bent over and lifted a hardwood plank-end up out of the hole. He then walked around and lifted the plank out altogether by its other end. He did the same with the other planks that he had uncovered. He said, "I guessed that I would stick around at least until the selectmen could

hold a meeting about me," and stood resting for a moment.

Old Emmett was sweating a little bit now too, although he hadn't done any of the digging or lifting. He said to Albert, "Just exactly what do you believe yourself to be up to?"

Albert stepped down a little into the hole that he had dug, and bent over and examined the interior of the cesspool. Then he beckoned, past old Emmett, to the state policeman.

"Step down here and take a look for a minute, Officer," he said to the trooper. "There's something here that I want you to see."

The trooper handed the stick with the revolver on it to Emmett to hold, and stepped down. He bent over.

"By gosh, I believe you're right!" the trooper exclaimed in a minute.

Souza said to the trooper, "You better have Emmett there fish all of that evidence out of that cesspool that he can, officer. I hereby deputize him for the job. In case anybody wants me, I'll be up at the John Alden Inn. I'd rather that he didn't use my spade."

"Maybe you'd better get a stick or something," said the trooper to Emmett.

* * *

By the time Judge Hull awoke to Mrs. Green's astonishing telephone message from Constable Souza, dressed himself and got to the John Alden Inn, Mrs. Henry Pairr was seated at the writing desk in her inn room with Albert Souza standing by. A sheet of paper was before Mrs. Henry Pairr and a pen was in her trembling hand. Mrs. Green was in the doorway so interested in what was going on inside the room that Judge Hull had to tap her on the back several times before she turned and noticed him.

"Well, then, so long as everything down there is true, you might as well sign," Albert said to Mrs. Pairr. He

turned and saw Judge Hull, and Judge Hull's corrugated forehead. "Good-morning, Judge Hull," he said.

Mrs. Pairr didn't turn. She put the pen to the paper and wrote her name. Then she arose from the writing desk and went over and sat on the side of the bed again. She pulled a corner of the comforter across her lap and looked at no one.

Albert took the pen up and signed the paper. Then he stepped to one side. The judge went over to the writing desk and looked at the paper.

I killed Henry Pairr. I brought his revolver down from upstairs. I don't know why I did this. I tore the envelope and the money up and put the pieces down the water closet. I did this to show that somebody else had done it and taken the money. I am willing for any of the \$1,000 that cannot be recovered from the cesspool, to be paid back to Joseph Yser from my late husband's estate. I threw the gun away while running to the inn.

Helen Pairr

Witness:

Albert Souza, Town Constable

The judge sat at the writing desk, and just beneath Constable Souza's name he signed his own name.

"I'll use a telephone downstairs to call over the state trooper from the Pairr house," Albert said. His face was stolid as he made his way out of the room.

IT WAS a funny thing to realize that Mrs. Henry Pairr didn't know why she had done what she did. Neither had the dead man known why, and never would Judge Hull. Everyone else in town would know that Mrs. Pairr had killed her husband the minute she saw a chance to do it and blame it on someone else, and that she had done it in order to get her husband out of the way and have clear sailing for herself with no less a personage than Judge Hull. For in places like Baywater, people always know you

better than you could ever know yourself.

Constable Souza felt that he was cut out to be the town constable of Baywater. It wasn't the \$666.66 extra that being town constable was going to mean, or the serious courting that he planned starting on very shortly, either.

It was, as he went downstairs to a telephone, that he felt real sorry for Mrs.



"I killed Henry Pair . . ." she confessed.

Henry Pairr, who would never have any opportunity now to learn that if you really want a thing you must be quite ready to give it up for something that is greater. Constable Souza was unable to say so in so many words just what that greater thing was. But he knew that it was there.

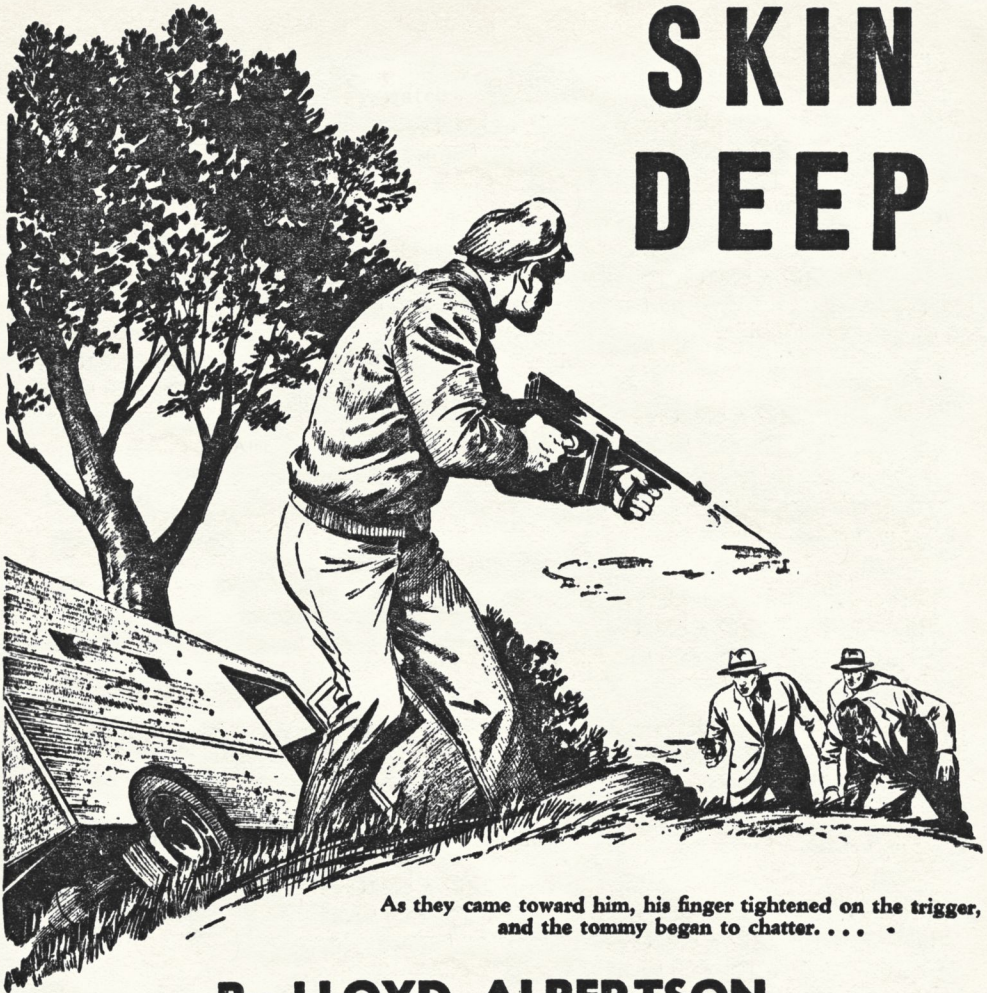
So when the telephone operator answered, Constable Souza said to her, "Are you going to be very busy when you get off duty this evening, Elvira?"

"Gosh," replied Elvira, "I don't know. Why do you ask, Albert?" She sounded as if she was surprised and needed to think it over for a while first.

"You'd better just connect me over to the Henry Pairr house," Constable Souza said.

"I'm not going to be so very busy," Elvira said.

SKIN DEEP



As they came toward him, his finger tightened on the trigger, and the tommy began to chatter. . . .

By LLOYD ALBERTSON

They gave Rocky Hardin a new face and got him an honest job. But how do you root out the larceny from a man's heart?

VERY carefully the nurse began to remove the last bandage. Ricky Hardin kept his dark eyes on her face. In another minute, at most, he'd find out whether all the pain he had endured the past few days and nights after the operation had been worth it.

If a reputable plastic surgeon had done the job there wouldn't be so much doubt. But Standish, of course, wasn't reputable.

Then the last bandage came away, and

the girl stared down at his face. After a moment her inscrutable expression changed and she glanced instinctively at the short baldish man beside her.

"Doctor—Doctor Standish!" she said breathlessly, "it's simply remarkable! He doesn't look at all the same!"

Standish studied Ricky's face from several angles before he smiled slowly. "Yes, a very good reaction," he agreed. "A very, very good reaction. One that my—

er—more reputable colleagues would find quite interesting. . . . Perhaps if you'd give him a mirror he'd like to see himself."

As she went to get it the other man in the room, Pete Erskine, came closer. He blinked. "Gee," he muttered. "I seen everything now."

Ricky Hardin felt a surge of relief. If their words meant anything the operation was a success. But exactly how had his appearance been changed, he wondered, waiting until the girl returned with the mirror.

He had never seen the face that was reflected in the glass before. Maybe his thick black hair and dark eyes were the same. But everything else was different. The scowl that had pulled his brows down was gone, and now the expression about his eyes was frank and pleasant. His nose was no longer flattened. The harsh, bitter lines had disappeared from around his mouth. It wasn't a handsome face, maybe—it was too rugged for that—but even the week's growth of beard couldn't hide the fact that it was a likable one.

And more important, Ricky thought with satisfaction, it was so utterly different that never would he be recognized as being part of that Fairfield bank job.

"Well, what do you think of it, Ricky?" Standish asked.

Ricky questioned him with his eyes.

Standish nodded. "It's all right to talk now. Go ahead."

Ricky smiled slowly. Experimentally. There wasn't any pain. That had been the worst part. Because of the cuts around his mouth, he had been ordered not to move his lips. He had even had to drink through a straw.

"Fine," he said stiffly. "If the movies ever see me, Clark Gable will have to move over."

They all laughed.

"Yeah, Doc, you did a bang-up job," Pete Erskine said then. He pulled an envelope from his pocket, hesitated, tap-

ping it on his fingers. "You're through with him now, ain't you?"

"All through. I won't need to see him again."

"Maybe it'd be a good idea if you was to forget you ever saw him. Anyway"—Pete held out the envelope to him—"the boss told me to say he thought so when he told me to give you this."

Standish's smile had a faintly wry, bitter tinge. "Tell him I have a very bad memory for faces."

Pete Erskine grinned broadly. "Well, that's that, then. We might as well shove along, Ricky."

Ricky stood up. He started to follow Pete Erskine to the door, then paused.

"I—I sure appreciate it, Doc," he said awkwardly. "I—well, thanks."

"Glad to help," Standish said, smiling. "And, Ricky, it's all right to shave now and give the public a chance to really see your new face."

THEY had just gotten out of the car in front of the hotel when Pete Erskine noticed it for the first time. A girl passing by glanced at Ricky, casually, and then with undisguised interest.

"Say," Pete said, "did you see the way that red-headed babe looked at you?"

Ricky shook his head.

"Boy, she really liked what she saw. That new pan of yours has sure got something."

"Nuts!" Ricky muttered.

But it was nice to know. No girl passing by would ever have turned and looked at him the second time a week ago. Suddenly he felt wonderful.

"Let's get on up and see Big Ed Fowler and not keep him waiting," he said harshly to cover up. . . .

Big Ed Fowler looked at Ricky and chuckled again. He actually hadn't known him when he'd first come into the hotel room with Pete, and recognized him only after he'd spoken.

He was sitting at a small desk with wide windows behind him and a panorama of the city spread out far below. He was a big man, with massive shoulders and an unlined but powerful face. And still hard looking in spite of a hint of middle-age flabbiness that expensive tailoring couldn't quite hide.

"Ain't it perfect?" Pete Erskine asked eagerly. "That dizzy dame that grabbed the handkerchief off his face during the Fairfield bank job never will be able to identify him now, huh?"

"Not hardly." Big Ed Fowler shook his head. "But I never expected anything like this when I told you to take him to Standish."

He leaned back and chuckled again. "Well, the cops still have their eye-witness, but what good is she to them now?"

They all laughed with him.

The amusement drained out of Fowler's eyes abruptly. He leaned forward, suddenly businesslike.

"I wanted to see you about this job we've got coming up, Ricky," he said. "This Maxwell Construction Company thing. You know about it?"

"A payroll stickup, Pete said," Ricky answered.

"Yeah. We want to knock over that one at the end of the month—about ten days from now."

Ricky thought back over what he'd been told. Maxwell Construction was located about fifteen miles out of the city down the Ship Channel and it had several hundred employees. It had been giving a lot of overtime recently, working on a government contract on the rearmament program or something. So the payroll should run about two hundred thousand dollars.

Big Ed asked abruptly, "Can you drive a truck?"

"I drove one in the Army for a little while."

"That's good enough. This Maxwell outfit's advertising for truck drivers. I

want you to go out there and answer their ad."

Ricky hesitated. "I don't have any references, Ed. I doubt if they'd hire me." No use going into details, he thought, and then decided to lay it on the line. "I never used to have much luck in landing a job. They didn't seem to like my looks or something. I'm just telling you the way it is. I'll go if you want me to."

"Okay. If you can't get on you can't. But go try and see." Fowler leaned back in his chair. "We've cased the place pretty good—Louie Gates has been out and Al Malone is there now—and we know the setup. But I'd like to have somebody out there to keep in touch in case of any last-minute changes. This truck driver job could be the break we need."

"I'll try," Ricky said.

PERKINS, the personnel director, looked across the desk at him.

"And you haven't any references, Mr. Hardin?"

Ricky shook his head. "Afraid not. Like I said, I'm a stranger here. And all the truck driving I've done was in the Army."

"I see."

He shuffled some papers on his desk. Ricky felt a wry amusement. It was going to be the same old story. A turn down. It didn't matter a lot this time, except that he wouldn't be on the spot for Big Ed. Watching Perkins frown and hesitate, Ricky suddenly felt a touch of the old bitterness.

Perkins said slowly, "It's very irregular, but—uh—I'm going to take a chance on you, Mr. Hardin."

"You mean I get the job?" Ricky asked uncertainly.

"That's right." Perkins smiled at his surprise. He picked up a printed form from the desk. "Just give this to my secretary in the outer office and let her have the information she'll need to fill it in, and then report to Masters down in

Transportation." He stood up and held out his hand. "And we're very glad to have you with us."

"Uh—thanks," Ricky said. "Thanks."

Something must have broken the jinx, he thought as he closed the door and approached the girl behind the secretary's desk.

"You're filling that truck driver's job, aren't you?" she asked when he handed her the form. "Now if you'll just let me have your full name, address and phone number . . ."

Ricky gave her the answer and watched her write them down. Her name, according to the little sign on the desk, was Miss Lockwood. Not a beautiful girl, maybe, he thought absently, but pretty. Brown hair and eyes. And a complexion that could have gotten her a job any time as a model in an Ivory Soap advertisement. Also, he noticed as she glanced up at him, a manner that was a lot more interested and far from impersonal than undoubtedly was required of her by Maxwell Construction Company. . . .

It was just as friendly later that afternoon when he swung aboard the crowded bus at quitting time and found the seat beside her was vacant. She nodded and smiled as he stood there in the aisle, hesitating, and he sat down.

"Well, how did it go?" she asked. "Think you'll like working for Maxwell Construction?"

In spite of himself, Ricky felt a little pleased that she remembered him.

"It was pretty good. Only that guy Masters is quite a character. Seems he was a motor sergeant in the Army, and he acts like he was never demobilized." He hesitated. "I guess I'm pretty lucky to be working for him, at that."

"Yes, you really are," she said. "It's very unusual to be hired the way you were. But of course," she added, "it's easy to see why Mr. Perkins decided to take a chance on you."

So that was it. Ricky felt a surge of sardonic mirth. It was this new face of his. Somehow the plastic surgery had not only changed his appearance; it had given him a face that even total strangers found likable and dependable. Ricky wondered sardonically what the girl would think if she knew exactly why he had taken the job at Maxwell Construction.

Then something Pete Erskine had said that morning about the passing redhead occurred to him, and he had an impulse to experiment a little.

"You working for Mr. Perkins long?" he began tentatively.

"I've been his secretary for over a year now. But I've been with the company almost five years—since I was eighteen. Got on during the war and stayed."

"Oh. So this is your home town?"

"No. I share an apartment with another girl."

"Seems like a nice place," Ricky said. And then: "I'm a complete stranger here myself, so I wondered . . ." He was about to ask if she wouldn't like to go to a night club, then hastily remembered that would hardly be in line for a guy supposed to be a truck driver. "I mean, I wondered if maybe we could go to a movie tonight—or—anywhere else you wanted."

"Why . . ." Her brown eyes studied him a moment. "Why, yes, I'd like to."

Ricky almost blinked. She'd said yes.

He said hastily, "Fine. I've got a car, and I'll call for you. Eight about right?" And when she nodded: "That sign on your desk said Miss Lockwood, but I guess I don't know your first name."

She laughed, maybe, Ricky thought, at the idea that she would give anyone a date who didn't even know her name.

"It's Mary," she said.

WHEN he got off the bus at the corner nearest the small hotel where he'd rented a room, he stood there for a moment watching it pull away, musing that

Pete Erskine had certainly called the turn. Then a drugstore's neon sign across the street attracted his attention and he remembered he hadn't yet reported back to Big Ed Fowler. He went over and found a phone booth.

Big Ed himself answered.

"Ricky," he told him. "Ed, I landed that truck driver job."

"Yeah?" Fowler sounded pleased. "That's fine. Have any trouble?"

"No trouble at all. It seems they just liked my looks."

Big Ed's chuckle came back over the wire. "No fooling! Looks like that new pan of yours has something. I'll have to remember that for future reference." Then with characteristic abruptness his tone became all business. "Okay, boy. You know what to do. Just keep your eyes and ears open out there. And better not call here again. We'll all get together the night before we pull the job and go over things. See you then."

"Okay," Ricky said. Fowler, as usual, was playing it careful. "But Ed, listen, the night before pay day the company's having a big dinner and dance down at Sylvan Beach. Kind of a celebration they have every year, and all the employees are expected to be there. So maybe I better—"

"Sure, be there," Fowler agreed crisply. "Celebration, eh?" he asked then, and began to chuckle. "Good thing they picked the night before to do it instead of afterwards, huh?"

"Yeah," Ricky said, "considering."

* * *

The orchestra was playing a waltz, slow and muted, and Mary Lockwood relaxed a little in his arms, and Ricky was content to be carried along on the flowing melody until the last note faded and was lost in a patter of applause.

Mary dropped her arms and smiled.

"I told you this would be something special," she said, "not just the usual outing most companies give their employees. Maxwell Construction does things in a big way."

"Uh-huh," Ricky said lightly.

But she was right. It wasn't a name band they were dancing to, but it was better than a lot he'd heard in night clubs. And the big bay shore pavilion was cool with a little gulf breeze drifting in, and had a dance floor large enough to accommodate the crowd.

Then Masters and a blonde girl who worked as a switchboard operator came by and stopped and spoke to them for a while.

"Mary, how about this one?" Masters asked as the orchestra went into another number, and not waiting for her reply, swung her out onto the dance floor. Over his shoulder he asked, "Ricky, you know Dot Ingram, don't you?"

Ricky watched them disappear in the crowd and said, "I guess that introduces us." He faced her. "Dance?"

She nodded quickly and slipped into his arms. As they started to dance, she glanced up at him and then lowered her lashes. Ricky got it then. Dancing with Mary hadn't been altogether Masters' idea. He felt a touch of sardonic mirth; even after a week it amused him the way they fell for his reconstructed face.

Dot Ingram said, "You haven't been with Maxwell Construction very long, have you, Mr. Hardin?"

"Just a few days," he said. "And you might call me Ricky. After all, could be we'd get a lot better acquainted."

"You're nice," she murmured, glancing up briefly. "But everybody knows that Mary Lockwood is your girl."

Ricky stared. "Hey, isn't that rushing things a little? Just because she happens to be the first girl I met here and I've dated her two or three times is no reason—"

"Oh, I don't blame you," she interposed. "A guy would sure be a sap if he didn't go for her if she'd let him. Mary's swell. . . . Oh, gosh!" she muttered, staring over his shoulder, "here comes that jerk Hubert Waters to cut in."

Ricky released her and drifted over to the stag line. For a little while he stood there idly watching the crowd, Masters was still dancing with Mary, and Ricky smiled at the effortless way she adapted her steps to his.

"Your name is Hardin, isn't it?" someone beside him asked abruptly.

RICKY glanced around. The man was chunky, with grey hair and shrewd eyes. Probably one of the company's big brass, he thought instinctively.

"Yes, sir," he said.

"Drive a truck in Transportation?"

Ricky nodded.

The other gestured negligently with the cigar he was holding towards the crowd on the floor. "Not a bad party we're having tonight, eh?"

The music ended with a little crash a moment later and couples came streaming off the floor for a short intermission. Mary and Masters came over and joined him.

"Want to walk out on the pier?" he asked her after Masters had given him a grin and departed.

Mary nodded. There was a question in her brown eyes. But she was silent until they had gone some distance out on the boardwalk and had found an isolated spot. She leaned on the rail and looked at him in the dusk.

"What was Mr. Maxwell talking to you about?"

"Maxwell?" Ricky blinked. "Was that the big boss?"

"Old W. H. himself. What did he say?"

"Nothing. Just asked if my name was Hardin, and remarked that I was a truck driver in Transportation."

Mary began to smile. "Oh—oh," she said very softly.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Congratulations. You're due to be promoted. And don't tell me I'm wrong," she added. "Because that's just the way it happened to me. I was only a stenographer in the typist pool, and then one day he stopped me in the hall and asked if I wasn't Miss Lockwood. The next week I became Mr. Perkins' private secretary. So . . ." She gestured expansively.

"Heck, you're just imagining things," Ricky said.

"All right. But you just wait and see."

Ricky stared at her. Less than five minutes ago he had been told that Mary was his girl. Now he was being told that the big boss had his eye on him for promotion. Matter-of-factly, even casually, he was being shown the way this new life of his was headed—towards marriage with a nice girl and working at a nice steady job.

He wanted to laugh. Talk about being taken at face value!

He looked at Mary again. She was leaning against the rail, the high-riding moon back-lighting her brown hair, and it struck him then how lovely she was. Being married to her would certainly be no hardship. As for the rest . . . Sure, he had to admit, it had been fun being a truck driver this past week, and doing it well enough to attract the boss' attention. But the idea that he would do it as a permanent thing—that really was a laugh.

He shrugged and grinned. "That I will have to see," he said.

"You will. You've just got an inferiority complex." Mary smiled at him. "Which is one of the things I kind of like about you. Come on, let's go back in, shall we? They've started dancing again."

Her smile gave him a swift, pleasant tingle. The music came faintly to them, but Ricky recognized the lilting refrain, and knew that the orchestra was playing

Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered.

THE RAIN had stopped, but the clouds still hung low and heavy as if it might start again any time. Ricky stared moodily through the truck's windshield at the dark wet asphalt and reflected that they certainly weren't getting much of a break on the weather for the job. The getaway car would need plenty of luck on these slippery pavements.

He was returning to the plant from a trip downtown; at the next intersection he turned right off the boulevard into the highway that wound for a dozen miles along the Ship Channel. His hands were gripping the wheel a little too tightly, he noticed. Even though it was still barely mid-morning, he was already beginning to be jumpy and tense. And to be more and more aware of another feeling, vague and indefinite, that seemed to have been building up ever since last night at the meeting in Big Ed Fowler's hotel room.

They had all been there—Pete Erskine, Al Malone and Louie Gates—listening while Big Ed went over the plans and last minute instructions.

It was simple enough. The payroll money, about two hundred thousand, would be delivered from the bank about mid-morning by armored truck to the Maxwell Construction office, where clerks in Finance would put it in envelopes to be ready to be paid out right after one o'clock. During the noon hour it would remain in the office, guarded by two men with shotguns. That was when the stick-up was to take place.

"The only bad thing," Fowler finished, "is that the getaway has to be made down that narrow road for a quarter of a mile and over the bridge. But maybe we can turn that to our advantage. Ricky, do you suppose you could be coming back from a trip somewhere and happen along there in your truck just as we make the getaway?"

Ricky nodded. "Yeah, I think so."

"Okay. Time it as close as you can. And when you're driving in, try to hog the road so as to block any cars that may be chasing us."

Ricky nodded again. Glancing around, he had an odd feeling of unreality—as if he were watching a scene in B gangster movie. Maybe it was only the contrast to the dance he'd left less than an hour before. Or maybe because he hadn't seen any of these men for a while. He really noticed for the first time how gross and flabby Big Ed Fowler was, and how ratlike Louie Gates' sharp features were. And several times he imagined he saw Louie and Al Malone looking at him with something like suspicion.

"Ed," he asked, "you still want me to stay on and work there at the company for a while afterwards?"

"You've got to or they may get suspicious, and we can't have that. I want this to be another job without any rough edges that the cops can get a hold on." Fowler spread his hands. "Oh, after two-three weeks when the heat has died down you can say your feet are itching and you want to move along or something."

THINKING of that now, Ricky realized all at once the cause of the vague feeling disturbing him. It was because he wouldn't be here much longer. That soon there would be no more dates with Mary.

He shrugged impatiently. What was the matter with him, anyway? So maybe he had had fun here. And probably he'd miss Mary for a while. His cut of that two-hundred-thousand-dollar payroll ought to be quite sufficient consolation.

He was well beyond the city's outskirts now. The highway was still wet, and almost deserted. Only an occasional car or truck passed by from the docks down the channel. Glancing in his rear-view mirror, he saw a familiar-looking black sedan coming up behind him. As it swung

out and started to pass, he saw he was right. Al Malone was behind the wheel. Louie was beside him and Pete and Big Ed Fowler were in the back seat. They grinned, and Ricky lifted a hand briefly from the wheel to wave. Then the sedan pulled ahead. On their way out to Maxwell Construction to get set for the stick-up he thought, watching it disappear around a curve.

A minute later another image grew large in his rear-view mirror. Even before it came up to pass he recognized it—an armored truck. The one taking the payroll money out to Maxwell Construction, undoubtedly. And a little late, to judge from the speed at which it shot past him. Watching it, Ricky had an odd feeling as if he were watching a movie approaching its climax.

And then abruptly it really did become like a scene in a movie. The big armored truck was about halfway around a long curve and traveling fast, too fast. Suddenly it began to skid. Spray flew in little jets from the tires. For several seconds the heavy truck hurtled along the slippery pavement while the driver fought desperately for control. Then the back wheels slid over onto the soft muddy shoulder of the road. Swinging broadside, the truck tilted, then fell over on its side with a crash and a grinding screech of metal on asphalt. Its doors burst open. Two money bags fell out, one ripping open and spilling its contents on the wet pavement.

Ricky could only watch, his heart pounding. Automatically he slowed his own truck and stopped a couple of hundred feet away. Then he was out of the cab and running towards the wreck.

As he reached it, a man wearing a guard's blue-grey uniform emerged from the door. He looked dazed; blood ran down one cheek, but he was clutching a Tommy gun.

"Are you all right?" Ricky asked.

"How about the other men with you?"

"Dead, I guess—or that's what they looked like." He got the words out with difficulty. "I told that damn fool he was driving too fast, but he wouldn't listen." His glance fell on the spilling money sacks and he stooped and began tugging at them. He winced and staggered.

"Take it easy," Ricky said quickly. "You're hurt. Better let me take you—"

"Can't. Got to protect— Got the big Maxwell Construction payroll—got to protect it. Might notify the cops and tell the company—"

Ricky glanced up and down the highway. A black sedan was coming towards them. Big Ed Fowler and the others, he realized abruptly. They probably had heard the crash of the wreck and were coming back to investigate.

The car braked to a skidding stop and the four men jumped out. Fowler and Al Malone had guns in their hands; Louie Gates was pulling out a Tommy gun.

"Hey, how's this for a break?" Al Malone asked. "Handed to us on a silver platter! And nobody's ever been able to knock off an armored truck, huh?"

"Yeah, but just take a look at who's with it," Louie Gates said bitterly. "Didn't I tell you about the guy? Didn't I—"

"Never mind that now!" Fowler snapped. "We'll settle that afterwards. Come on, let's go get it before the whole damn town gets here!"

The guard raised his Tommy gun. "Stay back, you!" he shouted. "Don't come any closer or I'll—"

HE NEVER had a chance to finish. Fowler's .45 Colt roared, and the others began to fire. Bullets rattled against the sides of the armored truck. Ricky felt a sudden red hot pain in his shoulder, and crouched lower. He saw the guard stagger, then level the Tommy gun and fire a burst.

It stopped the rush. Pete Erskine stum-

bled and fell face down on the pavement. The other three turned and ran back to the sedan, crowding behind it for protection.

The guard muttered thickly, "Didn't want to do it, but got to protect—" He slumped against the side of the truck. "Hell, it's getting dark out here. Can't see— Here, how about taking this and keeping everybody away till the cops come? They'll reward—"

He thrust the tommy gun blindly at Ricky as he fell.

Ricky took it automatically. Crouching there, he could feel his heart pounding. None of this made sense. But Big Ed Fowler and the others trying to shoot him was no accident.

Louie Gates' shrill, hysterical voice came clearly to him then.

"Didn't I tell you about the guy? Didn't I tail him to make sure? Ever since that plastic surgery job on his pan he's been changed. He's fallen for some dame, too. Didn't I tell you we ought to rub him? And you kept saying to wait!"

Fowler's rumble cut him short.

There was silence then for a long moment. Then abruptly guns began to crack and bullets drummed against the sides of the armored truck. This was it, Ricky told himself, watching the three start their rush. He lifted the guard's tommy gun, ignoring the pain in his shoulder. He tried to remember his Army instructions about it. Aim low because it would climb. As they came toward him, his finger tightened on the trigger, and the tommy began to chatter. . . .

WHEN the nurse in Surgery finished with the bandage, the doctor said, "That's all for now. But come back tomorrow." He turned to Masters, who had scowlingly watched the wound being dressed. "See that he does and that he takes it easy for a while."

"Sure," Masters said. "After what he just did, we can't afford to lose him. It'll be all right to take him out to the company for a minute, won't it? The boss wants to see him—and so does a party in Personnel."

Ricky heard them through a sort of hazy detachment. He was still shaken by the grimly ironic ending of the scene out there on the highway.

Through the confusion, though, some things were becoming plain. He could understand why Fowler and the others had thought he intended double-crossing them. Any of them, in his place out there, would have slugged the guard. But he had acted as any ordinary honest guy would have. Maybe Louie Gates had had a little something in his bitter charge that the plastic surgery had changed him. If so, it was a grim joke on Big Ed Fowler. Nearer the truth, probably, was that his face harsh and scowling before, had fooled everybody about him, and himself most of all.

He didn't know. All he was sure of now was that everyone who could connect his face with his past was gone, and that his future, offering a better chance, stretched brightly ahead.

"Before you leave, Mr. Hardin," the nurse said, "that armored truck guard would like to see you. He's in a room down at the end of the hall."

Ricky nodded, and he and Masters walked down there. The guard looked up weakly from his pillow.

"Just wanted to thank you," he said.

"That's okay." Ricky felt uncomfortable. He hesitated. "Look," he asked, "how come you asked me to help out there when for all you knew I might have been with those other fellows?"

The guard grinned weakly as if he'd said something funny.

"Hell, guy," he said, "anybody can just look at you and see you're not a crook."

YOU CAN'T GET AWAY WITH MURDER!

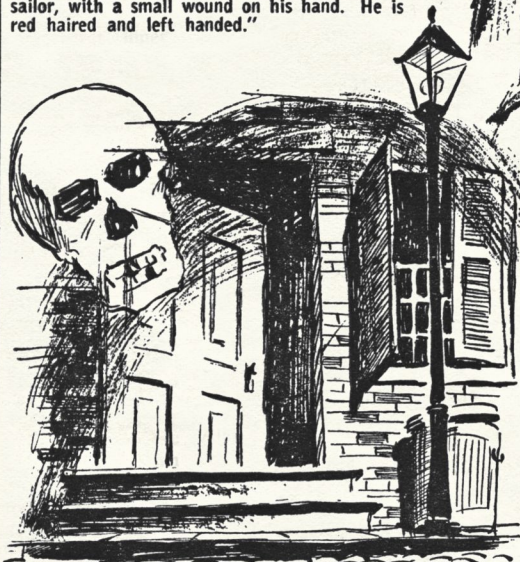


By NELSON and GEER

CASE OF THE RED-HEADED SAILOR

Marie Pallot was an enigma to her suburban neighbors in Havre, France. A pretty blonde, living alone without visible means of support, she kept her door and her mouth shut tight. Gossip had it that she was mixed up in smuggling, and kept large sums of money in the house. One morning a gendarme noticed the door open. Investigation revealed it had been forced. Inside he found Mlle. Pallot seated in her back parlor, a bottle and glass beside her, and her head bashed in. The house had been ransacked. "Burglars!" detectives surmised, after listening to neighborhood rumor, and sent out a pickup for known housebreakers.

But a visiting criminologist, examining the door, noticed a protruding splinter stained with blood. Scrutiny of the entrance hall disclosed dribbles of wax on the floor, and persevering search yielded two short hairs. When he received a report on the wax from the police laboratory, he announced: "The murderer of Mlle. Pallot is a Sicilian, probably a sailor, with a small wound on his hand. He is red haired and left handed."

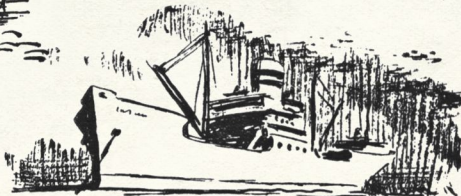


"And how do you know this, monsieur?" he was asked.

"Analysis shows the wax to be from a brand of candles made only in Sicily, and how would it be brought here more naturally than by a Sicilian sailor? In forcing entry he gashed his hand on a splinter. Once inside, he lit a candle, holding it in his right hand as the drippings on the floor indicate, and his weapon—doubtless a pinchbar—in his better hand, the left. On the floor, also, I found two short red hairs, obviously not the dead woman's, and there you have the picture."

Among the crew of a freighter just in from Sicily was a red-haired sailor with a gashed

hand, and the stub of the candle in his pocket. Confronted with the evidence, he lit a cigarette nervously with his left hand and confessed he'd taken this means of grabbing ALL the profits of their smuggling activities. Science and common sense, plus the sharp bite of the guillotine, cut short his enjoyment of them.



THREE STRIKES and

By **WILLIAM HOLDER**

Pitcher Joe Lundy had never faced such a team as this—a whole police force—with the bases loaded with corpses, and 10,000 volts waiting at home plate!



Thrilling

Homicide Novelette

DEAD!



Joe raised the gun slightly in his pocket. "Pal," he said, "I'm going in that back room. . . ."

CHAPTER ONE

Out of the Frying Pan . . .

JOE LUNDY stood before the desk, anger rising in him steadily and coldly. He said, "The hell with that. You're not sending me back to King City. I just come from there."

Mike Redding's eyes were steady, his voice patient. "You spent a year there. Last year. The club figures you need another year of minor-league

ball. Be sensible, kid. Hell, you've got plenty of time."

Joe spoke through the bitterness, the disappointment. "But not King City. Minneapolis, okay. Fort Worth, okay. Anywhere else. No King City."

The manager of the Cats got up from the desk and walked to a window. "It's business, kid. King City is your home town. You draw there like a good chimney. Hell, every time you pitch the park is filled. The club can't afford to waste a draw like you on some other team."

Joe remembered the demonstration when he'd left King City, a few months ago, for the Cats' spring-training camp. Banners across the street, a big band in the parade to the station. And then the station packed with fans and a speech by the mayor.

Go back there now? He couldn't go back. They'd laugh him out of town. Worse, they might be sorry for him. He said desperately, "I'm not doing bad here," although he knew it wasn't true. He'd won his first game, had been yanked out of three others. Shelled out. There was a little something missing.

Redding said, "Be a little smart. Another year up there, with Rocky working on you, and you'll be ready. Hell, we're counting on you for next year. You're a cinch for next year."

The door to the office opened then, and Harris, the club secretary, walked in. He was a large young man given to flesh. His manner was loud. Lundy hadn't liked him from the moment he saw him.

Harris boomed, "Well! Just the boy I wanted to see." He had an envelope in his hand, and now he threw it on the desk in front of Lundy. "Train tickets back to King City." He laughed loudly. "Hope you didn't think you'd have to pay your own fare, Lundy. We always keep return tickets ready for bushers. Some of them just can't find their way back alone." He enjoyed the joke enormously.

LUNDY looked at him in wonder and disgust, surprised that this man could take pleasure from his misery. He shook his head, refusing to accept the picture his mind showed him of a return to King City. "Give 'em to somebody else. The hell with the whole deal." He turned to the door.

Harris caught his arm. "Here, now, Lundy. You can't act like that. Take the tickets like a good little man." He was smiling, satisfied with his humor.

Lundy looked at him. "You know what you can do with your tickets, Harris."

The smile went off the man's face. He said, "So. A busher and a fresh busher. A punk busher. Why, do you know that I can fix your wagon so that you never see this town again? I'll ship you so far out—"

Lundy didn't think. He just hit him. A fine, swinging shot that plastered him up against a wall.

Harris stared at him in disbelief, his mouth cut. He raised a hand to his lips and said, "Another little thing, Lundy. Assault. I don't take that from anyone. You're on your way to jail right now."

So Lundy walked up to him and really pasted him. Harris slid down the wall, out cold.

Redding said, "Kid, wait a minute! This guy—"

Lundy didn't hear the rest. He was out of the office, moving fast down the ramp, taking one last look at the huge stadium he had come to love.

The street outside was almost deserted, and he was lucky to get the cab. He got in, closed the door, leaned back. He was in a fine pickle now. He knew Harris would have the cops after him. He had maybe fifty dollars in his pocket and no idea of where he was going.

The driver turned, looked at him for a ment, then said, "So?"

He looked at the man, a round, kindly face. Where was he going? Where was

there to go? How did you escape from this kind of a mess? He said, "The Hotel Gorton, on 43rd," and the man nodded, put the cab in gear. He might as well get his clothes, pack his bags. What happened then? He'd have to figure that out.

He turned and took a last look at the massive structure of steel and concrete, and he remembered the first time he'd gone into that dugout wearing a Cat uniform. The first time. Well, he'd done it for the last time, too.

He slumped back in the seat, crowded with misery, wondering what Mom and Pop would think about this, what the rest of the crowd would say. He would have been able to take the disappointment of leaving the Cats if they had wanted to send him to some place other than King City. He knew that. But to go home, where he knew everybody, where they'd given him the big sendoff—that was impossible.

The shouts reached dimly through the cloud of his unhappiness, and he saw that the cab was stopped for a traffic light and that they were almost halfway downtown. The door was wrenched open on the farther side, and Joe watched in amazement as a man scrambled in, slammer the door, shouted at the driver, "Get goin'! And fast!"

In bewilderment, he saw the man shove a gun through the open window of the cab, rest his arm on the door frame. Joe followed the pointing muzzle and saw the policeman on the sidewalk, not fifteen feet away. The sound of the gun rocked the interior of the cab once, then twice, and as if in a dream Joe watched the policeman fall, his drawn gun skidding across the sidewalk. Then the cab was in motion.

THE man with the gun paid no attention to him. He had the gun pressed against the driver's neck and was cursing in a low, thick voice. He said to the cab-

bie, "I want some poop out of this thing. Do as you're told and you won't get hurt. Turn right." The cab turned, the wheels squeeling, and they ran the length of the block. The man said, "Left!" and they spun into moving traffic.

Joe was debating a try at the gun, and as if reading his mind, the man turned to him. "I don't want no nonsense out of you, Jack. You just sit."

And Joe sat, held by the fear of the gun. The man was of medium height, slender, light-complexioned. His features were sharp, the eyes slightly protuberant and very watchful. He kept the gun in the driver's neck, and his instructions were terse and knowing.

It was a surprise when he said, "All right. Left here and park near the corner." It seemed to Joe that he had been riding like this all his life.

The driver pulled the car to the curb and braked it to a stop. He turned with a look of relief on his face, just as the man shot him in the head. Joe shouted in horror, and the gun turned on him. There was a metallic sound, then the man cursed, threw the gun at Joe with a short and savage motion, ripped open the door of the cab and ran into the street.

Joe acted without thinking. The gun had hit him on the shoulder and had fallen to the seat. He grabbed it, aimed at the running figure and pulled the trigger. It wasn't until he had pulled for the third time and the man had rounded the corner that he realized the gun was empty.

He turned to the cabbie. The man lay wedged between the wheel and the door, and blood welled from his head. Joe got up, reached across the partition and tried to pull the man erect. It was then he heard the boy's voice beside the door.

"He did it! I seen him! He shot the cabbie, then the other guy run out of the cab and he tried to shoot him, too! That's the guy, right there in the cab!"

Joe stared at the twelve-year-old kid

on the sidewalk. The boy was pointing at him, shouting at the top of his lungs, his voice a siren, shrill and reaching. Joe said, "No! He did it! The fellow who just ran. I didn't—"

But the boy's voice went on, thrusting panic into Joe, jamming it down his throat. He got out of the cab then, acted without thinking. He noted almost unconsciously that he was in an unprosperous neighborhood, the blocks lined with tenements. He saw people coming out of the houses, running from farther up the street.

"He done it!" the boy screamed. "I seen it! He . . ." Then the tone was one of surprise, but just as loud. "It's Joe Lundy! He pitches for the Cats! Joe Lundy!"

He thought of Harris, the club secretary, then, lying on the floor of Redding's office, blood streaming from his mouth. He thought of what Harris had said before he'd hit him the second time. The police would be looking for him even now. It would be stupid to stand here and try to explain the events of the last few minutes. How badly had he hurt Harris, he wondered? He'd really hit him that second time. He might even have killed him. And if they found him here now, with the dead cabbie and the kid shouting . . .

THEN Joe was running. Crazily, wildly. Up the street to the nearest corner, the shouts behind him growing in volume, adding to his panic. He took the corner at full speed, cut diagonally across the street through the traffic, turned again at the next corner. He wasn't thinking now, just trying to get away from the shouting, from the memory of the cabbie lying slumped over the wheel, the nightmare of the last five minutes. This whole thing had nothing to do with him and he was trying to get away from it. He ran through a short block and turned again, and he

was dimly aware of the stares of people that he passed.

He saw the cop then, fifteen or twenty feet in front of him. The man was standing in the middle of the sidewalk and he was trying to get his gun out of the holster. Joe didn't think. He crashed into the man, heard the gun fall, then hit the cop with a swinging left hand. He was running again when he heard the crash of a store window behind him.

It was only then that he became aware of the gun in his hand, heavy and slippery with sweat. He jammed it into his pocket and kept running.

The cab was parked at the next corner he turned. He slowed to a walk, got in, said, "Grand Central." He was thinking now in terms of escape, of anonymity, of avoiding the staggering spotlight that had held him for the last few nightmare minutes. He wanted to be alone, to figure this thing out, and he knew that the only refuge for him was in the faceless mass of the crowd.

The next few hours were a vague nightmare of subways, crowded streets, wandering around the fringes of Times Square. The panic had died now, but fear had clawed its way deep inside of him. Fear and desperation and a sense of loneliness such as he had never known.

He had been shocked by the first headline he'd noticed. CAT PITCHER KILLS THREE! it had screamed at him, and beneath it had been a three-column photograph of himself. He had turned away in fright, but later he had bought a paper and had read it over a sandwich and a cup of coffee in a crowded cafeteria. He wanted to know about the third man who had been killed. He thought of the cop he'd knocked through the store window, and his blood froze.

The story was detailed, but boiling it down to essentials, he found that Larry Dannon, an uptown bookmaker, had been killed by three bullets in the chest; Patrol-

man Monato, attempting to apprehend the escaping Lundy, had died of a head wound; Louis Kepberg, the cab driver, had been the last of Lundy's victims. Lundy had been positively identified by Willy Lennon, aged twelve, by Patrolman Keefe, whom he had knocked down while fleeing, and by three other men who had seen him escaping from the neighborhood of the last murder. There was no mention of Harris. He was relieved.

The description of him was minute. Six feet one, a hundred eighty-five pounds, sandy hair, fair coloring, blue eyes, twenty-three years old. The mad killing spree was attributed to Lundy's rage at having been released from the Cats that very afternoon.

"Whatta you think of that slob?" a voice said, and Lundy looked up, startled. A man and woman were sitting at the table with him. The man was addressing him.

Lundy shrugged. "I don't know. I've just been reading about it."

"They farm the bum out and he kills three people. That's gettin' real sore. Now if he'd been with Brooklyn the thing might make some sense." The man looked at Lundy and his brow wrinkled. "Don't I know you from some place, Mac?"

Lundy tried to smile. He could feel his stomach turning over slowly. "I don't think so."

"I know you from *some place*, Johnny. You in the Navy?"

Lundy shook his head. He moved his arm until the screaming picture on the front page of the paper was covered. "No, I didn't get into the war."

The man was intent on solving his problem now. He said, "I could swear I—"

"He looks like Gary Cooper, only younger," the woman said.

The man stared at Lundy. "Yeah, I guess you're right. The guy does, at that." He got up. "Come on, kid. We'll be late."

They left, and the woman looked over her shoulder once and smiled again. Lundy reached for the coffee cup and it rattled against the saucer like a pair of castenets. He went out in a moment, and it seemed that every one in the place was staring at him.

He knew he had to get off the streets soon, before they emptied, and it was a bit after midnight when he registered under a false name at a big YMCA. The clerk said, "Slater, eh? You don't have any relatives in Scranton, do you?"

Lundy said, "No. I don't know anyone in Scranton."

The man was pleasant. "Just a marked resemblance. I was sure I knew you."

Lundy locked the door of his room. It was getting too close. He was starting to remind people of somebody they knew. From here it was just a matter of time, of hours, maybe, until someone actually recognized him.

He went through the newspapers he'd brought with him and read again of how he had jumped into an occupied cab at the scene of the first murders. The other passenger had fled at the end of the cab ride and was being sought for the information he could give.

He was bucking a whole city now. The biggest city in the world. His face was on the front page of every paper and he was trapped in a little room ten floors above the street for any one who wanted to come and get him. There was no one to call, nowhere to turn, no help he could ask for or expect. He was a mad animal who had killed three men and every face was turned against him.

CHAPTER TWO

Tip-off

THE hours of the night were long and he sweated them through, knowing that the coming day would be worse. One

thing was apparent to him, that he couldn't give himself up, tell the police his story. They wouldn't believe him in a hundred years, for there was too much evidence against him, too many people to swear they had seen him commit the killings. The late papers told of several people uptown who could now positively identify him as the man who had killed the officer, Monato. Memory was a convenient thing and adjustable to circumstance. They had seen his picture in the paper, labeled as the killer, and now they recognized him positively.

There was a way out for him. One way. To find, by himself, the man who had entered the cab. Lundy would never forget the sharp features, the slightly bulging eyes.

And it was an easy job, too. He just had to line up eight million people and go down the rows until he came to the man.

His thoughts switched to the man named Dannon, the bookmaker. Apparently he had been quite an operator, according to the papers.

His thoughts centered on Dannon. He kept them on Dannon until the first light stole through the window.

He didn't leave until eight-thirty in the morning, when he knew the streets would be crowded with people on their way to work. He had showered, used a toothbrush and razor he'd bought the night before, and there was no tiredness in his big frame although he had not slept. He had a job to do and his time was limited.

He made his call to Mike Redding from a jammed drugstore. Of all the people of his limited acquaintance in the city, Redding held the most promise. The manager of the Cats was a knowing man, had moved in sporting circles for years, and his cynicism was born of experience.

There was no answer. Redding was not at his hotel.

Lundy called a dozen times from a dozen different booths in the next three or

four hours, but he couldn't contact Redding. By now, he knew, Redding would be up at the ball park. He thought of calling there but decided against it.

He went into one of the big movie houses on Broadway. The girl who sold him his ticket smiled and said, "Back to see it again?"

He said, "That's right," and walked in. She'd never seen him before in her life, but she'd seen his picture in the papers.

He stayed in the huge and blessed darkness of the theater through the stage show, the movie, the stage show once again, and then it was six o'clock. He could try Redding again now. If it had been a fast game, the manager might be back. He used a phone in the lounge. Redding was not in.

A sense of urgency possessed him, riding along with the fear and the loneliness. From the start of this thing, time had been against him, and now he knew it was running out. He was being chased down a blind alley, and although it was longer than he had thought it would be, he knew he'd come up against the final wall sooner or later.

Out in the street the evening was gentle and warm. It was half-past six and he was as empty as a drum. He went into a popular and crowded restaurant and chose what he hoped was an inconspicuous corner. He ordered soup and a special steak, then sat there and envied the people around him, the men and women who were eating, talking, laughing, free and unhunted. The movement of the clock to them meant a curtain time, a movie time, or time to go home and sleep. They had control of it to some degree. It wasn't running away with them.

HE FINISHED and went out again into the packed streets. He called Redding from a drugstore and the miracle happened. The Cat manager was in. For a moment he couldn't speak, then he said,

"This is Joe Lundy, Redding," and waited to see what would happen.

"Well," Redding said. "What do you know about that?"

"I need some help, Redding."

"An army couldn't help you, kid. You're the hottest thing since they discovered fire." There was a pause. "What do you want?"

"Do you believe I shot those people?"

Redding snorted. "Hell, no. You were sore, but not that kind of sore. A kid like you wouldn't do anything like that."

Lundy wanted to shout. He said, "All right. I'll tell you how you can help." He talked fast from there on, hoping that Redding wouldn't hang up on him. "The answer to this whole business is Dannon, the bookie. If you figure it from the start, that's the only way it adds up. I was in the cab, sure. This fellow must have shot the bookie, then the cop followed him. He shot the cop while I was sitting beside him. He killed the cabbie at the end of the ride because he didn't want any one to identify him."

"Why didn't he pop you?"

"He tried to, but the gun was empty. He threw it at me and ran. A kid saw the thing but got the wrong slant and started to yell. I got panicky and ran."

"Your biggest mistake since you pitched high and inside to Kelleher a week ago."

"All right," Lundy said, impatience propelling the words. "But look, Redding. Who would shoot a bookie?"

"I know a hundred guys who want an open season on them."

"Somebody who owed him a lot of money, or someone he owed a lot of money to. Did he deal in big money, Redding?"

"He was big enough. Big enough to be in trouble."

"Now you're getting it. Do me a favor. You know your way around this town, know a lot of people. Make a few phone

calls for me, Redding. Maybe some of your not-so-nice friends. Find out if someone owed him a lot of money or if he was in hock to somebody bigger." His throat was dry, he was squeezing the handpiece of the phone until it hurt. "Will you do that for me, Redding?"

The answer was slow in coming. "Kid, you're poison and I don't want you near me. And I'm not going to get myself a slug in the head for going around asking foolish questions. No."

"Redding!" Lundy was sweating now. Sweating cold.

Redding said, "Turn yourself in, kid. It's your best bet."

"And have fourteen people identify me as the fellow who did all the gunning? Redding, do me that favor." He waited for the answer. He waited through an eternity. The answer was long in coming.

"Call me back in an hour."

Lundy put the phone back on the hook with fingers that were barely strong enough to hold it. He leaned against the wall of the booth and wiped his face with a handkerchief. His right arm was trembling from the tension with which he'd been holding the phone. He heard the tapping on the door of the booth and looked up.

The cop was as big as the side of a barn and the night-stick in his hand looked like a ball bat. His face was expressionless but his eyes were alive with anger.

Lundy got up and opened the door. This close, and now . . .

"I get a ten-minute break to call the wife," the cop said, "and you want to take a nap in the only booth in the joint. Why don't you marry the girl?"

Lundy walked away on unhinged knees. He could feel the cop's eyes eating into his back.

H E SPENT the next hour in a news-reel movie. Halfway through it, he almost came out of his seat with a shout

when he saw himself on the screen. He was pitching against the Blues, then there was a shot of him at the training camp. With the brief and bitter running commentary were shown several other scenes. One was a still of the cop lying on the uptown sidewalk, the other a view of the cab at the journey's end.

He got through the rest of the program somehow and went out.

The drugstore was big and sold everything but yachts. The long counter was filled and he walked to the battery of phone booths at end of it. He had to wait a moment before one was empty, but then he got Redding immediately. He said, "It's Lundy."

Redding's voice held a strong note of reluctance. "It might do you some good to talk to a guy named Henny Lewis. Dennon owed him a lot of dough. It doesn't mean anything."

Lundy said, "Redding, thanks. Where can I find him?"

"How the hell do I know?" Redding was angry. Then, "He owns a piece of a joint named the 101 Club, on the East Side. But if you mention my name you're a lousy liar. I never heard of you. You understand?"

Lundy said, "If I get out of this thing, Redding, I'll—" But Redding had hung up.

Lundy looked up the 101 Club in the phone directory, then wondered what good all this was going to do him. He couldn't just walk in, say who he was, ask for the man who had been in the cab with him. The fact that the dead bookie had owed someone named Henny Lewis a lot of money actually didn't mean a thing. It didn't have to tie up.

But the fact that a smart, getting-around guy like Redding had thought to mention it . . .

The end stool on the counter was empty, and he sat down and ordered some coffee. Then he noticed the girl next to

him. She was slim, dressed inexpensively but with taste. She was reading a newspaper, and her face in profile was lovely and young. She must have felt his gaze, for she looked up, a touch of annoyance in her eyes. Lundy looked away quickly.

His coffee was served, and as he reached for some sugar he looked at the girl again. She was staring at him fully, her lips parted, her eyes wide. He glanced at the newspaper at her elbow, knowing his picture would be there. It was. He looked at the girl again.

Her face was pale and her large eyes mirrored some measure of fright, but her lips were compressed, and he felt that he was under examination. He stirred the coffee and tasted it, scalding in the dryness of his mouth. He waited.

For a little while nothing happened, and he turned his head to the girl. She was still staring at him, but there was color in her face now, though her eyes were wary. Lundy tried some more coffee, drank as much of it as he could. He put a quarter on the table to cover his check and started to get up, to get away from there.

The girl touched his arm. Under the noise of the place she said, "You didn't do it, did you?"

He said, "No." He couldn't take his eyes off her. This was the first person who had really recognized him.

She nodded. "I didn't think so. It didn't add up." She seemed pleased with her discovery.

Lundy said, "Why don't you yell? Why don't you call someone?"

A trace of a grin touched her lovely mouth. "For what? I'm a cop? A secret agent?" In her eyes there was compassion and something else—something bordering on friendliness. He felt warmed, as if by a hearth fire on a cold day. His loneliness had suddenly lost some of its severity. First Redding. Now this girl.

HE STUDIED her dark beauty, the wise eyes, the mouth full and heavily rouged. "Why are you giving me this this break?"

She shrugged. "Let's say I'm the motherly type."

He smiled for the first time he could remember. "How old are you?"

Her shoulders straightened. "Twenty-one, but a lot older than you." She flipped a cigarette from a package and he lit it for her. She said, "It didn't figure. Just because they send you down for another year's seasoning, you don't go blowing the town apart. Now, if the bookie had shot *you*, after that game you pitched against the Blues, the things would have made some sense."

Lundy said, "Look, I've got to leave."

The girl looked at him. "Good luck. All the way."

"But I can't leave you here." The thing puzzled him. "You might change your mind, call the police. I think you've got to come along with me."

The girl grinned again. "What are you going to do, carry me out on your shoulder while I kick and scream?"

He rubbed a big hand across his eyes. He was starting to feel the tiredness now. He said, "No. Of course not. I'm sorry. And I want to thank you." He got to his feet.

The girl touched his arm. "But maybe I'd like to go with you."

They left. This was a tall girl, an un-hostile shoulder occasionally to brush against on the crowded street, a face now and then lifted to yours who knew it to be yours, an identity sure of your own and unalarmed.

They talked easily in the privacy of the heavy pedestrian traffic. Her name was Sally Lake. A dancer. "A chorus girl without a chorus," she said. The last show had been terrible, had never reached New York. "*Hard Luck Harry*. With a title like that I should have known better.

It dropped dead in New Haven." She looked at him. "And what's with you, refugee?"

He told his story sketchily, touching on the important point. She nodded. "I had it for something like that. What's the next pitch?"

They were in a quiet eddy of the sidewalk traffic, sheltered by a building corner. "I have to stop into a place and see a man. *The man*."

"What place?"

"Something called the 101 Club." He smiled at her. "You've been wonderful. I want to thank you. Can I take you home?"

"At nine o'clock?" the girl said. She frowned prettily. "Look, Joe, I'm the sort of kid who hates to leave the movies in the middle of the picture. Why can't I tag along?"

He shook his head. "There might be trouble."

"I can get under a table faster than anyone you ever saw. Besides, if these are the people you want, they might know you. With me along"—she took a deep breath and the results were amazing—"they might be distracted."

He shook his head. "No."

"Don't be a spoilsport. The chances are you won't find anything. And I think you owe me a drink."

She was probably right, Lundy thought. He said, "All right. We'll get a cab."

She said, "No. It's a nice night and we'll walk. As it is, we'll probably be the first people in the trap. Let's walk."

They walked. The girl took his arm, a gesture for which he was grateful. "Did you think of turning yourself in, Joe?"

He nodded. "It's not the best idea in the world."

"It's the second best," she said. "If you don't find your boy here tonight, I'd do it. You can talk to a judge and jury, but not to a couple of bullets a cop puts into your skull, if he gets scary."

He knew she was right. "But this is worth the try."

"Then we'll take the chance," the girl said.

CHAPTER THREE

Killer Wanted

THE 101 Club was equipped with a liveried doorman who would have looked more at home on a rockpile in a different type of suit. The interior, however, was very nice. A headwaiter led them to a booth against a wall, and Joe saw that from his seat he could watch the door, see most of the place. A bar ran along the opposite side, and several of the stools were occupied. There were perhaps twenty people in the place.

"It isn't bad," the girl said. "What do we do now?"

"Wait," Lundy said. "I guess that's all there is to do." He turned to her. "Do you think there's a chance I'm right about this, Sally?"

She smiled. "I like the way you say that." Her eyes grew thoughtful. "You could be on the beam. This Henny Lewis is quite a character. He's been known to pull some very fast ones. Not what you would call a sweet person. If this Dannon owed him a lot of money and wouldn't pay . . ." She shrugged her fine shoulders. "*C'est la guerre.*"

They ordered drinks and talked, and Lundy kept his eyes moving about the place and on the entrance. This girl had a warmth and an easy friendliness, and he sensed the care she took that these might not be mistaken. Her nearness was exciting, her beauty alive and vibrant. Beneath the flippancy lay an honesty and directness as refreshing as a cool breeze.

A man came in alone, and the check girl made no effort to take his hat, but merely smiled. He walked the length of the bar, and a large young man on the

last stool got to his feet. The new arrival said something, the other man shook his head. The man went to a door in the rear of the place, opened it and walked into another room. The young man resumed his place on the stool.

Sally said, "And that was Mr. Henny Lewis. I've seen him around. Maybe you have something here, Joe my lad. We will wait."

They waited. It was a half-hour before anyone else went near the door. This time it was a big man, wide in the shoulders. Last-Bar-Stool got up, nodded to him, walked to the door and knocked. The door opened and the big man went in, closed it behind him.

The girl was looking at him inquiringly. "That your boy?"

Lundy shook his head. "He was smaller, slim. I'd know him right away."

"Well, I hope you have a chance to say hello to him." She tasted her drink. "And what will you do if he walks in? If this setup is what you think, they're not just going to shake hands with you and wish you bon voyage."

Lundy said, "Something'll work out."

"I can see you were never a Boy Scout. Why don't you call the police now? Be prepared."

"For what? I don't have anything to show them."

Her arched eyebrows raised. "There, Joseph, you have something. I was getting a little ahead of myself." She emptied her glass. "This is going to cost you, son. No matter what happens in these places, they make a profit." She beckoned to the waiter.

They had been sitting there for an hour and a half when Joe suddenly stiffened in his seat. The man coming down the steps of the entrance was the man who had jumped into his cab. Beside him, Sally said, "Easy, now."

The man took off his hat, kept it in his hand. His eyes swept around the place

once, and Joe bent his head as they came his way. The man walked to the rear of the room, and the big fellow moved away from the bar, nodded to him, walked to the door and knocked. In a moment he was inside and the door had closed.

Sally sighed. "Your friend, of course?"

Joe nodded. He was looking at the back door.

"Now is the time to call for the cavalry," the girl said. "A nickel in the phone booth and the city's finest will be here in two minutes flat." She handed him a nickel.

He shook his head. "It isn't ripe yet. I've got to get him to talk before I yell for the police."

She looked at him sadly. "Such a hopeful lad. I suppose you'll appeal to his sympathies, his sense of sportsmanship and fair play? He must have a tender heart. After all, he killed only three people yesterday."

Lundy said, "Something will work," He got up. "You stay here. I'll be back in a while."

The girl reached for his arm. "Joe! Don't be silly! You'll be . . ."

HE WALKED away from the table, headed for the door at the rear. He didn't know exactly what he was going to do, but he knew it had to be done now. He'd never have another chance like this.

The man sitting at the end of the bar was suddenly standing in his way. His face was expressionless. "Goin' some place, Mac?"

Joe said, "Into that back room. I just saw a fellow . . ."

The young man shook his head. "Private, Mac. Who you wanta see?"

"I don't know his name. He just went in there."

"You better shove off, Johnny. Go home." He was very large and solid. Lundy knew that if he were insistent help

would be summoned and he'd find himself out on the street. He turned away, and the movement brought his hand into contact with the gun in his pocket. He was amazed that he still had it. The weight of it had become an accustomed thing, he hadn't thought of it all day.

He put his hand into his pocket and turned again to the enormous young man. He showed him enough of the gun to convince him it was real, then shoved it into his pocket again, kept it in his hand. He said, "I'm going into the back room."

The man looked at it. "It seems like you are, at that."

"Just knock on the door, like you did for the others. Don't do anything silly."

"They don't pay me enough to get that silly." He turned, walked to the door and knocked. The door opened silently, and Lundy shoved the man in ahead of him, drew the gun from his pocket, stepped into the room and closed the door behind him.

The man who'd accompanied him said, "Henny, you got a visitor. With a persuader." He walked to one side.

The man Sally had said was Henny Lewis sat behind a desk. The room was small but nicely furnished. A large man sat in a chair at one side, and Lundy's fellow passenger in the cab stood in front of the desk. He turned now, and when he saw Lundy he uttered on oath and stepped aside.

Lundy said, "Don't anyone get careless. I don't mind using this thing."

He noticed the money on the table, quite a lot of money. Then Henny Lewis asked, "What do you want?"

The doorguard said, with a note of surprise in his voice, "Hell, he's the guy the cops are looking for. The ballplayer."

Lundy nodded. "That's right. And I want him." He motioned with the gun toward the slim man.

Lewis said, "Orvie? What do you want from Orvie?"

"I don't want a thing but his hide. He shot three people and they have it all nicely pinned on me. That I don't care for." He glanced at the money on the table. "Dannon's?"

The man called Orvie said, "Henny, get this punk outa here. He talks like a man with a paper nose."

"I'll leave right away," Lundy said. "And you'll come along with me."

Henny Lewis had a flat, calm voice. "What good will that do you? You can't prove a thing on Orvie. You don't make sense."

Lundy knew it was true, but he knew too that if he lost Orvie now, he'd never get him again. As long as he had him, he had a chance. A bad story could be proven a lie, a phony alibi could be broken.

He said, "Come along, Orvie. We're going to do some talking. But not in this place."

Lewis held up a hand. "Wait a minute. Let's say you're in a little trouble, kid. Let's say you figure Orvie could help you out of it. Well, he won't. You can just look at him and tell that."

Lundy looked at Orvie. The man wore a snarl and there was hatred in his eyes. Lewis was right on that count.

LEWIS piled the money together and pushed it across the desk. "Now this could give you some real help. It could take you a lot of places, buy a lot of nice things, including maybe a cop or two. Ten thousand. Why don't you just take it and scram, kid?"

"How far would I get? As far as the front door? Besides, I don't want that. I just want Orvie."

Lewis stared at him for a long moment, and Lundy wondered just how long he could hold this room on the muzzle of the gun, how long it would be before the tableau broke, before someone made a fast move.

He saw Lewis' eyes switch to Orvie.

Lewis said. "Well, Orvie, it looks like maybe you go with the man. Maybe you can talk to him. He won't listen to me."

Orvie snarled. "Henny, let's not look for laughs. Be funny some other time. Get rid of this punk."

"Maybe you'd like to try it," Lewis said. "I've heard you were good, Orvie. Very fast. Maybe you'd—"

The door burst open with an explosive sound, and Lundy's eyes whipped to it. Two beautiful policemen stood in the doorway, and each had a gun in his hand. One of them said, "Let go of that thing, boy," and Lundy dropped the revolver to the floor. The other cop said, "Everybody line up against that wall, facing it, with your hands high on the wall."

Lundy obeyed. He was standing next to Lewis. He felt hands going over him quickly and expertly, then pass on. He turned his head and watched the search. While examining Orvie the cop grunted and took a large gun from under Orvie's left shoulder. It was the only weapon the search yielded. In a moment the cop said, "All right. You can turn around, but don't get gay."

Lundy turned. There were three more policemen in the room now. Supervising their activities was a man in civilian clothes. Lundy heard one of the men address him as Lieutenant Kehoe.

The lieutenant came over to him. "So you're Lundy, eh? You're a hard guy to find. What are you doin' in here?"

Lundy pointed to Orvie. "That's the man who did all the killing. I've been trying to find him."

Kehoe glanced at the man. "Orvie! Well, well."

"The punk is goofy," Orvie said. "Yesterday I'm in Pittsburgh. I can prove it."

Kehoe nodded. "Good. A nice town." He scanned the money lying on the desk. "What's all this?"

"It might be money that was taken

from that bookie, Dannon," Lundy said. He certainly hoped it was.

Kehoe nodded. "It could be." He counted it. "A little over ten thousand. And Dannon was carrying fifteen."

Lewis' head whipped around to Orvie. Orvie's eyes found the floor.

Kehoe looked at Lundy. "Why didn't you turn in, kid? You knew we were looking for you."

Lundy nodded. "I thought it might be a good idea to bring Orvie along." He was still in this thing tight, he knew. "Maybe you can make him talk. He hopped into the cab and—"

Kehoe said, "Yeah, maybe we can make him talk." His voice was hard now. "Maybe his fingerprints are all over that cab. Maybe Orvie has cached the rest of this dough in his room. Dannon drew it from the bank yesterday morning, and the serial numbers'll be easy to check."

He picked from the floor the gun Lundy had been holding. A cop said, "Lundy had that."

Kehoe snapped the gun open and said, "It's empty."

Lundy's heart did a fast turnover. He's forgotten about that. He'd been fooling with people like Orvie, and with an empty gun. He said, "That's the gun he used. He tried to shoot me but it was empty. He used the last bullet on the cabbie."

Kehoe was looking at Orvie. "Maybe he should have been more careful. Maybe he was lucky, but not lucky enough. We couldn't have made anything stick on you, Lundy. Someone saw you get into the cab at the stadium, and the cabbie's fare sheet showed he picked up a fare there and was taking him to Forty-third Street."

Lundy said, "Fare sheet?"

Kehoe nodded. "As soon as they get a fare, they put down where they got the fare and where it's going. The guy who killed Dannon and Monato was seen to get into an occupied cab. It figures you were the guy in the cab."

Lundy heaved a long sigh. "So I've been wasting my time."

Kehoe looked at Orvie. "I wouldn't say that, Lundy. I wouldn't feel that way about it at all." He turned then. "So now we'll all go over to headquarters and talk things over. Have a little chat." He wheeled on Orvie. "A nice little talk."

They went through the club in single file, and Lundy looked for the girl. She came from the table to his side. Lundy said, "You called the police."

She nodded. He noticed that she was pale. "I thought you might be able to use a little help. How are you making out?"

He grinned at her. "Not bad. Not bad at all."

"Good boy." She gave him a phone number. "Call Sally. I'd like to know how things work, and I don't want to wait for the morning papers. Make them give you a nice cell."

REDDING'S office was quiet, though all about could be heard the muted noise of the stadium, an hour before game time. The Cats' manager sat behind his desk. "Yesterday, all the police in the world are looking for you, today you're at a ball game. What's on your mind, kid?"

Lundy leaned on the desk. "King City is on my mind. I'd like to go back there, like you said. If you want to give me train fare, okay. If you don't, I'll walk. Anything you say."

Redding grinned at him. "You didn't like the idea. You thought it would mean a lot of trouble."

Lundy groaned and shook his head. "I didn't know what trouble was. I do now. You say King City. Fine. I'll leave immediately."

Redding said, with a motion of his head, "Who is this?"

Lundy turned. "Oh, pardon me. This is Sally Lake. Mr. Redding, Sally."

The girl smiled. "Hello, Mr. Redding. I feel like a truant officer."

Redding smiled slowly. "You don't look like the one who chased me. What's your connection with this applehead?"

Lundy felt Sally's eyes on him. They seemed approving. She said, "Well, you might say that I'm his manager, too."

Lundy nodded. "Now about the tickets, Mr. Redding. I'll—"

Redding shook his head. "No tickets. No King City."

Well, Lundy thought, he couldn't blame them. They were sick of him. But after the last few days, he could take that. He could take anything. He . . .

"You stay with the Cats," Redding said. "You need a year of seasoning, so you'll get it here."

Lundy felt his mouth drop open. "Here? I thought—"

"You're not supposed to think. The front office thinks. And they've got you

tagged as the biggest draw of the year. Every time you walk out on that hill this place'll be jammed to the doors. Do you realize the publicity, the wonderful publicity, you've managed? What if you lose a couple of games? What if . . ."

There was more, and Lundy listened to it in a daze. Redding finally said, "And you have the day off. Enjoy yourself." He turned to the girl. "Take good care of him, Sally."

Lundy watched her as she walked up, took his left arm and steered him toward the door. She said, "Mr. Redding, I'll take very good care of him. The best."

They were at the door when Redding said, "Oh, Kid. About busting that loud-mouth, Harris. I'll see if I can't get you some sort of small bonus for that. I'll . . ."

But Lundy wasn't listening. He was just looking.

THE END

LET'S PLAY SAFE

JACK DOYLE was the kind of a guy who wanted to be tops in his profession—which in this instance was safecracking. Having just spent a four years in jail because of some slipshod work, he made up his mind he would take a post-graduate course in the art of cracking safes.

First he went to Washington, D.C., where he spent a great deal of time in the U.S. Patent Office thumbing through hundreds of blueprints and specification sheets explaining the construction of safes in detail.

Next, posing as a business man, he visited a number of safe manufacturers, where cordial salesman explained the intricacies of their products.

This should have been enough to start the best crackman to work, but Doyle wasn't going to be slipshod. He figured the law of averages might catch up with him again, so he put his nose into several law books to see just what sort of a rap he might draw if picked up for a job. He learned that by using explosives on a safe he could get thirty years, but by "peeling," using a crowbar like a can-opener, the sentence would be only fifteen years.

Doyle now felt that he was ready to try out his post-graduate education. For a while he was very successful, cracking about ten cribs to the tune of \$10,000. In one instance he purchased a car in the afternoon for \$1,500 and peeled the car agent's safe that night.

Perhaps Doyle got just plain careless, or perhaps his new education hadn't covered the matter of door locks. One night he forgot to turn the key in the door of the store he was working in and a cop interrupted his activities, putting him out of circulation for a good long stretch of time.

—John Lane

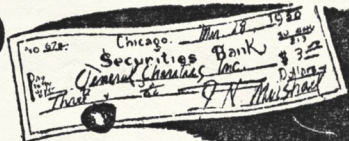
ODDITIES IN CRIME

By MAYAN and JAKOBSSON

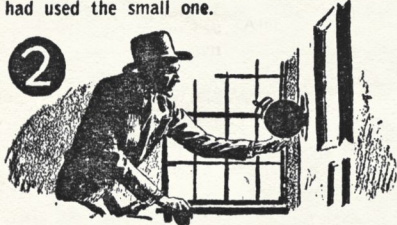
1. This may be the last story they will ever tell about Yellow Kid Weil, who took suckers for about eight million dollars in his day. The aging confidence man, last year, attached himself to two charity solicitors in Chicago as a friendly advisor, then quietly opened the mail, stole a three-dollar check which had come as a contribution.

For this paltry swindle, he once more tangled with the law. To his chagrin, however, he found that police had tracked him not because of his own fame, but as a by-product in their search for the two solicitors, who had been using much larger checks exactly as Weil had used the small one.

1



2



2. Fancy Dan Morris Kutler, the so-called cat burglar of Long Island, rifled mansions of that area, specializing in objets d'art, and wearing velvet overshoes and sheer silk gloves.

Far better for Kutler had he been more of a slob. What finally tripped him was the cleaner's mark in his spotless, well-pressed jacket — which led the law right to the best-furnished hideout in all New York.

3



Tokyo, Aug. 22. The rich Mikimoto oyster beds off the coast were "robbed" by unknown men.

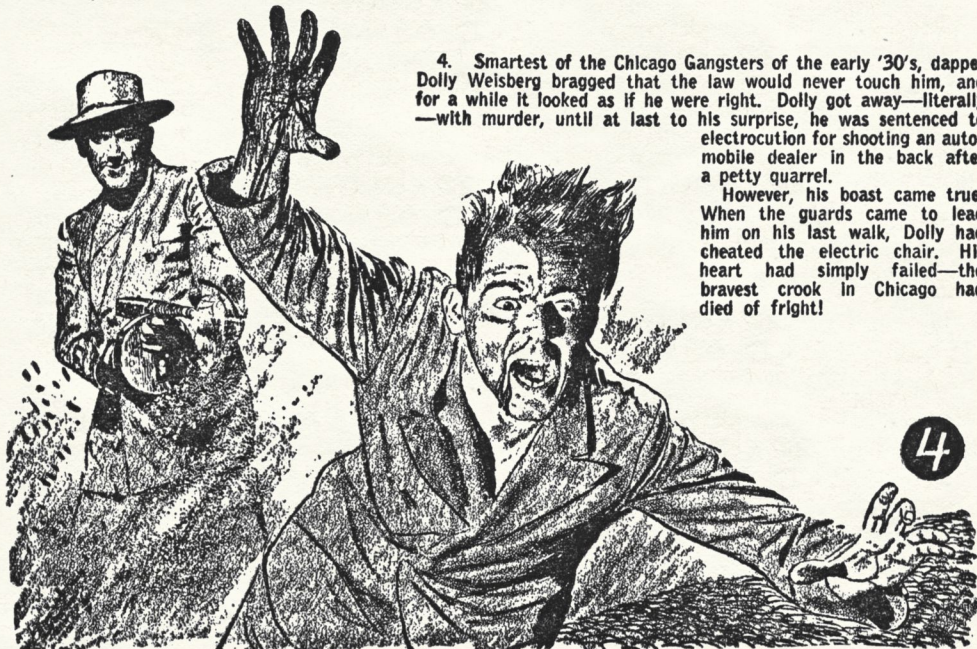
3. The lowest act of thievery is now on record, probably never to be beaten. However, the thief as yet is unknown, possibly because Tokyo policemen lack fins and gills. Though his taste was high — running to genuine pearls — he sank as deep as a man can go to indulge it, in fact, to the sea bottom southeast of Japan. And there, complained pearl tycoon Kokichi Mikimoto recently, the unidentified rustler made off with twelve tons of Mikimoto's live pearl-producing oysters.

Where is the thief now? Who can read fingerprints, below the face of the sea? Who can hear the plaintive wail of a kidnaped oyster?

4. Smartest of the Chicago Gangsters of the early '30's, dapper Dolly Weisberg bragged that the law would never touch him, and for a while it looked as if he were right. Dolly got away—literally—with murder, until at last to his surprise, he was sentenced to electrocution for shooting an automobile dealer in the back after a petty quarrel.

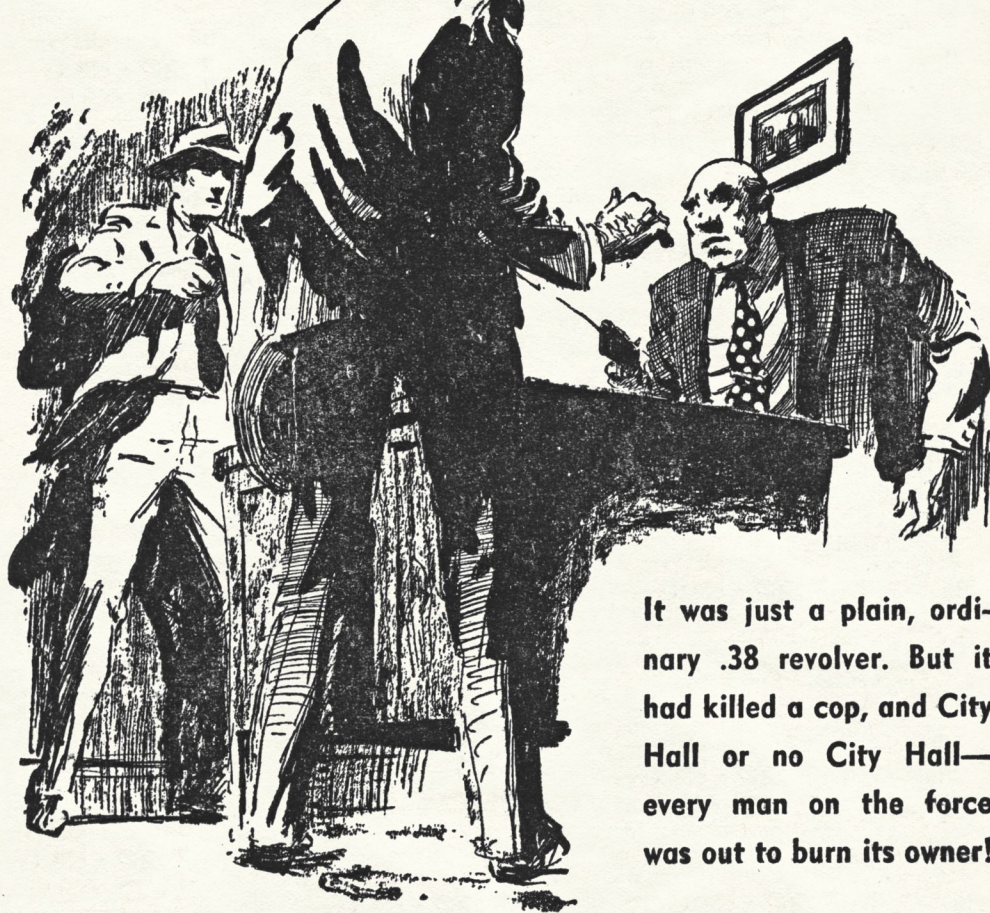
However, his boast came true. When the guards came to lead him on his last walk, Dolly had cheated the electric chair. His heart had simply failed—the bravest crook in Chicago had died of fright!

4



Lazian must have been holding the gun under the desk, because now he moved with lightning speed. . . .

By
DON JAMES



It was just a plain, ordinary .38 revolver. But it had killed a cop, and City Hall or no City Hall—every man on the force was out to burn its owner!

Man Behind the Gun

BEN DEVIN was in one of his black moods.

"Tell me something, Ben," I said. "Does being a homicide cop do this to you?"

"You're young," he said sourly. "Thirty. When you've been a cop like I've been for twenty years maybe you'll have a dim view, too."

"You admit I might still be around fifteen years from now?" I grinned.

"Doubtful. Very doubtful."

The door opened and Bill Hofstetter, our lab man, came in smoking cheap tobacco in a cheap pipe.

"Negative," he said. "The gun wasn't used to kill the gas-station attendant."

Ben sighed. "I didn't think so. Some

of those rookies will pick up any suspicious character. At least this punk carried a gun."

Hofstetter carefully tamped tobacco in the pipe. Then he said, "But I discovered something else. The test-bullet markings looked familiar. I checked back. It's the gun that killed Sam Keller last year."

Ben's tilted chair hit the floor with a solid thump. I was more vocal. I said, "What the hell! You're sure?"

Bill opened a folder and showed us photographs of bullets that had been fired from guns. Two of the pictured bullets had killed men. The third looked less marred and in laboratory condition.

Hofstetter pointed to one picture. "The slug that killed the station attendant." He pointed to the clean slug. "Our test slug." He pointed to the third picture. "The one that killed Keller." He showed another, picturing halves of two slugs matched against each other. "Here's a comparison microscope photomicrograph in the match position. The microscopic imperfections show up in the test bullet and the fatal slug. No doubt about it. We've got the gun that killed Keller."

I looked at Ben Devin. His eyes were narrowed as if he were staring into a light. He looked as hard as he had the night they brought him in with a flesh wound in his thigh while they took Sam Keller down in the elevator to the morgue.

Ben took it pretty hard. He and Sam had taken their examinations together, gone through the ranks together, worked together for nineteen years. Ben had become a lieutenant in homicide. Sam was a lieutenant of men in uniform. They had been bowling together in the Police League that Wednesday night. They came out of the bowling alleys. A sedan was parked at the curb. Shots crashed in the night. The car howled away from the curb and the two men were on the sidewalk.

We turned the city inside out for weeks

and we ended with nothing. Zero. Not even a clue. A cop-killer had pulled a job and got away with it. It was under our skins like a burr—especially for Ben Devin, homicide chief.

Maybe Ben was thinking those thoughts, too. His face was a tight mask; his eyes were fixed on Hofstetter's face.

"Thanks, Bill," he said quietly. "Thanks a hell of a lot."

He reached for a telephone on his desk and spoke sharply into it. "Send up the suspect in the gas-station job."

"You need me any more, Ben?" Hofstetter asked.

"No. You've more than done your part." He smiled grimly. "We'll do the rest from now on. Pat and me."

He looked at me and my smile was as grim as his. My eyes probably were as hard. My features as tight. Sam Keller had been my father-in-law. Even as I looked at Ben I decided that I wouldn't tell Linda about this until it was wrapped up. Meanwhile . . .

HOFSTETTER went out. Ben and I sat there without saying a word, waiting for them to bring in a man picked up on suspicion of a gas-station holdup and murder. A man who carried the gun that had killed Sam Keller.

The moment they brought him in I knew that it was just starting.

This kid—already cleared of the gas-station job—had not killed Sam Keller. Ben knew it, too. His eyes showed it when he glanced at me.

The boy was about nineteen. He was frightened and confused. His name was Clyde Linklow. They'd sent up Flynn's report with him. It was concise and thorough.

Ben and I looked it over while the kid awkwardly stood in front of him. His uniformed custodian leaned against the door and watched.

"So you've been in town just three

weeks, Clyde?" Ben said. "Is that right?"

"Yes, sir. I came here from Nampa, Idaho. I've been looking for a job."

"Ever in trouble in Idaho?"

"No, sir. I think they talked to the police there. We live on a farm."

"And you were just walking along a street near that gas station when you were picked up?"

"Yes, sir."

Flynn had written, "Does not answer witness' description."

Ben nodded. "We're going to turn you loose. There's only one thing we want to know. What about the gun?"

The kid blushed. "I—I heard it was tough in some places around here. I just thought it was a good idea."

"Still think so?"

"No, sir. I want no part of that gun from now on. I don't even want it back."

"Where did you get it?"

The kid blushed some more. "Well—I sort of bought it."

"Sort of? What do you mean?" I snapped.

"I got it from a girl."

"A girl? Who?"

"I don't know. It—well, I'd better explain. One night I met a girl here in a dance hall and took her home. She's a maid at some rich people's place and they were out of town. She asked me to come in and she made some coffee and sandwiches." He continued to blush. "I guess I stayed pretty late. Anyhow, I was talking about hunting in Idaho and she showed me the gun. She saw I liked it and said I could have it. She didn't want it and was scared to death of it. Said she never wanted a gun in her home. I said I wouldn't let her give it to me. I've some money and I offered her five dollars for it. She—she said I didn't need to do that. She liked me, she said." The blush deepened. "But I made her take it."

Ben nodded. "What's her name? Where does she live?"

"All I know is Alice. I don't know exactly where she lives. It's on the Heights. I don't think I could find it again. She said she'd better not see me any more. I guess she has a boy friend. There was a picture in her room of a guy standing by a truck."

Ben said, "Think hard, son. We want to find her. It's important."

"I don't know, sir. It was dark and late. We'd—well, we had quite a few drinks, too."

"How'd you get there?"

"We took a bus. I didn't pay much attention."

"You took a bus coming back?" I asked.

"I started to walk downhill, figuring that would take me to town. I've a room at the Y. A taxi came along and picked me up. It cost sixty-five cents."

Ben said, "What was the house like?"

"Big. Like a lot of others around there. Brick. There was a double garage and a driveway. Hedges all around."

"Remember any unusual thing about it?" I said.

He thought, wrinkling his forehead. "The driveway was blacktop and there was a hole in it. Alice stumbled in it. She said the man—her boss—got stuck on ice there last winter. He had chains on and spun the hole in the blacktop trying to get out. I looked at it. It's about a foot long and about as wide as a tire."

Ben asked a few more questions. We learned nothing except that Alice was blonde and "sort of pretty," and the kid did some more blushing.

Ben turned him loose, warning him not to leave town without telling us.

The kid started to go out and Ben called him back.

"Can you handle a muck stick?"

"Shovel? Sure."

"Too proud to work at it until you find something else?"

"No, sir."

"Tell Thomas Callaghan, a contractor on Seventh, that Ben Devin sent you."

"Thanks, sir. I sure will!"

When he was gone I put on my hat. "I'll cover the taxi end," I said.

"Good. I'll put a tracer on the gun. Maybe it's been in hock. We'll wire the factory, too. Might get a lead on the original buyer."

FINDING the taxi driver was routine. It was late afternoon when we released Clyde Linklow. It was about nine when I found the driver.

Meanwhile a check of pawn-shop reports failed to reveal the serial number of the murder gun. The factory wired that the gun had been sold to a Des Moines retailer. There the trail stopped. The retailer was out of business.

The taxi driver recognized Clyde from my description.

"I picked him up on Mountain Drive. Took him to the Y."

"What block did you pick him up?"

"Twenty-four hundred. He turned into the drive off Alpin. I was coming down and saw him."

That's all he had. Twenty minutes later I drove slowly up Alpin, looking at houses. Most of them had hedges. Most of them were brick. There was one way to do it, and I couldn't think of a better way. I parked the car and got out a flashlight.

A few householders came out and wanted to know what I was doing in their driveways. I showed my badge and said I was looking for a drunk reported in the neighborhood.

The tenth driveway was the one. The scar in the blacktop answered Clyde's description. I knocked at the back door and a small girl with blonde hair and wide blue eyes looked at me.

"Alice?" I said.

"Yes?"

"I was talking with Clyde about you."

For a second she was puzzled and then she smiled. "Clyde? What about? I hardly know him. I don't even know his last name."

"But 'e brought you home that night?"

"Yes, but I don't see what . . ."

I showed her the badge. "Is there a place where we can talk?"

"You're a policeman!"

"That's right. Where can we talk, Alice?"

"In—in the kitchen, I guess."

She opened the door. We sat at a kitchen table. She nervously locked and unlocked her fingers.

"Has something happened to Clyde, mister?"

"No. It's about the gun you sold him. Where did you get it?"

"The—the gun?"

I nodded.

"Why—well, I found it in a hotel room. It was right after I came here. It was in the back of a bottom drawer and the paper drawer lining had sort of curled over it. I stayed in the room a week right after I came here."

"What hotel? When?"

"The Anton. That was last June. I'd come from Salt Lake."

"If you're afraid of guns, why did you take it?"

"I didn't have much money and I thought I'd sell it if I couldn't find a job."

"What did you do in Salt Lake?"

"I worked in a café. I lived with my sister and her husband. Their name is Mr. and Mrs. Harold Teeter."

I wrote in a notebook. "Your full name?"

"Alice Hughes."

"Whose home is this?"

"Dr. Fulton Sandersoff."

"That's all you know about the gun, Alice?"

"Yes, sir. That's all. Did—did something happen to him? Did he get in trouble?"

"Nothing serious. We're just curious about the gun."

She still looked nervous. "Mister—this won't be in the papers, will it? I've a boy friend who—well, he doesn't know about Clyde. He's a truck driver and was out on a run. I guess I just was lonesome or something. Only I wouldn't want him to know about it."

"He won't," I smiled. "Forget it. But don't leave town unless you tell us. I'm Sergeant Pat Haney."

She nodded. "I'll let you know. But I don't intend to leave."

I DROVE back to headquarters. It was ten o'clock, Pacific time—eleven in Salt Lake. A little late, but I wanted a fast check. I called them. In half an hour they had contacted the Teeters and some others. Alice had told me the truth about her background.

Ben was home. I called him and reported.

"Good, Pat. Check the hotel. Call me back. I'll wait up."

I hung up and called Linda. She had put the kids to bed and was reading. She said she wouldn't wait up for me. She had an early-morning appointment at a beauty parlor. I told her to get her beauty sleep and no one could improve upon her beauty.

"You're sure you're working?" she laughed. "This sounds like a buildup for a late hour. Poker game?"

"Work, m'love," I assured her. "Sleep tight."

We said good-night and broke the connection.

I stopped smiling when I dropped the telephone in its cradle. Sooner or later I'd have to tell Linda about the job I was on. She had been an only child and idolized Sam.

The Hotel Anton was a third-rate hostelry. The night clerk was cooperative and checked through registrations for

June. Alice Hughes had occupied Room 314 for eight days.

"Who had it before that?"

"You get a break, Sergeant," the clerk smiled. "You don't have a lot of people to check. Phil Moyle had the room for almost two years."

"Describe him."

About forty. Small, thin, black eyes and hair. Sharp looking. Didn't have much to say. Came in every morning about five—or not at all. He was usually gone when I came on shift. Had few callers, and a phone call now and then."

"Know where he worked?"

"No, but Mike may know." He called the elevator man over.

"Moyle?" Mike glanced at me, and back at the clerk. "A beef?"

"This is Sergeant Haney. Police."

"He worked for Tom Lazian."

The puzzle clicked into place and a picture was almost complete. A cold chill ran along my spine. I hadn't been a cop long enough not to have one.

"You're sure?"

"Positive. I took them up together one night and Moyle said to Lazian, 'In all the time I've been working for you, boss, I never gave you a bum tip, did I?' They was talkin' about a horse in the seventh at the track next day."

"Okay. Thanks, Mike."

He looked as if he wanted to ask a question, thought better of it, and went back to his elevator. I thanked the clerk and went to a telephone booth and called Ben.

"It leads to Tom Lazian," I said.

"Lazian! You're sure, Pat?"

I told him what I'd learned.

"Meet me at headquarters," he snapped. "See what you can do about locating Moyle."

I went back to the desk. There was no forwarding address. Mike didn't know where he was. I put in a call to Czjeck on the vice squad.

"Moyle?" he said. "We've run across him a few times. Does chores for Lazian. Hangs out at Lazian's club on East Ninety-ninth. He's probably there now."

ON THE way out to the night club, Ben talked.

"Lazian and Sam never got along. You remember how it was. You've been around enough to know how a lot of things are in the city—any city, I guess. Sometimes it takes more than some honest cops to keep a guy like Lazian out of business. I'm not saying why or who. But you know what I mean. And in this city Lazian is the guy who gets the green light from a few rats in City Hall. But I guess they've got pressure on them, too. It goes way back—deep. People own property that might be hard to rent. Certain business men say you've got to run a little wide open to keep things stimulated—or to keep men in town to run their plants. It grates if you're an honest cop. Sam Keller was an honest cop."

"But would Lazian step out of bounds that much?"

"Lazian didn't step out of bounds. Sam did. He was riding Lazian and his rackets the smart way, keeping out of regular police channels where stooges for City Hall could give the tipoff on raids and stuff. There was a grand jury, and Sam was feeding them evidence to show the tie-up between City Hall and the rackets. Lazian knew it and he didn't like it. It would have queered his fix, to have the gang in City Hall stuck in jail. Without political protection, the cops could get on him. I wanted to pick up Lazian after Sam was killed, but I didn't have a damn thing on him, and I would have been out in the sticks on a beat if I arrested Lazian and couldn't make it stick."

He sighed. "Besides all the political stuff, and the fact that Sam was my friend—he was an honest cop. And we both know what has to be done about people

who kill cops. If we don't..." He shrugged. "There are a hell of a lot more on the other side of the fence than there are cops. It's tough enough without letting them get away with cop-killing."

I didn't say anything. I knew what he meant. Only too well.

* * *

We didn't have to look for Moyle. He was talking familiarly with the hat-check girl and looked at us indifferently when we came in.

Ben went straight to him.

"Moyle?" he said.

The thin, dark man suddenly looked cautious. He nodded. The girl looked at us and became busy at the back of her crowded work room.

Ben showed his badge. "We want you at headquarters."

"What's the beef?"

"We found the gun that killed Keller. You left it in your room at the Anton."

Moyle stiffened and his lips began to tremble a little. He was trying hard to think, but confusion and fright were crowding him. You could see it and feel it.

Then Ben took a chance. He said, "Looks like you'll take the rap for Lazian's dirty work, Moyle."

"Lazian..." Moyle swallowed hard. "Look—you better see him about this. I mean, tell him that you—I work for him, see? He ought to know."

"Why not?" Ben smiled thinly.

Moyle led the way, walking stiffly as a man does when he's frightened.

THE office was as ordinary as a salesman's. Behind his desk, Lazian was a short, broad man with a heavy nose, thinning hair, a white-toothed smile. His eyes looked wise as the ages. They were alive and glistening as he listened to Moyle's explanation. Then he said, "I

don't believe I know you two men."

"No," Ben said. "Homicide has never caught up with you before. I'm Lieutenant Devin. This is Sergeant Haney."

Lazian nodded. "Drink?"

"No."

"It looks as if Phil has himself in a little trouble, but I'm sure there's been a mistake somewhere."

Ben's voice was toneless. "Is there?"

"Where did you find the gun?"

"In a drawer in the room he'd vacated at the Anton."

"Someone else must have left it. I'm certain Phil hasn't killed anyone. Right, Phil?"

Moyle nodded. He wet his lips and fumbled for a cigarette, his eyes desperately watching Lazian.

Lazian smiled. "I wouldn't be too hasty, Devin. Why don't you just question him here? I'm certain he can explain that—"

Ben shook his head. "I think he's guilty as hell, Lazian. I also think that ten, twenty, thirty hours of questioning at headquarters will have him singing like a choir of canaries. He's scared and he hasn't the guts to hold out."

Lazian stopped smiling and glanced at Moyle. For a fraction of a second concerned into his eyes.

"I don't like to have my men pushed around, Lieutenant."

"That's too bad."

"I might have to complain to certain parties."

"Don't try to threaten me, Lazian, or I'll handle you *my* way. You wouldn't like that."

Lazian eyed him coldly. "You've made several cracks. What's on your mind besides Moyle?"

"You."

"Go on."

"I want to find out exactly what kind of jobs Moyle does for the boss."

"You're saying I ordered him to kill Keller?"

"Did you?"

"Get out. Beat it. You'll hear about this. Now get the hell out!"

Ben said, "Sure! It was Phil's idea, not ours. We just want to talk with *him*. We think *he* has all the answers."

Suddenly Ben grabbed Moyle's left arm and jerked up the sleeve. We looked at the small puncture marks.

"I thought so," Ben snorted. "On the stuff. When he doesn't get it, he'll answer more questions than we can ask. And when he's so ragged he's jerking, crying for a shot of the stuff, we'll ask him all about how Sam Keller was killed—who, when, where, how, and *why*! He'll have all the answers—he'll even steady his hand long enough to sign a confession. Want to bet, Lazian?"

Moyle jerked his arm free. "Tell them, Tom! Tell them they can't—"

"Shut up!"

"But you said you'd—"

"Shut up, Phil. I'll—"

Ben interrupted. "He'll do nothing, Phil. He doesn't give a damn if you take a murder rap."

"Tom won't let you—"

"He can't stop us, sucker. We've got this tied to you so tight you're practically inhaling gas now! Why did you leave that gun there? With your prints on it."

Ben was prodding, working it up, building the tension that filled the room.

"And," Ben said, "don't tell us you lost it somewhere. That someone used it and planted it there afterwards."

Moyle was trembling. His eyes had become wide.

"I did! That's it! I lost it and—"

"Shut up!" Lazian snapped.

Moyle stared blankly at him, not realizing he had admitted ownership of the gun.

"Tom, you tell them. I lost it and—"

Moyle was breaking. I felt the tingle along my spine again.

Ben reached toward his holster. "Lazian, we want you."

Lazian moved with lightning speed. He must have been holding the gun under the desk.

The first shot caught Moyle low and he screamed and doubled over.

BEN'S gun was out, but it was mine that caught Lazian in the shoulder. Lazian shot and the bullet went high. Ben shot. Then it was quiet. Lazian doubled forward on the desk, the gun arm that Ben had hit hanging limply at his side. He began to moan.

I stooped over Moyle. He was breathing, but his hip was shattered. Behind me I heard Ben dialing.

He identified himself. "I'm at Lazian's club on East Ninety-ninth. Send two ambulances and a squad. Emergency." He hung up.

Moyle was talking. We bent over him.

"Listen . . . I was supposed to get Keller. I—I lost my nerve—Tom grabbed the gun—shot Keller and another cop—you, Devin. He gave me the gun—said to get rid of it."

He stopped and pain made him bite his lips.

"Keep talking," I said. "What happened?"

"Wasn't on the stuff then. Drank. Got drunk. Next morning couldn't remember about the gun. Thought I'd thrown it away. Told Tom that. He—he killed Keller."

We stood and waited for the sirens.

Ben looked a long time at the moaning Lazian. Anger mounted in his eyes. He was thinking of Sam Keller.

He walked over and looked directly down at Lazian.

"Listen, rat. Keller was a cop. He tried to do some good, help people. He had something to live for. But you, a cop-killer, making bums out of kids, running your rackets, lousing up lives. What do you live for? Go on—die!"

Ben must have been remembering Sam's face as he lay on the sidewalk, the covered figure on the stretcher, and the memory must have been strong.

Then suddenly Ben looked at me and it was gone. I saw that age was beginning to show in his face.

"Damn it to hell!" he said. "Why don't they hurry? I want to go home."

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MURDER IN CELL 5

A man lay dead in Cell 5. But how could any
of his shackled cellmates have killed him?

By **EARL L. WELLERSDICK**

THE DAY had been exactly like hundreds of others inside the walls of the Bilibad Prison in the Philippine Islands. The sun had scorched the jail building until the inside was a humid oven bringing moans of discomfort from the prisoners and curses from the guards.

In Cell 5 a quintet of the toughest, most brutal prisoners in the jail slumped in awkward positions against the wall—two on one wall, three on the other—their handcuffed hands locked to huge rings high in the wall above their heads. They were the most troublesome men in the

burning prison, and for them was designed the greatest discomfort. Soon, at dusk, their handcuffs would be unlocked and they would be allowed to slump to the floor in their filthy prison rags to fight thousands of mosquitoes through the night.

In the gallery outside, the guards walked their posts and welcomed the approaching evening that would release them for a time from the heat of the day.

Suddenly, from Cell 5, frightened cries brought the guards on the run.

"What's wrong?" yelled one.

"Get a doctor, quick! Villanada is sick," was the cry from deep in the cell.

Within a few moments a doctor was there examining Villanada. He found the man had been beaten about the body, and there were marks on his throat.

"He's been murdered," said the surprised doctor.

"But that's impossible," cried the stunned guard who had shackled the men to the walls earlier in the day. He inspected the irons of the four men again. They were as secure as they had been earlier. None of the men could have gotten loose, and the guard was positive no one had entered the dingy cell while he was on guard.

Villanada had been one of the two men on one side of the cell. Marifosque, his nearest neighbor, was chained two feet four inches away; and the closest man on the adjoining wall was secured at a distance of seven feet. At first it was thought Marifosque might have swung up and strangled the dead man with his feet, but this theory was thrown out when it was realized the accused man was a partial paralytic.

The men all told the same story when questioned. Late in the afternoon Villanada had complained of feeling ill but wouldn't let them send for the doctor as he thought he would get better. Then, suddenly, before their eyes he had died.

Prison Superintendent Quillen was a shrewd man, having dealt with criminals most of his life. He knew that as long as these men were together they would stick to the same story out of fear, but separated each would be afraid one of the others would tell a story to pin the crime on a comrade.

With this in mind, the superintendent separated the men, and in a short time his scheme paid off. Marifosque was the first to give away. He said that Mallari and Gutierrez committed the murder of

Villanada. He himself was innocent.

"They knew how to get loose," he told the incredulous superintendent, "and they walked about the cell taunting us. Villanada threatened to squeal, so they gagged him, then beat and choked him to death."

"But how did they get loose?" asked Quillen. Marifosque wouldn't tell.

The superintendent then sent for Gutierrez.

"You and Mallari killed Villanada," he stated flatly. "You got loose and one of you gagged him while the other did the strangling."

Confronted with a few of the facts, Gutierrez soon broke down, babbling the complete story to save his own neck. Yes, he and Mallari had gotten loose, but it was Mallari who had choked Villanada. All he had done, insisted Gutierrez, was gag the man with his hands.

The superintendent was still interested in how the men had gotten free and once Gutierrez started talking he was willing to tell the whole story.

In Cell 5, under the close scrutiny of Quillen and the guards, Gutierrez showed them a piece of loose mortar in the wall. From behind this he extracted a piece of soap and two small fragments of brick, each a quarter-inch square and an eighth-inch thick. Soaping these he pushed them into the locks of the handcuffs which were snapped shut. Quillen tested the handcuffs but they remained closed.

With a laugh Gutierrez applied some pressure with his forearms, gave a twist, and was free. The soaped-up pieces of brick were so well fixed into place the handcuffs felt locked but weren't.

What might have been an unsolved, clever murder became just a simple killing through the shrewdness of Superintendent Quillen who, although he might not have been able to figure out the release method himself, knew the minds of his prisoners.

Doodlebug Death

She was beautiful as she lay there on the boat, her hair a golden halo around her soft white shoulders. Where could Ray Dorcas ever hope to find a lovelier corpse?



He jumped backward off the edge of the boat, heading for the dark water. . . .

RAY DORCAS had risen early, the morning he found the body. The sky was clear, and for the first time in days there was no wind, so that the waves along the Santa Barbara channel were powerless, even against tiny craft.

He was the first one down to the shot boat, but then he usually was. That way

By **V. E. THIESSEN**

he could start and check the motor, could get it purring like some well-fed kitten. With over fifty charges of explosive to set off before sundown, there would be no time to argue with a stubborn motor. Then too, if they fell too far behind the jetters, and the spread boat had to wait for them, there would be harsh words from Trimble, the party chief, and reminders that surveying for oil under a hundred feet of water cost plenty of dollars an hour. Worse still, there would be the edged kidding and raucous laughter from the crews of the other boats at the end of the day's work.

Ray began to whistle, thinking of the night before, thinking of the soft, cool smell of the night, and of Faye. For an instant he imagined he could hear her tiny, warm laughter, and he paused a moment in his whistling to smile, before he resumed the tune.

It appeared that the kid had reached the shot boat before him. A good sign, he thought, a good week starting. Coming closer, he could see that the figure in the boat was that of a woman. Whoever she was, her body had slumped into a twisted, grotesque position.

A chill crawled along Ray's spine. The whistle ceased as suddenly as if it were cut off with a knife. He began to run.

HE REACHED the wharf and dropped into the shot boat. The woman lay face down, her body part off, part on the board that served as an occasional seat. Her hair was blonde, the color of Faye's. The wind, that wind that had seemed so soft and cool the night before, had bleached and dried the board on which she lay, so that her blood had been sucked into its fiber. There was no sign of a weapon, only the wound in her back that had been the cause of her death. Ray stood there a moment, staring.

He could not see her face. Fear rose

in him. He knew that you were not supposed to move bodies; he was not going to look.

He reached out, his arm moving as slowly as if it were on strings. He lifted one shoulder enough to see her face. It was Faye.

He had known he would recognize her. He had lifted her shoulder and looked, hoping without hope. Numb with shock, he looked away across the placid waters of the channel.

Then he turned his head and began to look about the boat. He was thorough, in his slow way. Item by item he checked the equipment on the boat. At length he saw something strange. There were wires, two extra wires that should not have been there. They were loose, as though his arrival had interrupted their connection. Tracing them he found a charge of explosive.

He wondered. Was a connection to be made to the motor? Was he supposed to try to take the body to a more populated section of the beach? Then he and the boat and the body would have been flung along the channel. Or did the killer intend connecting to a firing reel and completing the demolition before Ray's arrival? Ray couldn't know.

He gave one last look. He had disturbed nothing. Faye lay unchanged. Only the sun had changed, rising above the water. It was the kind of day a man could make fifty shots.

Suddenly, as he stared at her body, work had no reality. The shock began to wear off and the numbness leave him. The remembered laughter of the night before became a knife in his mind. Black agony grew in his breast, and he turned away with his nails cutting blood from the palms of his hands.

He knew what he had to do. The kid or Lowe should be here in a moment. One of them had to watch while he called the police.

HIS MIND was still a whirling nightmare as the investigation began. It had taken little to summon the police. Sergeant Spearce, of homicide, was in charge. His voice brittle, he said, "I'm afraid I'll have to ask you some more questions. Come along."

Ray followed to the isolated beach area that Spearce had selected for on-the-spot questioning. Spearce kicked at the sand, then whirled, his eyes hard and probing.

"Why did you kill her?" The words had the savage pounce of a cougar.

A slow horror seeped into Ray's mind. "I didn't kill her. I—"

"You quarreled last night," Spearce's voice drove on mercilessly. "We know that. You must have stabbed her in anger. You placed her here, with the charge of explosive. If your crew had been three minutes later you would have sent her off into the channel, and blown the evidence of your crime into fragments."

"No. Not I. No."

"You would have fed her to the fish. You'd have destroyed the evidence in fragments for the fish."

Ray's hands clenched as he fought for self-control. "No. Don't talk like that."

Spearce's voice softened, gentled, like a cat playing with a mouse. "There seems no doubt that the woman is Faye Manning. You admit you knew her."

"Yes."

"She was a hostess in a swank night club near here, the Amber Lantern. You met her there, dated her a time or two."

"Yes." Ray had the feeling that there was sandpaper in his throat.

"Why did you quarrel?"

Ray shot a glance at the group near the boat. "We quarreled over the kid there," he admitted. "Jack had a crush on her."

"You were jealous, eh?"

"Not exactly. She told Jack to run

along, that she wasn't interested in boys. He took it hard and I thought she could have let him down easier. We argued about that most of the night."

"You admit you took her riding in the company boat, against the rules. Last night was your last ride."

It hurt remembering that. His fingers clenched tighter. "Yes."

"The moon was beautiful, as I recall. You were in love with her."

Ray stood, motionless, remembering. "Isn't that right?" Spearce's voice slashed.

"The moon was beautiful on the channel, yes," Ray admitted. He did not want to answer the rest of it.

"And you killed her in the moonlight. You won the quarrel that way. You saw the blood well out between her shoulder blades. Is that the way it was?"

"No! I left her at the door to her apartment about four this morning. We had talked it out and made up."

"You said that. But no one saw you leave her." Sergeant Spearce slid his hand into his pocket, drew out two quarters. He held them in one hand, began to manipulate them with his fingers, moving one coin above the other. He looked at the quarters, saying nothing. The rhythmic motion wore at Ray's nerves like water dropping on stone.

"I'm interested in this explosive," Spearce continued. "You say the charges were not connected."

"That's right."

"You shoot explosives as part of your job. Your boat explodes seismographic charges set by another boat."

"Yes."

"Are all your crew experienced demolition men?"

"Yes. Except the kid."

"Tell me about that."

"There are three of us," Ray explained. "I've handled explosives for doodlebugging—that's oil exploration—for ten years.

My regular helper, Bland Lowe, is an old hand with all kinds of explosives. The other helper, Jack Norris, is a college kid on summer vacation. He's learning the business—sort of an extra hand. He's learned quite a bit."

"Enough to set a charge like this?"

Spearce gestured toward the charge in the boat.

"Yes."

Spearce said shrewdly, "You see what I'm driving at. When a man kills, he uses tools he knows well. Even the crime of passion is covered up by the use of the familiar. The body was placed in your boat. Everything points at you."

Ray's body was hard with tension as he met the officer's gaze. "Am I under arrest?"

"No. Not yet. I like to be sure. I expect to be sure before the sun goes down. Don't leave town. Because when I'm sure, I want to be able to find you."

Spearce closed his hand, clicking the quarters with the finality of a shut trap. He thrust them into his pocket, and turned away, signifying that the questioning was over, as far as Ray was concerned.

IT SEEMED impossible that work could go on now, yet when the questioning was over another boat was provided. Hoping that the familiar routine would halt the whirling of his mind, Ray took his position in the tiny armada along the channel. Far ahead, the survey boat was plotting charges, followed by two jetting boats. These placed explosive charges at the bottom of the channel. Ray's boat followed and exploded the charges that had been set by the jetters. While the afternoon wore on and they sent geyser after geyser pluming out of the channel, Ray's mind returned to Sergeant Spearce's words. "A man uses familiar tools when he kills."

Ray was afraid that was true. He shot

a glance up toward the bow of the boat where the kid, Jack Norris, was stationed.

Jack was young, but not too young for love, or too young to kill a woman who had spurned his love. And what would be more logical than to set a trap for his more successful rival?

There was no doubt that Jack's infatuation had run beyond normal. Ray could recall Faye's voice saying, "I had to be cruel. He had even gone to see my parents in Daltonville. It's been a ridiculous situation."

If Jack were that crazy . . .

The boat was moving now. Jack was piloting it toward the next brightly colored buoy. Ray moved forward, beside the wheel. His mind was clear with necessity. He had better find out what he could, because it looked as if the police were measuring him for a prison cell.

He said suddenly, "What were Faye's parents like?"

He saw Jack turn, eyes blazing. The kid looked bad. Ray wondered if the haggardness were due to grief or guilt.

"What . . ."

"You went to Daltonville and met her folks. They'll take it hard won't they?"

"Damn it, leave me alone!" Jack's eyes blazed at him.

Ray smiled, trying to bait the other into some revealing words. "Sure had a crush on her, didn't you, kid?"

The word "kid" did it. Instead of saying something that might prove or disprove guilt, Jack came away from the wheel, eyes blazing, slender fists cocked and flailing.

Ray caught him with the skill born of many rough-and-tumble fights. He said, knowing he had failed in the effort to gain information, "Easy there."

Jack continued to struggle. The third member of the party, Bland Lowe, reached the wheel in a quick, catlike movement, straightening the boat. His disgusted voice lashed at them, "Break it up and let's

shoot this one. We haven't got all day."

Jack ceased to struggle. Ray released him and he went quietly back to the wheel.

THEY HAD reached the buoy that marked the explosive charge. Two wires came up from the charge to the buoy. As Ray busied himself about the routine of removing the wires and attaching them to the exploder he gave his attention to his co-worker, Bland Lowe.

Lowe was small and compact and quick. He said now, "Okay, let's get away from it." The boat began to back away from its position, unreeling the firing reel.

Lowe grinned and shook a cigarette out of a pack. He tapped the end of the cigarette on the crystal of his watch, in a gesture as old as habit. His dark eyes met Ray's and he said, "Better take it easy, Ray. The kid's pretty well upset. You don't look too well yourself."

Ray's mind ran over what he knew of Lowe's background. Could he have known Faye, somewhere in the past? He let his memory run over the day before.

He and Faye had met Lowe on the street. He recalled introducing them, recalled Faye's voice saying, "Somehow it seems that I should know you."

Lowe had smiled and said easily, "I hope so, but I know I would have remembered."

Could Lowe have been afraid she would remember him? Could he have killed her to prevent identification?

The water, geysering near their tiny boat, brought reality. Ray shook his head. Such a theory was wild—possible but not likely.

He was aware suddenly that it was near dark. They always worked as late as they had light. They fired another charge and then turned, heading in through the dusk. The sound of a strange motor approached, and a hundred yards from shore a police boat nosed alongside them and hailed them to a halt.

Sergeant Spearce came aboard in an athletic leap. He came directly to Ray and said, "I want to ask you some more questions." He groped in his pocket, drew forth a thin-bladed hunting knife. "Recognize this?" he asked.

Cold ran along Ray's back. "Yes. It's mine. I couldn't find it this morning."

"You're quick to tell me you lost it. I wonder why?"

Ray stammered, "You seemed to imply . . . I mean . . ."

Spearce's voice was cold as marble. "You're right. The knife has been washed, but there are traces of her blood in the handle. You see, her blood was a somewhat unusual type. I'm afraid you're under arrest."

So the frame was complete. Ray's whirling mind recognized that even as fear gnawed at him. He could see the rest of it. Any loose ends would be tied up while he lay in jail. If any more evidence was needed, the murderer would provide that too.

He jumped backward off the edge of the boat, feeling himself go deep into the dim waters. He thanked his luck that he was an expert swimmer. Kicking off his shoes, he began to swim underwater—away from shore, where he would be least expected. He heard voices, and once a searchlight from the police boat cut the gathering dark above him and he submerged again.

HE CAME out of the water with a new problem revolving in his mind. He had to get dry clothing and shoes before he did anything else. He debated going to his apartment. It was within walking distance from the beach, but it was also the first place the police would look for him. With radio cars they could be waiting for him now. But if they were still searching the waters of the bay, perhaps they might not have thought of his need for clothing.

There seemed no way to avoid the chance. He began to run from the beach toward his apartment. His heart, already pounding from the swim, became a great hammer that tried to tear his chest apart. He slowed, his breath great sobbing gusts, and walked for a few steps, then began to run again.

There were no cars parked near his place. He took one quick glance and then went on into the building, for there was no time for any excess of caution. He burst into his apartment and pulled shoes on his feet, without stopping for socks. He seized clothing from his closet, not wanting to take time to change here. His car was downstairs in one of the car ports, a two-year-old popular model, like hundreds of others in the city. If he could get that car out he could drive to some deserted place and change clothing there.

Laden with clothing he paused once, then jerked open a chest of drawers. Three letters lay inside, the sum total of all his letters from Faye. He thrust them in a pocket, hoping that somewhere in them he might find some overlooked clue to her past, some clue that might lead to her killer.

Then he was hurrying down the stairs, not wanting to run, in case he met another apartment dweller, yet aware of the need for speed. He made it to his car, and as he kicked the motor to life he heard the shrill of sirens. The sound sent a chill prowling his back. Then he was backing out and gunning the car down the street.

He met one of the patrol cars and forced himself to drive on, hoping his wet clothes would not be noticeable at night, hoping they were not yet aware of the kind of car he owned.

He made it. Thirty minutes later he was in the country and climbing into dry clothing.

Afterwards he sat in his car, dragging smoke from a cigarette, feeling some of the tautness go out of him. He had a

chance now, a bare chance. If he were lucky he could get clear out of the country. They could use doodlebuggers in South America. But if he were caught, his attempted flight would be the deciding proof, the last nail in the coffin.

He blew smoke in a great shuddering gust. He was afraid to stay, and he could not afford to run. He had to get information somewhere, information about Faye, about her past, her work. He had to find out about his two helpers, for the use of explosive pointed directed at one of them. The best place to begin, he thought, would be the newspaper morgue. Somewhere in the last year something would have been printed. Certainly there had been much written about the Amber Lantern, where Faye worked.

But he could not afford to go to a newspaper office. They would soon have all the details of his escape, and some enterprising reporter would be sure to recognize him.

HE DID the next best thing. He went to that often-forgotten source of knowledge, the last place to look for a hiding criminal. He went to the public library.

A girl sat behind the reference desk. She looked at him with wide-set, tawny eyes and said, "May I help you?"

He asked for the file of newspapers for the year and she got up, saying, "They're in the basement. If you don't mind helping me carry them."

Following her, watching her walk, was almost enough to take his mind off his troubles. They found the papers and she cleared a table where he could work. Then she smiled at him and was gone.

He fumbled at the papers with frantic haste. The library would close soon. He had little time to work.

He began to find scraps of information. A reference to the Amber Lantern, a reference to Faye. And gradually as he

read, the recesses of his mind built up a protest, telling him that it was impossible, that the picture that began to form could not be true.

For the Amber Lantern was good copy. While there was nothing definite, nothing real, yet here and there a bit about Faye crept in. These scraps did not point at the woman Ray had known. The Faye whose image grew out of these printed pages was not nice at all.

He stared unseeing at the headline of ten months ago. Had he know her at all? Or had she been a mask; had his knowledge gone no deeper than that warm voice and beautiful face?

He drew the letters from his pocket, the brief notes, that she had written in the last year. He began to read them again, not with the eyes of a lover. Now they did not seem the same.

He looked at the newspaper again and became aware of the headline. Some of the smaller print caught his eyes and he began to read. When he finished he looked up from the paper, fighting the theory that seized his mind. He did not want to believe this idea, and yet he had to follow it to determine the truth. He stacked the papers back neatly and went upstairs.

The girl at the desk looked up at the sound of his footfalls and smiled at him. He could not help smiling back as he asked for a telephone.

She was sorry that no library phones were available. But there was a drugstore across the street with booths.

He looked at her, wondering. Her voice was not like Faye's loaded with sultry promise. Her eyes were direct and friendly, not coquettish. He blurted suddenly, "What's your name?"

Her tawny eyes looked at him directly, "Thomas," she said. "Ann Thomas."

He said, "I'll see you, Ann, if things work out. And if they don't—pray for me, will you?"

Then he whirled and strode away, leaving her staring after him in amazement.

HE CALLED Bland Lowe from the telephone booth in the drugstore. When the other answered the phone, he said swiftly, "This is Ray. You've got to help me a little."

"Of course," Lowe agreed.

"Are you alone?"

"Yes."

"I'll come over there. I'm working on a theory of Faye's murder and I want you to help me work something out."

"I'll be looking for you. Where are you now?"

"About a half-hour away."

"I know, but where?"

Ray hung up the phone. Better not say too much until he was sure.

He went back to his car and started for Lowe's place. All the way there his mind worked on the information he had found in the newspaper files. The truth began to grow even clearer.

He came in the back way to Lowe's place, along a little-used side street. He pulled up at the curb and came out of the car to walk toward the entrance.

A shadowy shape detached itself from a tree and came beside him. He whirled, but the shape seized his arm, twisting it behind him. A shorter shadow came racing around the house and added its clutch.

Sergeant Spearce, patting him and finding no weapon, said, "I don't think you can get away this time, mister."

Ray stood quietly between the two officers. "Will you grant a request? Just one."

"What is it?"

"Let me talk to Lowe before you take me away."

"You can talk to him at the station, if he wants to talk to you."

Ray thought a moment. He had to see Lowe. He offered bait, dangerous bait, by saying, "Let me see Lowe. You

let me see Lowe and perhaps I'll confess."

Spearce considered that. "Okay," he agreed shortly.

They rang the bell. Lowe admitted them, and they stepped inside. He was dressed in a robe and held a newspaper as though he had been reading. Surprise registered on his face. Ray stared at him accusingly.

Lowe protested, "I didn't tip them off." He appealed to Spearce. "Did I call you?"

Spearce said neutrally, "I don't know. We got an anonymous tip."

Ray's mind became a hard shell of certainty. He turned to Spearce. "Lowe was your informer, he was the only one who knew I was coming here. He framed me all the way. He's the murderer you want."

BLAND LOWE smiled smoothly. "He's mad. I never thought Ray would turn on a friend, but if a man is desperate enough to murder a woman . . ." He shrugged, leaving the thought that such a man would do anything.

Ray said, "Or if he's desperate enough to blow up a safe!"

Lowe looked at him, his eyes cold pinpoints.

Ray said softly, "About ten months ago an oil company had a safe blown open and the payroll stolen. I imagine if we checked we'd find you worked for that oil company then. You're a mighty good hand with explosives."

"That's ridiculous!" Lowe's voice was hotly angry.

"Now how would you have found out about the cash payroll? Could Fay have known? Seems she was going out with one of the high officials about then."

"Damn it, finish this fairy story and then get the hell out of here!" Lowe's anger was barely suppressed.

"When you met on the street, and she said it seemed she knew you—that wouldn't have been blackmail, would it?

That wouldn't have been a hint that she was tired waiting for the money to cool off, that she wanted her share and would talk to the police if she didn't receive it? She was beautiful enough to get off easy, even if you accused her. You know that."

"Ridiculous."

"Couldn't be you met her and paid her with the thin blade of a knife?"

"No! It couldn't be."

Ray smiled, slipping a hand inside



his coat pocket. "But it could be that she suspected your treachery and put the facts in writing. It could be that she sent the letter to me, telling about the safe robbery and how you two planned it."

For the first time Ray saw fear in the other man's eyes. He pulled one of Faye's letters from his pocket. His voice dropped, low and meaningful. "Recognize her writing?" He put his thumb and finger over the postmark on the envelope and extended it where Lowe could see the address.

In that instant, Lowe's face changed. As he recognized the writing his face drew into a snarling mask. He clawed the letter out of Ray's hand and dropped the newspaper he held, revealing an automatic pistol. He covered Ray and the police

(Continued on page 126)

TAKE MY HOT SEAT!

By TED STRATTON

"Penrose!" I said hoarsely. But there was no answer.
There never would be. . . .



Rorty Mackin's bosses were just the politest guys ever. "Take a load off your feet," they told Rorty—and shoved an electric chair under him!

THE DAY it started for me, the store ran a special on nylons in the basement. Two things I know. Nylons look good on Nan Carter, my girl. When McGinley's advertises a sensational giveaway, customers should be wary. We can't give anything away. Rumor says we've been teetering on bankruptcy.

As head of the store's Security Division, I went down to the basement that

morning. Everything was under control. The super spotted me, beckoned urgently.

"Mackin," she said, "J. B. McGinley wants you upstairs."

"Sure," I said, and went upstairs to his office.

J. B. McGinley, store president, sat on two fat telephone books stacked on a swivel chair. He was a small, middle-aged philanderer. Fred Dalger, the husky, penny-scrimping treasurer, wore a woolen muffler around his neck. Keith Penrose, J. B.'s pet protege, had been called in. He was a big, curly-haired man who thought he was irresistible to the women when he arched his chest.

J. B. announced, "Mr. Dalger, explain matters to Rorty Mackin, here."

Dalger coughed, and mumbled, "Of course. We can trust Mackin." He coughed again.

"I'd take this trip myself," he rumbled, "but my doctor ordered me to bed with this cold."

He placed a small metal box on the desk. He handed a key to Penrose, explained, "Your key fits the top lock." He handed me another key. "Mackin, your key fits the bottom lock. It takes both keys to unlock the box."

"What's the story?" I asked curiously.

"You and Penrose are taking the 10:15 express from Grand Central. You have a compartment in Car 10. Open the box on the train and follow your instructions implicitly."

"Very good, sir," Penrose babbled.

I grunted, "Why the Junior G-man secrecy?"

"For obviously good financial reasons," J. B. put in. "It's a delicate negotiation, Rorty."

I've served time on the local police force, been with the C.I.C. during World War II. Dalger knew it. Why should he make a dope like Keith Penrose my watchdog? Besides, I hated Penrose's back

teeth. Nan Carter, my girl, is the store nurse. We're engaged. Penrose had tried to date her. Everybody knew I had slugged him for that.

J. B. stood up, walked over to me so that I got a good whiff of the pomade he used profusely on his sparse hair. "Do a good job, Rorty," he suggested, and patted my back.

Penrose stuffed the metal box into his coat pocket. "Better let me carry that box," I suggested, but Penrose squared his shoulders and said manfully, "It's safe with me."

I followed him outside. Keith Penrose was an incompetent. Fred Dalger was a louse who mistrusted everybody in the store. But J. B.—he was tops in my book.

SEATED in the taxi, I crowded Penrose into one corner, grabbed a handful of his shirt. "What's the lowdown?" I demanded.

"I don't know."

I had an idea. "Watterson?" I asked softly.

Too warily, Penrose said. "I—I wouldn't know."

Watterson had been head accountant at McGinley's for years. Juggling accounts over a period of three years, he had skipped out two months back with at least a hundred grand of the store's cash. And right from under Fred Dalger's nose, too. I'd always wondered how Watterson could have bamboozled our suspicious treasurer.

"You pugs gonna square off?" the cabbie wanted to know.

I released Penrose and moved over. At Grand Central, Penrose paid off the cabbie from a roll of bills he carried in one pants pocket. We went downstairs. "We'll go aboard the train," I said, "and open that metal box."

But Penrose headed for the cigar stand where he bought a copy of *Argosy* and

a comic book. "Yours," he said, and handed me the comic.

We passed through the gate, walked along the concourse parallel to our train. Behind us, somebody squealed. I turned.

A gorgeous blonde wearing a tiny hat and tailored suit had dropped an overnight bag. The catch had broken open, spilling her personal possessions on the concrete.

Penrose stooped down, crammed the stuff into the case, snapped the cheap lock. Whipping off his hat, he simpered, "A pleasure."

"So terribly careless of me," she purred.

"Isn't that suit," Penrose asked, sparing for an opening, "a McGinley Store model?"

"No-o-o."

"Miss—uh—that is—"

"Miss Alma Greenwood," she said. "Thanks awfully for your help. Will we see each other again on the train?"

"Sure, sure. I'm—"

I marched Penrose along the concourse, with a hammerlock on his wrist. "Keep your mouth shut, dope," I warned. Then I noticed the white-coated porter eyeing us at the open door of Car 10. "He's drunk," I explained, and pushed Penrose into the door.

George grinned. The gorgeous girl drifted past, smiled sweetly. Was she working an angle in this business? I wondered. The underwear in her cheap overnight bag had been six sizes too big for her sleek chassis, but Keith Penrose wouldn't know about that. He'd only been with McGinley's for a couple of months.

Inside the compartment of Car 10, I waited until the train chugged along the Hudson River. "Open that metal box," I ordered, and laid down my comic book.

Penrose used his key on the box. I used mine. The lid flew open. Penrose exclaimed, "Good heavens," and stared. Inside that box was a stack of crisp, hundred-dollar bills. I counted them. There

was eight thousand dollars in cash. There was also a note.

Destination: Barksville, Indiana. Arrival: 4:10 A.M. At Barksville, walk north along Main Street to first overhead blinker. Turn right. Walk along macadamized road for three miles. Beyond fourth bridge, locate a green-shingled old bungalow on the left. Inside, Mrs. Watterson will tell you exactly where to find Watterson in Barksville, where he has hidden the stolen cash. Mackin will then return to Barksville, and soliciting the help of the local police, will apprehend Watterson and the cash. Then, returning to Penrose and Mrs. Watterson, he will give her the eight thousand dollars in the metal box for her information and help. Wire a report.

J. B.

"Isn't it exciting?" Penrose bleated. "Look, I brought a gun."

He hauled out an automatic, waved it around. "Hey," I yelled, and wrestled the gun from his hand. There were shells in the clip. The dope had left the safety catch off.

"For the last time," I said quietly, "remember I'm the boss on this trip, dope. If there's guns, I'll handle the rapid fire. You do what the note says, no more."

Penrose licked his lips. "Is there . . . danger?"

"Men have been killed for less than a hundred dollars. We're mixed up in a hundred-grand deal, and I don't like it."

I SET the safety on the gun, pocketed it. I didn't like this deal that J. B. and Fred Dalger had handed me. Why should Mrs. Watterson, a dame I didn't know, trade over a hundred grand of successfully stolen cash for a mere eight thousand dollars? Why should I have been burdened with a dope like Keith Penrose when I needed a couple of my efficient store buddies in the Security Division? Why *walk* three miles out to Mrs. Watterson's hide-out, *walk* three miles back? Why weren't Watterson and his wife living together? Why . . .

I had enough *why's* to last me through lunch and a late dinner in the compart-

ment. At nine P.M. the porter made up our bunks. Penrose suggested, around a yawn, "Can't we manage a nightcap?"

"I'll have a couple of beers," I agreed, and shrugged into a coat. We locked the compartment. I had the metal box containing the cash in my left hip pocket.

In the lounge car, Keith Penrose made a beeline for Miss Greenwood, the gorgeous girl with the yen to make friends with us. "This is so nice," Penrose drooled. "Will you join us in a drink?"

She did. They talked. I sulked behind a magazine. Then she stood up and said, "I'm bored, Mr. Mackin. Let's drink at the bar."

I laid the magazine down, glanced at Penrose. He sulked. "Sure," I agreed, because it would give me a chance to find out if this girl had an angle in our business.

At the bar, she stood with one heel hooked on the rail, like a man. Penrose breezed past us, headed for Car 10. She had a double Scotch. I had a beer. The perfume she wore was heady, expensive. It smelled like Scotch heather. I know, because I'd been in Scotland during the war.

"Traveling far?" I began.

"Just to Chicago."

"New York girl?"

She smiled. "Don't go stuffy on me, please." She ordered more drinks, asked the bartender, "Powder room?"

"First car forward, miss," he answered.

"May I?" she asked, and laughter bubbled inside her eyes.

"Sure," I said.

I sipped my beer. Somehow she seemed vaguely familiar. The more I thought it over, the surer I was that I had seen her face somewhere before. The brown hair. The eager face, the laughing eyes. The full, inviting mouth.

The bartender said softly, "Funny about women, sir. They take an hour to powder a nose that isn't shiny because they pow-

dered it just before you came in here."

I flipped a five-dollar bill on the bar and strode off. The streamliner's deck was steady as the sidewalk outside McGinley's store. I tested the door on our compartment. It was unlocked. It should have been locked. I pushed inside. It was dark. Penrose sprawled on the far berth. I closed the door, vaguely sniffing at a sweetish odor that meant perfume—and something crashed against my skull. I pitched forward into sudden darkness....

SOMEWHERE nearby a man shouted, "All ab-o-ard!"

I crawled to my feet, dropped on the bed. I located the window shade, lifted it. Light streamed in. The train was stopped at a station. It began to move and—my God, there in the shadows by a pillar! The man wearing a hat, overcoat, muffler—Fred Dalger, the store treasurer.

I rolled over, bumped against somebody. "Penrose," I said hoarsely. "Was Fred Dalger in here? Was—"

He didn't answer. I whipped the shade down, stood up groggily and turned on the light. Keith Penrose lay on the bed. Powder had burned his shirt front. There was blood around the torn material. He was dead. He'd never arch his chest for another female.

His gun, which should have been in my pocket, lay beside him. I sniffed the barrel. The gun had been fired. I felt my hip pocket. The metal box was there. I opened it. The money was there. So were the instructions.

I stumbled into the private lavatory, stared at the bloody scratches on my face. I went back to Penrose, examined his hands. There was blood under his fingernails, and flesh, my flesh, there too. I'd been framed with his murder, framed neatly and completely.

It had been so simple, with the aid of that blonde. The killer had knocked Penrose out, sapped me when I returned.

Then he had scratched my face with Penrose's fingernails as the final, damning evidence against me for murder.

I washed my face, sat down and kept vigil over my dead buddy. He was my buddy now. I sat there all night.

During that time, something elusive evaded my conscious thinking. On a job, you check all the facts. You add, subtract, multiply facts until you arrive at the correct total. Sometimes murder isn't an arithmetical matter at all. It's a task for the imagination. Then I got a clue. It was fantastic, but I checked it. Maybe, maybe . . .

When the minutes had totaled up sufficient hours, the porter rapped on the door and warned, "Barksville in twenty minutes, suh."

When the train slowed, I told Penrose, "I won't forget what somebody did to you, fellow."

Locking the door, I debarked, told the porter, "Mr. Penrose is going on to Chicago. Here's five bucks. Let him sleep late."

IN THE darkness outside the back door of the bungalow three miles from Barksville, I rapped softly. I had a gun in my hand, the safety catch off. No answer. Absolutely no noise. I pushed in, fumbled for a switch and pressed.

Miss Greenwood had been a gorgeous girl. She sat at the kitchen table, head resting on the table cloth. There was a bullet wound behind her right ear and dried mud caked to her shoes. I opened the pocketbook, checked her driver's license. Then I tumbled.

She was Mary Catherine Watterson. She was the thieving accountant's dead wife. "Remember," I told myself, "about the time you were in Watterson's office and saw her picture on his desk?"

That didn't help much. Yet the connections began to form a sinister pattern. Behind all this—two murders, a faked

negotiation with eight thousand dollars in cash, theft of the store's money—was a master hand that had been in this deal right from the start. There was one more item to verify.

I searched the house. The third corpse lay in the bathroom. He was a tall, thin, elderly man with a hawk nose and surprise on his face. He hadn't expected death. He'd been a dupe so that somebody high up in McGinley's store could steal a hundred grand and leave me holding the bag for theft and a triple murder.

From an all-night beanery in Barks-ville, I phoned Nan Carter, at McGinley's store. "Love and kisses," I began, "but ask no questions." I gave her a New York address, ordered, "Find out if he's in his apartment, understand? If I can locate a plane, I'll be back this afternoon."

I signed off, asked the short-order cook a question. "We got a field right outside town," he said. "Yeah, you can rent a plane."

With eight thousand dollars of McGinley money in my pocket, I could have bought the plane that took me to La-Guardia Field.

At the apartment building, I climbed to the sixth floor. Nan Carter hadn't been in the lobby downstairs. That was all right. She wasn't parked in the sixth-floor corridor. Good, she'd had sense enough to check discreetly and get me the information that I had to have. She was a swell girl. I loved her.

I pressed the bell button. He took a long time answering from inside the door: "Yes?"

"Telegram from Barksville, sir," I said, like Western Union.

The catch snicked off. Gun in hand, I leaned against the door and shoved. I had expected some pressure behind the door. There wasn't any. I skidded in on all fours.

I had traveled hours on a train with a corpse. Walked six miles along a lonely,

country road. Planed home. Taxied. All that traveling to back a hunch so that I could burst into a room, skid on a runner rug, and have the rug spill me on the waxed floor!

When I rolled over, gunless, J. B. McGinley, a smile on his face, watched over me. He didn't say anything. He didn't have to. The gun in his hands would talk when he finished measuring me for a coffin.

I stood up slowly, noted that my gun was a yard to the right. He said softly, "I didn't figure you'd tumble to me, Rorty. This complicates matters, eh?"

"One thing tipped me off, boss."

His eyes were cold, thoughtful. "Yes?"

"That hair pomade you wear, boss. Our compartment in Car 10 reeked with the stuff. And someone high up in the store had had to connive with Watterson, the accountant, to enable him to steal that much cash from the store. Somebody—"

He interrupted irritably: "Did you have to involve Nan Carter in this, Rorty?"

I STARED. The floor under my feet started to turn to sand. He had Nan Carter in here! She had followed my orders too closely to find out if he were home. Maybe, when he had planed back from Barksville with all that money, she had been waiting around his apartment to find out *when* he'd come home or *if* he were in.

I had to think fast, with all my world tumbling around my weary shoulders. Slowly, I sagged at the knees. "Had a busy day—and busy night, boss—two, no, three corpses—and—" I slumped to the waxed floor and that stupid killer stood there with a gun in one hand, thinking how easy I was making my death for him.

My fingers closed on one end of runner rug. J. B. McGinley stood on the other end of that rug. I jerked, and he staggered backwards. His gun muzzle jerked up crazily. His surprised trigger finger

closed. The gun went off with a roar.

With my knees under me, I lunged forward. My shoulder struck his knees. He was a little fellow, pampered, not built for this kind of a deadly game. Still, he'd done pretty well at it so far. Three corpses in his wake, over a hundred grand of cash in his pocket. Sort of a bargain in murder.

I sat on his chest, took his gun from his hand. He was groggy. I carried him into the living room, flung him on the divan. "Where is she?" I demanded.

"The closet," he gulped, and lay back with his eyes closed.

I backed to the closet, jerked it open. Nan Carter fell out. She was gagged. J. B. had bound her wrists and lovely, nyloned ankles with handkerchiefs. I cut her loose.

She stood up, smoothed her skirt over slim hips and said, "Hello, Rorty darling. I phoned him repeatedly, for hours, like you said. When he didn't answer, I came over. He found me outside and guessed that whatever was in the cards had come out. So he brought me in here. Rorty darling, I'm no detective."

Then her eyes opened wide with wonder as she stared past me and she said, "Oh, no, no!"

I whirled.

Gun in hand, hat on, overcoat collar up around the muffler at his neck, stood Fred Dalger on the far side of the living room.

"Now, just a second," I snapped. "If you want to make with the gun, this ain't no toy in my hand, mister! If you—"

Dalger put his gun carefully in one pocket, came forward. "Has he talked, Mackin?" he asked coldly.

"Talked? Hell, I just busted in here and took his gun away from him! He had Nan gagged and locked in his damned closet! He framed me with three murders and—"

"Who?"

I told him. Nan gasped in horror,

pressed against me and said over and over, "Rorty darling, darling."

Without a further glance at me, without any sympathy for me and all my troubles, Fred Dalger strode over to J. B. McGinley and slapped the face of his boss. "Did you take me for a complete fool?" he demanded. "Did you think I didn't know you were running around with Watterson's wife on the sly? Did you think I didn't know all those fake bills of lading you signed were frauds? I could have gone to the police weeks ago, but I wanted to catch you good. I didn't think you'd stoop to murder when you cooked up this phony negotiation deal with Mrs. Watterson. Did she work on Watterson and force him into the theft? Had you planned from the beginning to involve both of them, then cross them for all the money? You needed that money, didn't you, to pay off all your gambling debts?" Fred Dalger's voice rose to a husky shout. "Now, where's all that cash?"

J. B. bleated, "I—I didn't mean to kill them! I—"

"Where's the cash?"

"In—in my safe deposit box! I—"

DALGER drew back a fist. Maybe I should have let him land one on J. B. McGinley's chin and knock him colder than a dead salmon. But J. B. would get what was coming to him some dark night in the electric chair, maybe in Indiana, where he'd killed two people.

Besides, I had a couple of scores to settle with Fred Dalger. I never had liked him. I liked him less now. He had let me go into this mess when all he had had to do was call me aside and tip me off as to the real mixture. He had let Keith Penrose go off blithely to his death. That had led to two other needless deaths, not to mention all the trouble I had had, my near death, and the near death of Nan Carter.

I grabbed his shoulder, wheeled him

around. He was as big as I was. "You penny-picking rat," I snarled. "You don't trust anybody, only Fred Dalger! Thanks, pal!"

He saw the punch coming. He tried to duck. But my knuckles cracked against the side of his chin and he reeled over backwards. Nan Carter yelled, "Hit him again, Rorty darling!"

Nobody, not even the lowliest scrub-woman in McGinley's store, liked Fred Dalger.

I rubbed my bruised knuckles, glared at the unconscious Dalger and told Nan, "Get some police on the job."

She went to the phone, began to talk. "Please," J. B. pleaded, "won't you lend me the gun so I—I can—"

"No," I said. "When you killed Penrose, left the train, what did you do next?"

"I—I hired a fast car and beat the train to Barksville. I had my private plane hidden there—you know I have a license and—Rorty, please lend me your gun so I—"

"Shut up," I said.

Nan leaned against me. She had black hair, almost blue-black, and laughing blue eyes and a smile that grabs at a man's heart. She asked softly, "Rorty, was she as pretty as I am?"

"Who?" I asked roughly.

"Why, Mary Watterson, the gorgeous girl you told us about."

Feet pounded along the outside corridor. Somebody leaned on the bell button. A bell began to ring inside the room. Nan started to leave the circle of my left arm. "Don't go," I said. "The cops will soon find out that the door is unlatched."

"Rorty, was she?"

"Nobody is as pretty as you."

Two cops pushed into the room. Gun out, the leading cop demanded, "What's going on?"

It would take a long time to straighten him out.

"Lost your voice?" he asked Beth softly. "Laryngitis? What a shame—you can't even scream. . . ."



"I don't want you," he said.
"But I'm not going to leave you
to anyone else. . . ."

THE CAGED HEART

By BENJAMIN SIEGEL

SHE wasn't asleep but had drifted into an in-between state where the weariness of her body was a floating pleasure, the lightness of her limbs a temporary escape from fear in the immediate fact of being ill.

It didn't last. The doorbell sounded viciously and Beth was frightened again. She didn't move while the memory of the sound throbbed, its potential repetition an

agony. It came again and Beth got out of bed and threw a robe around her. She hesitated at the door, unlocked it and flung it open like a challenge.

It was only her big and brusque and, right now, very angry downstairs neighbor. Mrs. Clausen said, "My kitchen is all wet, a regular flood. You—" She frowned past Beth at the open bed in its davenport frame. "You were sleeping so

early?" she asked. "You're sick?"

"Just a cold." It came out a whisper, grotesque, without resonance. Beth smiled apologetically and touched her throat.

"I'm sorry to disturb you, then. But your kitchen is leaking down—"

Beth gestured her in and they went into the small kitchen. There was a puddle under the refrigerator. Beth opened the door and there was a half-inch of water inside and a slow dripping from the pipes. "I'm sorry," she formed with her lips. "It was defrosting. The pan is too small." She turned the knob up to its maximum. "It'll be all right now." She held her throat, not that there was pain but in recognition of the strangeness.

"Don't defrost it again," Mrs. Clausen said. "Not when you can't take care—"

"I'm sorry," Beth whispered again. Mrs. Clausen strode out.

The bed was closer that the lock on the door. She'd take care of it later. She was chilled now and she burrowed into the bedclothes. She had been worried about her voice at first. A mild laryngitis, the doctor had said. Nothing to worry about.

An occasional car passed the apartment house with an oddly comforting sound of wheels sucking at wet pavement. A pair of young voices were eddied up meaninglessly and faded out. An automobile horn. A boy whistling *Baby, It's Cold Outside*.

Beth was warm now. She snuggled into the covers. There was peace here because she was alone. And then, because her aloneness was a conscious thing, she thought of Jerry and the peace was gone.

She had stayed with him for a year. That, in itself, was a tribute to patience and an effort to understand and help. Gay Jerry, the continually smiling. Very stimulating and warm and happy to be with—at first. The revealing had taken a long time, step by painful step. The core of cruelty for which the smiles were a glittering mask, the vicious sadism that

his gaiety termed mockery and harmless fooling. Finally, there had been the puppy that had tumbled across their feet as they walked home through the park one afternoon. Jerry had broken its back with a kick. He had laughed at her hysteria, steering her rapidly homeward, his fingers pressing into the flesh above her elbow. "A puppy, what's a puppy?"

And then, as she was packing with nervously fumbling fingers, Jerry smiling, leaning on the bureau. "You're my wife. Remember that. I'll never let you leave me."

Not then. But he hadn't been able to watch her, keep her locked in all the time. It had been a mistake, though, to take an apartment in the same town. She should have gone directly home. But Ma was sick, and this would have been another worry.

THERE were whorls of sleep and flashes of awareness and partial slumber. Suddenly Beth was sitting up in bed. The automobile sounds had ceased. There were no footfalls in the street. There was only the sound of rain that fell straight and sodden and windless. The bed lamp was still on and Beth could see the door and the knob was turning.

Terror awoke wildly within her chest. She watched the door and a scream rose in her throat to die there with the remembered loss of her voice. She clutched the bedclothes against her as if they could afford protection. The door opened slowly and Jerry came in and closed the door behind him to lean against it smiling.

"Hello," he said. "Hello, wife."

The words on Beth's lips were a croak. Jerry said solicitously, "Lost your voice? Laryngitis? What a shame." He came to the bed and leaned over her and said softly through the smile, "You can't even scream." He put his hands gently on her neck. "Supposing, of course, there were anything to scream about." He moved

away and looked around the room and sat down easily in a chair, facing her.

"Get out," Beth whispered.

"Did you think you were being smart? Did you think you were really hiding? I've known where you were for a week. I saw the doctor. A man naturally is concerned when his wife isn't well."

Beth's eyes went to the phone across the room.

Jerry shook his head. "You'd never make it." He grinned boyishly and Beth remembered how charming that had once seemed.

Jerry moved his shoulders and shivered affectedly. "It's a wet night. You wouldn't have— No, you wouldn't. Suppose you make me some hot tea."

Beth didn't move, staring at him, and her husband rose slowly and moved to the bed and yanked the covers from her. He looked down at her and his smile came off and his bottom lip stiffened and protruded oddly. He spoke through it, as if it couldn't move. "At first I thought I wanted you back. Then I knew I didn't want you any more. But I also knew I wasn't going to leave you to anyone else."

Beth moved quickly to the side of the bed away from him, but he was faster. He grabbed her arm and jerked her to her feet. She felt her head spinning and he pushed her away from him and she fell against the bookcase. "Tea," Jerry said.

Beth went into the kitchen. She should be thinking, she should be doing some-

thing. Her thoughts darted like a rabbit in a maze. Her head was suddenly large and pounding and she rested her forehead against the coolness of the refrigerator. Automatically she set some water boiling and took a cup and saucer, put a tea bag in the cup, set them on the table. She opened the refrigerator. . . .

"Well," said Jerry behind her. "Just like old times."

Beth started, took out the cream pitcher and put it on the table. Jerry made a deploring sound with his tongue. "You've forgotten so soon that I like it straight." Sitting at the table, an ordinary husband being served a midnight snack by an ordinary wife. Beth filled his cup with boiling water.

"Careful with that," he grinned, "you wouldn't want to scald me."

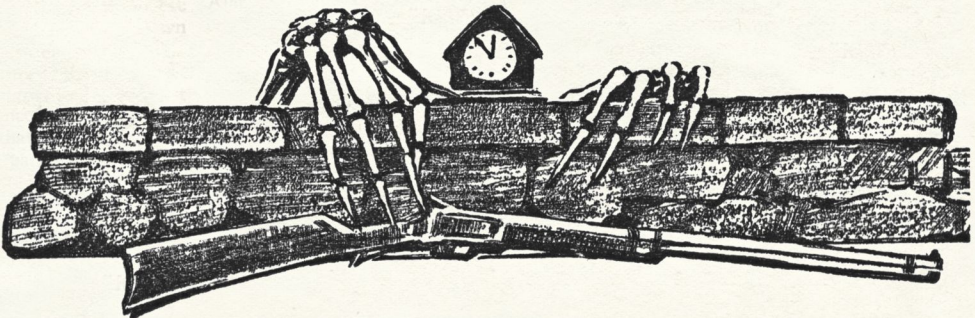
Beth set the kettle back on the stove. "I'm not well," she whispered painfully. "I'm getting back into bed."

"You're waiting while I have my tea. Sit down."

She sat and watched him, the ease of his manner, the normal scene, the family. She jumped up and ran for the door, and he was on her effortlessly, pressing her to the floor, his fingers in the flesh of her neck. Beth breathed the dust of the carpet. It was over.

But he released her and stood up, carefully brushing his knees, straightening his tie. "Not yet," he smiled. "Everything's better when it's slow."

(Continued on page 127)





CAN CANNIBALISM EVER BE RIGHT?

WHEN the English yacht *Mignonette* foundered during a storm in July, 1884, the crew of four managed to get away in an open boat, 1600 miles out from the Cape of Good Hope.

Huddled in the little dinghy were the first and second mates, Dudley and Stephens, a crewman named Brooks, and Richard Parker, a seventeen-year-old cabin boy. They had no water, and all the food they managed to get aboard were two one-pound tins of turnips.

For three days they were tossed around unmercifully in heavy seas. On the fourth day, when the storm subsided, they succeeded in pulling in a small turtle. On the twelfth night, when they were all severely weakened from hunger, thirst and exposure, the last of their meager rations was eaten. During a shower two days later, they spread out their oilskins and managed to catch a few precious drops of fresh water before the rain ceased.

Through five more days of famine and torture the little craft drifted aimlessly, while never a hopeful sign appeared over the vast expanse of water. On the verge of starvation, the gaunt men grew desperate. Then it was that Dudley proposed to Stephens that all should draw lots to see who should be sacrificed that the others might continue to have some chance of survival.

Stephens agreed, but it was decided to hold out for one more day and a night and that if no sail appeared by the second morning, the drastic step would then be taken.

When the fateful dawn brought light across the waves, there was still no sign of rescue. Parker, weaker than the rest and half delirious through thirst, had been drinking salt water and lay, in a semi-conscious state, in the bottom of the boat. It was obvious that he had not long to live, and Dudley and Stephens, both with families at home, suggested that under the circumstances, it was logical that the

? ?

What would you do if you were a member of the court
that judged this celebrated case of modern-day cannibalism

? ?

By ROY WOODBRIDGE

boy should be the first to go. He did not demur.

Brooks would not agree, but Dudley, with Stephen's consent, crept over and, drawing his knife, cut the lad's throat from ear to ear with one swift stroke. All three survivors then fed on his flesh, and by doing so kept themselves alive for four days longer, when they were picked up, in the weakest possible state, by a passing steamer.

All recovered, but on arrival at Exeter in England, Dudley and Stephens were committed for a trial on a charge of murder, after the happenings had been divulged. Neither of the prisoners made any attempt to distort any of the facts, and their story agreed entirely with that of Brooks, an impartial witness.

It was conceded that the cabin boy, being in a much weaker state, would undoubtedly have been the first to die, and that his chances for recovery in any event were practically nil. It was also conceded to have been unlikely that any of the other three men would have survived had they not fed upon the body of their dead shipmate. It did not seem to be doubted that had Parker not been dying, Dudley and Stephens would have proceeded to draw lots and that they would have abided by the results.

On their behalf it was argued that the universal law of self-preservation and the law of "urgent necessity" excused the act, everything considered.

Assume that you are a member of the court. What would your verdict be?

This celebrated case, which stands as a precedent in English law, was carried to the Royal Court and then to a special court consisting of five senior judges. It was held that "there is no absolute necessity to preserve one's life, and that there is nothing to justify a man taking the life of another to save his own."

Dudley and Stephens were both convicted of willful murder and sentenced to death. They were not hanged, however, the penalties later being commuted to terms of imprisonment.

Everybody wanted to get into Doug Kane's murder act, and who could blame them, with \$500,000 at stake—plus the cutest little bundle of double-dealing dynamite ever to blow up in a man's face!



*Dramatic
Crime Novelette*

CHAPTER ONE

Too Hot to Handle

DOUK KANE had worked on his story for three weeks and six thousand miles—from Shanghai to San Francisco. Too long. It sounded pat, slick and hollow. Johnny Ping would never buy it. Panic made a cold knot in Doug's stomach, he had to do something with his hands to work off tension. He stopped talking, fumbled in his coat pocket for a cigarette.

He looked around the plushy, chrome-trimmed office, and across the desk at Johnny Ping. There was no encouragement in that flat, yellow face.

Johnny Ping's eyes were almost hidden in greyish puffs of flesh. One fat fore-

A black and white illustration of a portly man in a trench coat and fedora, looking surprised or alarmed, standing in front of a door. The man has a large nose, a mustache, and a wide-eyed expression. He is wearing a dark trench coat over a light-colored shirt and tie. His hands are outstretched in front of him. The background shows a door with a handle and a keyhole. The style is reminiscent of mid-20th-century pulp magazine illustrations.

There was a gun in her hand, a stubby Smith & Wesson, pointing straight at Johnny Ping. . . .

Even if he hadn't killed old man Chao back in Shanghai, Doug Kane would have had cause to be jumpy. An innocent man

Ping shifted his bulk in the chair, his expensive pinstripe suit wadding at the shoulders. He rumbled, "So, go on. I'm interested."

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mildly high. "As I told you," he said, "we were the first ship to get cleared to Shanghai after the Commies took over. I didn't know what to expect—whether our friend Chao was still operating. However, we hadn't more than tied up when one of the cooks working with a hatch crew passed the word to me that Chao would see me at this hotel room. I wondered, at the time, why he'd moved from his regular place of business, but figured he was playing games with the Reds. I was right about that, anyway.

"When I got to the room, there was Chao, surrounded by half a dozen Red soldiers. Apparently, he'd pitched them about the five hundred grand I was bringing. The Commies stripped the money belt off me, booted my tail out of the hotel. The next day, I tried to contact Chao, but he'd been paid off with a .45 slug."

Doug Kane sighed, getting a kind of second wind now that the main part of his lie was behind him.

"I'm sorry, Johnny," he said. "I don't know how I could have done it any different. If you think I let you down, I'm sorry. I know that's a damn poor return on half a million dollars."

Breath whistled through Johnny Ping's large teeth. "It's a lot of money," he growled.

Doug tightened up. Here it comes, he thought. Matches under the fingernails, or any other torture that happens to occur to this guy.

Ping cleared his throat. "When do you shove off for Shanghai again?"

Doug had to swallow before he could answer without gasping. "I think, about ten days."

The Oriental studied the small, white nails embedded in the soft flesh of his hands. "That's long enough," Johnny Ping said. "I'll have another errand for you."

"You mean it's all right about the five hundred?"

Ping shook his head. "No. But there doesn't seem to be a hell of a lot I can do about it, does there? We'll make it back," he added, actually smiling. "I'll have another bundle for you and arrange a fresh contact."

DOUK KANE gripped the arms of his chair, stood up. It was like being suspended in a vacuum; no feeling of touching even the surface of the thick rug. "Good enough," he smiled. "I'll tell you frankly, Johnny, I was a worried guy when I came here. I didn't know how you'd take my news."

The Oriental shrugged. "In this business, you expect a loss now and then. By the way," he went on, "you *will* go to Shanghai on this next trip?"

Doug smiled. The cold knot in his stomach had become a warm, almost alcoholic glow. "As far as I know. Of course, the Nationalist Navy may have something to say about that—but if the Old Man clears for Shanghai at all, it's a safe bet we'll be tying up in the Whangpoo."

Johnny Ping's hand was spongy and cold in Doug's as he said, "Okay. I'll be in touch before you sail."

The interview was over. Three weeks of sleepless nights and fear, rehearsing what he was going to tell Johnny Ping, needling his courage for an ordeal that hadn't come off . . . Finished. Doug nodded mechanically at Ping's hatchet man, passed on through the door into a Chinese jewelry shop filled with stuff Johnny Ping imported for the record. He made his way through a maze of counters and carved Oriental chests to Grant Street.

By the time Doug Kane had walked to his hotel, his recovery was total. He'd been striding along, numbly aware of the people and traffic in the street, feeling like a man who'd received a reprieve after being lodged in Death Row. Suddenly it occurred to Doug that he'd got a full

pardon. The exact moment this realization struck, he'd seen his reflection in a shop window. He'd squared his shoulders, smiled at his image—a sharp-looking guy, well set up for a sea-going bookkeeper. His features were good, even and strong. An honest face—look what he'd sold Johnny Ping!

He'd won his gamble, and that was important. Another dead Chinaman—that was unimportant.

Doug Kane, the big wheel, elbowed his way through the crowded lobby of the hotel. He went to his room and shucked off his coat, decided he wanted a drink. He picked up the phone and spoke to the bar. A few minutes later, there was a discreet knock at the door.

Doug opened it, felt a small, cold, nervous explosion below his diaphragm.

A Chinese in a white mess jacket was holding a silver tray that contained a pint of Scotch and a seltzer bottle. Doug's hand sweated on the knob of the door as he nodded at the boy to bring the drink in. "Just set it down," he said. He gave the boy a five and waved him out of the room, shut and locked the door.

He dashed the ice into the wash basin, filled the glass half full of straight Scotch, drank it until the liquor gagged him. He stood in front of the dresser mirror, gasping. He had to get over this. He couldn't go through life being afraid of Chinese bar boys. He grimaced at his reflection.

The telephone jangled.

He took the receiver, slumped to the edge of the double bed. "Yeah?"

A woman's voice. "Doug! Oh, Doug, I've been trying to reach you all afternoon."

He said, "I had some business, Cerise. Just got in." He could imagine her pouting into the mouthpiece of her telephone. She had to pout, to sound so petulant.

"I don't approve of business that keeps you from calling me. After all, Doug, you've been gone three months."

"It's been three months for me, too," he answered.

"Well?"

"Well, I'm sorry, but this was something I had to take care of."

"When am I going to see you?" she asked.

"Where's the captain now?"

"Oh, he called about an hour ago and said he'd be tied up on the ship until dinner time."

"Good," Kane remarked. "Why don't you drive by the side entrance of the hotel in about fifteen minutes?"

"How'll I know you?" she laughed.

"I'll be holding a calla lily in my teeth," he grinned at the receiver.

THEY rode out to Golden Gate Park in Cerise's new Buick station wagon, parked on a side road back of the polo field. She came into his arms eagerly. "It's been such a long time, Doug!"

He chuckled, fingering the soft, long drape of her black hair. "Maybe you should arrange things better."

She looked at him strangely. "What do you mean?"

"Well, if your husband and your boy friend weren't on the same ship, honey..."

Her body stiffened in his arms. "That's a very unfunny remark, Mr. Kane."

"Okay, I withdraw it. Anyway, it's something you won't have to worry about much longer."

She wedged herself between the wheel and the door, studying him, her eyes large with interest. "What do you mean, Doug?"

"If you're really on the level about missing me, I think we can arrange it so I'll be underfoot most of the time."

Her face brightened. "You've got a job ashore?"

He shook his head, smiling wisely. "Uh-uh. I'm retiring, baby—to a certain little town in South America where you

and I can live like royalty for the rest of our lives."

Cerise's eyes were troubled again. "You haven't—"

"Robbed a bank?" He supplied the words for her. "No, honey, I let somebody else do that for me. I just cut myself in."

She was still worried, her arm rigid along the back of the seat. "Doug, you're—"

"Look," he said. "I never told you this, but I've had a mildly profitable sideline for the past year. There was lots of room in the ship's safe that wasn't being used, so I made a contact with a character who's a fence for hot money."

"A—a fence for hot money?" she echoed. "What's that?"

"Suppose there's a big payroll robbery," he explained. "More often than not, the bills are numbered in series, so the guys who pull the job would be picked up if they tried to pass the money. This character buys their loot for about forty cents on the dollar, then ships it to China, where the citizens aren't too particular about the pedigree on money."

Cerise's small face puckered with worry. "Doug, I can't have you . . . I won't . . ."

"Relax, baby," he grinned. "I'm through being an errand boy. On this last trip, I got a terrific break. The Commies had just taken over Shanghai, liquidated my contact man at that end. I couldn't think of anything better to do with the bundle I had in the safe, so I applied it to the Kane Retirement Fund and told my boy in San Francisco that the Commies had bagged his money too. That's where I was when you were trying to reach me."

"How—how much money is there?" she asked.

"Five hundred thousand," he said, matter-of-factly. "I understand that buys a lot of llama milk in Peru."

"But you said it was hot," she objected.

"If the police have the numbers—"

"Will you stop?" he smiled. "The stuff has already been converted. If the FBI wants to locate any of those bills, they'll have to take it up with General Mao Tze-Tung. Which leaves only one subject open for discussion. How fast can you lose that old man of yours?"

"Why, I—I hadn't thought about—"

"Look, you're not stalling me?"

"No, Doug. You know how I feel." Her hands were cool on his neck. "But I—"

"You *will* leave him?" he insisted.

"Of course, Doug."

"All right. Then the rest is details. There are some arrangements I have to make too. But I want to be sure that when I get to Arequipa you'll be there."

"You know I will, darling," she smiled, "even if I don't know where Arequipa is."

"It's in Peru," he said, "in the Andes. We'll work out how you're to go there in the next couple of days." He glanced at his wrist watch as he was speaking. "Right now, I think you'd better drop me at the nearest cab stand and get back home. Old Repulsive will expect his loving wife to be at the patio gate when he comes in."

She clung to him, tightly. "Doug, Doug, why do I have to pretend? Why can't we . . .?"

He shook his head. "I don't like it either, Cerise, but it's only for a few more days."

She kissed him again, sighed and withdrew from his arms.

CHAPTER TWO

Corpse Trouble

IT WAS turning dusk when Doug Kane's taxi deposited him in front of his hotel, across from Union Square. The Powell Street cable cars were groaning past with riders hanging on the steps; the

sidewalks were filled with hungry, weary-looking people. Doug stepped out of the cab, turned to pay the driver.

He was waiting for change when something clubbed the side of his head, sprawled him over the fender and hood of the cab. Two very large fists snapped his head back, and he stumbled across the sidewalk, bringing up hard against the grey stone front of the hotel.

He shook his head, trying to see who had attacked him. He didn't have far to look.

The Old Man—Captain Severn—was standing over him. The gold braid on the skipper's sleeve flashed as he brought up a big roundhouse swing. Doug managed to block it. But the captain's next blow was low, to his solar plexus, and Doug's body began to crumple away from the wall. Another blow was on its way—this one, he wouldn't be able to block. He tried to turn his head, roll with the punch. It never landed.

Doug came out of his shell painfully. The cab driver and a hotel doorman had come to his rescue, were holding Captain Severn, their legs braced against his frantic attempts to break loose.

Severn was obviously drunk—fighting drunk, his eyes wild under their heavy grey brows—but he couldn't get back into action with his fists.

Slowly, the two men pressed him through the knot of people who had gathered on the sidewalk.

"Stay away from Cerise!" he bellowed. "Stay away from my wife, Kane! I'll kill you if I ever hear another word about you two!"

Kane couldn't move. He swayed against the building, holding his chest, and watched Severn being dumped into a cab. A cop had walked over from the corner, saw blood on Kane's mouth. "What goes on here?" he wanted to know.

"Nothing," Kane told him. "Forget it." He forced his way to the hotel door,

walked as rapidly as he could through the lobby, hiding his face in a handkerchief.

He went to his room. The face he saw in the mirror of his dresser was florid, with large, white lumps puffing under the hot skin.

He thought of Cerise and groaned, crossing the room to the telephone.

"I've just seen the captain," he told her when she came on the wire. His voice sounded hollow, mechanical.

She gasped, "Oh?"

"He knows about us, honey," Kane went on, "and before he was through, he told everybody on Powell Street."

This time, her gasp was from the floor—a moan. "Are you all right, Doug? Did he hurt you?"

"He didn't do me any good," Kane commented bitterly. "Look, this is important. I suppose he's on his way home—some men put him in a cab. Do you want me there?"

There was a long silence on the other end of the wire, then Cerise said quietly, "No, Doug. I'd rather handle him myself."

"You're sure?"

"Yes. I'll be all right."

"Call me as soon as you can," he insisted.

"Yes, darling. Don't worry."

After he hung up, Doug fell across the bed his arm thrown over his eyes to shut out the light. His face throbbed as though every tooth in his head were loose.

He built himself a drink. It helped. He looked at the bottle, remembering the Chinese bar boy who had brought it to the room.

He'd lied when he told Cerise he didn't know where Severn got his information. He knew, too well.

Bland-faced Johnny Ping, who let him believe he'd accepted the story about the Chinese Reds getting old man Chao and the five hundred G's. Johnny Ping, playing cat-and-mouse.

Doug poured the last of the Scotch in a glass, settled himself deep in an easy chair. "The trouble with you," he said to himself, "you make Dr. Fu Manchu out of that Chinese hood. He isn't that good! There are lots of ways the captain could have learned about you and Cerise. A detective . . ."

Doug shook his head. If the captain knew before they sailed last time, he probably would have had a showdown right then—and if he'd had a report since they got in, it couldn't have amounted to more than the simple fact that Cerise had picked him up a couple of hours ago. Severn wouldn't blow his top over that, make the kind of a scene he had, down on Powell Street. Drunk or sober, Kane knew he wouldn't. No. The Old Man had been given a rugged jolt. Somebody had made him realize he was losing Cerise.

So here was Doug, still on the same merry-go-round—groping for, missing the same rings. It had to be Johnny Ping.

He finished the drink and dropped his glass to the floor.

THE telephone rang. Cerise cried, "Doug, can you come over right away?"

"You're home?" he asked.

"Yes. Please hurry!"

Doug Kane took a cab to the Severn apartment on Russian Hill. It was in one of those white, modern, clinically sterile buildings overlooking Fishermen's Wharf and Alcatraz. The Severns lived in a first-floor apartment, with a private entrance through a charm-size patio.

Cerise met him at the door, her face drawn, frightened. She took his hand when he asked her what had happened, and led him to the living room.

There was his answer—on the davenport across the room from the fireplace. Captain Severn was sprawled on one corner, his eyes shut.

Doug saw a half-empty bottle on the

leather-topped coffee table. "Did he pass out?"

She shook her head. "I think he's dead."

Doug was suddenly aware of the coldness of her hand in his. He dropped it, went to search for Severn's pulse. The captain's throat was spongy, lifeless.

Doug looked at Cerise. "How . . .?"

She buried her face in her hands, didn't answer.

He left the captain's body, shook Cerise by the shoulders. "Tell me everything!"

Her lips trembled, her eyes filling. "He started to scream at me the minute he was home. He said he knew all about us; he was going to throw me and everything that reminded him of me out the door. He had that bottle in his pocket. I watched him tear the seal and take a drink. Then he started all over again—every filthy name he could think of. I was sitting over there." She nodded at a blocky, deep chair by the picture windows.

"Suddenly he stiffened, half stood up. He tried to say something, then collapsed. I ran to him. He opened his eyes just once, looked at me like a puppy that's been run over. That was all, Doug. I went to the phone and called you then."

He let go of her shoulders, walked slowly to the picture windows, looked at the lighted buildings on Alcatraz without really seeing them. He felt Cerise close behind him—the words she said, little puffs of air against his neck.

"There must have been something in the whisky," she said. "Poison."

He turned slowly, glanced at her and at the bottle. He crossed the room, picked up the fifth, sniffed. It smelled strongly of bourbon—and something else. Something like almonds.

He wiped his hand across his face, his fingers cold and damp. "You're right," he said.

"Where would he get it?" she demand-

ed. "Who . . .?" Her hands clutched at him.

Doug freed himself, walked to the fire-stand, studied the blackened bricks. He knew who.

It fitted into the pattern of what had happened in front of the hotel. It was the final, subtle screw Johnny Ping had put into the box he was building around Doug Kane. After that affair on Powell Street, with all the witnesses who'd heard Severn's accusation, no cop and no jury would ever believe Cerise and her lover hadn't murdered the Old Man. They had to take a chance on getting away now, with the police and Johnny's mob lined up against them.

The only alternative would be to forget the five hundred thousand and give themselves up to the police, pray they wouldn't be executed for a murder they hadn't committed. . . .

He pushed himself back from the fireplace. "I think I'd better start by clearing away a lie I told you this afternoon. When we got to Shanghai, my contact for the disposal of the hot money was still alive."

DOUg watched Cerise let herself down into a chair by the windows as he went on. "I thought I saw a once-in-a-lifetime chance to get into the important money. The city was fouled up, with the Commies taking over. No civil administration. The soldiers were looting and having a hell of a good time.

"Suppose, I wondered, there happened to be a rhubarb with the Red Army and my man was killed. I could claim the Reds had copped everything in sight—the jewels I was supposed to be buying with the hot money, and the money. No one would ever question another dead Chinaman, the way things were going in Shanghai—if I stuck to my story.

"When I saw you this afternoon, I thought we were in the clear. Johnny Ping

—he's the big brain at this end—seemed to go for my pitch."

Cerise found her voice. "I don't understand, Doug. What's all this got to do with—with the captain? Was he . . .?"

"No, he wasn't in. But when he jumped me, I was fairly certain his scoop about us had come from Johnny. Every Chinese bar boy and bellhop in San Francisco passes along information to Johnny Ping. Now this," he pointed to Severn, "takes the guesswork out of it. It wasn't enough for Johnny to poison the skipper's mind—he gave him that bottle, too.

"The point is, honey, Johnny Ping wants us to play his way. He's squeezed us into a corner so we'll make a break. He knows we won't leave the money, and if we try to get away, his hatchet boys will close in for the kill!"

Cerise shuddered, hiding her face from him.

"I don't blame you, baby," Doug said despondently. "You didn't ask for any of this. I brought it to you, and you've every right to hate me. Frankly, I'm not very fond of myself."

"What are we going to do?" she asked.

He fell limply into a chair across from her. "I wish I had a fast answer for you."

"But we can't just sit here with . . . with . . ." she gestured nervously at the dead body on the davenport.

"No. There are a couple of things we can do—see if we can outrun Johnny Ping, or take our chances with the police. They're not so hot, either. A hundred people walking around San Francisco tonight heard the captain threaten to kill me if I didn't stay away from you." He slumped deeper into the chair. "One thing sets up just as lousy as the other."

He closed his eyes and tried to think. Far away, it seemed, he heard Cerise's voice, quietly: "Doug—Doug, maybe this is nothing—but what you said about a hundred people who'd heard the Captain threaten to kill you . . ."

He opened his eyes. "Yeah, what about it?"

Her hands were clenched on the arms of the chair—like talons, Doug thought—her eyes large, intent. "Do you suppose you might change places with him?" She nodded toward her dead husband.

"What do you mean, change places?"

"Look." She was on her feet, moving toward him. "He threatened to kill you. Well, suppose we could use that"—she waved broadly toward the captain—"to make people think he *had*." She was perched on the arm of his chair now.

He shook his head. "I don't know what kind of books you read, Cerise. How in the world could anyone take that body for me? Even if we burned it, the cops could identify it by the teeth. There's always something. I'll admit, right now, I like the idea of being considered dead, but I don't see how . . ."

Cerise hopped up from the chair, took a cigarette from a crystal box on the coffee table. She accomplished this without seeming to see Severn. "There must be a way, Doug," she said. "There has to be. How can you kill a man so there's no question about the fact he's dead, but there's no body?"

"A good question," Doug shrugged. "How?"

"It happens," she said. "I've read about it. 'There was no corpus delicti,' they say."

"Oh, sure," Doug remarked. "A dark night at sea—a guy leans on the rail, some joker gives him a shove. Someone else comes along in time to see it happen—so you've got a murder and no stiff. All we have to do is get the captain out to sea and have him lean on the rail."

"You're not being very helpful," Cerise pouted. "I think we're both in this."

"I'm sorry," he growled. "I'm not forgetting, honey. But when you talk about impossible things, I—"

"Wait a minute," Cerise cried. "What

you said about the rail, and a dark night at sea. Suppose the captain were to throw you off the Golden Gate Bridge?"

Doug snorted. "While thousands cheer?"

"No. Please, Doug, listen," she insisted. "If we catch an outgoing tide, he'll never be found—right?"

He shrugged. "Probably not."

"Well, then. These hundred people, who know you and the captain were fighting, ought to believe this. And even your friend Johnny Ping can't shake down a corpse!"

DOUG KANE studied his reflection in the full-length mirror in Cerise's bedroom. A very minor alteration of the captain's uniform to keep the pants cuffs from dragging, a touch of Cerise's powderbase combed through his temples—and her scheme almost made sense. True, he'd never pass as the captain with any of Severn's cronies, but a person seeing him only once, under artificial light and for a very few minutes, might believe he was Severn.

Cerise smiled when he asked if she thought he'd get by. "If you looked any more like him, I'd lock you out of this room!"

"Good enough." He nodded, glancing at his watch. "It's time we got this show on the road."

Between them, they dragged Captain Severn through the kitchen to the door that opened on the garage, dumped him in the back end of Cerise's station wagon. The captain weighed a good hundred and ninety pounds. Maneuvering his limp body through the house, getting him sprawled in the station wagon, gave Doug a small idea of what lay ahead.

He threw a robe over Severn, leaned wearily against the side of the car, looking at Cerise. Her face, too, was beaded with perspiration.

"I've had a lovely thought," he said.

"What if the old man stiffens up? Rigor mortis can set in any time after a couple of hours. It's rugged enough handling the old boy limp, like he is!"

Cerise's jaw sagged for a moment. She moistened her lips. "Then we haven't any time to lose. I'll get my coat."

Doug crawled under the wheel, started the engine, let it idle while he was waiting. The sharp bite of gasoline fumes filled the garage—and his mind with a crazy idea. They say you never know with carbon monoxide. You just go to sleep. Why couldn't he, Cerise—have a last cigarette together, cheat everyone?

Tomorrow morning, a neighbor would pass the garage, hear the engine running and call the police . . .

Cerise came through the door from the kitchen, wearing a long, silver-blue mink coat. She stopped for a minute, choked on the fumes, ran to trip the lever that lifted the garage door. Doug Kane reversed the station wagon into the street. Cerise snapped off the garage light, swung the overhead door down, then got in beside him.

"What were you trying to do," she asked acidly, "asphyxiate yourself?"

Doug shrugged. "Would it have made any difference?"

He could feel her looking at him across the darkened interior of the car, sense the curl of her lip. "You were the man who wanted to steal half a million dollars . . ."

"Thanks for reminding me," he murmured.

"You're driving," she said. "You can always stop the first officer you see and say, 'Look what we have with us!'"

"I'm not about to do that, Cerise," he answered. "But if you don't mind, I'm scared stiff."

She laughed nervously. "Of course this is just a *the dansante* for me."

That ended it—the conversation. They drove past the Marine Yacht Harbor, the Presidio, onto the approach to Golden

Gate Bridge with its amber foglights that made them look even more like ghouls than they were. Doug was careful not to let his eyes stray from the road. He and Cerise were bound together for life now—he didn't want to be haunted by the memory of her with black lips and dark, waxy shadows below her eyes. It would be hard enough to forget this night's work. . . .

CHAPTER THREE

So-Long, Skipper!

THEY stopped at the toll gate, long enough for Doug to pass the attendant fifty cents. Then they drove over to Marin County, as far as the turn to Sausalito, where he spun the station wagon around, heading it back toward the bridge. He pulled off on the shoulder, cut the engine and the lights.

Doug had picked a spot high enough to see, over the crest of the big suspension span, the headlights of the cars leaving the toll gate on the San Francisco side. At this hour, bridge traffic was light. It would never be, Doug realized, light enough to suit him.

A big lumber truck-trailer growled onto the bridge, and Cerise reported that nothing was in sight as far to the rear as she could see. This had to be it. There were no cars in the toll lanes, either.

He shot the station wagon forward, gaining on the lumber truck, until they were a quarter of the way across the bridge. Then he stopped suddenly, tight against the steel curbing. There was still no traffic in sight.

He reached in front of Cerise, snapped open the door. "Let's go!" he said.

Doug slid after Cerise, opened the rear door and pulled the captain out of the station wagon by his heels. A fast look both ways to be certain they still had their end of the bridge to themselves—then the most terrific physical effort of his life,

catapulting the Old Man over the rail. It was done.

He pushed Cerise roughly into the car, reached over the back of the seat for his own suit coat that they had torn before they left the apartment. With it between them, he raced to the toll gate.

This time he pulled up beside the little glass house used by the State Highway Patrol. On cue, Cerise had begun to have hysterics.

He flashed the captain's gold braid at the state cop, said, "A man just jumped off the bridge. We saw him climb the rail. I stopped, tried to grab him. This is all I got."

He shoved the coat through the open car window into the cop's hands. He waved Severn's driver's license, saying: "I'm Captain Severn, master of the *Silver Gull*. I'm afraid this has upset my wife. If there are any further questions I can answer, I'll be at home." He handed the officer a business card, as Cerise broke out a fresh series of screams.

The cop saluted. "Certainly, Captain. You'll hear from us."

Doug Kane got the station wagon away, down the bridge approach. "Cerise," he said. "Honey, before you turn that off, have a couple of good yowls for me!"

"Do your own screaming," she said. "I hate to admit this, but I wasn't acting."

"Well, it's all over now," Doug commented. "Or maybe just beginning . . ."

He pulled into a dark side street, parked, changed his clothes in the back seat. An old civilian suit of the skipper's. He got up front with Cerise long enough to kiss her and say, "Don't let me down, darling."

She smiled, her teeth a faint, white glow. "How can I let you down?"

He brushed her jaw lightly with his fist. "Remember, I'll be at the Western Union office at the corner of Market and First, at two o'clock tomorrow. When you come in, you'll see me at one of the writing tables. You're sound on the rest of it?"

She nodded. "Yes."

"Okay, baby." He bundled the captain's uniform under his arm. "Then I guess it's time for me to lose the Skipper." He kissed her again, then slipped out of the station wagon and hurried up the quiet street, looking for a likely spot to toss Severn's gold-crusted burlap.

DOUG checked into a fifth-rate hotel south of Market Street. He had a rugged, sleepless night. His room was no help. He was its only registered occupant, but he had plenty of company—plenty of sounds and smells, and six-legged competition for the thin mattress sagging between the iron bedposts. The sounds came from the other rooms, through thin walls and a window that opened on an airshaft.

He tried to concentrate on Cerise, the warmth and softness of her lips.

He knew it was daylight when bottles stopped falling to the cement outside his window. The room actually gathered a little smoky light through a streaked pane of glass. About the time he was thinking he'd get up and go out for a morning paper, the unaccountable happened—he dropped off to sleep.

It was eleven o'clock before he woke up—not a gradual coming of consciousness, but a sitting-up, staring slap of awareness. He dressed, went downstairs to a little café next door to the hotel.

He was much hungrier for the words printed under a picture of Captain Severn and his wife, on the front page of the *Chronicle*, than he was for watery scrambled eggs and limp bacon. He forced himself to eat, however, while he slowly read and reread the newspaper account of his death.

Cerise had driven home after he left her, was there when the police arrived. Apparently she'd done a beautiful, wide-eyed selling job. At least, the cops had passed it along to the papers.

She'd told how her husband had suspected her relations with Doug Kane, the purser on his ship. She admitted knowing Kane, but only in the most impersonal way. She'd called Kane, had him come out, thinking that a little civilized conversation might make the captain realize his mistake. However, instead of civilized conversation, the captain continued drinking, threatening Kane. At this point, Cerise declared, she went to her room for a moment. When she came back, Kane was lying unconscious on the davenport. The captain told her Kane had passed out, and suggested that fresh air would clear his head.

So the captain had carried Kane to the car, put him in the rear end, and the three of them drove to Marin County. On the way home across the Golden Gate Bridge, the captain had suddenly stopped the car and, before she realized what he was doing, he'd dragged Kane to the rail and thrown him over.

She was too shocked, too hysterical to stop him—even to speak when the captain was reporting Kane's "suicide" to the state trooper—but after they left the bridge, she'd made it clear she was going to testify against him. Captain Severn had driven into a side street, abandoned her and the car.

Of course she had no idea where her husband might be, but Cerise promised to do all in her power to bring him to justice. The San Francisco police, it said in the newspaper account, were expecting an early arrest.

Doug finished his coffee, left the paper on the counter and went up to his room.

At five minutes to two, Doug Kane was sitting at a table in the Western Union office at First and Market Streets. He took a fresh pad of blanks from the rack and, gripping the pencil hard, printed a message to a Mr. Don Kirk who was stopping at the Star Hotel, south of Market Street in San Francisco. It was a birth-

day greeting—very much in order, as Mr. Kirk was now almost one day old.

At two o'clock, he glanced casually at the door of the telegraph office, hoping he'd see Cerise. He was prepared to stall, if necessary, until she got there. It was almost unnerving to have her swing through the door on the minute.

He let his eyes sweep down to the pad of blanks in front of him, ripped off his printed message and took it to the counter. As he left the telegraph office, he saw that Cerise now occupied the chair he had just vacated, was writing on the same pad of blanks.

Last night, when they separated, he'd had no idea where he might hole up. They couldn't risk his telephoning her—but now she had his new name and address, engraved on that pad of telegraph forms.

HE WENT directly to his hotel room to wait for her call, began nervously pacing off the time. He'd been in the room about five minutes, when there was a knock at the door, a man's voice: "Come on, Doug. Open up!"

Kane stopped, frozen in the center of the room. No one at this hotel knew him as Doug.

"Want me to break it down, Doug?" the man asked through the panel. "I know you're in there—come on, open the door!"

Kane moved numbly to the door, unlocked it. Yancey, the third mate from the ship, was lounging against the wall—a big, rugged boy, sure of himself, hat perched on the back of his crisp, red mat of hair.

He grinned at Kane. "Invite me in?" he asked.

Yancey stalked into the room, looked around. "Riding steerage this trip, aren't you?" he leered.

Kane waved him to the room's only, seat-sprung, overstuffed chair in the cor-

ner by a corroded radiator. "Sit down, Yancey."

The mate fell into the chair, threw a long leg over the arm. "Hope you don't mind my dropping in like this. I spotted you down on Market Street. Thought I ought to know, as long as I'm a ship-mate, what you and the Old Man are up to."

"Up to?" Kane echoed.

"Yeah. Been reading the papers. The Old Man is supposed to have tossed you off the bridge. I want to know who's collecting the insurance and how do I cut myself a slice of it?"

"Nobody's collecting any insurance, Yancey."

"Come now, pal. All this stuff in the papers, and then I find you hiding out under a phony name . . ."

"I—I can't tell you anything, Yancey. I'm—I—"

"Look." Yancey's tone was soft, confidential. "Don't get nervous. Yancey can keep his mouth shut—if it's worthwhile. Know what I mean?"

Kane nodded stupidly. His answer was deferred by the ringing of the wall phone.

He grabbed the receiver, said, "Hello," heard Cerise's, "Doug!" Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Yancey get out of the chair across the room.

Quickly, he said, "Call me back in fifteen minutes." He was trying to hang up when Yancey's hand closed on his shoulder, spun him across the room. He heard Yancey shouting into the instrument, "Hello! Hello!"

Yancey hung up, turned and grinned at him wisely. "The Old Man, huh? Maybe it's just as well he calls back in fifteen minutes. That gives us time to settle the whole thing."

Kane indicated the open bottle on the liquor-and-cigarette-scarred dresser top. "Can I buy you a drink, Yancey?"

"Don't mind if I do," the mate smiled. "But no mickeys, hear?"

"Okay," Kane said indifferently. "Pour your own. There's a glass in the bathroom."

Yancey shook his head. "Suppose you get it. I don't want to be locked in there."

Kane shrugged, got a scratched, cloudy glass out of the medicine cabinet, put it beside the bottle. "Help yourself." Yancey did, grinned again.

"Good stuff," he said. "All right, now that we're all social and chummy, how about it?"

Kane shook his head. "Yance, I don't know how to cut you in on this."

"You'll think of a way," Yancey nodded, flopping into the chair.

DOUg KANE knew there was no bluffing Yancey—only one certain way of silencing him. For a moment, he thought he was going to be sick. He sat down on the edge of the bed, shakily.

"I can't tell you what this is all about," he explained to Yancey. "Not without talking to the Old Man first."

"That's all right. Just tell me how much is in it for me!"

Doug went to the dresser, the bottle. The way Yancey was sitting—only one foot on the floor; his head thrown back, inches from the radiator—offered a perfect target. All Doug Kane needed now was courage.

The courage was in his hand—in the bottle. He took another pull at it, put it down, leaning heavily on the dresser. He could see Yancey's reflection in the mirror. The mate hadn't moved. Kane's fingers dug hard at the wood of the dresser.

Yancey was saying, "Knock off the dramatics, Doug, I—"

Kane whirled, launching himself at the mate's throat. The chair went over backwards, Yancey's head striking the radiator. For only a second was there resistance in the fingers that clawed at Kane, the long legs thrashing at him. Again

and again, Kane beat Yancey's head against the coils of the radiator, until he was quiet. Kane's fingers didn't relax on Yancey's throat until long after the man was dead.

It was really the telephone that pulled him away. He stood up, stumbling weakly to the wall, gasped into the receiver, "Hello, Cerise."

There was a frantic note in her voice. "Doug, is anything wrong?"

"No. It's okay—now." He struggled to breathe, to keep panic out of his voice. "Now listen, Cerise—very carefully. Have you been followed today?"

"No—no, I don't think so. At least, no one I—"

"Where are you calling from?"

"The ladies' room at Magnin's."

"Anyone near you?" he asked.

"No."

"Good. Do a little more shopping, then go to the main post office—the general delivery window. They're holding a package addressed to you. Get it."

"Yes, Doug."

"All right. Drive down to the beach tonight. Bring the package with you. There's a gas station—across the Great Highway from the zoo—throw them a little business. While the men are servicing your car, go to the ladies' room. Leave the package in the waste-paper bin. Make it about eight o'clock."

"Yes, Doug."

"One more thing—what's the number where you are?"

She gave it to him.

"Good. I'll call you at that phone tomorrow at three-thirty. You won't be able to reach me here."

"What's happened? Oh, Doug!" she cried.

"Never mind. Good-bye, baby, and don't worry."

He hung up, turned and looked at the twisted figure by the radiator. The bottle on the dresser top was empty.

CHAPTER FOUR

Over Kane's Dead Body

DOUg KANE spent the last half-hour before eight o'clock on a bar stool, doing a little wishful drinking. He had left his hotel room taking the key, which he had dropped in a mailbox a few blocks from the hotel. No one would bother the room until tomorrow morning. He had that long, at least, until the police would begin looking for a killer named Don Kirk.

At two minutes to eight he stepped outside, across the highway from the gasoline station where Cerise was to perform. He waited, shivering in the cold wind blowing off the Pacific. He could hear surf roaring on the beach, smell clean salt spray in the air.

He saw Cerise's station wagon pull in beside the pumps. Two attendants became very busy with her windshield and headlights. She got out after some conversation with one of the men, walked primly across the driveway to a door marked "Ladies." Doug had lost interest in her, was watching a car that had stopped half a block down the Great Highway. When she drove into the station, the lights of this car had snapped off immediately.

In a few minutes Cerise returned to her car, got in. There was some more pantomime with the service men, and Cerise rolled out the station driveway and on down the Coast Road. As she did, the lights of the other car winked on and it took out after her at a safe distance.

Doug watched the two pairs of tail-lights disappear; then, pulling his tie down, he managed to put on a drunk, rubber-legged stumble across the intersection without getting run down. He made it very good once he was in the floodlighted area of the station, bearing toward the rest rooms. He shuffled uncertainly, then bolted into the ladies' room.

He heard a shout from the attendants, feet running across the asphalt driveway, a big fist pounding on the door.

A minute was all he needed to reach into the wastepaper hamper, find the package Cerise had left.

Tucking it under his coat, he weaved out. He grinned foolishly, drunkenly, nodding like a happy stew, allowed himself to be shooed off the premises.

He stayed in character, crossed the highway to the bar—sobered immediately when he was inside. He mounted a stool again and had a drink, this one to “Mission Completed.”

The future didn’t look too complicated. He’d take a street car to town, another one to South San Francisco, catch a Greyhound bus for Monterey. Tomorrow he’d contact Cerise and give her her final instructions for joining him in Arequipa.

A beautiful future—and all in this little box. He pressed its sharp edges hard against his side.

First, he’d transfer the rocks to his money belt. He paid for his drink and went to the rest room, shooting the bolt behind him.

There was a certain pleasure in being deliberate as his nails ripped the heavy wrapping paper. He shredded it carefully and dropped it in the toilet, watched the last small piece skim around helplessly and vanish. Then he opened the package, saw the layer of cotton he had placed over the gems. He folded it back gently. . . .

For several minutes he seemed to hang suspended above the cold, cement floor; then it was revolving, rushing to meet him—white at first, then black, hard, when he struck it.

He came to slowly. Someone was shouting, “What’s going on in there? Hey—you dead?”

He rose to his knees, clawing the wall until he got his feet under him. “Just a minute,” he cried. “I’ll be right out!”

He looked at the box lying on the ce-

ment floor, overturned, a handful of coarse pebbles scattered where they had fallen when he blacked out.

He kicked the box angrily into a corner, shot the bolt back and stumbled almost into the arms of the bartender.

“I’m sorry,” Kane murmured. “Sorry. I must have passed out.” He shuffled outside where the cold night air could slap some strength and reason into him.

He’d killed two men and taken a chance on being charged with the death of another—for a handful of gravel.

He couldn’t understand it. He’d smuggled the package ashore at Honolulu, mailed it to Cerise, general delivery, San Francisco, so that if Johnny Ping got rugged, the jewels couldn’t be found in any of his belongings. Other than himself, the only people who had access to the package were Cerise and several unknown postal employees. Of course, it was always possible one of them. . . .

HE BRACED himself against the wet, cold wind. If the substitution *was* the work of a crooked postal employee, Kane knew he could kiss off everything. But everything!

If it was Cerise . . .

He began to move his legs, obeying an instinct that told him it was. Sure. He was wide open for a double-cross. And what could he do about it?

Doug Kane was dead. Murdered. Thrown off the Golden Gate Bridge. All he had to do was show, and the cops would figure that switch with the greatest of ease!

Maybe Johnny Ping’s boys would get him first.

That was probably the way the little darling had figured. She’d feed him to Ping’s gang! Maybe she’d already sold out to them. If the cops got him, she was in as much trouble as he was. But Ping—she’d know Ping would dispose of him with finesse. No messy odds and ends. . . .

He looked around apprehensively. The street was quiet—hot-dog stands across from the zoo gate, their shutters drawn for the night; an empty street car, waiting at the end of the line.

Doug Kane started to cross the street, intent on catching that car, his mind already grappling with what he'd say to Cerise when he saw her—if he saw her. He was three long steps away from the curb when the sweep of automobile headlights pinned him to the pavement. A dark sedan had just rounded the corner, its engine roaring in second gear, tires spinning on the asphalt as it gathered speed, bearing down on him.

Doug acted automatically, throwing himself across the street. The rear fender of the heavy car spanked him as the car skidded past. Doug was thrown the rest of the way to the opposite gutter.

He rolled over, dazed, trying to scramble to his feet. He could see the car disappearing toward the city.

He was still on his hands and knees when the conductor, a worried, baggy little man, leaped off the rear platform of the street car and ran to him. "Are you all right?" he asked, helping Doug rise.

Kane swayed, caught himself. For a minute his legs didn't track, then he put one foot in front of the other, made his way to the street car. "I'm okay," he told the conductor as he climbed aboard.

"Did you get his license number?"

Doug looked down into the man's weathered face, fumbled in his pocket for fare. He shook his head as he rubbed his hip where the fender had struck him. "I'm lucky he didn't leave his license plate in my pocket," he said.

He dropped a dime in the box, walked through the car to the front smoking section and sat down easily, chased the flame of a match in his trembling hand with a cigarette. Lucky. He was the luckiest guy in the world to be alive, and he knew it.

That had been no drunk at the wheel

of the big heap. Someone had been waiting around the corner for him to step into the street so they could make a pass at him. Someone with murder in mind. Johnny Ping wouldn't be jubilant they'd missed him.

This sewed up the case against Cerise. . . .

He rode a few blocks, then got off and hobbled a very painful mile to another street-car line. He didn't want to give Johnny Ping's boys a second shot at him. They couldn't miss again.

DOUK KANE was sitting in the chair by Cerise's picture window when she came home. He'd broken a pane of glass in the door of her service porch and let himself in.

She gasped when she turned on the light and saw him. "Doug! What . . .?"

"What am I doing here?" he leered, finishing her question. "You can guess."

"I—I—I thought—"

"You thought Ping would take care of me?"

"Ping . . . take care of you?" she echoed. "I don't understand." The surprise had worn off. She was her glib self, acting. "No, Doug. I just thought—well, after all, we agreed it would be dangerous for you to come here."

He nodded. "All at once, everything I do is dangerous. Even crossing a street."

"What do you mean, Doug?"

"What do you mean, Doug?" he mimicked. "Isn't that a little funny, coming from you?"

"Is it?" she asked coldly.

"Look." He got out of the chair and moved toward her. "I'm not going to fence with you, Cerise. I haven't got time. I want to know about the sell-out. What kind of a deal did you make with Johnny Ping?"

"I didn't . . ." she began.

His hand lashed out, and she recoiled to the wall, her eyes large and frightened.

"I don't have time for lies, either," he stated. "What did you do with the jewels in the box?"

Her face froze, white except for the red outline of his fingers, her lips pale and taut.

"All right, I'll tell you," he rapped. "After you picked up the package at the post office, that jungle-cat brain of yours got very busy. Why run away to Peru with Doug Kane? Why be a fugitive's squaw? You thought how nice it'd be if you and Johnny could get together, split the contents of the package. Johnny would be very grateful, you figured. He'd know how to handle Doug Kane, and be glad to do it.

"Unfortunately for you, his boys missed. So here I am, baby—and I want an accounting. What's your deal with Ping?"

She threw herself at him, trying to hold his arms. "No, Doug! No! I didn't! I swear I didn't!"

He freed himself. "You're stalling," he said, his hands moving toward her throat, the muscles knotted, hot.

"No, Doug! Please believe me! I love you! I—"

He could feel the strong pulse in her throat. Her eyes were staring into his, pleading.

Suddenly he was weak. He let his hands drop to his sides.

"No, Cerise," he said. "I can't. Have fun with the money. It ought to bring you a lot of pleasure. There's enough blood on it." He turned his back on her and walked to the door.

His hand on the knob, he looked at her. She hadn't moved from where she was pressed against the wall, her face a putty-colored mask. What had he ever seen there?

"Good luck, Cerise," he said. "You'll need it, now you're teamed up with Johnny Ping."

"Where are you going?" she cried.

"I don't know," he said. "Maybe a

short ride to the Hall of Justice. I haven't made up my mind."

His eyes swept back to the hall in front of her door, and he stiffened.

JOHNNY PING was standing there with his bodyguard, a fat forefinger poised over the bell. The hood's hand drifted to his shoulder clip when he saw Doug.

Doug Kane smiled crookedly. He glanced at Cerise. "What a happy coincidence," he remarked, retreating into the room. "You have company, dear. Come in, gentlemen, come in."

The Chinese lumbered heavily through the door, a vacant smile creasing his flat face. The bodyguard closed and locked the door. Kane turned on his heel, walked to the davenport and sat down. Cerise had come to meet Ping, her eyes dry now, hot.

"You said you'd—" she started.

Ping held up a limp hand. "All in good time."

"But he came here to kill me! He might have—"

Ping was nodding; his whole body moved with the effort. "True, Mrs. Severn." His small, lusterless eyes were fixed steadily on her. "He very well might have."

Her hands covered her throat. She gasped, "You—you—"

Kane chuckled grimly. "The trouble with us, Cerise—we're amateurs. Of course. Johnny planned it this way. I thought, when his boys missed me down at the beach, it was an accident. Now I see his fine, Oriental hand.

"He'd rough me up enough so there'd be no doubt that you'd double-crossed me. Then I'd come up here and cancel his obligation for him. Am I right, Ping?"

The heavy Chinese smirked at him. "You've disappointed me before, Doug."

Cerise retreated until she was against the bookcase that lined one wall of the

room, her eyes nervously searching each of the men in turn.

"So now, baby," Kane grinned, "you know about playing for keeps."

"What—what are you going to do?" The words issued from Cerise's throat in a painful croak.

Ping didn't speak, so Doug snorted, "He's going to pay you off. Not quite the way you expected. I imagine his plan calls for killing us both. Any half-bright cop can take it from there—figure we murdered the captain, then had a lovers' quarrel. That would set Ping up in the clear, which is the only place Johnny likes to be.

"Personally, I don't give a damn. I'm sorry for you, though, Cerise. You had your face all set to play Mrs. Astor the rest of your life. Tough break, honey..."

Johnny Ping telegraphed something with his eyes to his bodyguard, who was standing near the door a couple of feet from Doug Kane. Doug twisted his neck in time to see a blue blurr sweeping toward his head as the hood chopped down with the gun barrel. He managed to roll with the blow, falling off the davenport.

Doug thought all the noise was inside his head as the glancing blow struck. When he came to his knees, looking over the edge of the coffee table he saw that a part of the crash had been a shelf of books falling behind Cerise. There was a gun in her hand, a stubby Smith & Wesson. As he dived to the floor he saw orange flame leap from its muzzle, punching a hot finger at Johnny Ping.

Ping's bodyguard swung around, began to fire, the sound cracking the air over Doug's head.

Doug Kane lay flat, stared through the legs of the coffee table at Cerise. She had started to crumple, the gun in her hand bucking as she came down. He could see Johnny Ping already on the floor, his suit deflating. Cerise sprawled

on her face. Blood bubbled at the corners of her mouth. Doug rolled over, drew his legs up under him as Ping's hatchet man tumbled to the woolly rug.

The room was quiet but for the sound of Doug's own heavy breathing.

He pulled himself erect, went from one to the other of them, then back to the davenport, where he collapsed.

Doug lit a cigarette, felt life flow back to his legs. "I don't know, baby," he muttered to Cerise's still form. "I suppose I owe you something. . . ."

THERE was a sudden, jarring peal of the doorbell. "What do you want?" Doug called.

"What's happening in there?" someone shouted.

"We're listening to a crime show on the radio—is that all right with you?"

"No! Open up—this is the police!" A heavy fist began beating on the panel.

"All right, leave the door. I'm coming," rasped Doug Kane, getting to his feet slowly. He'd been on this dream schedule for so long, escape didn't occur to him. Cops—sure, he'd seen them tailing Cerise down at the beach. They were probably watching the apartment, every move she made. They'd figure the captain might try to contact her.

He unlocked the door and stepped out of the way of two well-nourished plainclothes dicks.

They looked around. One of them said, "Some radio show."

"Yeah," agreed the other. "It beats television."

Both cops were studying Doug Kane. "I suppose," he shrugged, "you're waiting for me to tell you what this is all about?"

One of the plainclothes men fished a notebook out of his coat pocket. His opposite number said, "Any time you're ready, Buster."

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Name Age

Address

DETECTIVE TALES

(Continued from page 95)

with the pistol and snarled, "I'll be going now, damn you."

The pistol swerved to Spearce and the voice became a sneer. "Why don't you try for your gun? They can't hang a man any higher for two killings. How about the big brave policemen? How about the wise protectors of the citizens? Take me, if you can."

Spearce and his companion stood rigid, unmoving. Lowe laughed and said, "Don't follow too soon, suckers." Then he was backing out of the room. They heard the key turn, locking them inside, and then there was silence.

Ray lunged for the door, but Spearce's hand on his shoulder stopped him and spun him.

Ray whirled. Comprehension dawning, he said slowly, "You yellow . . ." Then he stopped.

Spearce's smile stopped him. It was savage and wolflike. Even Spearce's ears seemed pulled back, like a wolf listening in the night.

Shots sounded outside. Lowe's voice lifted in a defiant yell that guttered down the scale with a tattoo of bullets. Then a hand rattled the knob and a voice called, "You okay in there, Sergeant? We got him."

"All okay." Spearce looked at Ray and said softly, "I'm obliged to you. You'd make a good cop, I believe. But remember this: Don't ever go in a place without leaving a couple of good men to watch things outside."

Then they were gone. As Ray stood there, reaction attacked him and his knees felt weak and rubberlike. He needed a drink to straighten him out. He needed companionship.

He found himself wishing it were not so late, wishing that the library were still open.

THE CAGED HEART

(Continued from page 105)

Beth got up and went to the bed and sat there, watching him dully through the effort of keeping her head from spinning away. He wasn't anybody, he wasn't real. A smiling skull inviting her to join him. Death was a release from struggle, a resting place, a lazy dream. She was suddenly unafraid.

"You ought to see a doctor," she whispered. "Maybe you can still be helped."

THAT was the wrong thing to say. That was the end of her respite, the limit of his desire to prolong. It took his smile away, it brought out the thing that was in hiding. He came toward her and his eyes made her sick and she closed her own against him. She felt his hands on her, his nails pressing into her throat.

She didn't struggle, as if she wanted it to come quickly, like the time of her operation, the ether cone bringing oblivion. From a vast distance she heard the angry doorbell, heard it closer as Jerry drew away from her, his eyes losing the dead thing, becoming alert and frightened.

Beth whispered, "The fire escape. You can get away," looking up at him without hate. It was enough to have him banished, to try to forget him. He wheeled suddenly and heaved up the window and went through. Beth waited. She went to the window to shut it and saw him in haste on the slick iron steps. She saw, without comprehending, the slip on the wet step and the desperate futile clutch at the railing below her. She heard his wild cry and she turned from the window in sickness.

The doorbell continued to ring. Like a robot Beth went first to the kitchen to turn the refrigerator setting again off the defrost position. Then she let in the irate Mrs. Clausen and the haled-out-of-bed janitor.

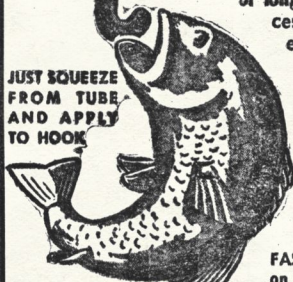
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UP THE RIVER

By
DAVE SANDS

A man can be expected to do just so much for his community.

Following the mailing of jury notices the Westchester County, New York, jury commission received the following note:

"I reside at Woodlawn Cemetery. I was pronounced dead and buried in February, 1928. However, as you seem to be hard up for jurors, it might be arranged for me to serve. Please contact St. Peter."

Captain George S. Peel of Gloucester, England, had delusions and thought he and his wife were Adam and Eve. He conceived of them as representing a struggle between good and evil, which meant to him that his strength for good must prevail over hers for evil. Peel killed his wife and then burned her body with gasoline, and is now in the Broadmoor prison for criminal insane.

A Dallas, Texas, man stopped his car during the night to help two men in an automobile stalled by a dead battery. The man's own car went dead as he tried to push the other, so he walked two blocks to his home to get help. When he returned to his car he found the men in the other vehicle had stolen the battery out of his car, put it in theirs, and driven off.

A woman who cashed five worthless checks for a total of twenty-one dollars at a Fort Worth, Texas, store promised the district attorney's office she would

UP THE RIVER

make them good. She returned to the store and cashed a twenty-one dollar check to pay off the other five. Next day the district attorney learned that that check was a phony, too.

Burglars in Springfield, Ill., got \$53 in "cold cash" from a café owner—who kept his money in an ice box.

A *Cairo* desert Bedouin, hired to play the part of a hashish smuggler in a British movie, was arrested for actually being a hashish smuggler.

While a Singapore girl's school debating team was defeating a boy's team—by insisting that honesty was not the best policy—someone raided the coat room and made off with over \$150 and personal belongings of the girls, but didn't touch a thing of the boys.

Officials of Limestone County, Alabama, made an inventory recently and found someone had carted away a ten-ton, one-hundred-foot bridge spanning a local river.

A *Cambridge*, Mass., man picked names at random from death notices and ordered elaborate funeral bouquets sent in their memory, then pocketed the difference between the cost of the flowers and the amount for which he wrote bogus checks.

A *man* who broke into the Ayer, Mass., Red Cross headquarters and stole a package of needles, was traced by the laundry mark in a pair of undershorts he left behind.

Thieves who broke into a Boston, Mass., café and removed a four-hundred-pound safe containing \$1500, added insult to injury by using some of the boss' best Scotch to make highballs while at work.

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DETECTIVE TALES

That Japanese Emperor Hirohito is no longer considered a sacred person was made evident recently when someone broke into his home and left the Emperor \$4,166 poorer.

After being robbed, stripped and having his cab put out of commission, a Washington hackie showed up at police headquarters dressed in a baby's diaper he found in the cab's glove compartment.

A convicted forger at San Quentin took such good care of his prison rock garden that guards became suspicious and found he was growing marijuana, resulting in another seven years being added to his sentence.

A man in Monroe, La., was arrested and may have to go to jail for not having a prison record. He is accused of defrauding a church group after representing himself as a former prison inmate and delivering a touching lecture on why crime doesn't pay.

Four convicts at the Massachusetts state prison demanded special jobs and special cells facing Mecca after claiming they now embrace the Moslem religion.

A man caught trying to break into a Memphis jail was booked pending lunacy hearing.

In Colombia, South America, a prisoner, tired of jail life, told officials he would like to get out and visit his five nephews, and thereby set off a string of events that ended the false story of the birth of quintuplets.

An English farmers' association has come up with a plan to tattoo all poultry, so the owners can identify their birds and foil foul play by chicken thieves.

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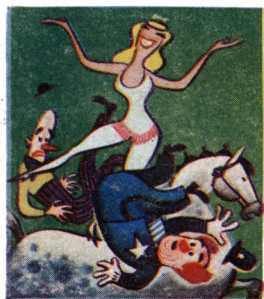
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"Under the Big Top the secret of top performance is teamwork," says Emmett Kelly. "And a look inside a B. F. Goodrich Silvertown shows that's true of tires as well."

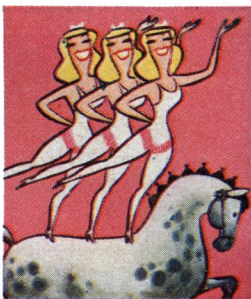
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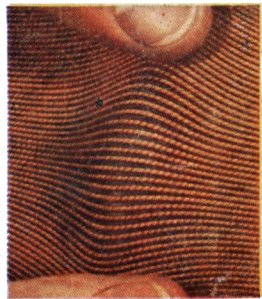
1 Every tire has thousands of cords that flex as you ride. In most tires, these cords are hampered by *non-working* cross-threads. Result: They're out of rythm like the bareback rider and clowns above.



2 B. F. Goodrich tire cords have no *cross-threads* to hinder their action. They work in *rythm* like the circus stars above. Carry impact from one to another, smother road shock, reduce wear, cushion bumps.



3 Most tire cords are bunched and gapped by slender cross threads. Weak spots, "slacker cords", overworked cords result. BFG cords, instead, are sealed in live rubber, with uniform spacing and tension.



4 Look inside—then decide. Only B. F. Goodrich can give you "rhythmic-flexing cords" in every tire for every need. See your BFG retailer. Buy now. The B. F. Goodrich Company, Akron, Ohio.