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TO
KILL**

by **DONN
MULLALLY**

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by **JOHN D. MacDONALD**

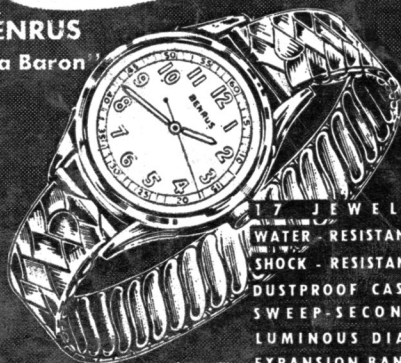
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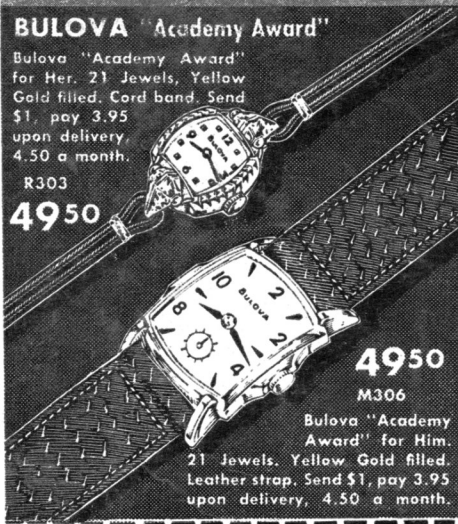
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15
STORIES

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VOL. FORTY-SIX

NOVEMBER, 1950

NUMBER FOUR

Dramatic Murder Novel

1. **THE PAW OF THE CAT**.....*John D. MacDonald* 12
—reached out for the killer of that lovely doomed blonde and closed—on nothing!

Two Daring Crime-Mystery Novelettes

2. **CORPSE ON THE GRILL**.....*Stewart Sterling* 64
—meant somebody—anybody—had to burn!
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3. **RAGE TO KILL**.....*Donn Mullally* 104
—put poor Tim Dant on a cold, cold spot, with nothing between him and a morgue slab—but a rage to live!

Seven Thrill-Packed Detective Short Stories

4. **BORN COP**.....*Richard Brister* 32
—they called Quade. What a laugh *that* was!
5. **THE BIG TIME**.....*William Campbell Gault* 40
—and George Taylor's wife waited for him—on the other side of Taylor's dead body.
6. **MURDER'S RED-HOT MAMA**.....*Alan Ritner Anderson* 48
—needed only one thing—a killer to match her corpse!
7. **HE'LL KILL YOU!**.....*Richard Deming* 60
—she said, laughing. But the Professor never even cracked a smile.
8. **HERE COMES MAXIE!**.....*Philip Weck* 84
—gun in hand, so persistent he almost deserves to be rewarded—with Jimmy's corpse!
9. **I GOT MY PRICE**.....*Johanas L. Bouma* 91
—and Nick would pay it, too—with little lead forget-me-nots!
10. **DARK ADVENTURE**.....*Robert Zacks* 100
—waited for Mr. Edwards in that lonely street. . .

Five Special Crime Features

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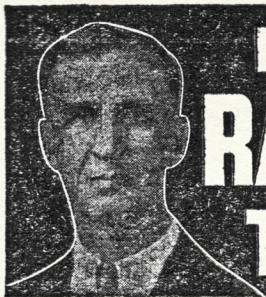
December Issue Published



October 27th!

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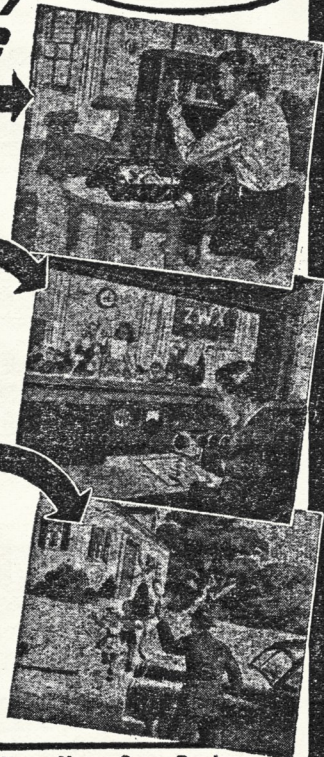
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Blood Relatives

By

JEFF HOUSTON

THE family tree has always been the proudest possession of the Englishman. Sure, it's jolly to have a Rolls Royce and a pile of gilt-edged securities, but these items are small comfort to the Britisher who can't trace his ancestry back to the Norman Conquests in 1066. It's a proud Londoner who can tell you about his great-great-great-great-grandfather who served in Parliament and of his mother's great-grand-uncle who hunted lions in the Congo.

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The founder of this remarkable dynasty was red-haired Cyril Loomis. In the year 1554, the records indicate that the terrible-tempered Cyril, then twenty-nine, and already the father of seven children, strangled a man who had accidentally spilled wine on Loomis' new cloak. When the authorities tried to capture the impulsive Cyril, he made for the forest. For the next twenty years he was a successful highwayman.

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(Continued on page 8)



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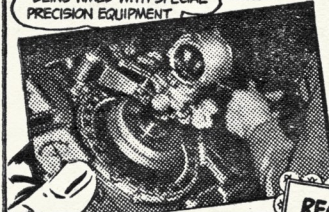


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DETECTIVE TALES

(Continued from page 6)

him. All seven of them participated in the bigger jobs. Lionel, the youngest, was a special joy to Cyril. Lionel, when he was only nine years old, could swig several tankards of whiskey and still be sober enough to make an excellent sentry.

In 1575 the elder Loomis and four of his boys were finally captured and swung. Lionel, now himself the father of five boys, was elected head of the gang. He robbed several more coaches, then moved back into town and found a job. He cleaned chimneys by day and strong boxes by night. Lionel probably would have continued to thrive if he hadn't inherited his father's temper. One day he bought several loaves of bread from the local baker. Lionel wasn't pleased with the bread. He claimed it was soggy and had given him a bellyache. He showed his annoyance by setting fire to the bakery. The baker complained. Not only did his shop go up in flames, but two of his best assistants. Lionel made his way to the gallows.

The next Loomis to lose his head was Thomas, second son of Lionel. Thomas wasn't bright enough to steal so he became a professional beggar. When people didn't contribute to his support he became peeved and killed them. The police objected to such behavior and he was shortly given the death penalty.

Three other Loomises whose first names are unknown stamped out money of their own, but unfortunately their coins bore no resemblance to the genuine stuff. These Loomises were indignant when storekeepers refused to accept their product as legal tender. Naturally, they would slay the skeptics. Theirs was a triple execution and a very fine show, all London agreed.

John Hammil Loomis, Lionel's grandson, took a job as a coach driver. John

(Continued on page 128)

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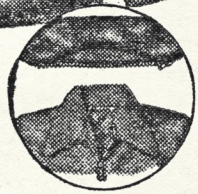
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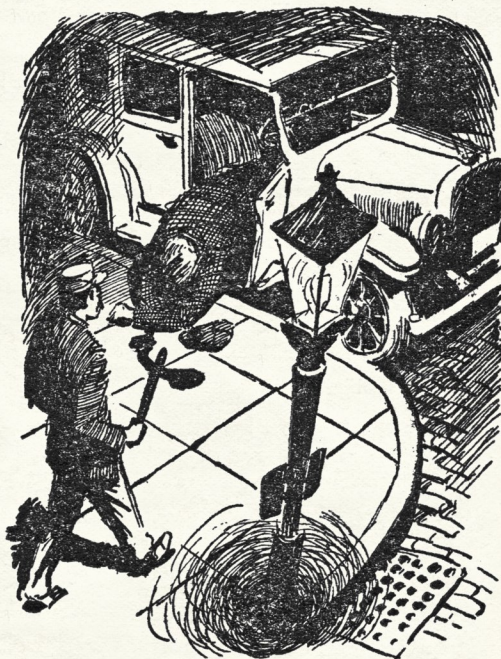
By NELSON and GEER

EVIDENCE IN REVERSE

Murderers think of the cleverest things. Sometimes they work—almost. An ingenious dodge gave Marseilles, France, police their weirdest mystery in the summer of 1938. One morning a cab driver was found shot to death in his red taxi, his pockets rifled, a pistol beside him. Police established that the lethal bullet had come from the gun, which bore a clear fingerprint. Find its owner and we have the murderer, they thought.

The taxi's last occupant, according to witnesses, was a thin, smartly dressed tourist with an English accent. A canvass of hotels turned up one answering that description. His story was that he was en route to Australia but had lost his money to one Jean Caquor in a poker game on the boat and had been forced to lay over and await more from England. He'd had an appointment with Caquor the previous evening, but when he failed to show up had taken a taxi back to the hotel.

The doorman recalled seeing him leave the red taxi and go inside, which gave the Englishman an airtight alibi—until police found his fingerprint on the murder gun. It looked bad for him, especially when loot from a recent bank holdup was found in the doorman's room. Suspecting the three were in cahoots, police sought Caquor. Finally lo-



cated, his apartment yielded a deck of well-thumbed cards and a pair of new gloves. Examination disclosed the Englishman's fingerprints on the cards, and the same print that was on the murder weapon on one finger of a glove. Only this latter was **OBVERSE**, as though it had been printed **FROM** something.

A horrible possibility occurred: could Caquor have photographed the fingerprints on the cards and in some way made a rubber stamp to transfer them to the glove for printing on the gun? Obviously, for the

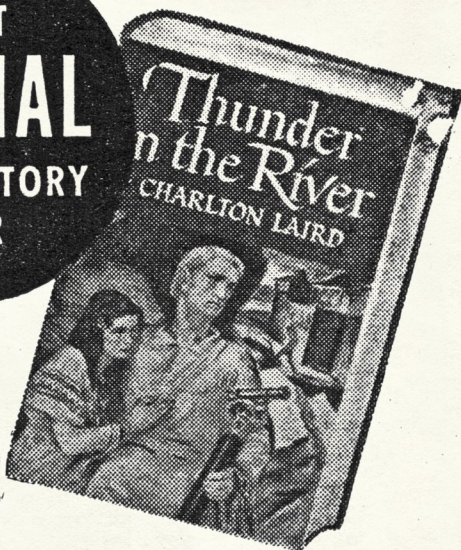
new bismuth test showed no perspiration on the prints on glove and gun.

The apartment of Caquor's girl friend yielded the materials for making this ingenious transfer. Caquor confessed he intended it for blackmailing purposes. But he'd been forced to shoot while robbing the cabman and left the gun with its counterfeit fingerprint to throw suspicion on an innocent man. Instead, it sent the killer to the guillotine.





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"I heard this scream. And then I saw her, both arms waving like she wanted to claw her way across the open space. . . ."

The Paw of the Cat

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CHAPTER ONE

Prettiest Corpse In Town

STENN came down the subterranean corridor of the emergency ward, his big hands swinging at his sides, an inch of damp cigarette pasted to his lower

lip at the left corner of his wide mouth.

The prowler-car cop was young, with nervousness hiding behind his blunt Slavic features. He pushed himself away from



"I figure it this way," Sergeant Stenn said. "She was a big, strong girl. Not the kind to faint. She's a good-looking dish. Show me a good-looking woman who messes herself up knocking herself off and I'll give you a big cigar. The only way I get her under that train is somebody wanting her dead!"

————— **By JOHN D. MacDONALD** —————

the wall at Stenn strode toward him.

"Are you—"

"I'm Detective-Sergeant Stenn."

"Patrolman Matchic. They're working on her in there."

"How did it happen?" Stenn said.

"Didn't Kevan report it all in?"

Stenn pinched the cigarette out of the corner of his mouth, dropped it and scuffed it with his foot. He shoved the grey hat with the stained sweatband back off his broad forehead and looked at Matchic with distant annoyance.

"I'd like for you to tell me."

"Sure. We were over by the station, cruising slow. A guy comes running out into the street yelling about an accident. I pulled over and Kevan and I ran in. It was on Track 7. A big mob was waiting to grab the 5:28, a commuter train. What always happens, they back it down beside the platform. Anyway this girl had gone over the edge, nobody knew how. It was up near the front end of the platform so that the engineer didn't know it and they backed seven coaches over her before the train stopped in the usual place. It was a mess, with women down on the platform and guys fanning them and everybody running back and forth. As we were running we found a doc in the crowd. You couldn't get at her from the side she fell off of on account of the platform is high. We went around the end of the last coach. It's a double track there and we could get to her. The little doc, his name is Fenner, he got a couple of neckties and he had a pipe and one of the other guys gave him a pipe and he went under there and put a tourniquet on each leg." Matchic swallowed hard.

"It got the legs?"

"Both of 'em. Just above the knee. The ambulance guys got there then and they got her out and then, right there, they gave her that stuff, the white stuff out of a bottle with a tube."

"Plasma?"

"That's it. We got a couple witnesses, Kevan and me, with the names and where they were standing and all. I think maybe she fainted and—"

"All I want is what happened. Any thinking you do is on your own time."

"Sure, sure. I just—"

"Kevan didn't report in no name for this woman."

"He checked her pocketbook but there wasn't anything in there to tell what the name is. Kevan's got the pocketbook out in the car."

THE door opened and a young doctor came out, his mask down around his neck, peeling his gloves off. There was an impassive, too-old weariness in his face.

"Too much shock," he said. "I thought for a while we'd make it."

Matchic swallowed again, his throat moving convulsively.

"You people hold her until we get an identification," Stenn said. "We don't get it by tomorrow noon, we'll move her down to the city icebox. Mind if I take a look?"

The young doctor shrugged. "If you want to."

Two nurses were on the other side of the small operating room, animatedly discussing the proper care of a nylon dress. They gave the three men a casual look. Bored attendants had moved the body off the table onto a large-wheeled mortuary cart.

"Hold it a minute, boys," the young doctor said.

Stenn looked down at her face. The mouth and nostrils had a white, pinched look, but he guessed that it was an effect of death. He squinted and tried to see the face as it would have looked in life. Blonde hair grew thick from a rather low scalp line. The eyes and cheekbones were set wide, the nose was snub, the mouth was wide, with a great disparity between the lips, the upper one thin, the lower one

so heavy as to give almost the impression of being bruised.

Absently he fingered the blonde hair by her ear, rubbing the tiny harshness of the hair between thumb and finger. He stood, a wide, heavy man, his eyes half closed, and years were gone, the clock spinning crazily back to a time when he had investigated the accident on the bay road and found Jeana, her fragrance stilled by death, all her lies suddenly transparent. And over the years the memory had never lost the power to cut into his heart like a splinter stabbed up under a fingernail. Jeana dead beside the man with whom she had . . .

Stenn shook himself like a dog awakening sleepily. He looked up. The doctor was staring at him curiously. "A natural blonde," Stenn said.

"And whistle-bait, I guess," the doctor said. "One of those leggy, chin-up dollies with an expensive look and a go-to-hell

expression. Maybe she likes it better this way."

Stenn stepped around the cart and picked up the flaccid cool left hand and turned it toward the light. On the third finger was the circular compressed area that a ring would cause, the skin faintly shiny.

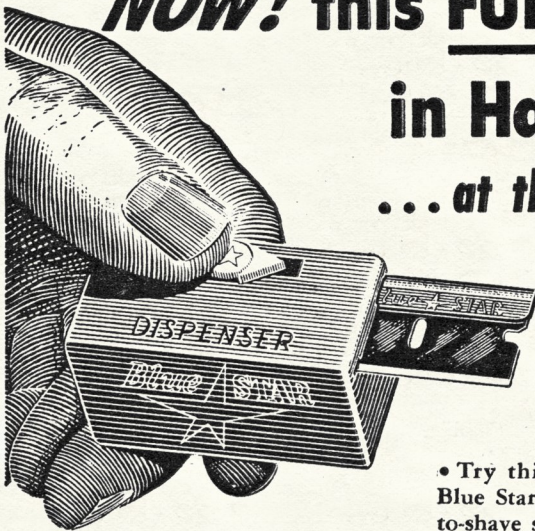
He turned to Matchic. "Anybody take her ring?"

"There's one in the bag." Matchic used a hushed, reverent tone in the presence of the dead.

"Help me with her, Doc," Stenn said. "I got to see if there's any distinguishing marks." They found a tiny mole at the small of her back, nothing else. As the moments passed Matchic became paler. "Check the legs, Doc, please, and let me know about them. And we'll need the clothes."

"The nurse out at the reception desk can fix you up."

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A tiny warning bell rang harshly. The nurses broke off their conversation and began to work briskly. "Better clear out," the young doctor said. "Another one on the way in." He walked toward the anteroom sink to wash for the next case.

Outside, in the hall, Stenn paused to light a cigarette. Matchic's relief was evident. "It makes you think," he said expansively, "of what a hell of a waste it is. A dish like that."

"Yeah," said Stenn coldly. They got the clothes in a neatly tagged bundle.

"Everything here?" Stenn asked the nurse.

"All but the stockings."

"We'll phone you if we get a quick identification. Otherwise tell your morgue boy we'll send for her early tomorrow afternoon."

The ambulance was growling to a stop as they went up the ramp to the parking area. Kevan was half asleep in the prowler car off to the right. He came to life as they approached. The dusk was beginning to blur the outlines of the trees in the hospital grounds.

STENN took the pocketbook and copied the names of the witnesses in his notebook. Matchic got behind the wheel and the car went down the drive to pick up the interrupted tour. Stenn stood in the dusk for a few moments. The early evening traffic was thinning. The softness under his chin blurred the line of the solid jaw. His heavy features held the constant expression of stubborn weariness. Pale eyes, as expressionless as a pair of blue dice, were half hooded by the lids.

Morganson of the *Courier* came out of the hospital. He peered at Stenn in the dusk and then came over. "What's on the station accident, Paul?" he asked. "In there a reporter gets classed with bacteria."

"Unidentified blonde of about twenty-four died of shock after both legs were

severed when she fell, jumped or was pushed in back of the 5:28."

"So much I knew. That her stuff?"

"It is."

"Anything with a twenty-four-year-old blonde in it is news, Paul. Going down now to check the stuff over? Mind if I come along?"

"Dirty scavenger," Stenn said mildly.

"Bone-head cop," Morganson retorted. They walked together to the department car and got in.

STENN pulled the chain on the shaded light over the table. Morganson stood back in the shadows. The stenographer opened his notebook under the glare.

Stenn chanted in a low monotone, "Alligator purse with shoulder strap, not new, apparently hand-sewn, with brass or bronze clip; no label or maker's designation. Contents: One-half pack of Camels, two partially used packages of book matches, both advertising Harold's Club in Reno, one small wide-rib Dunhill lighter, one gold bill clip made of a—a Mexican fifty-peso gold piece, forty-two dollars in bills, one round leather coin purse containing fifty-one cents, one coach ticket from here to Dumont, one partially used lipstick labeled Duchay's Tangent, one dime-store compact with cracked mirror, one plastic red comb, miscellaneous light-colored bobby pins."

He turned the purse under the light and fingered its depth. "No identification, keys or anything like that." He looked toward Morganson. "Not much, eh?"

"Enough to know that somebody will claim her, Paul. That money clip is worth the price of admission. Isn't that a ring there?"

"I was about to cover that. One ring, white gold or platinum, containing one diamond of an estimated one-carat size plus two small green stones, on either side, which could be emeralds."

He placed the enumerated objects back in the purse, broke the string on the package. "Okay. Clothes. One brassiere, pale yellow and pants, same, both labeled Oxford of San Francisco. One grey flannel suit, hand-made. No label. No apparent cleaner's marking. Jacket intact. Skirt badly ripped and bloodied. One white nylon blouse. One imitation-jade lapel ornament. Grey snakeskin shoes, size seven quad A, labeled Rodriguez of Mexico, D.F. Left shoe scraped, right shoe intact. Nothing in jacket pockets."

He looked again over at where Morganson stood. "I don't like it," he said.

"Why?"

"Nothing to tie to this city. Smells like a transient. If so, identity may be tough. She might have been running from something."

"She'd have to have a place to live, wouldn't she?"

"You mean a hotel. How about if her stuff was checked some place? We can't go pouring over all the stuff in all the check rooms. It might be thirty days before we get a look at unclaimed stuff. You notice anything that maybe I didn't, Al?"

Morganson stepped into the light. He fingered the purse. "I bought my wife one of those once. It's Mexican or Guatemalan, but you can't tell how old. They wear like iron. Catherine still uses hers for best."

"Tell you what," Stenn said. "Maybe you save me a little time. I'll fix it so one of your boys can take a picture. The face is okay. Have one of your staff artists fix it so it doesn't look dead. You know what I mean. Ask the public who she is. But don't put it in the works until morning. We got to give the relatives all night before they start checking. And get me a half-dozen of the prints fast so I can put some boys on the hotels. But on this I got a hunch."

"Care to tell me?"

"I figure it like this. She was a big, strong girl. Maybe five-eight, around one-thirty or a little over. Not the kind to faint. No liquor in her, according to that doc. She's a good-looking dish. Show me a good-looking woman who messes herself up knocking herself off and I give you a big cigar. The only way I get her under that train is somebody shoving her."

"I can't print that!"

"Did I say you should? It's a hunch, that's all. You ask me—I tell you."

CHAPTER TWO

The Lady's Out for Blood!

IT WAS a fifty-minute run to the commuter community of Dumont. At nine o'clock Stenn folded his newspaper and got off. There was a bean wagon down the street from the small station. He had a cheese sandwich and coffee.

The first witness lived at 81 Clover Road. It was a fifty-cent taxi fare. Stenn carefully wrote the amount plus tip in his notebook. As he walked up to the doorway of the small Georgian red-brick house he saw the man inside glance up from the paper. He was a small, puffy man with the grey, cautious expression that spoke of organic disorder plus a doctor's warning.

"I'm from the police," Stenn said at the door. "About that business at the station today."

"Come on in. I didn't think you'd be around so fast. Terrible thing. Terrible. I told the policeman that I wasn't a well man and I shouldn't be bothered with this thing but somebody else pointed me out as having been standing close to her when she fell and he made me tell my name and everything."

Stenn sat down in the small living room, put his hat on the floor and took out his notebook. "Just routine questions," he said.

"Well, make it fast. My wife took the kids to the movies and she gets excited about things like this. I didn't tell her and I don't want her finding you here, Officer."

"Your name is Frank J. Kelleher. I suppose you were on your way home?"

"From Shallon Photo on Broad. I bought a paper outside the station like I always do. I stood on the platform reading and waiting."

"You saw the deceased?"

"She died? Well, I guess that was best all around. Sure, I saw her. You notice a dish like that, a blondie like that. I saw her from the back and then edged around so I could see the front elevation. She was out of my class so I went back to the paper."

"How far from you was she?"

"Four feet, maybe five. I think a little to my left."

"Did you look up when the train backed down to the platform?"

"No. It's something I see every day. But I heard this scream. Horrible. I'm a man with a terrible heart. They keep warning me all the time and—"

"What did you see?"

"Her falling, naturally. Both arms waving like she wanted to claw her way across the open space. Then all I see is the high heels and legs up in the air and then the train sliding by and I can't see anything any more. Look, it gives me heart flutters to talk about it."

"Did you notice anyone else near her?"

"At that hour there's a jam on that platform. You got to be fast on your feet to get a seat. I can't run. Lots of times I got to stand up the whole way. There were people all around us."

"Could somebody have pushed her?"

"Who'd do a terrible thing like that? But I don't know. Maybe. Right then I was on the comics. I guess I was reading Dagwood when she screamed. Sure she could have been pushed without me see-

ing it. Anything could have happened. I wouldn't know."

"Thanks for your cooperation, Mr. Kelleher. We'll call on you again if we need anything more."

"Next time, please, get me at the office. Shallon Photo on Broad."

"Okay." Stenn walked to the front door. He turned. "What'd you do after she fell?"

"Me? Nothing. My heart was going fast. The train was open. I got in. It was easy to get a seat. So many people watching everything."

"You went back to Dagwood, I suppose?" Stenn asked.

Kelleher shrugged. "And why not? It takes my mind off things. The doctors all say that I'm a man whose got to have his mind taken off—"

"Good-night," Stenn said abruptly.

IT WAS a three-block walk to the next address. The house was a duplex in Spanish-style stucco. 518 Catherina Street. He looked at the name again under the street light. Miss Della Clove. It was a quarter after ten, and the downstairs lights were still on.

He pressed his thumb on the bell for a long time. Seconds after he removed it the door was yanked open and a heavy-set man with a bullfrog face said, "Okay, okay. Push a hole in the door, why don't you?"

Stenn sighed and flashed the gold and blue badge. "I want to talk to Della Clove. You her father?"

"Step-father," the man muttered. "Wait here in the hall."

Stenn leaned against the wall and whistled tonelessly. In the back of the house he heard the man bawling for Della. She came in a few moments, the man following her. "What's she done?" the man asked, his tone eager.

"She's just a witness to something. I want to talk to her alone."

"This is my house and I listen to anything in it I want to," the man said sullenly.

Stenn looked at the girl. Her heavy black hair was worn in an outmoded page-boy, the front bangs falling to the thick unplucked eyebrows. It gave her young face a pointed, vulpine look. She wore a black sweater and slacks. The sweater was a turtle-neck, and the slacks were closely tailored. Stenn guessed her at about nineteen.

"Go on back to that crummy program you were listening to," she said in a hoarse gamin's voice.

"Watch your mouth!" the man belted.

The girl shrugged. "Come on, Mr. Police. We'll go on up to my room if he wants to act that way."

The man gave them an evil grin. "See if I care how many guys you take up to that room, you tramp."

The girl was halfway up the steep stairs, looking back over her shoulder.

"We'll talk right here," Stenn said. She paused, turned, started back down. Stenn turned to the man. "Go on into the back of the house and shut any doors you come to. Give me an argument and I'll have you booked on the first thing I can think up and we both know it won't be the first time."

The man licked his lips. He tried to smile confidently. He turned and left the hallway.

"All talk, he is," Della Clove said. She sat on the second stair from the bottom, her fingers locked around one knee. "I suppose this is about that girl and the train today. Is she dead?"

"She is."

"I thought she would be, with both legs gone that way. I'm going to have nightmares tonight, believe me."

"You went around and took a look at her?"

"Sure. I never saw anything like that

before. Raoul says we must seek all experience."

"Who is Raoul?"

"My director. We're in rehearsal right now. The Theater of the Dance."

"Huh?"

"Oh, you haven't heard of it yet, but you will. It's all volunteer work. We give plays in pure pantomime. We dance out the parts. It's a new art form."

"Then you were coming back from rehearsal?"

"We worked all afternoon. I was exhausted."

"Did you notice that girl before she took the dive?"

"Yes. I always study everyone around me. Raoul says that observation is something a true actress must have. I always select the most attractive person nearby and study them. But blondes often look just a little anemic, don't you think? She was nervous. Very nervous. She kept fiddling with the strap on that alligator shoulder bag. She kept looking down the track and tapping her foot."

"THEN you were looking when she jumped?"

"I had learned everything I could from her. I had turned around to find someone else to study when she screamed. I turned in time to see her fall. I made a grab for her . . . like this." The girl made an exaggerated reaching motion, then shrank back as though in an extremity of fear. She sank to the step, fingering her dark hair back off the pale forehead. "Just like that."

"Maybe you should have grabbed a little quicker. Where was she in relation to you, Della?"

"Three or four feet in front of me and a little to my right."

"Was there a little fat man standing beside you?"

She frowned. "The world is full of little fat men. I wouldn't know."

"In your opinion, could she have been pushed?"

"I really don't know. It's possible, of course. The normal thing to do when a train backs in like that is to look at it. I suppose it would be a perfect time to push anyone."

"You've got a point there."

"And there was quite a crowd, you know. I often stay in until later to avoid that very thing."

"You do this dancing or acting or whatever it is for free, eh?"

"Is that any of your business?"

"You mentioned it, Della. I was just wondering how you lived."

She lifted her chin. "If it is of interest to you, I have my own money, from my father, my real father. I have to live with my mother until I am twenty-one. I'll be twenty-one in two more months. And then, believe me, I'll never look at this crummy town again. In the meanwhile I have a small income from the lawyers."

She came up onto her feet with a dancer's grace. Her eyes were snapping black under the heavy eyebrows. It was a dancer's body, long-waisted, flat across the belly, with a thigh-muscle swell under the tailored slacks.

"Is that all you have to know?" she asked loftily.

"For now."

"Could you make an appointment the next time?"

"I could, but I don't think I will. That is, if there is a next time."

He smiled as he walked away from the house. That one was a handful, for anybody. He phoned a cab from a drugstore that was just closing, rode back to the station and read a magazine until his train came through at a quarter after eleven.

THREE days later, at the request of white-haired, lean Lieutenant Sharahan, Sergeant Paul Stenn reported to him. "How about this Jane Doe?" Sharahan

asked in his mild voice. "You got anything on her yet?"

"Nothing. No tumble to the picture in the paper. No answers on the tape. Drew a blank in the San Francisco underwear shop. No dry-cleaning marks. Nothing at the hotels. I coordinated with Missing Persons and they've sent about fifteen people over to take a look at her. No dice. I sent her prints to Central Bureau Files. Got the answer this morning. Nothing on her. The dental work is pretty average. She had good teeth. Three small fillings. Not enough to go on."

"A big bundle of nothing," Sharahan breathed softly.

"I checked on the ways she could have come into town. I took the picture around. The desk guy at Intercity thought maybe. He dug out the manifest and the only one we couldn't check off was a Miss Betty Brown of Seattle. She got on the flight at Chicago. Could be, and then again maybe not. The Seattle report ought to be here day after tomorrow. That smells to me as though it would fade out on us. They give those Reno matches away all over the country. All we know is she probably was in San Francisco some time within the past year and that she definitely was in Mexico. Her suit was made there, the experts say, and she had to be there for the fittings. It looks to me like she was traveling without identification for a purpose."

"How do you mean? Because she was going to knock herself off?"

"It doesn't smell that way. More like it wasn't healthy for her to spread the right dope around. I've got a hunch she might have been wanted. But only a hunch."

Sharahan sighed again. "Okay. Drop it. No sense wasting any more time on it."

Stenn cleared his throat. "If it's okay with you, Wally, I'd just as soon work on it a little longer."

"Why?" For the first time Sharahan's voice was sharp.

"Call it a hunch. Call it anything. Give me a couple more days. I'll work it in between the regular stuff."

"Suit yourself," the lieutenant said. "Suit yourself, Paul."

That night Stenn went to a movie. The images raced across the surface of his eyes, leaving no impression on the brain. He sat utterly still in the seat and, starting from the beginning, he went over every detail of the case, the inventory, the way the dead girl had looked, the faint crispness of the blonde hair under his fingers. There was only one vague area in the entire case.

From the lobby he phoned headquarters and asked to have Kevan and Matchic pick him up in front. Within two minutes they cut out of traffic and pulled up beside the curb.

"Just keep cruising, Matchic," Stenn

said as he climbed into the back. "I got a couple of questions. About the blonde at the station three-four days ago."

Kevan laughed. "The 'day Matchic was grass colored, eh?"

"Shut up," Matchic growled.

"I want to know about those two witnesses. The little fat guy give you trouble?"

"Sure," Kevan said. "He didn't want any part of it. He was groaning about his bad heart. Somebody pointed him out sitting in the train reading his paper like nothing had happened. He tried to say he wasn't anywhere near the girl when she went over the edge. But two people saw him there and told me and I pressured the name and address out of him, then checked it against his papers."

"How about the Clove girl?"

"That was something else again. She insisted on being a witness. I thought she was a phony like a lot of that kind are.



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But we checked and found she was really right near the blonde."

"Notice anything else about her?"

"Outside of acting a little goofy, no."

"Goofy in what way besides wanting her name taken down?"

"Well, while the doc was under the train putting the tourniquets on the blonde, the Clove gal was on her hands and knees right beside me. I expected her to faint because it wasn't very pretty under there. I looked over at her and she looked like somebody watching the waiter bring a steak dinner. When a female is bloodthirsty she gets under my skin. I had to shove her away."

"Thanks. You can drop me off on the next corner. See you around."

CHAPTER THREE

Money Makes Murder

IT TOOK Stenn until eleven o'clock to locate the Theater of the Dance. He had thought that he could locate any organization in the city in half that time. It was at the end of a narrow alley that turned off Proctor Street in the oldest part of the city. Stenn vaguely remembered that the building, set squarely across the end of the alley, had at one time figured as a warehouse for a certain bootlegging combine. Proctor Street near the alley mouth was a place of horse rooms, dusty candy stores and several dance studios and Turkish bath outfits.

The place was dark. There was a heavy wire grill across the top half of the sturdy door. Stenn turned his pencil flash through the dusty glass, saw a table littered with papers, the end of a cot. He tried the door. It was locked. He took the folded newspaper out of his pocket, spread it on the ground, sat on it and began to wait with all the stubborn, endless, frightening patience at his command.

It was close to one o'clock when two couples came down the alley past the

trash cans. They were talking loudly, laughing, silhouetted against the lights of Proctor Street.

Stenn silenced them by rising to his feet as they approached.

"Sleep it off some place else," a man said. They stood, wary, staring at him.

Stenn flicked on his light, swept it across their faces, holding it for a fraction of a second on each one. Two girls, both blonde, both very young but with the threat of future hardness in their faces. One vast blonde young man with bovine good looks and a pink buttonhole mouth. One dark man, a bit older, his face alert and vital.

"What do you want?" the dark one said as the light touched his face.

"I'm looking for Della Clove."

"Why?"

He held the badge briefly in the white glare of the light. "That's why."

"You won't find her here. She lives outside the city," one of the girls said. "Which might be considered a very good thing." She laughed, too loudly.

"Shut your face," the dark man said. Stenn detected a faint accent.

"Are you Raoul?" Stenn asked.

"Yes. I have no business with you."

"I can decide that, one way or another. Open up. We'll go inside."

"You have a warrant, Officer?"

"No. It's your choice. Talk here or talk in my office."

"What's the charge?"

Stenn turned the light again on the younger of the two girls. "How old are you, honey?"

"Twenty-one," she said, with a knowing curl to her lip.

"And I think I could prove sixteen. That would make it a morals charge, Raoul. Now will you play?"

The laughter had gone out of them. Raoul pushed by Stenn and opened the door with a key. He reached inside and clicked on the light. It was an unshaded

bulb that hung between cot and table. There were two dirty paper plates on the floor, a container that had evidently held coffee.

Raoul said, his tone determinedly gay, "Sorry the place is in such a mess, Officer. We weren't expecting distinguished company. This is the old watchman's room. Now it's my bedroom. When we open up it will become the ticket office. Here, I'll show you the rest of the layout." He walked through the far door and clicked a switch. A dim light disclosed a large room with a stage at the far end. Wooden chairs had been lined up to give it the look of a theater.

"My name," he said, "is Raoul Palma. This is a school of the drama. I am licensed to teach here. I have been in this city for a year. My three friends are members of the cast in a play that is now in rehearsal. We have worked this evening. We went out to eat. We have returned to work again. Are there any more questions?"

Stenn turned and looked at the other three. The big man's face wore a permanent simper. The two girls gave him stony looks. "Go on in and work then, while I talk with Palma."

THEY filed by him. Palma sat on the cot. Stenn pulled the connecting door shut. He looked long and hard at Palma. The man's face was intelligent, sensitive. His fingers were long and delicate, but he appeared to be well muscled.

"Something about this layout smells," Stenn said.

"Is art criticism your strong point, old man?"

The tone was as cool and insolent as any Stenn had ever heard. He tightened his right fist a bit. "How many people will be in your play? What will it be called?"

"The three in there, Della Clove and myself. A cast of five. It will be called

'Etude in Three Acts.' It depicts decadence. We will be ready to put it on two months from now. I call the medium we are using interpretive ballet. I have a one-year lease on this building. The Theater of the Dance is organized as a charitable and educational institution."

"Do you have a job?"

"This," said Palma, with an inclusive sweep of his hand, "is my career."

"What do you live on?"

Palma's eyes were touched with arrogance. "Miss Clove, out of the goodness of her heart, feels that this venture is worth supporting. With the help of that portion of her small income which she donates, we manage to get along. Not luxuriously, as you can see, but adequately."

"Put it another way, Palma. Call it a form of extortion."

"Hardly that. Miss Clove and I are to be married once the play starts. We plan on a long, successful run."

"Does she know that?"

"Of course. Now is there anything else?"

"I'll be back to see her. She'll be here tomorrow afternoon?"

Raoul Palma held the door open. He bowed with irony. "So nice you called, sir. I'll tell Della she had a visitor."

Stenn frowned his way down the alley and out onto the Proctor Street sidewalk. Raoul Palma had handled him neatly, competently. Almost too well. It spoke of past contact with law. Raoul was a man practising a form of dishonesty that was neatly within the letter of the law and he knew it. Stenn guessed his age at about forty, a very compact, capable forty.

HE FOUND Al Morganson getting ready to leave the news room. They went together to Al's favorite bar, the Rip Tide, which belied its bold name by being small, dim, dusty. There were only forty-five minutes left until closing. Mor-

ganson was one of those rare men so colorless that he seemed to have no specific contour of face or body. To a very few people in the world Al Morganson betrayed his capacity for affection. Paul Stenn was one of these. To all the rest of humanity Morganson was as coldly emotionless, as calculatingly exact, as a key-punch machine.

But each man had found within the other a streak of vulnerable warmth as carefully and successfully concealed as a picture of Trotsky in Moscow.

They stood at the corner of the bar. "This," said Stenn, "is still the Jane Doe and now I am going around in more circles than I ever see before."

"It's a dance that cops do. A mating rite, I'm told."

"When we're stuck we come running to the fourth estate."

"You touch me."

"Because anybody sifting dirt long enough has a criminal-type mind."

"I take it back."

"What does the name Clove mean to you? With a dollar sign in front of it."

"Clove, Clove. Not hard, that question. Once upon a time that was a big name in this town. I guess right after the Civil War they owned most of the town. The last of the line was somewhat of a bum and by then the family fortunes had sagged more than somewhat. Roger Clove. At the age of forty or thereabouts he married a tramp of some kind. That was maybe twenty years ago or a little more. They had some public battles and separated. Roger drove his Pierce Arrow into a bridge abutment. There was a kid and it was a big story for a time because the wife got nothing and the kid got the works. Not right then, but when it got to be twenty-one. There was some sort of a maintenance income for the years in between. Say, you might have a yarn there, Paul! The kid ought to be taking that dough out of the deep freeze pretty

soon. It's just about time, I'd guess."

"Very much dough?"

"Unless I'm very wrong it was a half-million bucks in the beginning, and it maybe has earned a little increment. Now tell me how this works into the severed blonde."

"Because one of the two witnesses turns out to be one Della Clove. Maybe it is just coincidence. I worry about coincidences. All but one person out of a thousand is a plain ordinary joker like you can read his life history across the front of his vest. Then when you find some kind of an angle fastened loose like onto another case, more often than somewhat there is a connection. Nine times in my mind I am about to put my nose to the ground in another direction but there is one little fact I can't swallow."

"Like what?"

"Like two coincidences in a row. It seems that Miss Clove is playing a sucker-type patty cake with a very smooth citizen who could very possibly be from Mexico."

"Can you turn loose on him?"

"Not without maybe looking very silly. I think you ought to whip up a feature on an enterprise called the Theater of the Dance. You could interview the female lead, who is the same Miss Clove. The establishment can be located at the end of Kimball Alley off Proctor."

"What will you be doing?"

"I shall be bending the ear of the law firm which is supposed to be looking out for Miss Clove's interests."

STENN spent an hour over reports and picked up two routine assignments off the board. They filled the rest of the morning, resulting in one arrest, one positive identification from the gallery. He had fried fish for lunch and went back to Kimball Alley with the meal a solid lump in his middle, adding to his irritability.

The day cleared off as he reached the converted warehouse. The door was un-

locked. He pushed it open, walked between the cot and the table to the second doorway. Shafts of dusty sunlight came through the high barred windows and patterned the floor. Raoul, in black tights and a sweat shirt, sat on his heels at the edge of the stage directing Della.

"Try it again," he said. "Right toward me. And express, darling. Express! Every line of your body must mean something."

Stenn stuck an unlit cigarette in the corner of his mouth and looked moodily on as Della Clove, her hands over her head, fingertips touching, head back, chest arched, came slinking diagonally across to Palma in a bent-kneed stride. Stenn decided that it could be good or bad. To him it merely looked inexpressibly comic.

As she struck her pose close to Palma, Stenn lit a kitchen match on his thumb-nail. The cracking sound in the silence swiveled their heads toward him. Palma dropped lightly down to the floor and came across toward him.

"Ah, the persistent policeman! We'll take a break, Della, darling."

Della remained on the stage, her arms folded, her face scowling. "You broke the mood, you crummy cop," she said loudly. The voice had a harsh urchin quality.

Stenn ignored Palma and strolled over and stopped ten feet from the stage looking up at Della. "So it was a mood," he said. "I'm glad to know that. To me it

looked like a lot of no-talent being taught how to look funny by a guy who doesn't know anything about it either."

She turned red and then white. "What would you know about anything?"

"I know you're the corniest looking female ham I've seen since they closed the Lido Burlesque. They had a dame there did pratt-falls. At least you were supposed to laugh."

"That's quite enough," Palma said sharply.

Stenn turned and looked at him with a mild stare. "What's the matter? Scared I'll wise her up? Scared she'll find out you're a phony?"

"He's not a phony!" Della yelled. "You lunk cop, Mr. Palma was a director of the Mexican Ballet."

"Shut up!" Raoul said, too late.

The girl ignored him. "Raoul's got more talent in his little finger than you've ever had in your whole family."

Stenn shoved his hands into his hip pockets, bunching up his coat. "Sure he's got talent. I'll admit that. That teen-age blonde he was leading in here last night at one o'clock proves that."

Della's mouth sagged open. She snapped it shut and turned on Raoul. "Is that true?"

"I wasn't happy about the way Tommy, Berta and Lorraine handled their parts yesterday, darling. I found them and brought them back to run through it again. Don't let this man distress you."

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active ingredients. Anacin is specially compounded to give FAST, LONG LASTING relief. Don't wait. Buy Anacin today.



"I'm sorry, darling."

"He's got a handy way of lying about women," Stenn said casually. "Look at that fat line he fed you about the blonde."

Della's folded arms tightened across her breasts. Stenn felt the tension in her. Palma said smoothly, "My dear fellow, I've just explained that it was a late rehearsal."

Stenn stared at him with hooded eyes. "You're smooth, fella. You're a treat to a tired cop. I'll give you that. But she's already showed you she's a weak link. I would think you might worry about that. I would think it might interfere with your sleep." He gave Palma no chance to answer. He walked stolidly across to the doorway and left.

THE firm was Kalder, Harness and Slade. Stenn worked his way through the phalanx of secretaries until he reached Mr. Marion Harness. Harness sat behind a green-steel desk with an inlaid-linoleum top. The backs of his hands and the skin under his eyes and chin were over fifty. But Mr. Harness wore an expensive wavy brown wig, a dentist's carefully uneven work of art, the sheen of contact lenses, padded shoulders and, Stenn was certain, an adequate girdle. He was fifty-five trying desperately to look forty, succeeding in looking like a sixty-three trying to look fifty. The tip of his tongue ran slowly back and forth along the thin red underlip.

"I do not feel that we can give out that information."

Stenn shifted his bulk in the chair. "I do not care how you feel or how you don't feel. I do not care who your friends are or how high up they may be."

"There's no need to be insolent."

"I am not going to move out of this chair, friend, until I get the answers to my questions. Six days ago I got my teeth in a case. Maybe it's a murder case. I don't know yet. While unraveling I

come across a deal where a client of yours is heading for a lot of trouble. You help me and maybe I can stop it. You sit there and sneer at me and I'll sure as hell let it be known that I was blocked out of the play right here in your office. It will be my pleasure to nail you to your own wall."

Harness looked over Stenn's head at the far wall for ten seconds. He flicked the switch on the desk box and said, "Miss Trent, please bring in the Clove file."

Within twenty seconds a tall girl loped in with the file and placed it on the desk. She shut the door soundlessly as she left.

"In eight weeks and two days we shall turn over to Miss Clove securities which, based on average market values for the past quarter, have a value of two hundred and twenty-one thousand, four hundred and three dollars. In addition there are government bonds in the amount of one hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars, cash in the account totaling eighty-one thousand, seven hundred and fourteen dollars and seventy cents, and rental property estimated at a flat two hundred thousand dollars. In accordance with the terms of the will we paid out two hundred dollars a month to Mrs. Clove, now Mrs. Ferris, until the child was fifteen and since that time we have been paying three hundred dollars a month directly to Miss Clove. At the end of eight weeks and two days we shall turn over the entire estate of six hundred and twenty-eight thousand, one hundred and seventeen dollars and seventy cents, plus any accrued interest and income, to Miss Clove. There are no 'strings attached' as you put it. We hope that Miss Clove will continue to permit us to protect her interests, but that is a decision which she must make. We could keep the principal amount intact and pay her an income, before taxes, of roughly twenty-five thousand a year."

"Suppose something happens to her before she inherits?"

"Then we are directed to turn the entire estate over to the Salvation Army. As a legal point, should she die the day after inheriting, the money would, of course, go to her heirs."

"Does Miss Clove know the size of the estate?"

"At her request, for the past six years we have sent a quarterly statement."

"Has she made any attempt to borrow against her expectations?"

"If she has, we have not learned of it."

"Thanks."

"Please don't mention it."

CHAPTER FOUR

Dance Macabre

THE wire was on Stenn's desk when he returned. He read it carefully.

Señor Stenn: Photograph resembles one Fernando Barredo y Fourzan of good family. Imprisoned at Monterrey one year 1938-39 blackmail of Norteamericano tourist. No permission to leave Mexico on file. Suggest deportation. Unable identify woman.

Then followed the print classification, repeated twice for accuracy's sake.

He took the candid shot of Palma out of his desk drawer. He had been caught in bright sunlight as he emerged from the alley. Mexico City's reply had been prompt.

He sat and thought for a long time. He went to the communications room and explained, very carefully, what he wanted done.

Then he went out and picked up Palma. The man was casual, smiling. He sat at his ease in the back seat of the car, as placid as someone humoring a whim.

Stenn said nothing. The immigration man was waiting at headquarters. Stenn took over one of the small rooms off the rear corridor. He sat behind the desk.

"Your name," said Stenn, "and I probably can't pronounce it, is Fernando Barredo y Fourzan. And I think you're up for deportation."

Palma smiled, unruffled. "You did quite well on the name. Quite well. It used to be my name, as a matter of fact. If you've checked that far you probably know that once upon a time I was in a Mexican prison. Purely a misunderstanding, I assure you."

"You left Mexico without permission."

"Did I, now! Unfortunate, wasn't it?"

Stenn sighed. "All right. All right. What have you got up your sleeve?"

"This," Palma said. He reached into his inside jacket pocket, took out a small grey folder and flipped it over to the immigration official.

The man leafed through it carefully. He handed it back to Palma. "I can check, of course, but it looks all right to me. Born in Mexico. Acquired Argentine citizenship in 1943. The visa is in order and he's got another seven months here, provided he doesn't get a renewal at the end of that time. We could probably block a renewal on the basis of undesirability if we can prove the Mexican prison term, but it would be a little delicate to cancel the present permit."

"All you had to do," Palma said to Stenn, "was ask me. I could have told you all this. Now, if you're quite through . . ." He stood up.

"Sit down," Stenn rumbled.

Palma shrugged and sank back into the chair.

The immigration man said that he didn't see what more he could add. Stenn agreed and the immigration man left, leaving Stenn and Palma alone in the room.

Stenn looked into the man's dark, alert eyes, smarting at the half-veiled amusement he saw there.

"You're slick, like butter," Stenn said.

"Thank you. Muchissimas gracias, my official friend."

"Sit right where you are for a few minutes," Stenn said. He left the small room, went up to the second floor and found Lieutenant Sharahan at his desk.

In a flat tone Stenn reported what had happened, what he wished to do. Sharahan stared at him. "Since when are we running this place with crystal balls and tea leaves, Paul?"

"I got to make it fit."

"Like trying to put the kid's bike in the Christmas stocking. You got a line on this by digging on the other case. It isn't connected, you know."

"The girl insisted on being a witness, Wally. Girls like that are maybe part psycho. They want to live fast. They want to see, taste, feel everything. That Palma, now. She's got the bait, hook, line, sinker, pole, reel and his arm up to the elbow."

"No," Sharahan said very gently. "No, Paul. You got to do better. Let him go. If he's as slick as you say, he's slick enough to make trouble. We can't hold him three minutes if he wants to complain to his legation. He's a foreign national."

"You know what happens if she's as tough as I think?"

"I can guess."

"She gets that dough and she converts it into cash, all of it. They get married and they go to Argentina. I've got a hunch that down there everything belongs to the husband. She can have an accident down there. It's a big con, plain and simple."

"That's too bad. You were working on a Jane Doe. You're not campaigning against matrimony. Not on department time."

"Were working? Is the Jane Doe case closed?"

"Closed."

"I'm sick, Wally. I think I got to have a couple days off. Maybe it's flu."

Sharahan waved a limp hand. "Okay. Get out of here. Be a damn fool. It'll get you nowhere."

Stenn told Palma he could leave and Palma left with a smirk.

MORGANSON hitched his belly closer to the bar of the Rip Tide. "Don't get sore, Paul," he said. "Don't get sore. Just tell me. How much of it goes with the Jane Doe having blonde hair?"

"You're making me sore."

"Take it easy. Call me a student of human nature. Ten years we know each other. Every time there's a blonde body, a dead blonde body, you knock yourself out. Maybe you lose what the smart boys call a sense of perspective. Objectivity. Sure, I looked over the Theater of the Dance. Palma had to play up to me because the Clove girl was there and he had to make it look good. He knew who sent me. The Clove girl was all dithery about it. She gushed. Palma gushed. I took notes. The hell with it. They'll never put anything on. The whole layout is phony. But how can you paste it to the Jane Doe? Don't answer that question. I just want you thinking straight."

"I'll ask you a question," Stenn said. "How many people that get better than a half-million worth of pie out of the sky go around thinking they're God? Add a busted home on top of that. Add a lot of play-acting. Add gullibility. I'll play out the hand and what can I lose but a couple days' pay?"

Morganson sighed. "Okay. What do I do?"

"You got to get that Palma out of my hair. I want the girl alone in that warehouse this afternoon. I got to get there first and get in and get his stuff out of sight. This has got to look real good."

"How do I do that?"

"You're a big boy now. How the hell do I know how you do it?"

Morganson snapped his fingers. "I'm the eager reporter. I went and got hold of that will. I found a clause in it where she can't marry until she's twenty-five. I've got a friend who'll play along. A kid lawyer. Maybe I can take Palma to his office. How long do you need?"

"She comes in to rehearse at two. It's eleven now. You get Palma when he goes after food. Say about one. I'll hang around until you get him away from there. I can get in all right. I'll be there when the girl arrives."

STENN sat with one haunch on the corner of the table, the big shoe swinging slowly, his hat shoved off his forehead, the pale eyes hooded. The cigarette in the corner of his mouth sent a tendril of smoke upward along the heavy cheek, curling around the hat brim. He had tossed Palma's personal things in a suitcase and shoved it under the cot. The grey sheet hung down far enough to conceal it.

Through the dusty glass and wire grill he saw Della Clove come down the alley with cat-tread, sunglint on the heavy black hair, the red slash of lips.

She pushed the door open and the smile faded. "What do you want? Where's Raoul?"

"You won't see him any more, honey. He outsmarted us. He jumped just before we grabbed him."

She put her hands on her hips, spread-legged in fishwife pose, the pointed chin thrust toward him. "Just what the hell is this all about?"

He kicked the cane-bottomed chair toward her. "Sit down. That will keep you from falling down."

Fear flickered for a moment in her eyes. She sat down. He regarded her somberly. He said, "Kid, you can get tied up with some real rough people when you don't watch yourself."

"I don't need a guardian."

"I could give you an argument on that. Look. See this? A picture of Palma. We got it as he was coming out of the alley. See this? A picture of the dead blonde, retouched a little. We sent those two pictures by airmail to Mexico City. We got an answer."

"I don't have to read it. Raoul told me about the trouble he had in Mexico."

"Maybe you ought to read it. Maybe there's something in it you don't know."

They had fixed up the wire in accord with Stenn's detailed request. It was a nice job. Official looking.

Señor Stenn: Photographs are of Fernando Barredo y Fourzan and female accomplice who practised extortion here. Method of operation, girl would locate wealthy woman, Barredo would contact, marry and later desert after acquiring wife's money. Pair fled country in anticipation of arrest. Request deportation proceedings against Fourzan. Girl believed U.S. citizen but known to be Barredo's wife.

The yellow sheet slipped out of the girl's fingers, swooped toward Stenn's heavy shoe, fluttered to the floor. He grunted as he bent over and picked it up.

Though the girl's voice was barely audible, it had the quality of a scream. "No," she said. "No! It's all a lie!"

"Sure," Stenn said. "Talk yourself into believing that, the same way you talked yourself into the cock-and-bull story Palma gave you."

She looked through Stenn and beyond him. "But I . . . she came here and said horrible things. She was on her way out to talk to my mother. He told me how for years she had made his life . . ."

She turned suddenly as Palma came through the doorway. He looked sharply at Della and then at Stenn. He was breathing hard. "I thought so!" he said. "Your friends were a little clumsy. They contradicted each other. They were too anxious to have me stay with them." He put his hand on Della's shoulder. "Are you all right, my darling?"

Stenn saw her shudder and then smile up into his face. "Of course."

"This police person is a fool, you know." Palma spoke intently, looking into her eyes. "A complete fool."

"Of course," she whispered, still smiling.

Stenn put the pictures and the wire in his pocket. He looked at the girl with sadness. She continued to look into Palma's eyes.

Stenn saw that Palma sensed that the girl had slipped, that some information had been given. There was deep tension in Palma. He looked quickly at Stenn, apparently reassured by placidity. The cord of his throat relaxed.

He patted Della's shoulder lightly. "Come on, darling. Time for rehearsal. You'd better change."

Della meekly left the room.

Palma said, "Possibly I underestimated you, my friend. It won't happen again."

"It could have worked."

"What could have worked? I don't know what you're talking about."

"I'm talking about using a half-wild impressionable kid like that to do your own dirty work, Palma. You didn't have the guts to handle the blonde yourself. It was easier to play on the girl, wasn't it?"

Palma peered at him. "My dear man, have you been attending the cinema too often? Or is it those comic books you read?"

"Sooner or later," Stenn said. "Your time will come."

"I'm afraid not," Palma said. "Now you may watch us rehearse, if you care to. Where did you put my things? Oh, under the bed. Of course."

STENN sat on the table. Palma took off his jacket shirt and undershirt. His shoulders and chest were well muscled. He pulled on a sweat shirt, smiled mockingly at Stenn and said, as he walked toward the inner doorway, "Art cannot wait, you know. The show must go on."

Stenn said a short incisive word. Palma grinned over his shoulder.

Stenn went to the doorway. The girl, in rehearsal clothes, stood on the stage. She had changed, apparently, behind the

makeshift curtain that served as a backdrop.

Seventeen years of police work had sensitized small alarm circuits in the back of Stenn's mind. He did not understand how they operated, but he knew that usually it was the result of something seen with the eye but not recorded by the brain. His eyes flicked across the room, across the litter and the dust. A half bottle of milk, caked and curdled, stood by the door. He stood up and felt the tension in his shoulders. Morganson pushed the outer door open and came in. He was flushed.

"I didn't do so good, Paul."

"Neither did I. Anyway, it was a try."

Morganson looked around with distaste. "The happy little pigpen."

Stenn followed his glance, saw the chipped plate half under the cot. The alarm circuits quickened. He stared at the plate. A tarnished knife lay across it.

Alarm can come from something that is visible, or something that was once visible and suddenly, for no reason, has disappeared.

He grunted, low in his throat. He turned and strode toward the inner doorway, Morganson at his heels. They went through into the big room where the folding chairs sat in orderly ranks staring mindlessly at the stage.

Palma said, "Now, you remember this one, darling. I am upstage, here. Half turned. I am looked across at Berta. She represents hidden desire. She will be over there, facing me. You are jealous. Now circle me slowly and keep the count in your mind. Crouch low and keep looking up at my face. Your hands must express tension and anger."

Morganson said, "Do you really want to watch this glop?"

"Shut up!"

"Now look, Paul, just because—"

"Damn you, watch them!" he grated.

Something in his voice froze Morganson. They stood side by side. The years

of conditioning kept Stenn on the verge of running forward, crying out. But something far stronger kept him there. Sun dappled the dusty floor. The distant traffic was more vibration than sound. Somewhere a radio played loudly.

Palma stood looking across the stage. Della circled him, crouched as he had directed. She circled him twice as he stood motionless. Then she straightened up in front of him. There was one flickering glint of metal as she drove the tines of the corroded fork with all her strength into the base of his throat. Morganson made a thin, whimpering sound. As Palma tottered she ripped the fork free and, with a hard mad cry, drove it home again, releasing the handle this time to fall to her knees.

Palma's lips worked with an amazing rapidity, flapping together soundlessly like a ventriloquist's puppet. Stenn ran to him, leaping with an extraordinary agility for so heavy a man, up onto the stage. Palma's expression was intent. He grasped the handle of the fork and, just as Stenn reached him, he pulled it free. After that there was nothing that could be done for him. He died quickly but nastily, drowning while he fought for air that he could not suck into his lungs.

IT WAS dusk and Stenn was sitting on a bench in the unlighted squad room in his undershirt when Morganson came in.

"What was Wally's reaction?" Al asked.

"He's still upset because we still got a Jane Doe. But now we'll unravel her by backtracking on Palma."

"How about the girl?"

"The two state psychiatrists have been working over her. Already some crackpots who read the papers have phoned in wanting to marry her. She gives the story that the blonde showed up and she had been tracking this Palma for a long time.

Palma told the girl, the Clove girl, that the blonde was insanely possessive and now she'd never let him go. The blonde had the name of the Clove girl's mother. I guess she was going to get the Clove girl off Palma's neck by telling the mother how this Palma was already married, or a crook, or something like that. The Clove girl waited until the little fat guy stopped gawping at the blonde and she timed it right and shoved the blonde in the small of the back as the train came in. A crazy thing to do, all right, and she said she did it because Palma explained how a great artist must experience everything in order to be fulfilled. Something like that. My guess is that Palma and the blonde were in on some deal and they separated and he ran out with the stake. Maybe we'll find out. Even if we could prove it all, we'd never been able to touch him. He could always claim it was just a discussion he had with the Clove girl and she took it wrong. The trouble was he talked too good. The Clove girl wasn't satisfied with doing the pushing. She had to ring herself in as a witness too. She's nuts, I think, and I think the state guys will come to the same answer."

The room darkened some more. Stenn clicked on the light, squinting against it, yawning. "I'm beat," he said.

"A bone-headed cop with a soft spot for blondes," Morganson said.

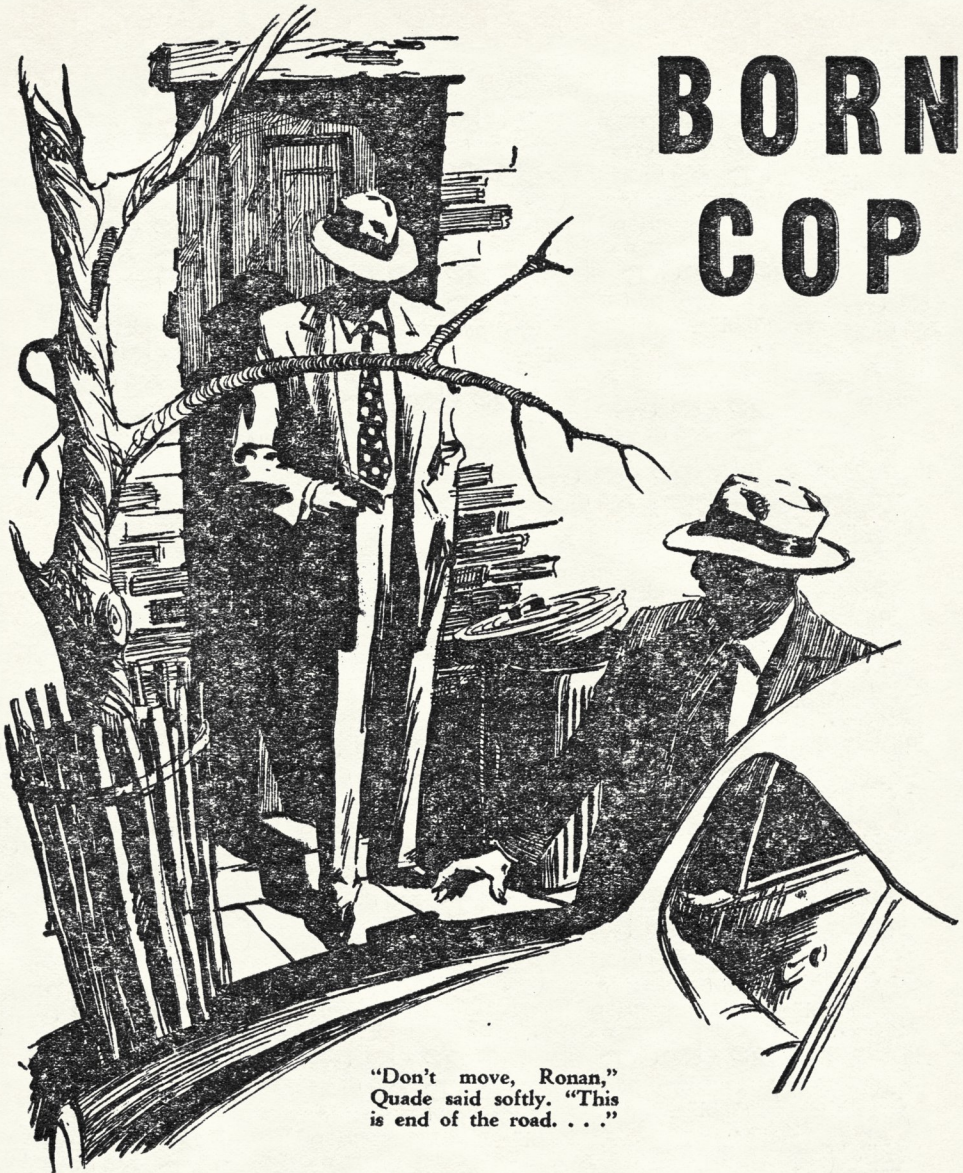
"I'm not too proud to eat with a vulture of the press," Stenn said.

"Get your clothes on."

Stenn frowned and spoke absently, "For sure he would have knocked off that Clove girl sooner or later."

"Probably," Morganson said gently, sensing the concealed bitterness of self-accusation, feeling glad that their jobs were not reversed, knowing that now Paul was seeing the girl as an animal rigged around with traps he had set. "Probably," he repeated.

BORN COP



"Don't move, Ronan,"
Quade said softly. "This
is end of the road. . . ."

By RICHARD BRISTER

They said Quade was an ideal cop because he understood the criminal mind. Quade smiled. Who should understand it better? Wasn't he one of them?

FROM the criminal's standpoint, Quade was the most dangerous kind of cop. Quade had brains and imagination; he could be ruthless in stalk-

ing his quarry, and what really drove the denizens of the underworld nuts was Quade's uncanny ability to second-guess them. It was as if the big, burly plain-

clothes man somehow managed to get down in there under their skins, think along with them, plan along with them, and so it was that too often, as the boys who preferred the easy buck saw it, Quade was right there waiting, Johnny-on-the-spot when a job was pulled off. It was aggravating, it was depressing. The only operator on the South Side who didn't seem to be worrying about the department's ace bloodhound was Jimmy "No-Dice" Ronan.

"Quade?" said No-Dice, snapping his short, chubby fingers. "Nuts to the guy. He don't worry me any. I ain't worried about *any* cop."

Nothing worried No-Dice, for that matter. A swarthy little man who netted better than two thousand a week from numbers, night clubs, brothels and various other fragrant enterprises, No-Dice had enough innate shrewdness to realize that the man in his position who hugged a dollar too closely was courting disaster. No-Dice paid out half what he netted weekly, spreading the money around strategically where it could be counted on to pay the best dividends in times of crisis.

For instance, the night No-Dice learned that Picky Davis, a trusted lieutenant who had shared some of his closest secrets, had been observed entering the Department of Justice building for a furtive rendezvous with the cops, No-Dice had summoned the hapless Davis and thrown two exceedingly ugly, but appropriate, words at him.

"Stool pigeon," said No-Dice. He had a .38 automatic in his right hand. He pointed it across his huge, glass-topped desk at Davis, who stiffened, his face turning ash-grey.

"Boss, I—"

"Stool pigeon," said No-Dice, and in one of those sudden bursts of anger that were his cardinal weakness, he pulled the trigger.

SOME of the boys took Davis out of No-Dice Ronan's carpeted office, toward dawn the next morning, and wired a stone to him, and chucked him off a pier into the river. But the boys bungled the job. A month later, what was left of Davis reluctantly surfaced, and McGinty, Chief of City Detectives, took Quade down to the morgue for a look.

"How about it?" the chief said, glancing at Quade.

"That's Davis. Our stoolie. No-Dice has a sensitive pair of nostrils. I guess he smelled it on Davis."

"You think No-Dice killed him? Personally shot him?"

"The guy has that flash temper, Chief. It's his big weakness. That and the little tramps he picks out of the shows in his night clubs and uses for personal playthings. Sure, he killed Davis."

"Let's get him," the chief said. His big jaw clamped shut tightly and his eyes glittered. Davis had been a valuable asset to the department.

"On this?" Quade said. "Are you kidding? He's got the fix in so deep we couldn't even get an indictment. He'd horse-laugh us silly."

"Get him," snapped McGinty. "I'm putting you on it. Your private manhunt, Quade. Just get No-Dice Ronan where we can really put the screws to him."

Quade frowned. "That's a big order."

"You're a big boy. I wouldn't throw an order like that in the lap of any man on the force except you, Quade. You know that."

"Sure." He knew that. He knew a lot of things, he thought, and indulged in a grim little smile at the irony of his position. Quade, the complete cop, McGinty's best boy, the guy who could be counted on to bring the bad boys to bay, because he was one cop who really understood them.

And why not? he asked himself bitterly, all the while carefully planking a

deadpan expression on his ruddy, large-featured face. He was one of them, wasn't he?

He wondered how the chief would react to the knowledge that Ed Quade, one of his best in the bureau, twelve years in a bull's harness, was wanted under another name, wanted by the warden of a rathole prison down south from which he'd escaped after serving two years of a four-year sentence.

On the cops. Him, on the cops. What a laugh that was! But they'd never tumbled. Something should really be done to improve the efficiency of this nation's manhunting methods. But in all fairness, who looked for a con on the cops? What better place to hide, once he'd greased his way in here?

"Well?" McGinty said.

"Well, what, Chief?" Quade jerked his mind back to the present.

"Will you get No-Dice Ronan for me?"

Quade shrugged, said, "Hell, I'm just another monkey on your string, Chief. I take orders." But there was no rancor in his voice. He liked McGinty. The man was honest, hard and honest. Some cops were just hard, Quade told himself with dry amusement.

Get No-Dice Ronan. Now here was a job to Quade's liking. It had been a man cut from the same stamp as No-Dice who had framed him up the river years ago, and while that man was now dead, beyond retribution, Quade still could take a measure of satisfaction in cutting the props from under a man so like his malefactor.

QUADE went after him like a man engaged in a card game, playing for high stakes, and shrewdly his mind probed the weakness and strength of the cards held by his opponent, and tried to fill his hand with cards that would trump those held by No-Dice Ronan.

"Two weak cards in his hand," Quade decided. "He lets his temper boil over. He's a sucker for dames, usually tramps. Talk is he can get crazy jealous. Now that should add up worth something."

Quade went to work, unobtrusively, ploddingly, with the patience of a stalking cat, the patience he had learned during two years in prison, and at the end of a week he had located the apartment where No-Dice Ronan's current girl was stashed to await the pleasure of the very big little man.

Her name was Ginger Baby. What it had been before she'd started calling herself Ginger Baby, Quade didn't know, nor did he care greatly. She was a brunette, extremely well-stacked—No-Dice had taken her out of the chorus line in his Tic-Toc Club only a couple months back, and her new work agreed with her. She was sleek and extremely well-fed, and the long days of loafing around in the apartment had charged her with an excess of energy, so that her basic quality, an earthy femininity, had become more apparent in her every languorous movement.

The apartment was across the street from an aging, red-brick office building. Quade finagled himself office space, had a sign painter letter in the words "Ace Sales Company" on a frosted-glass door panel, brought in some props to make the setup look credible, and moved in on what became almost a round-the-clock basis.

He had to glance obliquely down street toward Ginger Baby's apartment, but the season was mid-summer, she was a girl who liked plenty of air stirring about in her rooms these muggy hot days, and consequently she kept the blinds up most of the time. There wasn't much she did in there that Quade was not privy to, with the aid of a pair of strong glasses.

No-Dice's nights were usually Tuesdays and Fridays. Why, Quade couldn't guess, but that seemed to be the pattern. He'd

come in around two in the morning and wake up Ginger Baby, and usually leave about two hours later, although, to be sure, there were some times when he didn't leave until noon the next day.

Quade waited for something—something he was banking on heavily. The girl, if he was any judge of human nature, was just another in No-Dice's long string of tramps. Quade, from what he'd seen of her, felt she was more of a tramp than had been some of her predecessors.

He waited a solid month before his hunch finally paid off. No-Dice checked out around four o'clock one Saturday morning. Quade, watching from the darkened offices of the Ace Sales Company across the street, saw the girl pick up the phone and engage in a very brief conversation.

A half-hour later a sedan parked at the curb, a full block down the street. A man got out, walked up to Ginger Baby's apartment building, buzzed, was admitted. Quade's mouth twisted in a thinly triumphant smile as the lights blinked off in Ginger Baby's apartment. Dark as it was, he could swear he saw signs of movement over there in the rooms he had held under such constant surveillance for so many weeks.

"Knew she was a real lowdown tramp," he chortled. "And after all, a little guy as ugly as No-Dice—a girl like Ginger Baby needs some sweetness in her life,

don't she? So she's late-dating No-Dice."

QUADE felt he had something now, but he lacked pertinent information. He slipped quietly downstairs, out the side door of the old, red-brick office building, walked around the block and inspected the car that had brought Ginger Baby's spare boy friend to his tryst with the lady.

The car told him nothing. He took the license number, checked it through channels, learned it belonged to Harry "Pretty Boy" Ramac, who fronted for No-Dice in one of his gambling casinos.

Quade talked to Chief McGinty. "I'm holding pretty good cards, and I'm ready to play. But somebody could get hurt, Chief."

"Who?"

"Harry Ramac."

McGinty's mouth twisted. "That punk. That smooth-faced, slick-talking little slob. So he gets hurt. So he gets killed. He'd've been rotting in jail years ago, without No-Dice's money greasing things for him. What's with you anyway, Quade? Getting squeamish?"

"Got me. I wanted to try this on you, is all, Chief."

"It fits. I want No-Dice. What's the deal? What kind of a fire you building under him?"

"The big rap."

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"Murder?"

"If I know my man, yes," Quade said. "Murder. Exit Harry Ramac."

"How?" the Chief said.

"Under the circumstances," Quade said, "maybe I ought to fly this one solo."

The chief frowned uneasily at him. "You're the damnedest man, ain't you? Sometimes you almost give me the willies. I'd hate like hell to have you riding my tail, Quade. If I didn't know you were a family man, with a nice wife and three kids you'd give your life for, I'd swear you weren't human. . . . All right, fly it solo."

Quade's hand of cards wasn't quite full yet. Ginger Baby, he had discovered during his weeks of watching the lady at various pastimes, was a vain little floozie. She spent much time peering at herself in her several mirrors, modeling the mink No-Dice had coughed up with, the bracelets, the necklaces, the Fifth Avenue gowns.

Rather a stupid little creature, really, thought Quade, and it occurred to him that the lady had no pearls, and he personally did something about that. He invested some hundreds of dollars in a pearl necklace, and made arrangements with a cab driver.

The lady was bored, she often went out of an afternoon, but she was, naturally, above walking on her pretty stems, she who once had earned her living as a hooper. She went on her pointless little errands in taxis. She went on one such errand in the taxi whose driver was temporarily in Quade's employment, and discovered a simply beautiful string of pearls on the floor, under her well-shod little tootsie.

She did not, of course, mention her discovery to the driver. Quade watched her later, admiring the pearls in one of her mirrors. She loved them, obviously she was quite daft about them, wanted

to wear them. The question in Quade's mind was, would the girl be stupid enough to wear them in the presence of No-Dice Ronan?

She was. Quade watched her showing them to No-Dice on the occasion of the gambler's next visit. The face of No-Dice Ronan, even from Quade's great distance, was an interesting study in primal emotions. Suddenly furious, he grasped the girl by her negligeed shoulders, shook her, all the while spouting what must surely be venomous epithets at her, and the girl reacted as Quade had expected.

She stood up to No-Dice, gave him back insult for insult, insisted, as Quade interpreted the conversation which he could see but not hear, that she had found those pearls, and that No-Dice's suspicions were just absolutely without foundation, and—and just simply too silly. She had found those pearls in a taxicab, and she meant to keep them and wear them, and No-Dice, if he didn't like it, could go pound sand in a bucket.

No-Dice cooled himself out, his suspicions at least partially allayed by the violence of the girl's protests, and Quade thought, from his post across the darkened street, Women. I love 'em. The little hussy. She's cheating on him with Harry Ramac all this time, but she found those pearls in a taxi, and how dare he have the nerve to suspect that there was anything—that another man could have . . . Women!

WILL Harry come tonight? Quade wondered. When No-Dice departed, Ginger Baby picked up the phone and engaged in a longer-than-usual conversation with a party who could hardly, Quade reasoned, be other than Harry Ramac. Quade saw the girl shake her lovely brunette locks negatively as she talked, and he could fill in the words which he was unable to overhear.

Harry wanted to come over. Ginger

Baby was saying, "No. This thing about the pearls has him all excited. He's so terribly jealous, and now this has made him suspicious. We'll have to stop seeing each other for a while, until this thing blows over."

It was three more weeks before Ginger Baby again late-dated No-Dice with Harry Ramac. Quade smiled grimly and played a card shrewdly. He typed out an anonymous letter to No-Dice. It said, "If G. B. had a boy friend, what would be the safest time for her to entertain him?"

Now Quade knew his man, was banking on the vanity in No-Dice to dictate the gambler's reaction to this anonymous missive. He won't put one of his side boys to checking on Ginger Baby, he'll



Even from this distance you could see that No-Dice was boiling. . . .

do his spying on her himself. And why so? Because he'd hate to admit to anyone else that he could doubt himself with a woman.

The cards were all dealt, the ante was up, the betting was on, and the next Friday night, the game reached its climax. No-Dice paid Ginger Baby his usual visit, checked out around three-thirty in the A. M.

Ginger Baby grabbed the phone and Quade could tell, watching her head bob as she talked, that she was giving Ramac the go-ahead to come over. He did, and he had been up there no more than ten-fifteen minutes when a small, indistinct

figure slid down the street, hugging the shadowy inner edge of the sidewalk, and paused momentarily to study Harry Ramac's parked car at the curb.

Quade watched the man pick the lock of the apartment-house door and slide quietly in there. It was No-Dice Roman, and even in the dim light, from this distance, you could see he was boiling. He took a key, undoubtedly his private pass key to Ginger Baby's apartment, from his pocket, just before he slid in out of Quade's line of vision.

Quade stayed on post at the window. Shortly thereafter the lights snapped on in Ginger Baby's apartment. Quade saw Harry Ramac scurry across the room, with a hunted-rat look on his pretty, pale face, saw him throw his hands up, and then heard muffled shots.

Ramac pitched down headlong. Quade saw No-Dice Roman stand looking down at the fallen man, saw the gun in Roman's hand, the blind fury in the gambler's face, which gave way to self-concern after several seconds.

No-Dice turned, apparently saying something to Ginger Baby, then went toward the door.

Quade was already on his way down from his self-made cell in the old office building. When No-Dice Roman reached his parked automobile, Quade stepped out of a shadowed doorway and pointed his Police Special at the gambler.

"Don't move, Ronan."

The gambler stood frozen. "Who is it?"

"Quade."

"Up kind of late, ain't you, copper?"

"This is the most interesting time of day, Ronan. I'll take that gun you used on him."

"On who?"

"Ramac."

The gambler hesitated, then permitted Quade to remove the .38 from his shoulder holster. Quade pocketed the still-warm

automatic, took cuffs from his side pocket and said, "Wrists up, Ronan."

The gambler looked at him. "You sure you're being smart, Quade?"

"Let's have those wrists."

"Let's get in the car and have a little talk first."

"Why should we?" Quade said, his throat getting sticky.

The gambler pulled an ace card from his sleeve, said, "I hear you got a nice wife and three kids that think you're a hero, Quade."

"What about it?"

"Nothing. Provided you don't care if they find out you're an ex-con, still wanted for busting out of prison down in . . . Let's get in the car and talk a bit, Quade."

Quade said throatily, "Where'd you— How did you—"

"I've known it for years, Quade. One of my boys was in stir with you, recognized you. He ain't around any more. He stopped a bullet. You look like a man with a problem on your mind, Quade. Let's get in the car and talk, shall we?"

QUADE let him key the door open, got in the front seat beside him, keeping him covered, watching him carefully by the light from a street lamp.

"Go ahead. Talk, Ronan."

"You're working alone on this, if I know you," said the gambler. "Those shots don't appear to have aroused anybody up there at her place. I can fix my way out on this, with a little cooperation from you, Quade. You didn't see anything, I don't know anything about your background. It's an even trade. If you're as smart as I think you are, I think you'll buy, Quade."

"I can plug you," Quade said, "and get away with it."

"Some of my boys know what I know," said the gambler.

"So then you're not selling me anything," Quade sighed heavily.

"I can keep their mouths zippered."

"I'm to take that on trust, am I?"

"Why not? You've got me cold on this Ramac killing. It ain't a matter of trust, from my standpoint. The position you've got me in, I have to play your way, Quade. And the same goes in reverse."

"It's a bad bargain," Quade said bitterly. "I know you pretty well, Ronan. One of these days I'd wind up missing. I'm too dangerous to you. You'd rather risk killing a copper than have one walking around who could pin a murder rap on you."

"So we both take our chances. I'm a gambler. I'm used to taking chances."

"I'm not," Quade said, and he kept the gun trained on Ronan. "Start the car. I'm taking you in."

For the first time the gambler's swarthy face displayed real concern. "Don't be a fool, Quade. Listen, I can understand how you'd think I'd try rubbing you out. Suppose I put it in writing. I shot and killed Harry Ramac. You hold that signed confession. Put it away somewhere, in a safe deposit box, say, with orders to be opened if anything happens to you. There's your life insurance. I'm a desperate man, Quade."

Quade stared almost hopefully at him. "You're not that desperate?" he said.

"When the stakes are high enough," said No-Dice Ronan, "I'll always gamble. You got a fountain pen and a piece of paper for me to write on?"

"Sure." Quade kept him covered with one hand, produced writing materials with the other from his inside coat pocket. He dictated the confession. No-Dice scribbled it off in the dim light cast by the ceiling globe. "Make the signature nice and legible," Quade ordered.

"How's that?" said the gambler, as he finished, handing Quade the signed statement.

Quade stuffed the paper into his pocket. "Start the car, Ronan. Let's go."

"Where?" said the gambler in a thin voice.

"I'm taking you in."

"Why, you lousy, double-crossing—" No-Dice Ronan's flash temper burst. He made a savage swipe at the gun in Quade's hand, managed to knock it sideways. His other hand drove at Quade's face, his chubby fingers seeking Quade's eyes. Quade's head went back against the glass. He caught the smaller man's wrist, lifting the gun into train and thought, I ought to plug him. I really ought to. Then maybe they'd never know, down at headquarters, that I . . .

Quade was a cop. On the cops, you brought them in alive, whenever you could safely manage to do so. That was orders. Quade dropped the gun on the floor of the car and hit his man a short clubbing blow on the point of the chin.

Jimmy No-Dice Ronan slid down limply behind the wheel. His small body teetered over against Quade. Quade put the handcuffs on him, then got in back of the wheel and drove toward headquarters, taking his man in on what would probably be the windup of a brilliant police career.

"SO THAT wraps him up," Quade said. "That little confession he wrote out so pretty won't stand up too good, seeing how it was gotten out of

him, but it should help to fry him. We got Ramac's body, full of bullets out of his gun. I didn't see him actually plug the guy, but I nailed him right after he lammed out of there, and the girl will play ball, if I know her. I don't see any way out for him, Chief, no matter how much he spends trying."

"Yeah," said McGinty. He grinned slowly at Quade. "I knew about you, Quade."

Quade's mouth went slack. "How?"

"Picky Davis. Our stoolie. The guy No-Dice liquidated."

"But then—that means you've known for some time. You knew when you put me on this job."

"This was a test for you, Quade. I knew No-Dice Ronan would try to make a deal with you, once you got him where you could hurt him. I wanted to see if you'd buy. You didn't. I'm going to bat for you on this thing, Quade. I'm going to see to it that you get a full pardon. And you'll get it. Don't you doubt that for a minute." He sighed. "There'll be a little publicity, though. Think that family of yours can stand it?"

"Sure," Quade said softly. His throat was clogged with relief and gratitude as he looked at McGinty, a hard cop and a straight cop. "They'll hold their heads higher than ever," he said proudly. "They're that kind."



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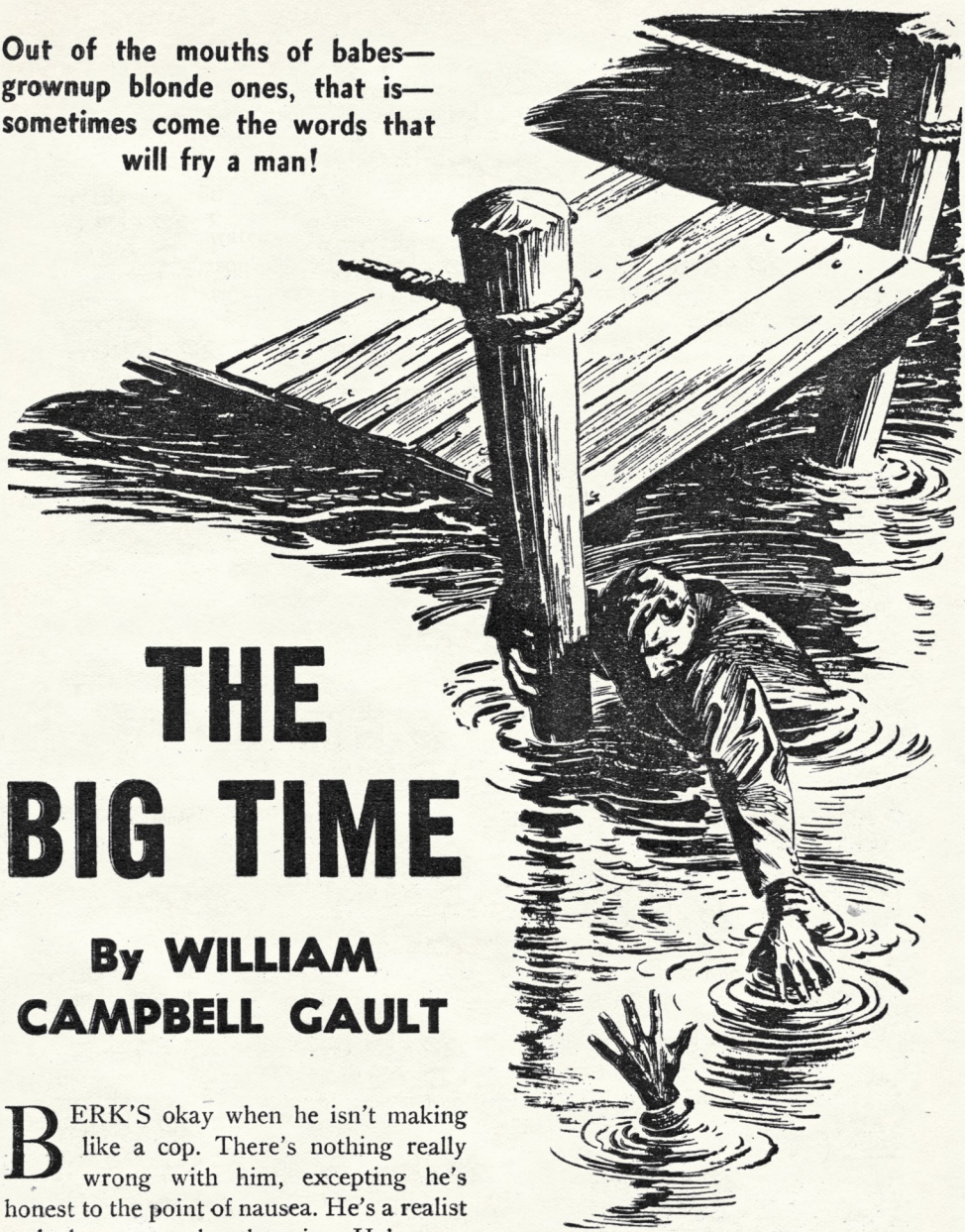
By WILLIAM
CAMPBELL GAULT

BERK'S okay when he isn't making like a cop. There's nothing really wrong with him, excepting he's honest to the point of nausea. He's a realist and sharp enough otherwise. He's even good looking.

He sat in my office, this June afternoon, giving me hell. We don't often see eye to eye, me and Lieutenant Berk.

"The hell of it is," he was saying, "you make your lack of ethics pay off, Steve. That Taylor divorce deal must have brought you some heavy money."

40



● I kept his head under until his hands fell away from mine, until his body was quiet. . . .

"A few dollars," I agreed. "That makes it worse, because I made a few bucks?"

"That makes it *right*, in your book," he answered. "And that means you'll follow the path until it doesn't pay off."

"How's Homicide connected with the Taylor mess?" I asked him. "Why should you fret about a lousy divorce case that hasn't even been put on the calendar yet?"

"I'm not here as a representative of Homicide today," he told me. "I'm here as a cop, and as the guy who went to bat for you when your license was up for renewal."

"And why'd you go to bat for me?"

He looked at me coolly. "You tell me."

"Because I practically solved the Atwater mess for you. Because I handed you the killer on a silver platter, and you're figuring the time will come when you'll need me again."

He shook his head and expelled his breath. "Just the first part of that is right. I did it out of gratitude—but not out of expectation. But I wouldn't expect *you* to believe that."

"I wouldn't believe it from anybody in the world but you," I said. "But with you, honesty's a disease. Look, should we put *all* our cards on the table?"

HHE LOOKED at me curiously. "Your play."

"The fact that you're a friend of George Taylor's wouldn't have anything to do with this visit?"

He colored. He said, "You don't miss much, do you?"

"I try not to miss anything. Let's see how honest you can get with that one."

He really looked uncomfortable now. Finally he said, "I'm a friend of George Taylor's. It's at least a part of the reason I'm here."

"Maybe the whole reason."

"Maybe. And George Taylor is one fine lad, the victim of an unfortunate marriage."

"All marriages are unfortunate—for the man," I told him. "That's why the smart ones like me and you never got married, right?" I paused. "You didn't come here to bawl me out, Dick. You came here to

make some kind of deal with me."

"I don't like that word, Steve," he said.

"I came here, hoping you'd level with me. I know that tramp you used, that Sylvie Jessup. She's been used before."

"She's not new," I agreed, "but she has her points. And George really sailed for her."

"George was drunk."

"Every day. Because of his love for his beautiful wife. George sulked, in front of a bar, pouring out his troubles to the rest of the luses. He's only got about three million bucks, but he was so unhappy." I was getting excited for some reason. "Guys like George Taylor I can't work up any sympathy for, not at all. Slobs like him were meant to be taken."

Berk was standing now. "What was that word?"

I was breathing hard. I gave him stare for stare. "You know what I called him. And it goes for all the others like him."

He continued to stare at me. Then, "You'll never get another license in this town. I'll personally see to that, Harper."

"Thanks," I said. "Maybe I won't need it."

He picked up his hat off my desk and stood there a second, studying me. "And if George Taylor's attorney proves collusion between you and that Sylvie Jessup, things could get awful rough for you."

"I stopped worrying about lawyers when I was fourteen," I told him.

He turned and went out, slamming the door.

LAWYERS I didn't worry about. But cops? And cops like Lieutenant Dick Berk—smart, incorruptible cops? Well, I hadn't come this far in life without learning a few things. Cops shouldn't bother me.

But I had a drink anyway. A stiff one.

Then I put the bottle back in the bottom drawer and looked at the telephone. I started to pick it up, and it rang.

"Harper Investigations," I said. "Steve Harper speaking."

"Baby," she said, and I wanted to put the phone down. Sylvie.

But I said, "Baby yourself. What's on your mind?"

"Money," she said. "You don't consider last night payment, do you?"

We'd made the rounds last night.

"Money?" I said. "For what?"

"Don't be cute." Her voice was different now. "For the job I did on your drunken friend. You think it was fun?"

"I don't know. I wasn't there with you two love birds. Why should I pay you?"

"Look, Steve . . ."

I said nothing.

"You're not saying it wasn't your idea, are you Steve? You're not saying you didn't tell me the bar I could pick up Taylor in, and how to handle him and how to keep you informed and just what was needed for evidence. You're not saying this was *my* idea, are you?"

"I'm not saying anything. I'm listening."

"Well, start saying something, and quick."

"All right, Lieutenant Berk was just here. He told me that if Taylor's attorney could prove collusion between me and you, he'd see that I lost my license and you got a minimum of five years. He said he knows what a tramp you are, and he'd love to nail you. He's out of Homicide and it really isn't his business, but Gutless George is a buddy of his, and Berk's making it his business. How does all that sound?"

"It sounds like I ought to raise the ante. Clean, you told me it would be, clean and simple."

"That was before I knew how much Berk hated you. You never told me that."

"I don't know the man," she said. "This is another one of your dreams, isn't it? Just to save a few lousy bucks."

"How few?" I asked.

"I figure two hundred would make me whole and clean again."

"Okay," I said. "Piker."

"What was that word?"

"Lover. A chance to pick up about fifty grand, but you're willing to settle for two hundred. No wonder you'll never wear mink."

"I'll never wear mink working with you." A pause. "What did you mean, fifty grand? Another of your dreams?"

"Sure," I said. "You can pick up the two bills tomorrow. That soon enough?"

"Steve, what did you mean by fifty grand?"

"Nothing," I said. "Not a damn thing. I've *got* the letters. I forgot about that. It's my fifty grand. That's all we've really got is the letters. And my testimony. And I can be bought. I can go in the package with the letters. A package deal."

"Steve, he wrote those letters to *me*."

"I know. But who else knows? Who else even knows there are letters?"

"Your client does."

"Does she? You know that, for sure?"

Some words that wouldn't bear repeating.

And I said, "I'm not going to double-cross my client. I'm going into court with the letters, probably. And then they're a part of record. And when you go into court later, everything's clean and ready for you. And you want to settle for two hundred."

"Two hundred in the hand," she said, "or fifty grand on a breach-of-promise suit. Is that what you're telling me?"

"I wouldn't tell you anything," I said. "You're too bright to listen to me."

A silence.

I said, "If I were as bright as you are, I'd go to some shyster and ask him what he thinks. He might have better advice. Now, do you want to wait for your two hundred or pick it up?"

"Damn you," she said. "Has it occurred to you that I might want to see you, too?"

You haven't much memory, have you?"

"Sure have. I remember Berk saying if he saw us together, he'd know there was collusion. You think I don't want to see you, temptress? I wouldn't have seen you last night if I'd known what I know now."

"I wish I could believe you," she said. "Steve, I wish—"

"Darling," I said, "wishes don't buy any mink. We're from the same side of the tracks, and I didn't think the day would come when I'd have to tell you your business."

"Angles," she said. "Always, with you, angles."

"And curves," I added. "Isn't it a nasty world? You're not up to it, I guess. I'll send the money over by messenger."

"Keep your money," she said. "I'll play along. And that means I will see you occasionally, doesn't it?"

"After this Taylor deal is finished," I told her, "you'll see me so much you'll need colored glasses. Together, we'll plot the fifty-grand pitch. Together, we'll spend it. Have you ever been to Mexico?"

"No, and neither have you. All right—*sweetheart*."

"Bye-bye," I said softly and hung up.

I WAITED a minute and dialed. Jean answered the phone.

I said, "Your hubby's friend was here, threatening me. He promised I'd lose my license."

"Who's that?"

"Lieutenant Richard Berk, of Homicide."

"Dick? Dick Berk? Why, the—"

"Friend of yours?"

"Well, a friend of George's. And at a party once, he—well, he was drunk, I guess. Or anyway, drinking. He's handsome, isn't he?"

"I never noticed. At the party, who started it?"

"Steve, what a horrible thought! Steve, you don't think that I'm—well, cheap, or—"

"I'm sorry," I said. "The way I was brought up, girls—"

"You're jealous," she said, "and I forgive you. See you tonight?"

"I sure want to. But Berk . . . I don't know."

"Don't be a sis. I'll go to that recital at the Athens Hall, go in the front door and out the side. And you could be parked at the side. Wouldn't that be simple?"

"You should be a detective," I told her. "What time?"

"Oh, eight-thirty-ish. We could go to the lodge."

"Dandy," I said. "How are you going to pack a swimming suit?"

"I've a couple up at the lodge. Bring yours. And I'm not too sure of the liquor situation up there. George was up there last week."

"I'd better bring some, in that case," I said. "Be good." I hung up.

She wasn't the best-looking doll in the world, but she was a long ways from the worst. Her shape I would enter in any competition. She was enough for any man; she'd been too much for George Taylor.

But he hadn't had enough of her and he'd refused to give her a divorce, with or without a settlement. He still carried the torch, drunk or sober, and I can't say that I blamed him.

For me, she could have been poor, and I'd still have sailed for her. That's what she had, for me.

I went back to the furnished cave I call home and took a bath. My new sharkskin was back from the cleaners, but that didn't look like proper lodge wear. I wore the Harris tweed.

I bought liquor and mix from Maxie, on the corner. He gives me a price. I ate at Vernon's. I don't get a price at Vernon's, but the food's good.

AT A little after eight I was parked at the side door of the Athens Hall. It was early enough to find a place to park. About eight-twenty, they started to come.

Cads and Lincolns and Packards and Bentleys—just to hear some jerk fiddle. It beats me, what these big wheels go for. With Benny Gregory fighting Devlin at the Coliseum, they pay money to hear some guy fiddle.

Eight-forty, I see the side door open, and here she comes. I reached over to open the car door.

Her cheekbones are too high, and there's a little slant to her big eyes. But her mouth is full and rich and her shape—I guess I mentioned that.

"For you," she said, "I pass up Lazarret."

"Who's he?"

"The violinist, dear."

"Oh. I thought it was some kind of mouth wash. How's the home front?" I swung the Buick out into the traffic stream.

"George? I don't know where he is. He left the house around three. He's got a new one now. He's threatening to commit suicide."

"Those are the guys who never do, the ones who talk about it," I said. A guy in a Chev tried to cut in ahead of me, and I closed the hole. He gave me a hard look and barreled on.

"Wouldn't it be nice if he did?" she said.

I turned to look at her. "You mean, if George conked himself off, you wouldn't have to worry about going to court and getting alimony?"

"That's right," she said. "Just think—three million." She put a hand on my knee. "What could we do with three million, Steve? Or what *couldn't* we do?"

I didn't say anything for seconds. I gripped the wheel and watched the traffic ahead and breathed slow and steady.

Finally, I said, "We? Are you proposing?"

"I guess. Oh, what's the use? He won't do it. We know he won't do it. We're not lucky."

I said carefully, "He didn't write any letters or notes threatening to commit suicide, did he?"

She didn't answer.

I looked over to find her staring at me.

I looked back at the traffic.

"Steve . . ." she said. "Steve, don't talk like that."

I said nothing.

"A tramp I might be," she went on. "But I'm no . . . I draw the line at something like that." Her hand left my knee.

"Tramp?" I said.

"Well, opportunist. I only married George for his money, you know."

"I can't think of a better reason," I said. "Or any other reason, where George is concerned."

"Let's not talk about him. You're so *serious* tonight, Steve."

Three million dollars would make Milton Berle serious. But I said, "We'll have fun."

THE lodge. . . Rustic living, you know, roughing it. Just a log cabin with five bedrooms and five baths, with a living room you could review the Seventh Division in, with a fireplace as big as a two-car garage. I'll bet he picked it up for a couple hundred thousand.

No servants yet. A couple from the village kept it spick and span, but they came on weekends. The Taylor servants came up when they did, but since the honeymoon it wasn't being used much.

We sat out on the raft and watched the moon and looked at the million pines along the shore. Not another house in sight, not another person. We talked and smoked and swam and dived.

Then we went back to the lodge and started a fire in the fireplace and uncorked the joy juice. She put a lot of records on the player, but low and sweet, and

there was just the light from the fireplace.

I said, "You and George swim a lot together before?"

"He can't swim," she said. "Why do you insist upon talking about George?"

"I envy him," I said, "married to you."

Then her lips were coming up to mine and we forgot about George.

Next day, though, I thought about him again, and about her, and about her saying, "He can't swim." And I thought of the way she'd said, "What could *we* do with three million!" We, she'd said, as though we were set for life.

And maybe we were. Maybe I had something she liked. I can't remember any girl giving me the bounce, though maybe that's because I never stuck to one long enough for it to happen. . . .

I wasn't much good the next day. Always, I'd been making the petty pitch, chiseling for nickels, fighting to eat. I looked around the office, and it had never looked crummier. You'd think I was seeing it for the first time.

Around noon, just as I was going to lunch, Sylvie showed up. She had a big red-faced character with her, man named Scofield.

He sat there and rubbed his jaw and told me of all the breach-of-promise cases he'd won and accident claims. He was the kind of attorney who owns his own ambulance.

I told both of them, "We want to get our business out of the way first. I can't release these letters until that's settled."

Scofield rubbed his jaw some more and looked at me. "I'd planned to have photostatic copies made of them. The . . . letters were written to Miss Jessup, you know, Harper. They really belong to her."

He wasn't so cordial now.

"She shouldn't have released them to me then," I said.

Now he was frowning. Sylvie was fidgeting, looking from him to me.

"We don't want to quarrel, do we?" I said quietly. "Are you afraid I'll make a deal and freeze you two out?"

He was still frowning. "I'm merely representing my client's interests, Mr. Harper."

"And your own, incidentally," I said. "I suggested she look up someone like you—some attorney, that is. It was my idea. She'd have sold out for two hundred dollars."

He smiled. "Before she came to my office. Mr. Harper, I must insist that the letters be—"

I cut into that. "You're not in any position to insist on anything." I gave him the name of Jean's attorney. "You could argue with him. I'm not bright enough to argue with lawyers."

"You underestimate yourself," he told me. He looked at Sylvie then, and she nodded slightly. He looked at me. "We'll play along, Steve." He stood up and tried to smile. "All of us ought to do very well."

I nodded and smiled, and they left.

All of us—excepting them. Well, I'd saved two hundred bucks. Which wasn't bad for a few minutes of fast talking.

Then, as I was going out the door, heading for lunch, the phone rang. It was Jean.

"Where are we going tonight?" she asked me.

"Look, baby," I warned her, "we've got to be careful. I wouldn't be at all surprised if Berk puts a tail on me. And if he catches us together too often—well, say good-bye to your alimony."

"I'd rather say good-bye to that than to you," she said. "You do things to me."

"I'm thinking of *you*," I said. "I'm not going to get any of your alimony."

"I'll try to be patient," she said. "But . . . tomorrow night George is going up to the lodge. He says he wants a week to think things over up there."

"Alone?"

"Alone. We'll have a week we won't have to worry about him."

"He's still drinking?"

"Not so much. He's not going to, up there, he claims."

"Maybe," I suggested, "if he shapes up, you'll want him back." This I had to know.

"I don't want anybody in the world but you," she said. Her voice was dead serious.

I could be had. For three million I could be had for life. For three million I could throw the big pitch—maybe. It's something you've got to decide for yourself, whether you'd stick your neck out that far for *any* amount of money. And I decided.

I PLAYED poker that night and my luck was running. I was a hundred and seventy ahead at eleven-thirty.

I shoved my chips over to Len Ternen, who was banking.

"Quitting?" he said.

"I've got a headache," I told him.

The others laughed. Len said, "Find another game, Steve. This isn't the first time."

"All right," I said. "Just give me the hundred and seventy, and save the comments."

He handed it over, tens and fives and singles. "You don't need any friends, do you, Steve?"

I waved the money at him. "I've got a handful of friends right here. Why don't you monkeys get wise?"

Al Fidler said, "So-long, Steve. You're interrupting the game."

What a bunch. I could drop in twenty years from now, and they'd still be playing for the same stakes. And the world was full of them.

I went home and tried to sleep. But I couldn't. I took a hot bath and a couple slugs of whiskey and tried again. No deal.

In the morning, Jean called. She said, "George phoned me from the lodge. He's willing to let me go, baby."

"Why not?" I said. "He's licked, anyway." I took a deep breath. "Is he coming home?"

"No, not for a couple days. He says the place is working a miracle for him."

"Did he say anything about a settlement?"

"No, he didn't. But George is generous, you know. Where can I meet you tonight?"

"I'll phone you later," I said. "I'll be down on the west side most of the day."

George was generous, all right. But alimony doesn't continue if a divorcee marries again, not without kids. And George wasn't so generous he'd overlook that angle. His lawyer wouldn't let him. There'd be no lump settlement.

What the hell was I stalling for? I knew what I was going to do, and I wasn't going to do it in town. I was going to set myself up for life.

I was nervous and my stomach seemed full of cement, but I was determined. I took the Buick out toward the Drive and headed her for the lodge.

The *how* I wasn't completely sure of. I'd get him into the water; that much I knew. One way or another, I'd get him into the water, and without a mark on him if I could help it. Even if he screamed, up there who'd hear him?

It didn't make me any less nervous. The thought of Berk kept riding with me; the careful, sharp way he operated, the way he was probably laying for me.

I CAME up the gravel drive, between the pines and into the sunlight of the back yard. His car was parked on the apron back here, and he must have seen me drive up.

Because he was standing on the back porch, his hands on his hips, and he didn't look happy. He looked like a spoiled kid.

I grinned and waved, and stepped out of the car.

"All alone?" I asked him. He'd come down to the steps.

"Until now," he said. "What's on your mind, Harper?"

"Justice," I said. "I think I gave you a raw deal, Mr. Taylor."

His dark hair was too long, and his dark eyes too soft. "Really?" he said. "Conscience—from you?"

"Seems strange, doesn't it? Why don't we go in and have a drink and talk this over?"

"It's too much of a trip for the fumigators," he said. "Say what you have to say and go, Harper."

"It's about—about Mrs. Taylor," I said. "I've an idea she would like to . . . kiss and make up."

"Really?" His voice was scornful.

"You're getting into a rut," I said. "All right, if you're not interested." I started back for the car.

"Wait," he said, and I turned.

He studied me a second. "Come on up on the porch and sit down."

"Let's go down to the pier," I said. "This is my kind of country. I sure love a lake."

It didn't sound any phonier than the ring of a lead dollar. But he smiled and came down the steps.

"What did you mean about Jean—about Mrs. Taylor?"

I kept walking toward the pier. "Well, in my office the other day she broke down and cried. She said she didn't feel she was doing right, and I—well, after all, my fee is based on how valuable my information is, and—"

We were on the pier now and walking toward the end. I kept spiling the palaver and walking toward the deep end. There I stopped walking, and stopped talking.

I looked all around, at the timbered shoreline, and said, "Some men have all the luck."

His eyes were quiet, on me. Then he looked out over the lake.

And I really threw a block into him.

He went backward into the water, and he was hollering before he hit. I stood on the edge and saw him come up, right next to the pier, splashing and sputtering and keeping afloat, somehow, with all his thrashing. He started to drift underneath.

I jumped in, feet first, and landed behind him. I got a good grip on his hair and kept treading water. I pushed his head under, and kept away from him.

His hands clawed at my hand, but I kept my fist knotted in his hair. I kept his head under until his hands fell away from mine, until his body was quiet.

My hand was bleeding when I came up onto the pier. I wrapped my handkerchief around it and trotted back to the Buick.

MY WET clothes were in the bathroom and still dripping. I had some coffee heating on the stove and I'd taken a hot shower. The scratch on my right hand was covered with an adhesive bandage. I was still nervous, but not as much.

That was when my doorbell rang.

I don't know why I thought of Berk. There wasn't a damned reason in the world why it should be Berk.

But it was.

"Let's go," he said.

"Go? Where?"

"Down to the station. George Taylor's been killed."

"Am I supposed to mourn?"

"You're supposed to burn. Where were you this morning?"

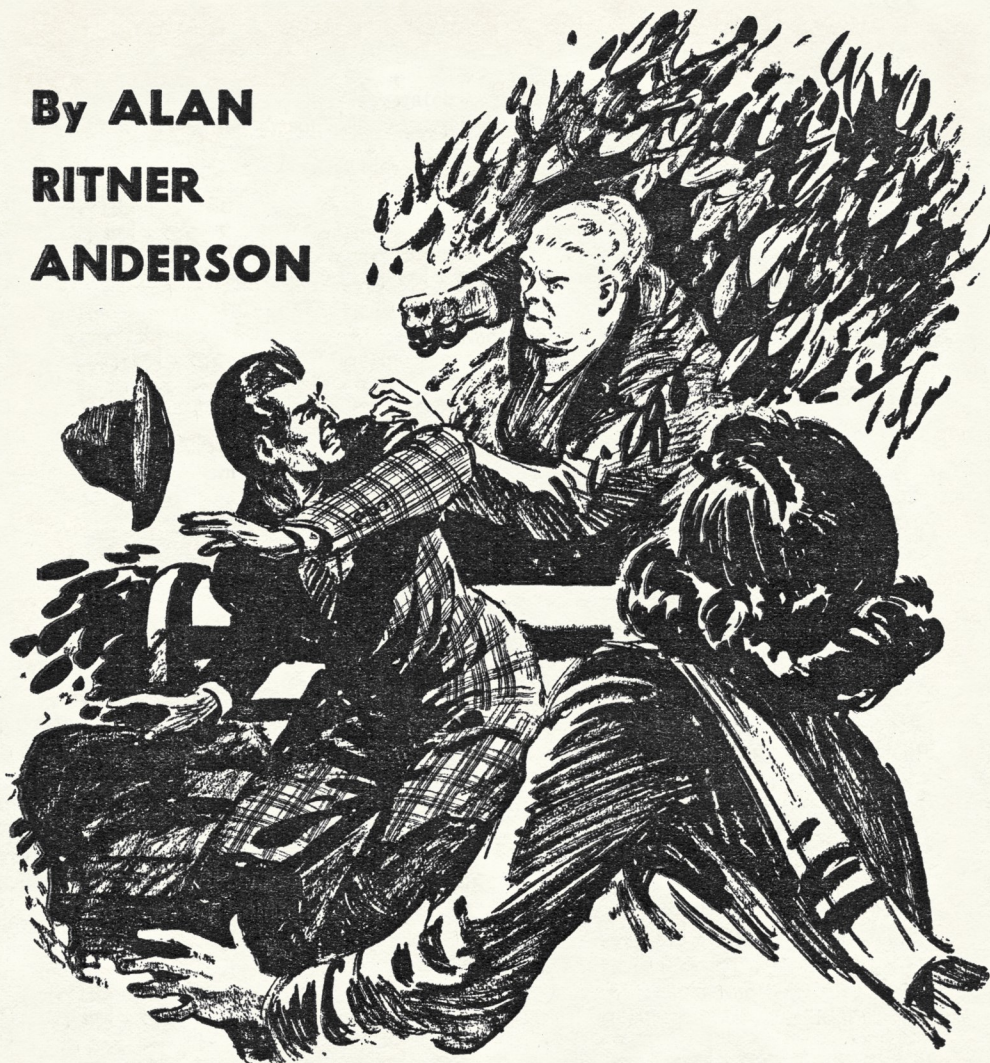
"Around the west side. Why?"

"I just don't trust you. Come on down to the station and make out a sworn statement. Then we can get you for perjury, if nothing else."

I went down with him. I figured he was bluffing. I made out a statement, be-

(Continued on page 129)

By **ALAN
RITNER
ANDERSON**



Gil Cantlon started to get up—too late. Maude's big fist was poised right behind his neck for a rabbit punch. . . .

Murder's Red-Hot Mama

Fat and ferocious Maude Mahoney shook her head with worry. It was too bad her last bottle of Professor Prosser's Nerve Nectar (160 proof) was gone. For now she could barely keep a steady finger on the trigger. . . .

NORA, the upstairs maid, came into the kitchen shaking with excitement. She went to the table where Maude Mahoney sat fashioning her home-made sausage into waferlike pats.

"They're fightin' again," Nora whispered. "The new madam says that if you ain't fired, she'll leave him."

Maude Mahoney's blue eyes misted. She was a brawny woman with iron-grey hair and chubby cheeks the color of wine-sap apples. "What've I ever done to her?" she moaned, her lower lip trembling. "I only seen her once."

"She wants a French chef," Nora explained.

Maude snorted. "Snails an' horse meat! Pancakes set fire with likker!"

Nora bristled. "Sam Halverson went crazy two weeks ago, if you was to ask me. Marrying a woman not much older than his daughter. A naked dancer at that!"

Maude Mahoney frowned. "Don't make sense," she confessed. "Of course, I'm a maiden lady an' I ain't up on such things."

"I'd think a grand cook like you would get lots of chances to get married," Nora said.

"The man I loved got kilt," said Maude woefully. "He was a rookie cop when I was on the force. Got kilt in a gunfight with a couple holdup men."

Nora hastened to get back on the subject. "The blonde woman's got Sam Halverson hexed. Miss Dolly, too. Look at them! Not eatin'. Not talkin'. She's a witch, I tell you. Her and her airs! Her and that social secretary, that snooty Miss Page. What'll you do if you get fired, Maude?"

"I'm only forty-six. Maybe the force'd take me back as a policewoman. Like I told you lots of times, I was a policewoman fifteen years ago."

The kitchen clock struck eight. Maude dusted the sausage from her hands and reached for the bottle of Professor Prosser's Nerve Nectar on the back of the table. Came catastrophe! The bottle slipped from her greasy fingers, rolled off the back of the table and broke on the tile floor with a glassy crash.

"Me last bottle!" Maude cried, horror in her voice.

JORGENS, the butler, stepped into the kitchen, saw the shattered bottle and took a deep, deep breath. The mishap, he gloomily surmised, would have dire consequences. At thirty-minute intervals during every waking hour for the past fifteen years, Maude Mahoney had found comfort and solace in a generous dose of the medicine.

"Sure it's the last bottle?" he asked anxiously as Nora began to clean up the mess.

Maude nodded and thrust out her lower lip. When asked to partake of alcoholic beverages, she'd throw her big hands overhead and cry, "I never touch the filthy stuff!" The professor's product, however, prudently failed to state that the alcoholic contents were eighty percent by volume. Professor Prosser was a certain Lew Monkwitz who manufactured his so-called medicine in violation of an imposing number of state and federal laws. Little wonder it soothed nerves and sun-lighted dispositions! For fifteen years Maude had been pleasantly aglow—beaming, affable, mellow.

Jorgens suggested, "After Gus drives the master to work—"

"He's gettin' me a case," Maude said. "I have Gus fetch me a case when I'm down to me last bottle." She went on fashioning her sausage pats, but with an uncharacteristic air of preoccupation; the corners of her small mouth drooped and her forehead knit in a fierce frown.

"I could make me fortune with them sausages," she remarked. "Oh, why'd I ever leave the force?"

Nora was arranging trays against the time when the women of the house would phone down for breakfast. Not being very bright, she asked, "Why did you?"

Jorgens held his breath as Maude glowered. "I was brandied with sweet words," she avowed darkly. "The commissioner asked me to whip up a tasty meal for a committee. Sam Halverson was on it.

He talked me into bein' his cook. Now he don't even eat me sausages." Tears welled in her eyes and she began to snifle.

"I'm exceedingly fond of your sausages," Jorgens hastened to say. "I'll be most happy to eat them."

Somewhat mollified, Maude sat down and looked at the clock. 9:20! Three doses missed. She could have wept. Her stomach was gurgling and there was a hot constriction in her beefy throat. "Fifteen years," she moaned. "I took it fifteen years."

"What made your nerves bad in the first place?" asked Jorgens, who'd often wondered.

"A gun battle in a roomin' house. Next day me nerves was so bad that I asked me neighbor for some medicine, though a drinkin' man he was. He gimme the nectar. An' nicely it's toned me system up ever since."

Jorgens could affirm that Maude's system was well toned up. He'd seen her manhandle a hundred-pound bag of flour as if it had been a sack of salt. And he remembered, with considerable embarrassment, how he and Gus had huffed and puffed lifting one end of the grand piano while Maude held the other end off the floor with one hand.

Nora warned suddenly, "Shh!"

WILMA PAGE strode haughtily into the kitchen. Tall and thin, mannish in a tweed suit, she was the homely, intellectual type a stunning blonde would have around for contrast. Her mousy hair was done in French braids and she wore no makeup. Eyes big and brown behind the thick lens of her spectacles, she looked at them as if they were freaks in a sideshow.

"The dinner dance for the governor is tonight," she told Maude in her thin, precise voice.

Maude Mahoney had always treated the social secretary with considerable awe and

respect, and had tried to get into her good graces by hearty cooperation and puppy-dog friendliness. Now the situation had changed. Lacking her quota of nerve nectar, the buxom cook was no longer affable. Instead, she recalled half a hundred thinly veiled insults Miss Page had shot her way.

"I ain't forgot," Maude growled. "Twenty-eight places. Eight sharp."

Smirking, Wilma Page laid a typewritten sheet of paper on the table in front of Maude. "The menu," she said icily. "To be followed implicitly."

It was the last straw. The menu was in French. Maude slapped her hand down atop it. "Look, dearie!" she said. "I'm buildin' a tasty meal around boiled beef and horseradish sauce."

Wilma Page paled and her body trembled with suppressed rage. "You stupid, fat fool!" she cried. "You're a servant here. Do as you're told! Your food isn't fit for the dogs."

Maude pushed the work table away. Rosebud mouth a grim, thin line, her big right hand flashed out with amazing speed and caught Wilma Page's left wrist. A savage yank, and the social secretary was sprawled face down across Maude's big lap. A beefy forearm across the small of Wilma Page's back held her immobile despite her furious struggles.

"Mr. Jorgens," said Maude primly, "you best leave."

The butler was glad to. He retreated to the wine cellar where he had a stiff jolt of brandy, his first daylight drink in thirty years. When the sound and fury in the kitchen had abated, he tiptoed upstairs. Maude sat at the table examining her right palm with vast satisfaction. It was red and looked hot.

"Used to paddle wayward girls," she said. "Done them good."

Jorgens cleared his throat, suggested timidly, "Since you broke your last bottle of medicine, I thought a spot of

brandy, perhaps, might soothe your . . .”

Maude's big hands went overhead. “I never touch the filthy stuff!” she cried. “The spawn of the Devil, it is, an’ I’ll have none of it.”

Nora came down the back stairs to the second floor. Her eyes were huge and her mouth foolishly agape. “Welts!” she said. “Oh, my goodness, you should see the welts.”

“Bet she sits on a pillow for a few days,” said Maude with modest pride. “I paddle good.”

The house phone in the kitchen whirled like an angry hornet. Jorgens answered it, said, “Yes, madam, right away.” He hung up and looked at Maude sorrowfully. “The madam wishes to see you. She’s furious.”

The cook lurched to her feet and massaged her hands. Dark shadows rippled across the blue of her eyes. “If she yells for help, stay put!” she warned. “I got me Irish up.”

AS A gesture of defiance, she ignored the back staircase and marched out into the spacious hallway. She climbed the carpeted spiral stairs that did a white-banistered semicircle up to the second floor. Fire in her eye, she marched down to Mrs. Halverson’s bedroom. The door was closed. Maude twisted the knob and barged in, kicked the door closed behind her.

The new decorations stopped her. A hand-waving interior decorator had redone the room to suit Mrs. Halverson’s glittering bloneness. The severely modern furniture was a deep hue of ivory. The rest of the decorations were in varying shades of blue, ranging from the indigo of the carpet to the pale robin’s egg of the drapes. The oversized Hollywood bed sported midnight-blue silk sheets and pillow slips.

Mrs. Halverson was sitting up in bed with two pillows wedged behind her back.

She was a slim honey-blond with a heart-shaped face and dimples. The strapless nightgown bared white shoulders. Her pale grey eyes looked like spheres of dry ice.

Maude sneered. “Like one of them corny B pictures,” she said. “Bet if I was to whistle an’ stomp my feet, you’d climb outa bed an’ start peelin’ down.”

Mrs. Halverson’s face went as white as her shoulders. She spoke between clenched teeth. “Get out! Pack your things and get out! Now!”

“Don’t go hysterical, dearie,” Maude warned comfortably. “Sam Halverson hired me. Sam Halverson fires me.”

“Get out before I have you thrown out!” Tears of rage and frustration welled in the blonde’s eyes.

Maude laughed. Some of the wildness within her was in her voice and rolled from wall to wall. “A naked dancer,” she scoffed. “Did you do a full strip, dearie? Or did you wear a patch?”

Mrs. Halverson closed her eyes and little muscles bunched the length of her jaw.

Maude said, “Wish I had a buck for every drunk you rolled.”

Greyness spread out from the corners of the blonde’s mouth.

“Get the score, don’t you?” said Maude Mahoney, voice low and soft. “You know I’m tryin’ to get you to say somethin’ that’ll give me an excuse to take you apart. Go ahead! Call me a fat fool. Call me a tub of lard. Tell me I couldn’t get a man if I was the last woman on earth.”

Mrs. Halverson’s throat worked frantically.

Maude struck her left palm with her right fist. It made a harsh, slapping sound. The blonde winced. “Look, dearie! The governor an’ the guests eat what I cook. I don’t want no trouble. Not a word to Sam, see! Don’t do nothin’ to get me riled up. We might meet on the street some day. Or in a beauty parlor.

All I need is one punch. Your face'd never be the same again."

Maude went to the door and opened it. The blonde had her eyes open and they were glazed with fear. Little beads of cold sweat clustered on her forehead and formed a dewy mustache above her upper lip.

The cook said, "You got the score, dearie? Tell me you got the score!"

Too terrified to speak, Mrs. Halverson nodded with such vigor that honey-yellow hair exploded around her face and shoulders. Against the pallor of her face, her bright red mouth seemed to be suspended in midair.

Maude Mahoney went out and slammed the door.

DESCENDING the spiral staircase, Maude felt like a fighter who'd scored a knockout in the first round. And, like such a boxer, she felt as if she'd taken physical punishment. Her head throbbed and her stomach fluttered. She reached the hall and headed toward the kitchen.

Abreast the library, she jerked to a stop. The door was ajar and she heard a woman crying. Dolly Halverson! Maude's eyes went huge. Dolly was the outdoors type, keen on sports and not too interested in men. Or was Maude wrong?

There was desperation in Dolly's voice. "I haven't got five thousand, Gil Cantlon. I've given you forty thousand already." No one replied, so Dolly was using the phone with no extensions. "I told you about tonight. Well, all right. The stone bench in the garden by the summer house. At ten. But I can't stay long and I *can't* get five thousand more."

The handset clicked into its cradle and Maude scurried down to the kitchen. Nora and Jorgens were at work on the company silver. Both looked up apprehensively.

Maude said to Nora, "What'd you tell me about the young crowd goin' to that

new roadhouse where there's gamblin' upstairs?"

It took a moment for Nora to collect her wits. "That's all I heard," she whined. "Dolly, Tony Drake, and that gang."

"Who runs the place?"

"Nobody knows," Nora said.

Jorgens cleared his throat. "Everything—ah—all right?"

"She's as yellow as her hair," Maude replied testily.

The porch door opened and Gus came into the room. A tall, lean man with a sad face, the chauffeur had started at the Halversons with a team of bays.

Maude practically danced a joyous jig. "Me nerve nectar!" she chortled. "Where's me nerve nectar at?"

"I couldn't get it, Maude."

"Couldn't get it?" she almost screamed. "Bet you put me money with your bookie." She balled up her fists and bore down on Gus, who hastened to get the table between them.

"The joint's closed," he cried. "There's a cop outside. Professor Prosser took a powder."

The law, at long last, had grabbed Lew Monkowitz by the scruff of the neck.

Maude staggered to her chair at the table and sat down. "Why?" she screeched. "Professor Prosser's a big scientist. I talked to him lots. It's a secret formula his grandfather got from a Hindu prince."

"Well," said Gus unhappily, "seems like a character drunk a bottle of nerve nectar and croaked."

"It ain't true!" she cried. "There ain't no poison in a carload of nerve nectar."

"Croaked of acute alcoholism," said Gus.

Maude brushed back a wisp of grey hair that was sticking to her forehead. "Dirty pool!" she avowed. "Some stew-bum probably used an empty bottle to mix canned heat an' licorice drops."

Jorgens, fearful of Maude's health, suggested, "Why don't you call a friend at the police laboratory?"

The cook's faith was sorely shaken. She licked her lips, stared morosely at the table top. Finally she got up. "That I will," she said. "I'll use the private line in the library." She marched out, unhappily, it seemed. The three in the kitchen maintained a cautious silence. Maude came back looking cheerful.

Gus said, "The nerve nectar's okay, huh?"

She chuckled so heartily her big bosom quivered. "He's a sly one, that Professor Prosser. He got away with all his nerve nectar."

THE women of the house lunched in town to be prompt for their appointments at beauty salons in preparation for the evening. The staff took their sandwiches on the run. As always before a dinner dance, the afternoon slipped away in frenzied activity that left them all hot and sulky. Maude went about her chores in a fretful, slapdash sort of relish, banging pots and pans, slamming doors, chasing the cat with a broom.

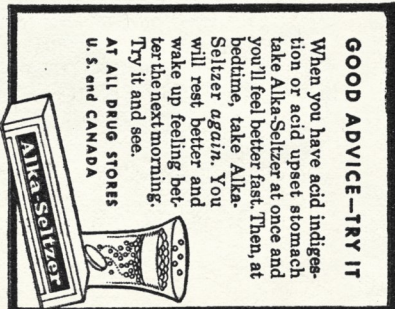
She took a breather on the back porch in midafternoon. She saw that the stone bench in the garden by the summer house had a profusion of head-high shrubs growing behind it. The fact pleased her. Collaring Gil Cantlon would be a cinch. Gamblers she classified in the same category as murderers, arsonists, and persons who beat crippled children. She only hoped that Cantlon would have Dolly's I.O.U. along. Afterward, she'd give the young lady a tongue lashing.

Back in the house she was chagrined and outraged to find out that Gus had taken off for Mr. Halverson a full two hours early. She raved and ranted about that, but neither Nora or Jorgens shared her righteous indignation. Luckily, two of the extra waiters hired for the evening

arrived early and she put them to work.

At 8:45 that evening, Maude sat at the kitchen table suffering the usual hell of suspense she experienced until she got a

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COLD DISCOMFORTS AND HEADACHES



report on the guest of honor's reaction to her cooking.

Nora came into the kitchen. "Six servings," she said wonderingly. "The governor's taken six servings of the boiled beef and horseradish sauce. How do you do it?"

Maude, her brain choked with dismal thoughts of the future, Gil Cantlon, and positive that she'd get fired, decided to satisfy a mystery of long standing. "Why," she said, "I called the governor's mansion an' talked to his housekeeper. She said he's nuts about boiled beef and horseradish sauce, only his wife don't think it's swanky enough for his job an' he don't get it often."

"So that's why all our guests of honor eat like pigs," Nora said. "If master dines out, do other cooks call you?"

"Turn about's fair play," said Maude, getting up and heading for the sink and the piles of soiled dishes.

"You should have seen the new madam," Nora cried. "She got pale every time the governor took another serving."

Maude waded into the dishes with a light heart and a heavy hand.

AT FIVE minutes to ten the cook approached the stone bench with all the silence and stealth of an Indian scout. The black cloth coat blended with the shadows, and she'd kicked off her shoes to insure silence and because the grass was cool and soothing against the soles of her stockinged feet. She reached the line of bushes behind the bench without mishap, parted them gingerly.

Gil Cantlon stood facing the house. The moonlight and the distant radiance of the drawing-room lights illuminated his features. He had a swarthy, ferretlike face, black hair and eyes, and his tall body was arrayed in a gaudily patterned tweed suit of extreme cut. Maude nodded. He looked the gambler, every inch of him.

She began to shake. Her teeth were on edge. She'd have given five dollars for a dose of Professor Prosser's Nerve Nectar.

Gravel crunched and Dolly Halverson rushed up breathlessly. Gil Cantlon made Maude feel good by sitting down on the bench and lighting a cigarette.

"I haven't got it," Dolly said tonelessly.

"Get it!" Cantlon's voice was harsh.

"Forty thousand already. When will it end?"

His voice went smooth and reassuring. "This is the last."

"That's what you've said right along."

"Creepy Yeager," he said savagely. "Dead. Murdered. How about the pictures I gave you? Yeager on the floor dead. You standing beside him with the kill gun. I got the gun. Your fingerprints are on it. Just yours. You saw the picture of the butt."

"I didn't do it!" Dolly said, voice choked and terrified. "I never even knew him."

"Yeager threw reefer parties at his dump," Cantlon said. "Reefers'd make you kill your own mother. The cops know that. They're not looking for anybody with a motive."

"I never smoked a reefer in my life."

"Can you prove it?"

There was a brief silence and from the ballroom came the torrid rhythm of a rhumba. Said Dolly shakily, "I've told you. Tony Drake and I went slumming. I don't remember a thing after the third dive. When I came to, it was dawn and I was in Tony's convertible parked on River Drive. I was in back. Tony was in front, sleeping."

"Skip it! Skip it!" ordered Gil Cantlon wearily. "I know it by heart. I gave you the answer. You and Tony went to Creepy Yeager's for a thrill. The boy friend left first. That left you alone with Yeager. You killed him with his own rod. Just for the hell of it. Five grand,

sis, is what I charge for silence."

"I'll have to sell some horses."

"Sell them! Five grand. By tomorrow noon."

Maude Mahoney had listened with a stupefied sort of awe. Expecting nothing more serious than a gambling debt, it took her a while to adjust her mind to the new situation. She suddenly waxed hot with a fury so violent that she trembled from head to foot. Dolly Halverson was as close as she'd come to a child of her own, and if she'd neglected her in womanhood, it was because Dolly had developed into a self-sufficient person.

MAUDE obeyed her animal-like instinct. A twig snapped as she stepped into the bushes. Alarmed, Gil Cantlon started to get up. Too late! Maude's big right fist smacked the nape of his neck in a vicious rabbit punch. Cantlon did a dive off the bench and hit the gravel path on his face, skidded a foot and became very still.

Dolly Halverson began to scream.

"Shut up!" Maude growled, stepping over the bench and wincing as the gravel bit into the soles of her feet.

Dolly watched the cook worm a foot under Gil Cantlon's hip bone, then roll him over. "Maude, have you—"

"Shut up! No, he ain't dead, though I don't much care."

Dolly began to cry. "I didn't kill—"

"Shut up! How can I think with you blubberin'? I heard what was said. Anything else?"

"No," said Dolly tonelessly. "I'm frightened." She was shaking and crying softly.

"Listen," Maude said. "This ain't no time to go to pieces. Listen to what I say!"

"Yes, Maude," said Dolly humbly, in a little girl voice.

"Go in the house and take a drink."

"Yes, Maude."

"And don't say a word to anyone. Does Sam know?"

"No, Maude."

"Get going! Don't think about it. Don't talk about it."

Dolly turned and walked woodenly away, her high heels crunching the gravel, a tall, stately woman with wavy brown hair and browner eyes.

Maude heaved Gil Cantlon over her right shoulder, looped her right arm around his forward leg and grabbed his right wrist in the fireman's hold. The extra weight made the gravel bite into her stockinged feet. She hastened through the bushes and on to the grassy lawn.

The coupé and station wagon were dark hulks at the rear of the garage. Maude opened a cabinet and fished out a new clothes line. She went upstairs, passed through her tidy living room, and went into the guest bedroom. She dumped Gil Cantlon on the four-poster bed. He struck on his back, bounced twice, then became very still. She didn't like his looks. Or his suit. Or the way he greased and parted his black hair.

Maude went into her bedroom and got out her sewing basket. She took the six-inch scissors into the guest room and cut four lengths off the clothes line. With them, she tied his ankles and wrists to the bed posts, using dependable square knots. In the bathroom she tore off a short length of two-inch adhesive tape. Gil Cantlon had a big mouth, but the tape sealed it.

"Shucks!" she said. "I left me shoes out on the lawn."

There were slippers in the guest room. She put them on. Then, scissors in hand, she went to the head of the bed and grabbed Cantlon's right thumb. Shears open, she placed the point of the short blade between thumbnail and flesh—and jabbed.

He came out of it rolling and tossing and muttering curses through the adhe-

sive. Finally he quieted, breathed gustily through his nose. Black eyes hot with hate, he glared at her.

"Ready to talk?"

He shook his head in violent negation. She said, "Why are men bullheaded?" He proved stubborn. By the time he nodded, his face was putty-grey and sheeted with sweat. She tore off the adhesive. Cantlon talked. When he was finished, Maude Mahoney was as grey as he was.

He made the mistake of trying to butt her in the face with his forehead as she went to replace the adhesive. Her right hook knocked him cold. She applied the adhesive and searched his pockets. He had a fat wallet bulging with banknotes, identification cards and papers. He hadn't lied. His name was Roy Fisher. The Gil Cantlon had been for Dolly exclusively.

MAUDE went into the living room. She felt sick, and not because of the lack of nerve nectar. She went to the phone on the wall and dialed the main hallway of the mansion. An extra waiter answered. She said, "Get Mrs. Halverson! Tell her it's an emergency."

It took a long time. The blonde's voice was fretful. "Yes?"

"Roy Fisher," said Maude succinctly.

There was a brief silence. Then Mrs. Halverson laughed. "How obvious, my dear Miss Mahoney."

It was not the reaction Maude had expected, and all she could say was, "What's obvious?"

"The trap. You know you're washed up here. You had a snap. You want a chance to muss me up. So you nosed around and found out I once knew a Roy Fisher. And a rat he was."

Maude tried to keep the desperation from her voice. "I got him up in my apartment," she avowed. "He's hurt."

"Nuts!" was the unladylike reply.

"I got his wallet," Maude cried. "Want

I should read his address off his driver's license?"

"Yes."

Maude did so. She could hear Mrs. Halverson's quick, sharp breathing.

"Mahoney?" There was a trace of panic in the voice.

"What?"

"It can still be a trap."

"He's up in me guest room. He's hurt. I found him outside, unconscious."

The blonde said, "Meet me outside the kitchen porch in five minutes. I'll be armed. Understand, I'll be armed."

"I understand," said Maude, hung up.

She chose a Spanish .25 automatic from her collection of weapons. It fitted into her coat pocket with ample room for her hand to reach in and seize it. She looked into the bedroom. Roy Fisher was apparently unconscious. She turned off the light and went outside to wait.

Mrs. Halverson finally came out on the porch. She'd thrown a dark cloth coat around her shoulders and fastened the collar button to wear it like a cape. Her lacquered hair glittered with a hot yellow brilliance. The right front of the coat tented over a concealed weapon.

"A .45," she said, voice jerky. "It's itching to talk. How'd you connect Fisher with me?"

"He had your name an' address writ down on a card in his wallet," said Maude, marveling that she could lie so easily.

"If he was hurt, why didn't you phone a doctor?"

Maude erupted sweat at every pore. "He'd call the cops."

"Why?"

"Because Fisher is shot."

The blonde digested that soberly. "Why didn't you call a doctor and let him call the cops? If Fisher's my friend, that'd put me on the spot. That'd suit you to a T, wouldn't it?"

Maude had an inspiration. "I figured

that if I played it this way, I'd get in good with you an' maybe keep me job."

To Mrs. Halverson's way of thinking, it was high logic. She nodded. "Lead the way! I'll be right behind you."

THE cook led the way up to her apartment. She stopped in the center of the flowered rug in the living room with chills walking up and down her spine on spidery feet. She hoped that the sight of Fisher gagged and spreadeagled by ropes would surprise the blonde long enough to be disarmed.

Mrs. Halverson stepped into the living room warily. Her restive eyes took it in with quick, darting glances. She sneered. The furniture was strictly mail order, overstuffed and colorless. The arms and backs of chairs and sofa were protected by crocheted antimacassars, and the one draped over the back of the easy chair proclaimed: "God Bless Our Home."

"Where is he?"

Maude stepped into the guest room and flipped the toggle switch. Shocked and dismayed, her throat worked and there was a roaring in her ears. Ropes and gag were gone. Fisher's legs were straightened with heels together and his hands were on the bed beside his hip bones.

Roy Fisher had been murdered! The scissors had been driven through his heart with considerable force and only the handles projected.

The blonde ordered, "Come back in here!"

Maude turned around. Thoughts were a confused jumble that brought mental chaos. Mrs. Halverson had shed her coat. The wine-colored evening gown sheathed her supple body and bared her white shoulders. The .45 automatic covered the cook's midriff. The blonde's eyes were glassy bright.

Thinking of murdered Roy Fisher, Maude said, "You knew. You made me wait outside the porch while it was done."

Mrs. Halverson didn't reply. The grey of her eyes was interspersed with pinpoints of blackness. She said, "Take off your coat and drop it on the floor. Then go sit in a chair! The God Bless Our Home number."

Maude hesitated. Then she saw that the hammer of the .45 was cocked and the index finger encircling the trigger had begun to whiten. She took off her coat, dropped it to the floor, and sat in the easy chair. The seat was low and her weight further compressed it. To get out of it fast would be an impossibility.

Mrs. Halverson moved to the end of the sofa away from the door to the stair well. The position gave her command of all entries and of Maude Mahoney.

The cook said, "I see. You rode me because I was a policewoman once. You wanted me fired because I was apt to get nosy an' upset the apple cart."



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The blonde could have been a deaf-mute. She stood waiting, listening, her cold grey eyes centered on the doorway to the stairs. Shuffling footsteps started up. The .45 swung that way. Maude leaned forward. The automatic turned to her instantly. The cook settled back and sat immobile.

Sam Halverson shuffled into the room. He was a robust little man with thin grey hair and a florid face. His brown eyes were dull and lusterless. Smiling foolishly, he moved like a man in a dream. Dolly followed him. She too seemed stupefied and amused. They knew where they were, what was going on. But it didn't matter.

Maude's throat worked. Drugged! It was in their eyes, in their silly expressions. An opium derivative, she decided. Heroin, more than likely. It kept the victim conscious but acquiescent, and without a will of their own. They'd used it before. On Dolly and Tony Drake.

Wilma Page stepped into the room, kicked the door closed and leaned back against it. She wore a tan suede jacket over her white evening dress and both hands were rammed into the pockets. The right gun covered Maude, the one in the left pocket aimed down at the floor.

MAUDE looked at the thin Wilma Page. "You done a good job on Roy Fisher.

The eyes behind the lens of the spectacles went yellowish. "Recognize that .45?"

"No."

Wilma Page grinned mirthlessly. "It's yours, fat stuff."

"It ain't. Mine's in me drawer. I seen it just . . ." Maude broke off suddenly. They'd switched automatics! The one Mrs. Halverson held was registered in the name of Maude Mahoney. It would be the kill gun, naturally. She could see the headlines. "Banker and Daughter Murdered by Cook." She, of course, would

by then have perished by her own hand.

Wilma Page laughed. "What sweet luck," she said. "You breaking that bottle of medicine! Gus, Nora and Jorgens only have to tell the truth about today and it'll look like you went off your nut."

Maude looked at father and daughter. They were listening. It registered. But they just plain didn't care.

The blonde said, "Let's get it over with."

Maude stared at her. "You killed Creepy Yeager," she said. "That's the hold Wilma Page has over you. And then you blackmailed Sam into marrying you by telling him Dolly had done it."

Mrs. Halverson nodded. "Natch! And pretty soon I'll be a widow." She looked at her so-called social secretary. "Let's wrap it up before Jorgens or—"

"No! I put each of them to work on projects that'll keep them busy a half an hour. Damn! If only that rat Fisher hadn't started a gravy train of his own! He knew the daughter might have spilled to the old man. He had to blackmail her on his own anyway, the louse!"

"We had to get somebody with a solid in with Creepy Yeager," said the blonde. "Is Fisher holding us up?"

Wilma Page nodded. "How's this? We wrap it up. Even the report of a .45 wouldn't be heard in the house. We hide Fisher in the bushes. The car he came in will be the only one left after the guests leave. We'll take the body and car away after the servants go to bed."

"What about the car?"

"I'll say it's mine." Wilma Page nodded at father and daughter. "Well, may as well get it over with."

Maude came out of her shocked stupor. "You fools!" she snapped. "There'll be an autopsy. It'll show dope."

Wilma Page sneered. "We're not dopes. This isn't the big town. The county coroner's a jerk. The cause of death will be obvious. If the rich widow

doesn't want her husband carved up, the coroner will play along. I . . ."

They all heard the throaty rumble of a laboring motor coming up the drive, the crunch of gravel. Mrs. Halverson stiffened and greyness spread down to the bodice of her gown. Wilma Page's throat worked and her eyes darkened with fear. Faced with the unplanned, the unexpected, she stood paralyzed.

The blonde's voice cracked. "It's coming into the garage."

Maude leaned forward and rested her forearms on her knees. There was no protest. Every muscle in her body tense, she said, "Cops. I had Nora call the cops."

Yanking her hands out of the pockets of the suede jacket, Wilma Page spun around and reached for the door knob. Maude came out of the chair with the nerve and dash of a pro footballer.

"I'll shoot!" screeched Mrs. Halverson.

Maude was halfway to the door before Wilma Page turned. The social secretary pawed for her pockets and the weapons there. Then the cook was upon her. The murderous right hook on the left side of her face knocked Wilma Page the six feet to the corner of the room. She struck the wall, sagged to the floor.

Maude spun around. The blonde stood staring down at the big .45 in her hand. The hammer had fallen. But nothing happened, nothing. Sam and Dolly Halverson were registering mild surprise.

Maude said, "The firing pin is filed down, dearie. Quite a story about that gun. You should have test-fired it."

IT WAS easy. Mrs. Halverson couldn't move, couldn't speak. Maude walked right up to her before she rallied enough to raise the automatic as a club. Maude Mahoney was a kindly woman. She didn't hit her too hard. She even caught her and

steered her into the God Bless Our Home chair. Then she went to Wilma Page and took possession of the two .25 automatics in the suede jacket.

"It'll all come out in the wash, Sam," said Maude. "It always does. They'll talk. They ain't superwomen."

Sam Halverson nodded stupefied agreement.

There was a knock at the door. Maude went over and jerked it open. The dapper little man in the gayly checked suit came into the room with his derby tucked under his left arm.

"A good evening to you, Maude Mahoney," he said, bowing.

The cook beamed. "Professor Prosser!" she cried.

Lew Monkowitz had been around plenty. He had convenient eyesight. He pretended that the two unconscious women were items of furniture.

"Gus took off early this afternoon to hunt me up," he said. "I—ah—am going out of the medicine business. Going to retire, so to speak, and go south for my—er—health. My entire stock of nerve nectar's on the truck downstairs. Sixty cases. I'll give you a good price on a quick cash deal."

Maude massaged her hands with relish. "Fetch up a bottle an' we'll talk turkey," she said, then looked at the Halversons. "You two look as if you could do with a dose. Right?"

Father and daughter nodded solemn agreement.

Lew Monkowitz shuddered. Then he saw the family resemblance between the two on the sofa. It added. Maude must have been using the nectar to knock off her husbands. Only this time Maude was polishing off the step-daughter too. He was glad he was getting out of the racket. Lew Monkowitz, alias Professor Prosser, gave Maude a knowing wink, turned around and went downstairs.

HE'LL KILL YOU!

By
RICHARD DEMING

I SAID, "I think I'd better report Ellen missing tomorrow. If we wait any longer, the police may think it strange."

Margot's freckled face spread in the grin I had grown to love. She always laughed when I mentioned Ellen, and while I loved the sound of her deep, good-humored laughter, her jollity on this subject upset me. I suppose humor was the



Holding my flash on the floor of the furnace, I indicated the freshly laid cement.

"You've never shown me where you buried the body," Margot said to him. It was a little joke they had. But this time he didn't laugh. . . .

sanest attitude toward Ellen's departure, and I for one certainly felt no regrets, but somehow Margot's laughter indicated a lack of delicacy I would not have expected from her.

It was the laughter and the wide, unaffected grin that first drew me to Margot. When we moved to Bradford, the faculty house assigned us was next door to hers, and my study window looked directly into the broad windows of Margot's sun room, where she kept her phone. She was fond of phone gossip, and often I would see her there, her sun-freckled face animated with laughter, and one lean, strong hand making wide gestures as she talked. When she phoned Ellen I particularly enjoyed watching her, for in the hall I could hear Ellen's part of the conversation, and from Ellen's words and Margot's gestures, sometimes piece together what Margot was saying.

Almost from the first we were attracted to each other—as early as the faculty tea given in my honor as the new head of the English Department. Miss Rottell, the dean of women, introduced us, saying in her precise, inhibited drawl, "Professor Brandt, Miss Margot Spring. She's Music," and moving away to leave us together.

I remember bowing formally and saying, "An appropriate name, my dear. You have the look about you of nature's fairest season."

She laughed. "Why, Professor! I do believe you're a romantic."

It started as simply as that, and grew as the months passed into a deep but quiet love. Oh, on the surface we were merely good-natured friends, for in a college town gossip can be fatal to careers, and Margot chose to accept my compliments as laugh-provoking jokes, even when no one was nearby to hear. I too was meticulously careful to arouse no comment. Not once did I even so much as kiss her on the cheek, restraining my physical love-mak-

ing to an occasional accidental touch—my fingers brushing against her hair when I held her coat as she prepared to leave after a visit with Ellen, or lightly managing to touch her hand as I passed her a cup at a faculty tea.

But the depth of understanding that springs from mature love made my innocent words and gestures as meaningful to Margot as though I held her in my arms, just as her apparently joking replies had a meaning for me that a less perceptive nature might have missed entirely. As a matter of fact, it was best that no one aside from me understood her subtlety, for she had a breathtaking flair for danger and seemed to love making me shudder at the risks she took. She had a trick of brazenly stating her true thoughts as though they were rather clumsy jokes, such as the time she lightly remarked to Ellen, when Ellen first began to plan her visit home, "You better hurry back again, or you may find I've stolen your romantic husband." But Ellen only laughed, and I pretended Margot's remark was a great joke.

I WAITED until two days prior to Ellen's scheduled departure before even mentioning what opportunities her absence would leave us, and even then I brought it up to Margot casually. But she surprised me with the blunt frankness of her reply.

"It's too bad Ellen means to stay only two weeks," I remarked.

"Ask her to stay a month," Margot said. "I'm sure if you explained you wanted to elope with your next-door neighbor, Ellen would be glad to cooperate."

Margot's habit of affixing a completely fantastic suggestion to a sensible statement was another twist her odd sense of humor sometimes took, and I knew of course she had no expectation of my explaining any such thing to Ellen.

I asked, "Would you like it if she stayed away permanently?"

"You mean bury her body in the cellar?" She dropped her voice to a conspiratorial whisper. "Is there enough insurance to finance our honeymoon?"

I said patiently, "I meant ask her to get a divorce."

"And have a campus scandal?" Somehow she managed to grin and look horrified at the same time. "No, Theodore. The safest way is the cellar." She closed one eye and made a cutting motion across her throat.

I said, "I've never even killed a chicken."

"There's nothing to it," Margot said. "Read the papers. Husbands do it all the time. I'll phone Ellen tonight and ask her to stand still."

"Now please don't make clever comments to Ellen," I told her. "I know Ellen misses the double meaning of your jokes, but it's an unnecessary risk."

But Margot disobeyed my request when she phoned Ellen that evening. From my study I could see Margot's wide smile and loosely gesturing hand, and in the hall behind me I could hear Ellen's restrained laughter.

"It amazes me that you find Theodore so excruciating," Ellen said. "I've never been able to detect the slightest sense of humor in him."

I knew then that Margot was brazenly describing our conversation to Ellen, and even though Ellen was obviously enjoying it as a joke, I was irritated at Margot for indulging her bizarre sense of humor against my specific request.

It was a week after Ellen's trip was supposed to have started that I suggested to Margot I inform the police I had not heard from her. We sat in my study sipping a Sunday afternoon cup of tea.

"You've never shown me where you buried the body," Margot said, grinning across her cup like a good-natured Spaniel.

I said, "I thought you'd rather not

know. However, come along. I'll show you."

I rose and led the way through the house with Margot chattering behind me. Getting my flashlight from the kitchen, I preceded her down the cellar steps.

Holding my flash on the floor behind the furnace, I indicated the freshly laid cement. "There," I said simply.

She turned toward me, a peculiar expression beginning to form on her face, and all at once she was so desirable my restraint fell away and I took her in my arms. She stood stiff but unresisting when I kissed her, and her lips were cool.

Immediately I realized it was a mistake to let down the barriers so soon, and the wisest course was to retain our surface amiability until the police lost interest in the case. I moved back a step, bowed and apologized.

Margot's stiffened face gradually drained to the color of paper. It was an interesting example of delayed psychological reaction. Obviously the sight of fresh cement for the first time fully impressed on her what we had done, and that it was not a matter for laughter.

She climbed the stairs ahead of me slowly, swaying slightly from shock. When we reached the parlor, she turned to face me and her expression was a study in terror. Without a word, she took her coat and stumbled toward the door.

FROM my study window I can see her talking on the phone now. But her boyish face is not laughing as usual and that eloquent hand is strangely still. Her expression is one of dull horror, and I am worried that she may transmit some of her feeling to whichever of her innumerable friends she is phoning. But she loves the phone, and perhaps a little womanly gossip will help cure the delayed shock reaction.

I wish she would grin.

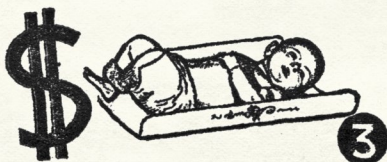
ODDITIES IN CRIME

By MAYAN and JAKOBSSON



1. Proponents of government economy might do well to examine the record of Justinian, most famous and last emperor of Byzantium, in the eleventh century. This thrifty ruler paid no salary whatever to his magistrates—in fact, they were expected to pay a heavy fee into the public treasury upon appointment to office. However, fines upon private citizens were left to the magistrate's discretion thereafter—he could levy them where and when he pleased, and keep the money himself.

Pretty soon everyone wanted to be a judge. And nobody wanted to be a crook—or a Byzantine.



3. Probably the youngest mobster of the century was four-month-old Martin Wiencek of Hamtramck, Michigan. Arrested on suspicion of possessing policy tickets while taking his wife and child for a spin in the family car, the elder Wiencek successfully protested his innocence—until his wife began to insist on taking the baby home to change its diapers. Policemen are notably helpful to young mothers, and one of them decided to lend a helping hand and change the diapers on the spot.

In them, he found 63 policy tickets.



2. When your local coroner goes broke, the village of Waterville, Maine, discovered a century ago, it's best to give him a raise, or fire him outright. When the richest man in town was found with his pockets emptied and his skull bashed in, Dr. Valorous Coolidge declared the cause of death to be a blunt instrument. Waterville might have lost more rich citizens, had not curious medical men borrowed the first corpse for further autopsy. They discovered that Ed Matthews had died of poison—and that their colleague had removed the vital organs likeliest to prove it.

Coolidge died on the gallows.

4. Despite their best efforts, neither police nor the utilities company could catch the mysterious saboteur who kept cutting the power lines of rural Montilly sur Noireau, France. One day the saboteur went further, and shot repairman Marcel Payen while he worked on the lines, helpless as a sitting duck. Arrested was the richest man in town, Eugene Bonnesoeur. Bonnesoeur readily confessed that he had cut the wires and killed the repairman in revenge for his son's accidental electrocution some years earlier.

Now Bonnesoeur is happy and calm. French justice is considerate. By special dispensation, Bonnesoeur's cell is illuminated by candlelight.



By
**STEWART
STERLING**

CORPSE

*Gripping
Murder
Novelette*



ON THE GRILL

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CHAPTER ONE

Medals for Corpses

THE FIRE MARSHAL groped his way through the labyrinth of round tables on which were stacked a forest of upturned chairs. His electric

Fire Marshal Ben Pedley's job was easy: All he had to do was find the madman who'd set fire to the four-story "Ice-Taurant" to conceal a murder—and then put the corpse where it couldn't be burned!

There was a short-bladed knife in his hand, and he struck viciously at Biddonay. . . .



torch penetrated only a few feet into the swirling fog of thick, cream-colored smoke. His feet slipped from under him; with an effort he managed to catch his balance.

The beam of his flashlight, turned down, disclosed a sheet of ice ruttled with the marks of many skates. The marshal knew they had put on a skating show here, but he hadn't been sure whether it was real ice or the imitation stuff that didn't require freezing. He mumbled a curse through his smoke mask; this discovery didn't make him feel any easier.

From the floor above him came the hoarse thunder of lancing streams from high-pressure nozzles; from the wintry street outside came a fury of noise—throbbing pumpers, motors, shrieking sirens and the excited clamor of people being hustled out of their beds in the tenements. But here, in the tremendous dining room of this Broadway night club, was neither flame nor the crackling of fire—only a soundless menace lurking in those oily wreaths of smoke.

HIS foot bumped a pulsing serpent of canvas. Marshal Pedley stooped, followed the hose with his hand until it snaked suddenly down a flight of stairs into darkness. A blast of icy air swept up the staircase and the smoke suddenly cleared. In its place a fine mist of cottony white floated lazily upward. Ben Pedley shifted his gas mask, listened. The hiss of rushing water from the nozzle somewhere below was deep and steady, not the fierce, rushing roar of a stream played on wall or ceiling. He turned, ran back to the street.

A rubber-coated man in a black helmet was kneeling in a pool of water and broken glass, wrenching at a hose coupling.

Pedley called sharply, "Hey, 86! Where's Wilmot?"

The man lifted smoke-reddened eyes.

"Down cellar, Marshal . . . refrigerating plant . . . boys having . . . little trouble."

"I'll say they're having trouble. Got any extra waders on your wagon?"

"Nope." The fireman moved away through the coiling clouds of smoke. "Only had two pair. Boys thought they might get a taste of that damned ammonia, so they took 'em."

Pedley scowled at the apparatus down the block. The police emergency truck would be parked there, but the men on that squad would be busy getting the women and kids out of the tenements.

There might be an extra pair of hip-length rubber boots on one of the other hose-company trucks—but there might not be—and now, when seconds might mean life or death for those men down in that ominously quiet basement, Pedley didn't dare risk it. Still, he had seen the effects of ammonia fumes too often to think he could descend into that white inferno with nothing but wool and cotton on the lower part of his own body.

Across the street was a garage; Pedley sprinted for it. A shirt-sleeved man outside the office gaped up at the mushroom of sooty black blossoming from the top of the four-story restaurant building. Pedley yelled at the top of his lungs.

"Grease! Quick! Heavy grease! Snap it up!"

The man pointed to a pyramid of red and green cans. "Help y'self."

"Open 'em up! Fast!" Pedley slid out of his coat, then slipped off his pants and shirt. He dug his fingers into the can the goggling garageman held out. Rapidly he smeared the buttery substance over his entire body. Grease might do the trick, if it was thick enough; if the heat of his body or the fire itself didn't melt it too quickly. He got back into his clothes and dived back across the street, yelling to the engineer on the big sixteen-cylinder pump-er:

"Hey, 91! Round up a couple from the

Emergency Squad; hustle 'em inside here, first floor!"

"Okay, Marshal."

"And get an ambulance here by the door!" Pedley plunged into the night club. Instantly the blanket of smoke cut off the sounds of the street, giving him an uncanny sensation of being all alone in the burning building. He cursed beneath his mask; maybe he was alone at that!

THE cottony vapor was a little higher up the stairs now. The marshal jabbed his big electric torch at it, but the light was reflected as from a whitewashed wall. There wouldn't be much seeing through *that*. But he could still follow the hose downstairs. Wilmot and his men would be near the nozzle.

Half-blinded by the luminous mist, Pedley tripped over a pile of debris—brick, timbers, broken planking. He knew then how the firemen had been trapped. Those high-pressure lines, throwing better than a ton of water a minute, had poured enough dead weight into the upper floors to weaken the structure; a retaining wall had given way and four good men and one of the best deputy battalion chiefs in the department were probably pinned here under a four-foot layer of corrosive fumes!

He struggled desperately with the tumbled wreckage, found the first fireman face down with his hands around his groin. Pedley used his axe like a man gone berserk, tugged the unconscious victim loose, staggered back to the staircase.

A huge mountain of a man in one of the emergency squad all-purpose helmets came down toward him ponderously, poking the beam of a powerful battery lamp ahead of him. Pedley got close to him, lifted his mask an inch, shouted, "Wall down on the right. Four more men there." The big cop nodded his helmeted head, and his waders vanished in the

steaming vapor. The marshal lugged his burden as far as the door, turned the fireman over to a white-coated interne, slogged back to the fume-filled cellar.

Three back-straining, heart-breaking trips he made, while the giant from the emergency squad was making two. In the end they had all five firemen up on the pavement. There were more doctors there now; one of them gave Pedley first aid for ammonia burns.

"Take a good slug of vinegar water every five minutes for a while, Marshal." The surgeon doused him with a neutralizing liquid. "Thing like this is damn dangerous. You ought to get over to the hospital for a going-over."

"Yeah. Sure, Doc. I'll take care of it." The marshal looked over at Deputy Battalion Chief Wilmot, who was trying to hoist himself up on his elbows, gasping and waving feebly at Pedley. He said, "Got a job here to look after first." He reached Wilmot.

"Ben," coughed the battalion chief weakly, "There's a body . . . down there."

"Another one of your boys?"

"No . . . no. A *dead* body. It was dead . . . when we . . . found it."

"Hell, you can't be sure," Pedley growled "That's up to the doctors. I'll . . ." He started for the smoke-clouded door.

"Wait, Ben. This one's dead, all right."

"Where is it?"

"In that big ice box. Reason I know it's dead, Ben—the damned thing didn't have any head!" Wilmot coughed up a thin trickle of smoke. "Or any legs or arms!"

THE recall sounded. Reserve apparatus clanged brassily away to their stations and the hose companies began taking up. A faint smudge, drifting up out of the gutted building through the cold night air, was reddened by light spilled over street and sidewalks from hook-and-ladder headlights. Pedley slumped on the

curb while an interne finished swabbing out his eyes. The moisture streaming down the big man's weathered cheeks was not tears, but might have been. He kept his head averted from the three figures lying motionless under rubber blankets beside the smouldering structure.

Wilmot and one other member of Company 86 had been rushed to the hospital; with breaks, they'd live. But those three were ready for the undertaker and a posthumus citation for bravery in line of duty. Three good men gone to their graves, Pedley thought bitterly, because some nameless maniac had used arson to hide a murder. For murder it must be, if Deputy Chief Wilmot was in his right mind.

An enormously stout man with a round face that was white with misery shuffled past the police lines. He wore shabby slippers, striped pajamas and florid bathrobe. He pointed at the blanketed figures.

"They . . . dead?"

Pedley nodded.

"Dreadful!" The fat man stared miserably up at the smashed windows, the smoke-stained brick. His eyes came to rest on the neon sign which the hose-streams had miraculously left intact. The tubing, under the bloodshot eyes of the fire engines, glowed faintly:

ICE-TAURANT
Skate as you Dine

He turned sadly to the marshal. "Wipes me out. Yeah. I'm Bill Biddonay."

"Own this joint?"

"Most of it. With this," he gestured wearily, "I'm washed up." He pulled his bathrobe tighter. "But I can start again. Those other guys"—his voice was harsh—"they don't get another chance."

Pedley got to his feet painfully. "D'you live over the café?"

"Sure. Third floor. Fixed up a couple rooms there. I don't guess there's much

of my stuff left. I was asleep when I heard the engines roll up."

The marshal eyed him coldly. "Covered by insurance, weren't you?"

Biddonay shrugged. "*We* weren't. Banks were. Ought to get nearly enough to pay off our notes. Herb Krass and I don't get a lousy dime. Besides, it'd take us a month to get going again, somewhere else. Then the season'd be shot. Hell with it. I'm okay; plenty of people be glad to back me again if I want to start. It's these men losing their lives that matters."

"That's the way to look at it," Pedley agreed. "Bad enough to lose men as the result of carelessness. But when the fire was set—"

"*Huh!*"

"Yeah." Pedley went toward the building. "C'mere. Want to show you something."

Biddonay followed, snuffing and puffing, through the dining room. They crossed the ice-covered dance floor, went past the orchestra dais, on down the stairs to the basement.

CHAPTER TWO

Snowball in Hell

THE portable suction fan that the emergency squad had hooked up in the adjoining building by now had cleared the basement of the deadly white fumes. But the acrid bite of ammonia still gnawed at their nostrils.

"For God's sake, what happened?" Biddonay wheezed. "Pipes bust?"

"No. Somebody used a hammer on one of the compression valves. Opened it up so it couldn't be shut. Nice idea. Like to have that slug stripped naked in a roomful of ammonia for about ten minutes."

"Lord! Who'd do a thing like that?"

"That's what I got to find out." Ped-

ley stalked to the huge cold room, occupying the far end of the basement. The heavy glassed-in door was closed tightly, but one of the glass sides had been shattered by the force of the hose. The floor of the refrigerator was piled with tubs of butter, cloth-wrapped hams, buckets of lard. A few racks of lamb, some loins of pork and one quarter of beef hung on meat hooks. The marshal stepped through the aperture in the smashed glass.

"Boys broke in here to find that ammonia leak, Biddonay. They found something else." Pedley pointed to a piece of meat that was almost concealed by the beef carcass. There were raw, red stumps where the legs and arms had been hacked off. The torso was impaled on a steel hook just above the breastbone. Blood had congealed in a purple-black clot across the open wound that had been a neck.

"Almighty!" breathed the café owner. "That . . . was . . . a man!" He made a strangling noise, looked away.

"Nothing to put on the front page of the papers. No." Pedley looked closer at the grisly object. A chunk of flesh had been cut from the back of the corpse, about three inches above the waist; the white cartilage of the ribs had been bared. "What you make of this?"

Biddonay groaned; his face puckered up as if he were suffering from toothache. "Somebody . . . cut a piece of meat right out of that thing!" He leaned against the wall and covered his face with his hands.

"Looks like a butcher had gone after a piece of sirloin." Pedley's mouth tasted as if he'd been chewing old pennies. "Come on, let's get out of here. Air's bad." He led the café man out. Biddonay sagged heavily against him, stumbled drunkenly.

"Why on God's earth," the restaurant owner mumbled thickly, "would anyone do a thing like that? Even a crazy man wouldn't—"

"Not likely." The marshal swept his flashlight around the cellar. "In all the years I've been doing the detecting for the Fire Department, I've never run across a blaze set by a lunatic. Children, yes. Dimwits, sure. And pyromaniacs might be cracked, according to these psychiatrists, but in court they're just plain criminals. Anyhow, no pyro ever set a fire to hide a corpse."

Biddonay mopped sweat off his moon face with the inside of his sleeve. "That . . . thing . . . wasn't in the cold box at nine o'clock tonight. I was down here with my wholesaler; he dropped in for dinner."

"What time'd you leave the café?"

"'Bout one. We close one-thirty."

Pedley grunted. He stalked back upstairs, the fat man moaning along behind.

In the kitchen Pedley paused in front of the wide brick grill. "Cook over charcoal, eh?"

"For steaks an' chops yeah. The range is for roasts and bakework." Biddonay wet his lips and swallowed hard.

The marshal put his flash on the water-soaked and blackened mess in the fire pit. Charcoal gave a blazing heat, Pedley realized; it would crisp any flesh to a black and brittle ash in a few minutes. Even bone would be consumed to a warped and twisted bit of char. But those things on top of the drenched coals still held the shape and semblance of human bones. The marshal picked them out, laid them on the stainless steel surface beside the grill.

"Somebody," he said grimly, "has been having himself a cannibal barbecue."

BIDDONAY shivered, bent over the blackened objects on the dresser. "Legs an' arms, huh?"

"I'd say so." Pedley fumbled in the wet, gritty mess of the fire pit. "But no skull."

The restaurant man clutched his stomach.

"Well, the guy must have had a head. Where is it?" Pedley climbed up on the iron grating, peered behind the bricked-up grill. There was nothing there that could have been a human head. But the boarding of the wall directly behind the firebox was an ebony cinder. This was where the fire had started, then; someone had left too hot a fire in the grill—probably left the electric bellows turned on to give an extra intense heat in order to reduce the bones to ash. The brick wall at the rear of the grill had become red-hot; the sheathing had ignited and the flames had gone up inside the walls to the higher stories. The marshal clambered down.

"Who'd have access to this joint after closing, Biddonay?"

"We don't permit anybody back here in the kitchen except the chefs and the waiters."

"Well, you had a key to the front door, didn't you? And this partner you mentioned a minute ago?"

"Herb Krass? Sure. We both got keys. But I was in bed and Herb went home around midnight."

"Which one of your employees is supposed to lock up after the rest've gone?" Pedley snapped, irritably.

"When me or Herb ain't here, Pete Donnelly closes up. He's cashier. He's got a key, too."

"Where's a phone? Give this Donnelly a bell. Tell him I want to see him down here right away."

"Sure." Biddonay looked away. "But Pete ain't the kind of a lad to harm a flea, much less chop up a guy."

The marshal followed to the office, a little water-soaked, soot-stained cubby-hole off the corridor leading to the entertainer's dressing room. There were a couple of ash-smeared desks, swivel chairs, a black iron safe piled high with old and

soggy *Racing Forms*, a glass-front bookcase filled with a row of *Moody's Manuals*, some small silver cups, a few paper-covered Spalding pamphlets on bowling, and two round, black-leather cases for carrying bowling balls. Biddonay sagged into one of the padded chairs, dragged a phone across the desk toward him, dialed.

"Pete? Hello, Pete? This is Bill. Yeah . . . all hell's bust loose. We had a fire, Pete. . . . The whole shebang's burned down. Just now. They only put it out a few minutes ago. And that ain't all. There's a—" The café owner glanced up at Pedley's outstretched palms.

Pedley said, "Shush on the killing, Biddonay."

The fat man nodded unhappily. "Listen, Pete. There's a guy from the Fire Department down here with me now. He wants you should get down here right away. . . . I don't know what for; I suppose he wants to ask you some questions. Hurry it up, Pete." He hung up, as a blue-uniformed man in the regulation cap of the Fire Department came into the office and saluted Pedley.

"E. T. Jewett, fireman first class. Company 86. Inspection duty, sir." The man's narrow, tight-lipped face was tense with worry.

"These premises on your beat, Jewett?"

"Yes, sir." The fireman rubbed his chin uneasily. "I checked the floor show here tonight. About eleven-thirty, wasn't it, Mr. Biddonay?"

The café man sighed. "Guess it was. Seems a year ago."

Pedley took out a notebook. "What time did your tour end, Jewett, Twelve?"

"Yes, sir. Everything was okay here, then. How'd she start, do you know, sir?"

"Overheated wall behind the charcoal grill. Hike out and tell that cop to ring his station. We'll need the medical examiner, homicide boys, and one of the lads from the Bureau of Identification.

Then come back down to the cellar. There's plenty to do here."

Jewett's eyes opened wide. He saluted again and hurried away.

The marshal said curtly, "Let's go down to your private morgue, Biddonay. See if we can put the finger on that corpse."

THE fat man labored to his feet, mumbling something about not wanting to set eyes on the damned thing, much less a finger. They went downstairs, into the nose-tingling ammonia vapor. They searched the rest of the refrigerator first, for the missing head. They had found nothing when Jewett rejoined them. The fireman expelled his breath in a long whistle of repugnance.

"Somebody had a screwy sense of humor, huh?" he said. "To hang that thing in here like a chunk of mutton? He was a big guy, wasn't he!"

"Big," Pedley answered, "and powerful as a bull. Look at those shoulders. Don't see chest muscles like that very often."

Biddonay pointed to a number of red scars on the back of the torso, about the level of the shoulder blades. "What were those marks?"

Pedley's mind went back through the years to a body that had been fished out of the ashes of a great conflagration; the cadaver had been marked in the same peculiar way. And that body had been identified.

"Mat scars," he suggested. "They might be scars from a canvas-covered mat. Sort a wrestler gets from having his shoulders scraped by some two hundred and fifty pounder on top of him."

"A wrestler!" Jewett frowned. "Say, Mr. Biddonay—"

"I don't know any wrestlers," the café man muttered hastily.

"That big black-haired guy who comes in two-three times a week and tries to

date Snowball Sue," Jewett said. "Looks like an ape who needs a shave, you remember?"

Biddonay shut his eyes, shook his head. "I don't notice every customer in the Ice-restaurant. Hell, I couldn't remember 'em all. . . ."

Pedley went close to him, grabbed the fat man by the back of the neck, pushed his face within an inch of the gruesome thing on the steel hook. "Don't hold out on me, mister! Not when there's murder and arson involved and three of my department buddies are sleeping on a slab! You talk! You talk straight and quick—or I'll put you where you'll be glad to have even this bloody hunk for company!"

Biddonay stammered. "It's only I don't want to give you a wrong steer. I'm not certain—"

"Who's this wrestler Jewett described?"

Biddonay shuddered. "An ugly lum-mox they call Gorilla Greg. I don't know who he is. I don't know anything about him except that Sue kids him and calls him Gorilla."

"Who's this Sue?"

"Our snowball dancer," Biddonay moaned.

"You know," Jewett put in. "She comes out after them chorines do their strip tease on skates; she ain't wearing a stitch except she's holding this big snowball, and of course while she skates around the snowball begins to melt. . . ."

"Shut up," barked Pedley. "What's her name?"

Biddonay looked at the floor. "Name is Sue Rivers. She's a swell kid. She wouldn't harm a flea."

"Where's she live?"

"Over on the East Side somewheres. The address'd be up in the cashier's ledger."

The marshal got his arm, shoved him toward the stairs. "Let's go, fella. I might want to work with this mouse."

CHAPTER THREE

Gorilla Greg

THEY went up to the office. Biddonay opened the safe with fingers that rattled the combination dial. He pulled out a black and red ledger. "Here y'are."

Pedley read: "Suzanne Rivers, 12 Griswold Place." He checked down the list of employees until he came to: "Peter Donnelly, 966 West 51st Street."

"This cashier of yours lives just around the corner, eh?"

"That's right."

"Funny he hasn't showed up."

"It's queer." The café man snuffled dismally.

"Give him another buzz," Pedley suggested.

Biddonay stuck a pudgy forefinger in the phone dial, spun it seven times. There was an odd puzzled look in his round eyes; after a bit he held the receiver away from his ear so Pedley could hear the operator ringing. "Nobody home."

The marshal growled, "Give him another couple minutes. If he doesn't show up, we'll have to go after him."

"It would be a dumb trick to lam out, Marshal. An' Pete ain't dumb, at all."

A black sedan slid to the curb in front of the restaurant. Four men got out, carrying valises, camera cases, tripods, flash guns.

Pedley said, "Homicide boys'll take over here, but you better come with me, Biddonay. I'll put you under technical arrest as a material witness."

"For the Lord's sake—"

"Hold on, fella. Material witness arrest means the cops won't be able to drag you downtown for a day of question-and-answer stuff while I need you to run down this arson business."

The stout man seemed relieved. "It's just I don't like the idea of being arrested, is all. Besides, I won't be much use as a

witness, will I? I don't know anything about the fire. And I've only seen this Gorilla lug a couple times here in the restaurant. I never talked to him."

"Don't worry about your testimony."

The marshal opened a closet door, peered inside. "This is your joint; you hire the help; you were first on the scene after the crime was discovered. That'll be all I'll need. Except I'll want you to shag over to Donnelly's with me, if he doesn't get here directly."

"I can't go like this." Biddonay wriggled his toes in the slippers. "My clothes're upstairs."

Pedley tilted his head toward the closet. "Who belongs to those duds?"

"The tux? That's Herb's. I couldn't get into that."

"Try it. Better than going around like you are." The marshal went out to meet the headquarters men. He explained the setup briefly and wound up, "All that's left of it in the refrigerator is the torso. Arms and legs went on the grill. Might look around for the skull. I'm going over to the cashier's; he's supposed to be the last man here, the guy who closes up." He didn't go into detail about the wrestler or the snowball dancer; Jewett would do that, anyhow, and the homicide squad liked to do things its own way. And they made a fetish of identifying corpses before rounding up suspects. . . .

THE murder experts trooped down to the basement while Pedley went back to the office. Biddonay was dressed. The pants were skin-tight and an inch too long. The coat wouldn't button, but there were shiny patent-leather shoes on his feet and a soft dress shirt under the coat.

"I buzzed Herb," the fat man said. "He wasn't home. Mrs. Krass was there. She don't know where he is. I told her to have him come right over soon's he shows up."

"That's right. Thought you said your partner went home early."

Biddonay pursed his cupid-bow lips. "Herb likes to buck the tiger once in a while. Prob'ly where he is now."

Pedley was noncommittal. "He's lost his shirt, anyway."

They walked a block and a half, found 966, a shabby, red-brick rooming house. An angry woman in a bedraggled dressing gown answered the bell after a while, subsided after a glance at the gold badge in Pedley's palm.

"Second floor front is Mr. Donnelly. I hope there ain't anything wrong?"

The marshal didn't satisfy her curiosity. He borrowed her keys and went upstairs.

Biddonay panted, "Hell of a place to live. Pete can afford better'n this."

Pedley knocked, without result. Then he used a key.

By the light of a cheap lamp on a center table, they saw the cashier lying face down on top of the bedclothes. He might have been asleep, save for the wedge-shaped wound on the back of his head. A thin red ribbon trailed down the back of his neck, across his pajama coat.

The marshal barked, "Stay outside, Biddonay. Don't want you smearing up any prints in here." He gave the room a rapid once-over. Nothing seemed to be disturbed; there were no signs of a struggle, and no indications that the bureau or the wardrobe in the corner had been ransacked. The man's clothes were neatly piled on the back of a chair by his bedside; the suit had been hung on hangers in the wardrobe. He put a hand on the dead man's wrist. It was cold, but not yet stiffened in rigor mortis.

He lifted the head. Donnelly's eyes were open; the man hadn't been killed in his sleep. By the placid expression on the corpse's features, Pedley guessed that the cashier hadn't even known he was going to die.

Pedley knelt, looked under the bed and behind the wardrobe. No sign of a weapon. He went to the bureau, opened the draw-

ers with his hand covered by a handkerchief. He found shirts, socks, underclothes; a bank book with eleven hundred dollars as the last balance; some old baseball scoreboards and theater programs. There were gloves, handkerchiefs, cuff links—stuff you'd find in half a million rooms like this.

Under a folded sweater in the bottom drawer, Pedley found a photograph. It was a glossy print of a nearly nude girl, with a figure that could stand that kind of photography. She wore only a white fur cap, white mittens and skating boots with woolly socks. She was poised on the toes of her skates, holding in her mitten hands a white ball about the size of a basketball. The marshal took it over to the door and asked, "This the mouse who does the snowball dance?"

Biddonay exclaimed, "Why—why sure! That's Suzie. But I never saw this. What would Pete be doing with her picture?"

"Maybe he went for this mouse."

Biddonay gaped. "I'd never dreamed."

Pedley picked up a newspaper from the table, slid the picture in between the folds. "The guys who go for Suzie seem to get treated pretty rough, mister. Suppose we ask her why."

DOWNSTAIRS in the hall, Pedley used a slot phone to call Biddonay's office. To the plainclothes man who answered, he said, "When you've finished at the Ice-restaurant, there's a job at 966 West Fifty-first. Second floor front, name of Peter Donnelly. Cashier at Biddonay's place. Back of his head split open with a cleaver, or something like that. Hurry it, will you?"

He hung up. He questioned the landlady as to possible visitors to Donnelly's room, got nowhere. She couldn't keep track of everyone who came in her house at that hour of the morning, could she?

Biddonay said, "I think Pete's mother lives somewhere upstate. We better send

her a wire or something about Pete."

"Up to the Bureau of Identification," Pedley replied. "They'll find her address in his things, probably. Here comes the death watch; let's grab a cab."

They went out as the homicide squad came in. Ten minutes later a taxi dropped them in front of 12 Griswold Place. A new apartment with a river view, it boasted too much plate glass and stainless steel for the marshal's taste. Miss Suzanne Rivers occupied Apartment 7-B. They used an automatic elevator. There was no night man visible in the lobby.

Pedley listened at the door of 7-B for a minute, and heard voices. They ceased abruptly when he buzzed, but it was a full minute before a girl's voice called, "Who is it?"

"Fire Department."

The door opened, revealing a flaxen-haired, pleasant-faced girl with wide-set mint-green eyes and sensuous lips. The negligée she wore hadn't been designed to conceal her curves.

"Mr. Biddonay! Is something wrong?"

"Yeah, Suzie." The fat man sighed. "A lot is wrong. The spot burned down tonight; three fireman lost their lives. And—"

"I want to ask a couple of questions, Miss Rivers," Pedley cut in.

"That's perfectly dreadful. Come right in." She seemed shocked at Biddonay's news. Still, she was in show business, the marshal realized—she might be putting on an act. The café proprietor introduced them.

"Better give out with the answers, Suzie," Biddonay counseled. "The truth, the whole truth, you know."

She said she understood. She watched Pedley warily as he gazed around at the ultra-modern furnishings of the apartment.

"Someone here with you? Thought I heard voices," he inquired.

"I had the radio on. I turned it off."

"Oh, that was it." The marshal thought she was lying. "You know a big guy they call Gorilla Greg? A wrestler?"

"Gregory Scanopolous? I ought to." She nodded calmly. "He's my husband."

Biddonay cried, "You said you weren't married. That's what you told me and Herb!"

"Sure I did. A wedding ring wouldn't go so good in the snowball-dance business, Mr. Biddonay."

Pedley interrupted: "You're not living with this Gorilla gent now?"

"No. We called it a day. Been separated for two years now. He used to beat me up." She said it quite without venom.

"Why's he keep going to the Ice-restaurant to see you?" Pedley asked.

She rubbed thumb and forefinger together. "He's broke. Greg used to make fair dough out of circusing with one of those cross-country wrestling troupes. But he strained his back; he couldn't wrestle one of the Quints now. So I give him a few pieces of change now and then. I hate his guts, but I wouldn't want to see anything happen to him."

"No?" The marshal heard a scraping noise from somewhere outside the living room; it sounded like a dog scratching at a door. "Somebody did. And gave your husband a workout on a butcher's block. With a cleaver."

CHAPTER FOUR

The Skull Container

SHE didn't scream. She put the back of one hand to her mouth and squinted as if the light hurt her eyes. "Killed him?"

"Dismembered him," Pedley said. "Burned his arms and legs in the charcoal fire at the restaurant. You wouldn't know anything about that?"

"No." She turned her back so they couldn't see her face, but the marshal didn't miss her glance toward the bed-

room. "I wouldn't know a thing."

Pedley palmed his automatic and approached the bedroom cautiously. Five feet away he paused; a roomful of men were stepping toward him in the darkness. They were all alike; they were all like Pedley himself. Suzie's bedroom was walled with mirrors. He switched on the light; saw his own reflection from a dozen angles. But there was no place to hide in that room. He stepped into the bathroom, shoved back the shower curtain. Nothing. There were two closets, both empty. He swiveled quickly to find Suzie watching him with fascinated intentness.

"I give you my word there's no one hiding in my apartment," she said unsteadily. "And unless you want to ask me some questions about Greg..."

Pedley tried the kitchenette. No dice. But there was another door opening out of the kitchenette. There was no keyhole under the knob. A fire door. Opening onto a flame-proof stairwell, a door knobless on the outside, so no intruder could get into the apartment from the internal fire escape. He yanked it open.

There was a movement in the gloom outside. The marshal reached out, grabbed a coat lapel and jerked into the room a thin, bony man with pinched and harassed features set in a hairless skull.

"Yeah?" growled Pedley. "And who in the hell are you? What are you doing out there?"

Suzie spoke up sharply. "He's my brother."

The bald-headed man snarled, "I'm Jimmy Yalb. This is my sister's home; I got a right to step out on the fire stairs if I wanna."

Pedley slammed the fire door, pushed Yalb roughly into the living room. As he shoved the eavesdropper past Biddonay, the café man yelled:

"Suzie's brother! He's a lying so-and-so, Mr. Pedley. He's the baker at my restaurant, that's who he is."

Yalb tugged away from Pedley's grasp, rushed belligerently at Biddonay. "Yes, and no thanks to you, either, you big tub of lard!"

"Jimmy!" Suzie screamed.

"If it hadn't been for Mr. Krass," Yalb spat out, "I'd have been bounced a dozen times."

The marshal watched Biddonay redden with rage. "You bet you would, Yalb; I've never trusted you. And now I know you're Suzie's brother, I'll trust you even less."

Yalb rumbled hoarsely, deep in his throat. He twisted swiftly out of his coat, eluded the marshal's grip, lunged fiercely at Biddonay. There was a short-bladed knife in his hand. He struck once at the café owner before Pedley could stop the blow. Biddonay screamed fearfully, reeled back. He struggled desperately to defend himself with his bare fists. The blade of the knife licked out like a snake's forked tongue. Biddonay clutched at his side, stumbled, pitched sideways against a heavy center table, went down to his knees and stayed there, squealing like a stuck porker. Pedley closed in on Yalb.

The girl kept shrieking at the top of her lungs, "Don't, Jimmy, don't! You can't fight the law!"

But Yalb tried. He butted the marshal's chin with his hard bald pate; he kicked, gouged, used his knee. He dropped the knife and clawed at the marshal's eyes with vicious talons. Pedley clipped him across the side of his face with the barrel of his automatic. He had to hit the baker five times before Yalb let go his teeth-grip on the marshal's wrist. He sagged to his knees, clutching at Pedley's coat to keep from falling to the floor.

The marshal gave him one extra belt with the gun-barrel, to make sure the man wasn't possuming. Mr. Yalb wasn't.

"Now then," Pedley said. "Get up on your feet and let's level on this."

BIDDONAY rolled over on his stomach and got his knees under him, but remained with his head down, his chin touching the carpet.

"He cut me," the fat man moaned. "He stabbed me. Look!"

Pedley got his arms under Biddonay's shoulders, hoisted him onto one of the underslung chairs. He ripped open Biddonay's vest, pulled up his shirt. There was a crimson line about an inch long, but the blood was merely oozing from it.

"That's a belly wound," the plump man blubbered. "I'll get blood poisoning. . . ."

"Stop squawking. That's a flesh wound. Couple of stitches and you'll be good as new." He motioned to the girl. "Ring the Ice-aurant."

She nodded silently.

The marshal turned to Yalb, who was leaning against the wall. "You didn't hack your sister's husband to pieces with this thing." The marshal picked up the knife at the spot where the blade entered the handle. "What'd you use?"

Yalb snarled, "I never touched the lousy ape. I had plenty of reason to, but I never touched him."

Suzie held out the phone receiver. "Here," she said dully, and when Pedley took the phone, she knelt down on the floor beside her brother, caressed his face with her hands.

The man on the phone was Jewett. He said the homicide boys had taken all their pictures and powdered everything for prints and removed the remains. They had left a patrolman on guard, and the fireman was awaiting Pedley's instructions.

"You run my car over here." The marshal gave him the address. "And then you can take a guy to the hospital."

Biddonay snuffled, "I'll bleed to death before then."

Pedley racked the receiver, went over to the girl and pushed her away from Yalb. "Nothing wrong with your brother; he'll

have a jaw ache for a while and his face'll be black and blue, but—"

"Sure." The baker bared his teeth. "Beatings don't bother me. I'm used to 'em. That big Gorilla used to beat me, the way he beat Sis."

She said, "Hush, Jimmy. Don't!"

The marshal got hold of Yalb's collar, yanked him to his feet. "Stand against the wall; fold your arms on your chest. . . . That's the idea. Now, what time did you leave the Ice-aurant?"

"Twelve o'clock. I ain't s'posed to work after twelve. Ask him." Yalb pointed at the restaurant owner.

"Where'd you go after twelve?" Pedley wanted to know.

"I come over here."

"Jimmie has a key," Suzie corroborated.

"You been here ever since?"

"Yeah. Maybe you think you can prove different?"

Biddonay twisted his face up in a lopsided grimace. "Ask him where he hid in the cellar."

Pedley turned on the stout man. "I'll figure out my own questions, Biddonay. While I'm at it, how come you got such a heavy grudge against your star's brother?"

Biddonay told him, sitting there hunched over with his hands pressed tightly to his midriff like a Buddha with a bellyache. He didn't like Yalb because he made lousy pastry; also, he was dirty looking and insolent. Sure, Biddonay'd tried to fire him, but he didn't hold any grudge against him, or hadn't until he'd learned Yalb was Suzie's brother. He didn't mind Suzie; she was a swell kid and a good draw. The snowball gag was a good moneymaker. He didn't even mind Suzie's playing around with anybody she wanted to, including Herb Krass. Sure, his partner was probably footing the bills for this fancy apartment they were in right now.

THE girl didn't try to interrupt. She merely watched Biddonay with fear and disgust in her eyes. But Yalb unfolded his arms and, with his hands hooked in that curious, talon-like attitude, started for the restaurant man. Pedley lifted the muzzle of his gun.

"Do I have to put you out of commission, fella, or will you be nice?"

Yalb retreated to the wall again. Biddonay went on, eyeing Jimmy Yalb.

"What Herb does is his business; what Suzie does is strictly up to her. But when I find out that Herb has hired one of Suzie's relatives to work in my kitchen, to spy on me behind my back, I don't like it. So I wouldn't trust Yalb and I aim to have a showdown with Krass, believe you me."

There wasn't any need for Pedley to check the story with the girl. She didn't attempt to deny it, but she didn't seem ashamed or embarrassed, either.

There was a buzz at the front door. Pedley answered it. Jewett stood there, gawking in at the tableau—Biddonay hunched over, the girl slouching on the arm of a divan, and Yalb rigid against the wall. Pedley pointed with his gun.

"Take this gent down to City Hospital. Tell 'em to post a cop over his room. I'm holding him as a material witness."

"Yes, sir."

"And then run this lug down to my office in the Municipal Building. Tell Barney to keep him in the cooler till I get there."

"Right."

Pedley said, "Take a cab. I'm going to need my car to hunt Krass."

"Sure, Mr. Pedley. Say . . ." Jewett spoke in an undertone, held the door open while Biddonay walked with short, toed-in steps to the elevator. "They didn't find that skull, but they found the thing it was carried out in."

"Yeah?"

"Remember those leather cases for car-

rying bowling balls? It was one of them. They opened it up, found a lot of blood inside."

"But no head?"

"No. The butcher must've delivered that somewhere else."

The door closed behind Yalb and Jewett, and the elevator hummed down. Pedley turned to the girl. He said, "Biddonay doesn't look like he'd be much good on a bowling alley. How about your friend, Krass?"

"Herb is a kegler," she admitted. "He's nuts about it. But that doesn't make him a murderer, does it?"

"It might," Pedley said. "You get some duds on; we'll go find out."

CHAPTER FIVE

Pedley Looks at Death

SHE didn't move. "Listen, Mister Wise. You don't want to make me go to Herb's. What have I got to do with it?"

"You're in it already, babe. Climb into your clothes and make it fast!"

She stared wildly at him, ran into the bedroom, slammed the door.

She came out in five minutes, pert and trim in black skirt and scarlet sport jacket. She didn't seem to want to talk. They went downstairs, climbing into his car.

On the way over to Krass, she said dully, "You can horse me around all you want to, but I wish you'd leave Jimmy alone. He hasn't done anything!"

The marshal grunted. "He wouldn't be the guy who sliced a steak off your husband's body and cooked it on that charcoal grill then."

She whimpered as if Pedley had struck her; he'd wanted to jolt the truth out of her, at that. "I wouldn't believe it," she cried, "if I hadn't told Herb about Gregory threatening to expose us—Herb and me—unless he got a wad of money."

"What'd Krass say?"

"Herb said that if my husband tried blackmail," she shuddered, "after abusing me for years, he'd carve Greg up and serve him to me . . . on toast."

They pulled up in front of a half-timbered double house. Herbert R. Krass occupied one wing. He was home; he let them in. He was a tall, gaunt-framed man with iron-grey hair and grey eyes. There was apprehension in those eyes now.

He wasn't surprised to see the marshal, but Suzie's presence startled Krass.

"I heard about it, Suz."

"You did?"

"Yeah. Guy phoned here about five minutes ago. For you," he scowled at Pedley. "From a hospital. Said his name was Jewett." He handed the marshal a slip with a ward number on it. The detective got on the phone, while Suzie and Krass whispered together in the living room.

JEWETT answered in a voice thick with pain and rage. There'd been an accident on the way to the hospital. That rat, Yalb, had started a fight in the cab; a window had been smashed back of the driver's head and the glass had cut the cabby, making him run into a parked truck. In the confusion, Yalb had got clean away. The fireman had notified the police. He, himself, had a broken collarbone. Biddonay had gone to the hospital with him; Jewett was ready to go up to the operating room to have the setting. . . .

Pedley frowned; this whole case stank to Heaven. Things kept slipping out of his fingers: Donnelly dead; Jewett hurt; Yalb taking a powder. One thing sure—the next lead Pedley got his hands on, he wouldn't let go of!

He had hold of Krass, now. He put the fat man's partner over the jumps. Krass had no alibi; he'd been in New York from the time he left the Ice-restaurant

until an hour ago. Where? In the lobby of one of the off-Broadway hotels. No, he hadn't talked to anyone; he'd gone there to meet this Gorilla Greg. Why? Because the wrestler had phoned to him and said that unless he came through with some important dough, Mrs. Krass would know all about Suzie's little apartment. Well, Mrs. Krass knew the whole thing now, anyway. He'd made a clean breast of it; his wife was a good trouper who understood that a man can step over the line once in a lifetime without having it break up his home.

Mrs. Krass was there to back him up. She was a good-looking woman with henna-dyed hair and a figure that might once have done for the front line of the chorus, but was now too buxom.

She appealed to the marshal: "You've got to believe Herb. If he'd wanted to put anything over on the law, he could have said he'd been home, here with me, ever since leaving the restaurant, don't you see?"

Pedley said, "He might not have dared to, Mrs. Krass. If he'd established a phony alibi like that and then someone showed up on the witness stand who'd happened to spot him on Broadway, or say over at West Fifty-first, it would be a one-way ticket to Sing Sing sure."

"What," asked Krass, "is all this marlarkey about Fifty-first Street?"

"Your cashier got himself murdered tonight, too. Sometime after the fire broke out. So you see," the marshal reached for his handcuffs, "I'll have to take you along."

Mrs. Krass buried her face in her hands, rushed sobbing from the room.

Suzie got between them, held onto Pedley's arms. "You're making a mistake, mister. Don't arrest Herb. You'll only get all this in the papers. . . ."

The Fire Department's chief investigator shoved her aside gently. "That'll be the least of it," he agreed. "And the

less fuss you make about it right now—”

There was a *whish* of motion behind the marshal. He ducked, but not in time to avoid a crashing blow from a heavy and-iron swung by a frantic woman. Pain rocketed through his brain; he made a lunge for Krass, got hold of him.

The part owner of the Ice-aurant struck at Pedley savagely. Mrs. Krass smashed him again on the back of the neck with that lethal instrument. Somebody tripped him. He fell heavily, keeping his grip on Krass and sending home one bone-crushing blow to his prisoner's jaw. There wasn't time to get out his gun. The marshal felt another heavy paralyzing blow on top of his head—and that was all he felt.

IT WAS dark and damp and cold. Pedley's whole body ached so that it was torture to move. When he did attempt it, he found his movements were tightly restricted. His right arm was strapped to his side with surgeon's tape; his mouth had been plastered up with the same adhesive and his feet bound together. His left wrist was locked in one half of his own handcuffs; the other half of the bracelets had been snapped around a two-inch waterpipe running from floor to ceiling.

There was a cement floor under his feet and rock wall at his back; he knew he was in the basement garage of the Krass house, even before he distinguished the low purr of the motor.

So that was the idea: the locked, un-ventilated garage, the running motor. . . . Easy, painless death! And there wasn't anything to do about it, except take it. Krass's wife had begun that attack on him because she must have suspected that her husband was guilty. Once they'd started it, Pedley supposed they could think of no alternative course than to put him out of the way. And yet. . .

He strained at his bonds. It was hope-

less. There was no way of telling how long it would take for the carbon monoxide to take effect. He had heard that the only warning you got was a splitting headache; but he had that already. And he couldn't guess how long he'd been down here.

A drop splashed down on his face. It felt cool, refreshing. He looked up. Dimly he could make out a faucet in a T-joint on the riser above his head. Water! If he could get that faucet open, there might still be the slimmest chance.

He slid his handcuffed hand up the pipe, stood on tiptoe. He could just touch the lower rim of the faucet wheel. It was badly rusted. It took him an eternity to force it open enough to permit a slow trickle down on him.

Pedley shifted so the water would drip on the tape at the right side. He squirmed and wriggled with every ounce of strength he could command. At first he thought it would be useless, but the adhesive began to give.

CHAPTER SIX

The Man with the Key

THE purr of the motor was louder now, or it seemed so to the marshal. By the time he had managed to wrench his wrist free from the gummy tape, the pounding in his ears was thunderous, either from the motor or the thumping of his heart.

He tore at the bindings around his ankles, ripped the sticky bandage loose. He let the water splash on his upturned face a second, then shinned up the pipe, using his feet and left hand to grip the metal, until he could turn the faucet on full force.

He got it wide open. Then he gripped the T-pipe with the fingers of his right hand, got the ball of his thumb across the jet of the stream. Would it reach?

It would.

The spurt of water hissed out in a thin fan toward the hood of the sedan. Pedley jockeyed it so the jet hit the side louvres. The sound of the stream hitting the metal of the hood was music to his ears.

But there was no certainty it would reach a vital connection, dampen the wires, get to the distributor. It might . . . and that was all the chance he had.

He felt himself getting noticeably weaker. It took strength to maintain his grip on that pipe; he couldn't last much longer. The motor droned away, unconcernedly.

He altered the angle of the jet. There was a sputter, a miss. He clung to the pipe with the grim determination of a drowning man clutching a branch. Finally, when his hold was loosening and he was beginning to slip down the pipe, there was complete silence.

He'd done it! The invisible, deadly fumes wouldn't come pouring out of that exhaust any longer. If there wasn't already too much poison in the air . . .

He climbed up with a final effort and shut off the water. Puddles on the floor gurgled as they ran to the drain.

The marshal left the tape on his mouth, rearranged the bindings around his feet so they wouldn't seem to have been disarranged, at first glance. He turned over on his side so that his right arm would be against the wall.

Then he waited. Hours it seemed.

THE footsteps came slowly down, gritting on the cement floor of the garage. Pedley could just make out a vague shadow moving in silhouette against the deeper blackness.

Pedley kept his muscles limp, relaxed, simulating as nearly as possible the lifeless corpse he should have been. The fire detective could hear the murderer's stertorous breathing, could feel fingers probing his throat for his pulse. Then the marshal snapped into convulsive action.

His right hand shot out, clutched the shadowy figure fiercely by the neck. At the same instant, using his steel-locked left hand as leverage, Pedley threw his legs around the man's body in a scissors grip.

Blows rained on the marshal's face and neck, fingernails clawed viciously at his eyes. But he held on to the windpipe in his grasp, squeezed the murderer's midriff punishingly with his leg hold. It was over in less than sixty seconds. The man went limp. Pedley let the dead weight sag to the floor, crouched down beside it. He fished through the man's pockets, found the key to the handcuffs, let himself loose. Then he ripped the tape from his mouth, jumped for the faucet, turned it on and drank from the icy cascade that poured down on him.

First he locked the killer's wrist to the pipe from which he, himself, had just won release. Then he dragged the unconscious figure under the shower. There was a deep groan; the man opened his eyes and stared up with a mixture of cold malignity and shocked astonishment.

"This is where we came in," Pedley growled, "with me damn near out on my feet and you wandering around like you'd lost your best friend."

"What's the matter with you?" snarled the man on the floor. "I come down here, find you kyoed and wonder whether I ought to call a doctor. And you tear at me like a wildcat. What's the idea?"

"Idea is, it's all over, Biddonay. All except the little room where they sit you with your back to a switchboard."

"Because I tried to save your life?"

"Because you tried to kill me, you pot-bellied buzzard. And tried to make it look as if your partner had fixed my wagon, instead of you. How the hell did you get out of the hospital?"

"What difference does it make whether I stayed in the hospital?" The fat man walked on his knees around the water

pipe the way a dog roves on a chain. "I been takin' it all night, now. From the fire, from that louse, Yalb. And now you. I'm the big loser in this thing—"

"I thought you were, until I got my grey matter going. You said you were all washed up. Remember?"

"Well...?"

"You were. Only before the fire. Not after. You're practically broke, way I figure it. You mentioned the take was okay at the restaurant. But you didn't seem to be spending much dough on wine, women or such. And when I saw that row of *Moody's Manuals* in the bookcase in your office, I should have known right away."

"I've had 'em for years," Biddonay protested.

"You got the new edition damned early, then. The guys who use *Moody's* much are generally stock-market brokers or suckers who think they're wise boys."

"Is it a felony to own shares on the market now?"

"Your trouble was you didn't own 'em. Maybe you had 'em, but you lost 'em."

"Okay, crystal gazer. Suppose I am strapped. What of it?" Biddonay nursed his wrist, where Pedley's bracelets had chafed it.

"**W**HY, you might have tried to get more dough. The logical place for you to try and get it would be to gyp your partner. And if you figured you'd gone as far as you could, along that line, without being found out, you might try to get out of your fix by putting Krass out of the way."

"I never even saw Herb," Biddonay jeered, "after he left the place at midnight."

"You wouldn't have to. You could get Krass in a jam by killing that wrestler in such a way that everyone would pin the blame on your partner. That would send Krass to the burner and leave you to take

over the Ice-restaurant. Including any funds of Krass' which you may have stolen, to date."

"You fat-headed fink!" the restaurant man yelled. "I never knew anything about this Greek wrestler!"

"Oh, sure. Sure you did. Jewett knew you did."

"You couldn't get even Herb to believe a frameup like that."

"Maybe I could, fat boy. I could point out to Krass that you'd heard him talking on the phone to that wrestler. That would have told you where your partner was supposed to meet the Gorilla and cross his palm with silver."

Biddonay laughed and waved his hand contemptuously.

"You like it? Here's more. You beat it over to this hotel where they had the date. You got there before Krass did, maybe a quarter of twelve or so. The Greek was there; you gave him some song-and-dance about Krass meeting him in your rooms above the restaurant. Right?"

Biddonay stared at him, slack-jawed. "I—"

"Well, it's close enough. Anyhow, you got Gorilla Greg to come back to your rooms. After the joint closed you got him to come down to the café, prob'ly on a pretext of meeting Krass then. When you got him there, you killed him, chopped him up into soup meat, put the legs and arms on the fire so it would look as if the murderer was trying to conceal his crime—though *you* weren't—and then hung the torso up in the coldbox. That's the story, isn't it?"

The light in the garage was stronger now, but Biddonay's face seemed to be still grey, like the sky at false dawn. His voice had a quaver now.

"I suppose I cut that steak out of the wrestler's back, too?"

"Who else, Biddonay? You heard about the threat Krass made, about serv-

ing Suzie's husband to her on toast if he caused too much trouble."

"Hell! If you ain't just been hitting the pipe and dreaming this up, why'n't you slap me in a cell?"

"I want to get a couple of things straight first, fatso."

"No kidding! Just ask me. Anything at all," the prisoner sneered. "Be glad to oblige."

"Okay. About that phone call to Pete Donnelly. I know you killed your cashier. I suppose it was because he was wise, or getting wise, to your financial finagling. You must have killed him before the apparatus got to the blaze, because you'd have to have time enough to get back to your rooms from Fifty-first Street and change out of street clothes into pajamas. Then you came down into the street, looking all worried and upset—and I don't wonder, with that evening's work behind you."

"You'd have to go on the witness stand and testify that I talked, in your presence, to Pete after the fire was over. And that I was with you all the time from that moment till we found poor Donnelly's body."

Pedley shook his head. "All I could swear to is that you called a number and talked to somebody. It might have been a Chinaman at a chop suey joint for all I heard. It wasn't the cashier."

BIDDONAY beat his head against the iron riser. "Listen to the lunatic! He don't even believe his own ears."

"I do when I hear something. I didn't hear the guy on the other end of your wire then. And I can't prove that you dialed a different number the second time you called Donnelly. But I know you did."

The restaurant man began to sob great gusty sobs that shook his tubby figure like jelly. "Couple of hours ago, you

weren't talking this way. You put the pinch on that rat-faced monkey, Yalb. And now—"

"Now I think just the same about Yalb as I thought then. Suzie's brother is scared, dumb and rattled. He got sore at you for putting suspicion on his sister, and cut you for it. We'll get him for that; he'll probably still be serving time when you're waiting for the reprieve that won't come. But Yalb isn't a wholesale butcher, like you."

"Why me? Why not Krass? Why not?" the fat man shrieked. He was pouring cold sweat.

"Krass wouldn't have used that bowling-ball case to carry the Greek's head out of the café, for one thing. It would have been too much of a giveaway. By the way, what'd you do to scare Herb off?"

Biddonay shook his head, without answering.

"He must have got good and scared after he knocked me out. And that's when you came along. You told him that the finger was on him for sure. You persuaded him to disappear. You'd want him to take it on the lam because you'd need somebody to act as fall guy, and Krass had to get the chair if you were to come out ahead on the money end."

The fat man broke down and blubbered piteously, pawing the air with his free hand as if he was trying to beat off a wasp.

The marshal started for the stairs. "Say, there's always a little silver in the lining. . . ."

The proprietor of the Ice-restaurant looked up, soddenly. He was drenched with tears and perspiration.

"You won't have to worry about replacing your burned wardrobe, Biddonay. You wouldn't want to spend a lot of dough on a suit they're going to rip up the legs and arms in a few weeks."

THE END

IN KANSAS CITY a federal grand jury said that bookmaking was not a dead issue there—although a bookmaking establishment was being operated from a mortuary.

Muncie, Ind., police were annoyed by letters in the local paper complaining about the “inefficiency” of the law until they caught up with a local safe cracker who admitted to being the critic.

A thirty-seven-year-old tailor confessed to German police that he strangled a young girl so that he could wear her scalp while prowling the streets at night disguised as a woman.

A police captain in Inglewood, Cal., called the department when he found the insides of his television set were missing, then called off the search next day when he realized he had sent the innards out for repair.

A rookie policeman in North River Rock, Ark., downed a belligerent city jail prisoner with a flying tackle, and was horrified when he came up with a leg—wooden.

An auto-theft suspect in Los Angeles with the name of Innocent pleaded guilty to a charge of driving a stolen car.

In West Los Angeles a man by the name of Safety First forgot to follow the first rule for preventing a burglary—locking the doors and windows of his home—and was burglarized of \$40.

A prestidigitator whose specialty is a

UP THE RIVER

By **EARL L. WELLERSDICK**

disappearing act found thieves in New Haven were pretty good magicians, making his equipment disappear from his car.

The will of a British noblewoman set aside \$25.40 to be paid a doctor to cut her throat just to make certain she would not be buried alive.

A judge at Point Pleasant, W. Va., called a recess while one of the jurors went home to milk his cows, accompanied by the rest of the panel.

Five months after a camera was stolen from a New York home the police found it, developed the films, recognized the pictures of two lads who admitted the theft and taking the pictures.

While in a theater watching the movie “Bicycle Thief” a fourteen-year-old Hartford, Conn., boy had his own bicycle stolen from outside the theater.

A Clinton, Mass., man who was seen weaving and generally cavorting on horseback was arrested and fined \$5 for drunken driving.

**By PHILIP
WECK**



It was too long a time to
run, with Maxie's face
always before you. . . .

Here Comes Maxie!

They tracked him down wherever he fled, and there would be Max, standing there, gun in hand, waiting. . . . How long can a man run from his fate?

FROM the alley, the rooming house looked big and grim and grey in the late-afternoon sun. And quiet. You wouldn't think anybody was in there waiting for you, waiting at the end of a five-

year-long trail, with a gun in his hand, and a bullet he'd written your name on in the cylinder of that gun.

From the alley, you couldn't tell at all. Maybe he wasn't in there yet. Maybe you

still had a chance—five minutes more, or ten.

So I tried it.

I sneaked in through the kitchen and up the back stairs, and when I reached the door of my room I kicked it open and jumped back against the wall.

Nothing happened.

Maxie wasn't there yet. He hadn't tracked me quite this far. I pulled the shade down and grabbed the suitcase from the closet shelf. A cold perspiration covered my forehead and I had to fumble with the catch on the suitcase half a dozen times before I could open it.

Shirts, socks, underwear, a couple of ties. And then my Army .45, from the back of the bureau drawer. A .45 isn't much of a gun—you can't carry it without advertising the fact that it's there. But it was the only gun I had and it went in on top of the clothes.

That was when I heard footsteps.

I grabbed the .45 and held it down, behind my suitcase, out of sight.

"Who's there?" I yelled out.

But it was only Mrs. Bruno, the landlady. Mrs. Bruno with the long, dreary, tired face and the bags under her eyes.

I dropped the gun into the suitcase again and snapped it shut.

"Hey, you, Potter," Mrs. Bruno said. "Your girl, she's-a call you."

I said, "Tell her I'm not in. Tell her I've gone for the evening. I can't talk to her now."

"No, no." Mrs. Potter shook her head. "She's-a no call now. She's-a call two, three time, not now."

"Okay, okay." I picked up the suitcase, ready to shove off. "I'll go over and see her."

Right past Mrs. Bruno I barged, down the hall to the rear steps.

"Hey, you, Potter!" she called after me. "You be back?"

I said, "Sure, sure, I'll be back. Wait up for me, kid."

She'd be waiting a long, cold night.

So would Joan. Sitting and waiting and wondering where I'd gone and why.

BUT I couldn't stop to think about that now. I had to get out of town, fast. And on the sly. Hop a bus to the next little burg and grab a rattler there just as it was pulling out, and pay the conductor on the train. That was the best bet.

I cut through the alley and across the gas-station driveway.

Bill, the boy who ran the station, was greasing a car in the back.

"Hey, Potter!" he called out.

I stopped. "What do you want?"

"It's that girl friend of yours," he said. "She's been calling here for you. You'd better give her a ring right back."

"Thanks, Bill," I said.

"You can use the phone in here if you want."

I said, "No, thanks, Bill. I'm on my way over there now."

It's funny how many people you get to know in six months. The beer tavern was next. Walt, the bartender, banged on the window when I passed. Then he came running out on the sidewalk and grabbed my arm.

"Potter," he said, "some dame's been calling here all afternoon for you."

"Thanks, Walt," I told him. "I'm going over to see her now; I know who it is."

That made the third time I'd denied her. Three times inside an hour.

A bus pulled up to the corner and I hopped on. Half an hour now and I'd be on a train, free of Maxie, speeding away from him again. Alive and loose and able to go on living.

Half an hour and maybe I'd have said good-bye to Maxie forever. To Maxie—and to Joan.

That was when it finally penetrated my thick skull.

Joan was worried. Worried, and may-

be frightened. She'd been trying to reach me everywhere.

And Maxie was in town.

Maxie—and Joan?

It couldn't be! He didn't know about Joan! He couldn't have known!

He couldn't have known where I was, either, what town I was in, what plant I was working for. But I'd seen him that afternoon as I left the factory, standing beside the entrance to the parking lot with his eye on my car, calm and patient, waiting to see me so he could give me that bullet with my name on it, through the barrel of his gun.

Maxie—and Joan?

The big slob! He couldn't do that! I'd—I'd kill him!

I jumped off the bus at the next corner. No other bus was in sight going back. No cab was driving past.

I ran for a block, lugging my suitcase, ran until my lungs were bursting and my heart thumped against my ribs hard enough to break through. I ran and ran as the sun went down in my face and the gloom thickened and people stared at me, ran until finally I saw a cab and hailed it.

THE house where Joan lived with her kid brother was small and quiet. Nobody was stirring on that whole street. It was too quiet. Was Maxie there already? Was I too late?

Tossing the driver a bill, I ran up that walk and hit the front door with my shoulder. It shook and I heard wood splinter and then it burst open, and I tumbled in headlong, dropping my grip on the porch.

Joan was there in the living room, her face white and tear streaked, her hands pale and clutching at her soft white throat.

Alone.

"Joan!" I cried out. "Are you all right? Where is he?"

She rushed into my arms and put her

head on my shoulder and held me tight. She was trembling with fright, shaking, scared to death.

I lifted her head off my shoulder and kissed her on her moist lips and I could feel her tender, curving body against mine.

"Where is he, Joan?" I asked.

"I don't know! I don't know!"

"Has he been here?"

She said, "He hasn't been home all week, Jimmy! Something terrible's happened to him! I know it has!"

That was when I realized she wasn't talking about Max.

I led her to the sofa and made her sit down. She wouldn't look me in the eyes. She took my handkerchief and pulled at it and twisted it and finally she said, "I—I couldn't stop him, Jimmy! I tried but I couldn't! He went to Chicago."

Chicago!

She was talking about George, her brother, of course. He'd gone to Chicago a week ago and he hadn't come back.

"Why?" I asked.

But I was afraid that maybe I knew why. Maybe I knew what had happened. Maybe I knew how Max had traced me.

Still not looking at me, she said, "Well, we really don't know very much about you, Jimmy. You've never told us a thing. Not a thing. And with—with you coming around so often, well, George just thought we ought to know. I tried to stop him, Jimmy. Honestly, I did." She turned her head toward me but in the darkness I couldn't see her face or her eyes.

I said, "But why Chicago?"

Her voice very low, almost apologizing, she said, "There's a label in your overcoat, Jimmy. I've seen it myself lots of times. And you were always talking to George about that baseball team, the Sox. And oh—a number of things. He just thought you must be from Chicago."

"Chicago's a pretty big city. Where was he going to go?"

"To the tailor shop where you bought the overcoat. He'd never heard of it and he thought it must be a small one where they might know you."

So that was it. That was the whole deal. George in Chicago. And Max in Indianapolis, on my trail again, sworn to kill me, all because this blundering young fool . . .

You see, I'd bought all my clothes from Jake before the big bustup. Jake, Maxie's brother.

Beside me, Joan was crying again. "And now something terrible's happened to George! I know it has! Jimmy, you've got to find him!"

I said, "Maybe George is all right. Maybe he just decided to stay a while."

Blubbing, she shook her head. "No! I called his hotel—and he's checked out, Jimmy. He checked out right after he got there. He'd promised to phone me, but he didn't. Not once! Jimmy, you've got to go up there and find him! You've got to!"

Go back to Chicago? Back to Jake's? Back into Maxie's waiting shiv?

"I can't," I said. "I have to get out of town tonight, on business."

"Oh, Jimmy," she said, "what am I going to do?"

Somehow her face was even closer to mine. I could smell the powder she wore and the moist, wet odor of her tears, and her hair, and even her lipstick.

After a minute or so, I said, "Okay, I'll see if I can find him." Even as I said it, I knew I was lying.

"There's a train at half-past nine," Joan cried. "If you hurry . . ."

Just like that. The little witch.

FIVE minutes later I was out on the dark sidewalk. I'd put off the cab; I had plenty of time to take a bus, I told Joan. And I was walking down the street, carrying my grip again, watching each shadow, feeling the fear creep over

me once more, expecting to see that bulky, sinister form in front of me, to see the smirk on his fat, ugly face and the glint of the street light on the gun in his hand.

I reached the corner and stood there in the shadows, watching two buses go by, one in each direction. Westbound, away from the city and the railroad station and the train to Chicago. And eastbound, right back toward Max and the death he had promised me five years before. I crossed my fingers and I uncrossed them.

I took the next bus. West.

I rode it to the end of the line. Then I gave the driver another fare and rode it back to the railroad station.

"Chicago," I said to the ticket seller.

The rider to Chicago was long. I sat by the window and watched the flat prairie roll by and had a lot of time to think. A lot of time.

Most of that time I thought about Max and what had happened.

It went like this:

I grew up in the Canaryville section of Chicago. Back of the yards—the stock-yards. You play in the streets in Canaryville when you're a kid, until you're old enough to move into the poolrooms. You learn how to handle brass knuckles, until you're old enough to use a shiv. You get picked up by the cops for every petty charge they can think of, until you're old enough to step into one of the gangs that have political protection.

There isn't much sweetness and light in Canaryville and the one man who doesn't live long there is the fellow who whistles for the cops.

That was what I'd done. I'd whistled. On Max.

One night they'd picked Max up for armed robbery. He needed an alibi and he decided it was up to me to furnish it; I'd always been in Max's gang when we were boys.

But the political situation changed on Max. The cops put the pressure on me,

too. They said, bust the alibi, or go up yourself. Consorting with criminals, conspiracy, accessory, carrying a concealed weapon—they'd planted a revolver in my topcoat. They could rig up plenty of charges against me if they wanted to, and this time they wanted to.

So I busted it. What else could I do? And Max went up. He swore he'd kill me when he got out—if his boys didn't get me first. And he meant it. I moved from Canaryville to the far South Side and stayed home after dark. They tailed me. I moved from the South Side to the North and I kept the doors and windows locked. Still they found me. The night of the next election I moved out of town. Max's boy went back into office and he was a cinch to be sprung on parole.

Jacksonville, Florida, first, until one night in the hotel lobby I spotted Max asking questions at the desk. Kansas City, where I went out the window of a rooming house as Max came in the door. Oakland, California; New Orleans; Springfield, Mass., and Indianapolis. Every time he found me. And every time, I ran.

And now I was running back, right to him.

SHORTLY after midnight the train dumped me at Englewood Station. In a creaky hotel bed I spent a few restless hours, and the next morning, with my .45 in my hip pocket, I hopped a trolley car for Canaryville.

They had me spotted as soon as I got off the trolley.

I could tell by the way the street grew quiet, deathly still, as I walked down it in the hot morning sun. Nobody moved on the sidewalk; even the kids had scrambled. The Ajax Diner was empty and only a couple of lonely clerks were in the chain drugstore. The sun became hotter and the street was long.

I'd almost reached the end when I heard someone whisper my name.

I whirled around.

It wasn't Max. It was Maisie, standing in the doorway of her apartment.

For five years I hadn't see her, and for five years I hadn't forgotten her. She was still the same Maisie—red lips, a sweater that curled and curved and swelled, a tight, short skirt split up the side.

And she could still send the blood singing through my veins and ringing in my temples.

"Jimmy!" she said. "You fool! What are you doing here?"

I said, "I had to come back, Maisie."

"Max will kill you! Jimmy, you've got to get out of here!"

I took her by the arm and turned her toward the stairs. "Look, kid," I said, "I want to talk to you."

In her cheap, squalid little room, her clothes tossed about everywhere, her dishes still in the sink, she poured me a shot of whiskey and she had one herself.

"Now what's the score?" she asked.

"A kid came up here looking for me about a week ago," I said.

"What about him?"

"He goes with me when I leave. In a wooden box, maybe, but he goes with me."

"Who is this kid? Did some dame send you after him?"

I shrugged.

"Okay," she said. "I'm a sap, Jimmy. I'll see what I can find out."

She walked over and kissed me, quick and light.

"Don't budge out of here until I come back," she said. "Remember."

Before I could answer, she was gone.

I tossed some of her lingerie from the couch, took my coat off and went to sleep.

WHEN I woke up, darkness had come outside. A dim light was on in the apartment and Maisie was perched on a chair watching me.

She grinned. "I got a sandwich and some coffee ready in the kitchen," she said. "You're probably hungry."

I was starved and while I wolfed down the strong black coffee and the food, she told me about George. Sure enough, he'd shown up at Jake's asking about me. He didn't get very far. Right now the boys were holding him in an abandoned warehouse, a place where we used to play when we were kids.

Maisie said, "I couldn't find out why."

"It's me. They've already found out from him where I was, and they're keeping him around so he can't tip me off."

Maisie poured herself some coffee. "So there's nothing you can do about it now. You can't get him out. Let's scram, Jimmy. Let's get out of town. You and me."

"Sure," I said. "You and me. And the kid."

She slammed the cup down, coffee slopping all over. "Okay, you lug!" she blazed. "Go ahead! Get your fool head shot off! See if I care!"

I said, "Sure. I probably will." And, with the .45 clunking around in my hip pocket, I went to the door.

I went out, closing the door gently.

The warehouse was big and black and ramshackle. It had a dozen entrances, a dozen sagging doors and broken windows, and I knew every one of them. So did Max and his boys. But I had the advantage of surprise. Through a grimy, dusty back window into the basement, and up a creaky flight of stairs I went. Only one room was in good enough shape for any sort of use. With my gun in my hand, I shoved the door open.

There, stretched out and tied on a dirty cot, was George. I went in.

A roar filled my ears. Something whooshed down on my skull with a hollow thud. My legs were knocked out from under me and I fell, tumbling into a black, deep, bottomless pit.

When I opened my eyes they were standing there, staring down at me. Max. And Morris, yellow-livered, butter-fingered Morris, who'd been Max's boy as long as I could remember and who'd just clouted me from behind.

And Maisie.

Maisie, with her face as white as the white of her legs, and with her hands tied behind her back.

"Get up, Jimmy," Max said.

I climbed unsteadily to my feet, wavering, shaking, my head throbbing.

"This is it, Jimmy," he said. "The end of the line. It's all wrapped up, neat as a pin."

He was holding my gun in his hand and he grinned when he saw my glance fall on it. "Yeah, your gun, Jimmy. That's part of the package. Want to hear about it?"

I DIDN'T answer but he went on anyway. "Like this, Jimmy. You're all set to marry this babe in Indianapolis, see? But her brother smells a rat about you and he comes up here to find out. Right?"

Sure, he was right so far. But what was coming?

"You tail him, Jimmy. And you catch him talking to your old girl friend, Maisie. To keep them from spoiling your new marriage, you plug them both. With your own gun, see? And before he goes out, the kid brother gets you with his. This .38 I got in my pocket, which I will plant on him.

"Neat, isn't it?"

It was neat, all right. Neat, and ready to spring.

"You can't do it, Max," I told him. "It won't work. Let Maisie go. She never did anything to you."

He stepped back slowly and raised the gun. "Listen, stoolie, the hell she didn't! The boys phoned me this morning in Indianapolis, as soon as they spotted you,

and I hopped a plane and got here just in time to find her nosing around, asking questions, trying to find out about the kid there. So we watched her apartment and grabbed her as soon as you left. She's a rat, the same as you, stoolie. She goes, too, see?"

I went for him.

The side of my palm caught his gun wrist and my shoulder sent him skidding back ten feet. I leaped after him.

But as I went by Morris clouted me on the head again, and I missed.

All my life I'll wonder what might have happened if I hadn't missed.

Because Max scrambled to his feet and side-stepped me and fired. Not at me. It wasn't in his plan to plug me with that .45.

At Maisie.

The big, soft .45 slug hit her square in the chest. She sighed, a soft, tired sigh, and slumped to the floor.

By the time I reached her, it was too late. I tried to stop the bleeding but it was no use.

"Maisie," I said, "there's no babe in Indianapolis. Believe me, Maisie."

She smiled. "You're a lug, Jimmy. And you're a liar, too."

Then she kissed me. Hard. With all the strength left in her, strength that ebbed out of her and waned and left her lying limp and dead in my arms.

"How touching," Max said.

I got to my feet and faced him. He had the .45 turned on George.

"Go on outside, Morris," he said. "Somebody might have heard that shot. Keep 'em away." Morris went outside.

The .45 was aimed at George's belly, only a few feet away from it.

I put my hand over the muzzle.

In the Army, they'd told us that you can keep a .45 from firing by shoving against the slide. It's sort of a safety.

I wrapped my fist around that gun,

the palm tight across the muzzle, and I held onto the trigger guard, hard.

Twice Maxie tried to jerk it away from me. But he couldn't. Instead, my skin caught in the sight and he tore a long, jagged gash in it. But I wouldn't let go.

I brought my knee up and I slugged him with my left, across the temple. Then I twisted that gun as hard as I could, put my foot behind Maxie's legs and yanked.

He went flying, letting go of the gun, and as he hit the ground I kicked him in the face. He was out like a light by the time he landed.

I WAS free, except for Morris, still outside the door.

"Morris!" I called out. "Morris! Listen, you spineless, yellow punk! You're yellow, Morris! All your life you've been yellow. You ran to your mother when you were a boy. You wouldn't get in a fight. You were afraid of your own shadow, Morris.

"And you're still yellow, Morris. I've got the gun now and I'm coming out of that door and I'm going to plug you, Morris. You better run. Do you hear me, Morris? I'm coming out!"

I jerked the door open. Through a window I could see Morris' heels, disappearing fast.

Then I went back and cut George loose.

"You saved my life," he said.

I said, "Yeah, I guess I did."

"You're coming back to Indianapolis, aren't you?"

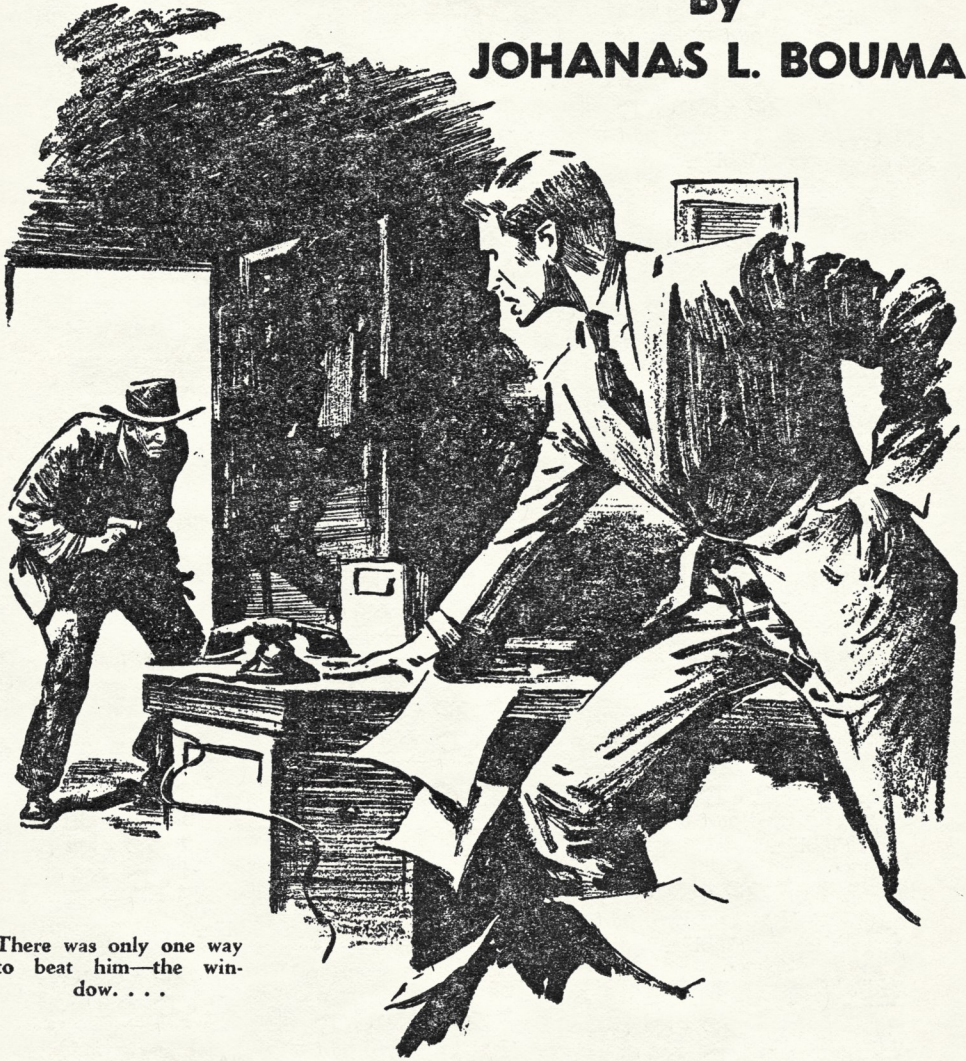
"No, George," I said, "I don't think so."

George was a stand-up boy, though. He testified against Max and, with my story, that was enough to send Max to the chair.

Then George went back. Alone. Yeah, I stayed in Canaryville. I had a grave to take care of.

I GOT MY PRICE

By
JOHANAS L. BOUMA



There was only one way
to beat him—the win-
dow. . . .

I LOOKED down seventeen stories at the traffic snarl on the far corner, with everything in miniature, like looking through the wrong end of a spy-glass—and I closed my eyes and had a sense of helpless swaying toward destruction.

I turned around and listened to her, and that too meant facing destruction. But not

They paid Logan twenty-five grand a year for little chores like framing pretty Jo Fletcher into a larceny rap. Which wasn't nearly enough money—for the rap that was coming to Logan!

permanently, brother, not permanently.

It had taken her long enough to figure things out. And if this was punishment, I could take it and plenty more before I cried Uncle. What she was trying to do, of course, was to make me see myself through her eyes, but I was still looking through the wrong end of that spyglass. And that's what I meant to keep on doing.

"Frances," I said, "take it easy, will you—"

"That's all I've been doing since I met you. We had such wonderful plans—" She broke off and shook her golden head. "We had youth and our dreams were sweet—"

"Five years ago," I said. "You don't look a day older."

"When you age inside it doesn't show. And from the day you handled a case for that man—"

"For cripes' sakes! The sweet dreams you mentioned were concerned ninety percent of the time with cash money, and I'm making more now—"

"His money! Once upon a time you wouldn't have touched it. But now your pride is gone and your confidence with it."

"Honey," I pleaded, "Nick Udell is a big man in this town. He throws a lot of cases my way."

She stood suddenly and laughed on a high note. "You mean he uses you to find loopholes in the law. You mean he uses you to help convict people who stand in his way. I've had all I can take, Walter."

SHE twisted the ring from her finger and threw it on my desk. It rolled, the diamond throwing out tiny sparks, and fell to the floor. She gave a half sob. "Five years!"

I walked slowly toward her and took her in my arms. For a moment she stiffened in my embrace, and then her

head dropped against my chest and her shoulders began to shake.

"When you want the ring again you'll know where to find it," I said.

She raised wet eyes. "I don't know. I just don't know. . . ."

I watched her leave the room, a slender golden-blond girl with shapely legs. Then I turned back to my desk and called Edna. She came in from the outer office. "Yes, Mr. Logan?"

"Anything new?"

She grimaced. "That little man, Melody, just came in."

"Okay. I'll see him."

Melody was Nick Udell's watchdog, and I didn't blame Edna for making a face. He came through the door, walking in that crab-like way of his, a hump-backed gnome of a man with a pinched face and hard eyes that flashed at me briefly before darting around the office. As always, he hummed softly, the reason he was called "Melody." If he owned another name, I never knew it. He had the disposition of a rattler, but was more deadly than the snake. And God help the man, woman or child who got in his boss' way.

I always bent over backwards in order to keep on Melody's good side.

He came right to the point. "Nick wants you."

"I'll call him." I reached for the phone.

"If he wanted you on the phone, he'd've called you. Grab your hat, shyster."

I sighed, grabbed the hat, and we took the elevator downstairs. Melody was driving the boss' Cadillac, and he handled it the way a teenager handles a hot rod.

I tried to relax and wonder what Nick's beef was. The syndicate had been running smoothly for the past six months, so that wasn't it. And then I thought of Nick's son, Tony, and since the boy was home from college, I had a pretty fair idea it concerned him.

NICK had climbed to the top of the hill the hard way. From prohibition on through to the fat, black-marketing war years he had managed to make a name for himself. A man of no scruples and keen intelligence, he had switched from one racket to another when a switch was called for without catching sight of a cell. But it was his son he worried about.

"The boy is my life," Nick had said to me, when it was first understood that I was to work for him. "I'm telling you now in case we ever have a misunderstanding about him. I want him to have the breaks I had to fight for with my bare hands." He had held his big, capable hands out in front of him for me to see, and his slate-colored eyes had drilled deep inside me. "The best schools, everything the best. And if you mean to make me happy, you will always see eye to eye with me where he is concerned."

Surprisingly enough, considering that the odds were against it, the boy had turned out all right.

"Wake up, shyster." We had stopped in front of Nick's home, a rambling white stucco set on an expansive stretch of lawn, and Melody was jabbing a hard elbow in my ribs.

We followed a winding walk to the front door and Melody rang the chimes. You always rang at the boss' house.

A Chinese boy wearing a white jacket opened the door. We went in and removed our hats and followed the boy in the white coat across a thickly carpeted sunken living room, through a library and into what Nick referred to as his study.

Nick was on the phone, and he gave me a quick, anxious glance as we walked in.

"All right, son," he was saying, his voice soothing. "Of course, I'll be happy to meet her. If she's everything you say she is. . . . Fine. How's the golf? A seventy-six?"

He cupped the telephone and grinned

at us. "The kid shot a seventy-six this morning." Then to his son, "Fine, fine. Then you'll be home for dinner tonight. . . . All right, son. Take care of yourself."

He pushed the phone away and breathed out hard. "Sit down, Walter. A cigar, a drink?"

"No, thanks, Nick."

He was wearing a velvet smoking jacket, a thick man, not tall, with a strong, smooth face and bushy hair greying at the temples. He took a silk handkerchief from his jacket pocket and wiped his brow.

"A dame again," he said suddenly and slapped his desk hard with his open hand. "A lousy dame. All of 'em out to rook my kid—"

"We can fix it, Nick."

He grunted, took a big black cigar out of a leather box, bit the end off with a snap of his teeth and glared at me. "This time is different. The kid is talking marriage."

"He'll be going back to school next week."

He lit up and squinted against the smoke. "That's just it. He wants to get hitched and take the dame with him. And to think she's working for me!"

"Maybe it'll cost you a little—" I stopped. "Working for you? Where? What doing?"

"At the club," he said impatiently. "Hell, I don't know her. You know I never go there. She's the hat-check girl."

"Hell!" I said. "Jo Fletcher."

"Yeah, that's it." His eyes narrowed a little. "What about her?"

"Well, nothing, really. She's—hell, Nick, she's one of the few that're on the level."

"Bah! They're all out for what they can get." He let himself go back in the chair. "Okay, let's have it."

Something inside of me turned over, and for the better part of a second I hated

what faced me. Then, quickly, my mind grabbed at twenty-five thousand a year, and I said, "She's a really a nice girl, Nick. Goes to a secretarial school during the day and works at the club at night. She's trying to get ahead—"

"At my kid's expense!" he shouted. He flung his cigar across the room. From the corner of my eye I saw Melody pick it up. He brought it back to the desk as Nick said, "Listen, Walter. You know that I have big plans for my boy. I don't want my kind of life for him. And that's just how he'll end up if that hustler grabs him."

I SWALLOWED and looked away. Jo Fletcher was as far from being a hustler as Nick was from being an honest man. But I couldn't tell him. He had made up his mind about the girl, and nothing could change it. And if I tried, I was out, out, out.

He said casually, "Tony wants me to meet her tomorrow."

I was on the edge of the knife, and it was cutting me.

"How did he meet her in the first place?" I asked.

He gave an impatient shrug. "He took in the club his first night home. Got to talking to her, I suppose. You know how those things go. Anyway, that doesn't matter." He leaned forward a little. "I have been very satisfied with your services, Walter. I hope I can say the same thing tomorrow."

I couldn't get the words out, so I just nodded. The knife was no longer cutting me, but I needed a drink. Badly.

Melody was at a little side table cleaning his automatic as I went out. He shot me his hard grin and said, "You walk back, shyster."

"The hell with you," I said thickly, but it didn't make me feel any better. I knew on which side of that knife blade I'd fallen.

When I got back to the office, Edna looked up and said, "Miss Stevens was in a half-hour ago. She asked if she could wait in your office, so—"

"She left?"

Edna nodded. "She only stayed a few minutes."

"All right," I said.

I went into my office and saw that the ring was gone. Even that didn't make me feel any better. I hung my hat and sat down, thinking about names. Finally I looked in the directory for a guy by the name of Ben Morton. He wasn't listed, so I knew he was down and out again. But after a few calls I found where he was living. I went downstairs, had a couple of drinks and grabbed a cab. I wished I'd taken a third drink. I needed it for what I had to tell him to do.

When I got back to the office I called Frances. "Hi, baby. How does it look?"

"What?" she asked stiffly, as if she didn't know.

"The ring, baby. Feel warm all over again?"

Her breath caught. Then, "Yes, damn you. Can you say the same?"

"I'll say it with orchids and a night on the town."

"Oh, Walter—"

"Around ten, huh? Be ready?"

"You know I will."

A MAN named Bricker managed the club for Nick. I went there and talked to him for a few minutes before he opened the place, but not about what was going to happen that night. I needed another drink, and I wanted there to be no mistake in what I had to do.

On the way out I tried to slip past the hat-check room, but her voice caught me and turned me. "Hello, Mr. Logan. A little early for you, isn't it?"

I managed a grin. "Hi, Jo. How's it going?"

"Fine," she smiled, and there was a

freshness about her I had never noticed before. A glow, so to speak, that had nothing to do with complexion. She was of average height, with firm bones, and she moved with the fluid ease of a dancer. Smiling at me with her black eyes, her dark hair brushing the tan polo coat flung carelessly across her shoulders, "Another night, another dollar," she said, and removed the coat and hung it in a small closet at the rear of the hat-check room. She had a white silk blouse and dark slacks, and she came back with her handbag and placed it beneath the counter.

"Well—" I said.

"How is Frances? I haven't seen her lately."

Her face was eager, as if we shared a secret that needed only to be hinted at. I knew what it was. She was in love and thought I was in the same boat—but I'd gone ashore a long time ago. With Frances now, it was partly habit and the rest convenience. I had never told myself this, but suddenly I knew it.

"She's fine," I said. "We'll be in to-night."

I went out of there fast. I couldn't look her straight in the eye, and the sickness was inside me. I went home and changed into another suit, put the extra wallet in my outside coat pocket and took a cab to Frances' apartment.

I knew from her expression when I told her that she'd have gone anywhere rather than Nick's club. But when I held her in my arms and kissed her, then pinned the orchids in place, her eyes misted.

"You're good to me, Walter."

"Sometimes I slip."

"A girl can't have everything."

I loaded the act. Loaded it in the cab, she holding my hand in both of hers. The lights in the club were soft, the band was smooth, and as couples floated around the dance floor. I'd had a ringside table reserved, and the minute we were set-

tled there I glanced around for Morton.

Ben Morton was a red-faced little man, going to fat, and he was sitting about four tables from us. A blowsy blonde of about forty sat with him, and a couple of waiters hovered around their table. I hated to think what the tab would be at the end of the evening, but it really didn't matter. Let them shove! the food in, I thought. Let them guzzle the champagne. And suddenly I was seeing myself again, the real me, like looking into a mirror when you don't expect it and thinking for a split, uncertain second that you are looking at a stranger.

Frances didn't want the full meal, so I ordered chicken sandwiches. We ate, drank, danced, but nothing helped get rid of the sickness. Once Frances took my hand across the table and said, "She's nice, isn't she?"

"Who?"

"Jo. The hat-check girl. Didn't you notice?"

It was something Jo had said when we came in, but I hadn't wanted to listen. This had to be cold as ice and hard as steel. In this I had to forget personalities and remember only one thing—that if it didn't work, I was out of business.

"Yeah," I said. "She's a nice kid."

"You're . . . Mr. Udell's son and she are in love, you know. You can tell just by looking at her that it's the real thing. He's a nice boy, from what I've seen of him." She looked away from me. "I just wish . . ." Then she gave me her best smile. "Let's dance, darling. I love dancing with you."

IT WAS an hour before closing time, the place packed, and I knew that soon now the customers would begin to leave. This was the dull period for the hat-check girl, and I got up and excused myself and drifted toward the office. Passing the bar, I saw Bricker talking to his head waiter,

and I slipped into the office without being noticed.

What I had to do didn't take long. A door inside the office opened next to the closet in the hat-check room. It was not a large room, but four rows of hangers ran its full length, so that when I looked inside I could just make out the top of Jo's head across the barricade of garments. I ducked down, opened the closet door about six inches and dropped the wallet into one of the deep pockets of Jo's polo coat. When I returned to my table I had the feeling that a gun was pointing at my back.

The minutes crawled by, and if Frances noticed my impatience she didn't mention it. We danced and had some more drinks, and then it was two A.M. The orchestra folded up for the night. I glanced at Morton and met his eyes, and on catching my slight nod he called the waiter for his check. Frances said she was going to powder her nose and I told her to hurry. I didn't want to see the entire play, but I had to catch the curtain raiser, and I gripped the edge of the table hard, and the feeling of falling came over me again.

Morton was fumbling through his pockets. He glanced with open mouth at the patient waiter. Then he got up and slapped his pockets again, and in a strangled voice he said, "My wallet—it's gone."

The waiter stiffened a little.

Suddenly Morton gave a relieved laugh. "I remember now; I left it in my topcoat." He handed the waiter his coat check. "Have the girl get it, will you? Tell her it's in the inside pocket."

The waiter took the check and went away. In a moment he was back, and Bricker was with him. Frances came to the table.

"Ready, darling?"

"Let's go," I said.

As we passed Morton's table, I heard

him say to Bricker, "Of course I'm sure. There must be some mistake. Perhaps the girl . . ."

Jo had our wraps waiting as we reached the cloak room. She smiled and said, "Have a good time?"

"A wonderful time," Frances said.

I couldn't look at Jo. I tossed a dollar bill on the tray she kept there and took Frances' elbow. As we passed through the entrance, I heard Morton's loud voice again. "Then it's been stolen!"

WHEN I got home, I couldn't sleep, and I pulled memories out of the dusty volumes of my mind. They weren't good memories. Working nights, attending law school during the days. Always on the edge of poverty, always on the edge of making something, and never quite making it.

I remembered my first dingy office, waiting for clients that never came, scraping bottom to pay the rent, reflecting bitterly that the gun shining shoes on the corner at least made a living, while I, framed diploma and all, had holes in my shoes and hunger in my belly. But all that had changed when I met Nick Udell, and I knew that nothing in the world would stop me from keeping what I had. . . .

But still the uncompromising fear and the sickness were inside me, and the next day I locked myself in my office, afraid to look at a newspaper, afraid of what it would do to me to see it in print. I told Edna no when she asked if I wanted lunch sent in, and sat staring out of the window, smoking one cigarette after another, trying to kill my thoughts.

Around four in the afternoon, Edna poked her head around the door. "Mr. Udell is here to see you."

"Send him in."

I thought it was Nick, come to give me his personal thanks and possibly a little something for the kitty, and when Tony

walked in a lump clogged my throat. There was a tense, drawn look to his lean face, and I had the impression that he was trying to hold himself together.

I came around the desk. "Tony! This is a real surprise."

He dropped into the chair next to my desk, his elbows on his thighs, his face cupped in his hands.

"Hey!" I said. "What's wrong?"

He raised his head. He was a handsome kid, with straight black hair and deep dark eyes. His mouth twisted. "Don't you know?"

I opened a drawer and put a bottle on the desk. "What you need is a drink."

"No," he said. "What I—*we* need is help." He said it in a desperate tone, but there was an edge of hardness to it. His mouth stiffened. It had worked, all right.

I sat down, leaned back in the chair, smiled. "It can't be that bad."

"It's Jo," he said. "They've got her in jail. They say she stole a customer's wallet at the club."

I sat straight. "For cripes' sake—"

"A guy named Morton. Said he left his wallet in his topcoat. It wasn't there. He raised hell, wanted to call the police. It was a mess." For a second his mouth broke again. "They found the wallet in Jo's coat."

I got up and walked to the window. I needed a cigarette, and I didn't want the kid to see my hands shaking. "I can't believe it—not Jo."

"Nobody can believe it," he blurted out. "It's a horrible mistake."

I turned back. There was a sickness in him, too. He said, with the pleading in him, "You've got to help us."

"Take it easy," I said, "and tell me about it. You say they found his wallet in Jo's coat?"

He spread his hands. "This Morton insisted that Bricker go through her stuff. Jo didn't know what it was all

about. Bricker told me he thought the guy was pulling a fast one. But to satisfy him, they did what he asked, with Jo's permission. And when Bricker went through her coat—"

"Then what happened?"

He looked away. In a dull voice he said, "Morton yelled cops. Bricker tried to talk him out of it, but he said he was going to file charges. He did, this morning. And Jo is—" He broke off. "It doesn't make sense. Jo wouldn't do a thing like that. We were to be married at the end of the week. It's almost—" A change came over him, and the awful thought hit me that I had never stopped to think how Tony would take this. I had made my moves and I had won my game, but this was one opponent I had never thought of.

"Look," I said hurriedly, "I'll find out what I can, and then we'll see what's to be done."

He didn't even hear me. He was looking inside of himself and finding answers. In a hoarse voice he said, "She was framed."

"That's ridiculous," I said. "Who'd do a thing like that?"

He looked at me, and hatred and disgust fought in his face. "Who do you suppose? Do you think Nick was happy when he found out I was going with Jo? Do you know that he tried to get me to leave? I didn't think anything about it, then. But when I told him we were planning to marry, he raised the roof. And when he knew there wasn't any use, he quieted down." He got up and looked at me wildly. "Always the best for Tony. Why the best schools back east, when I could just as well have gone to the local university? Why didn't he like for me to come home? He didn't want me to this year, did you know that? Wanted me to go to Europe. But I came unannounced because I wanted to see him—I really wanted to see him."

"You've got him all wrong—"

"I don't think so," he said in a low hard voice. He turned suddenly to the door.

"Tony! Where're you going?"

He looked at me. His eyes held the same coldness I have seen in Nick's, when Nick would settle down to fight a rival mobster.

"I'm going to hunt up this guy Morton, and learn the truth."

"Tony—"

HE WAS gone. There was no use going after him. Trying to stop him would confirm his suspicions. I waited two minutes and beat it downstairs, grabbed a cab and directed the driver to where Morton lived. It was a cheap hotel in the dumpy section of town. I worked on the theory that Tony had to find out first where Morton lived, and by that time I would have Morton out of town. Running up the stairs, I tried to calm myself. I knocked on the door. No answer. I tried the door. It was locked. I pounded again, called Morton's name. He wasn't in.

I returned to the office. It was getting dark outside, and my mind fumbled for a way out of this mess. If Tony ever got to Morton, it could be rough. It would be rough in any case. I thought of calling Nick, of telling him what had happened, but I was afraid. I told myself that everything would work out all right.

I couldn't sit there. I kept thinking I should have left a message for Morton, that I should or shouldn't have done a lot of things. I grabbed my hat and was out the door when the phone rang. I had to take it in Edna's office. All the calls to my office go through her switchboard, and she'd gone home long ago.

"Walt? Joe Ramsey."

Ramsey was one of Nick's bookies.

"This is Walt. What is it?"

"Trouble. I was down to the Trail Inn a few minutes ago. You know where that is?"

"Yeah." Sweat broke out all over me. The Trail Inn was a small bar a block or so from where Morton lived.

"Nick's kid came in and tangled with a guy named Morton. Something about a dame—"

"God? Where is he?"

"Right now, he's in the pokey. The other guy is dead."

"No!" I shouted.

"The kid started to slug this guy. Before anybody could stop him, he'd flattened Morton. The guy hit head first on the bar rail. Split his skull. I figured you being Nick's lawyer—"

I hung up and slumped down with the cold shakes. How long I sat there, I don't know. The phone hit me again. It was Nick.

"I figured you'd be up there." His voice shook with suppressed rage, and I could picture his big hands gripping the phone. "You fixed it, didn't you?"

"Nick, wait, listen to me! I didn't know the kid would go off his nut! We can still fix it, Nick! An accident. At most it'll be a manslaughter charge. A few years—"

"You framed that girl! Admit you framed her!"

"Sure, Nick, but—"

"And because of that, and because my poor kid is in love with her, this happened."

"Nick—"

"Isn't that right?" He was shouting now. "Isn't that why my kid got in a scrap with that guy?"

"Yes, but listen to me—"

He hung up.

As I mopped my face, it suddenly came to me that the call hadn't made sense. Instead of threatening me, Nick had got me to confess that I had framed Jo, and that Morton's death evolved from that

frame. That meant only one thing. Others had been listening in on that call. Nick had been protecting not only himself, but he was already building a case for his kid.

FOR me, there was only one answer, and that was to get as far away as I could in the shortest possible time. I went out and I didn't bother to lock the door. Any minute now the cops would be rounding me up. The corridor was dark except for the single light above the floor indicator by the elevator door. I stopped short. The arrow was moving up. I watched it, fascinated, moving past the twelfth, the thirteenth, the fourteenth, and the panic took me back, a step at a time, while the arrow continued to move to the sixteenth.

Suddenly I broke into a run, back to the office. I locked the door behind me, ran to Edna's office and made certain her door was locked.

There had to be a way out. I groped for the switchboard and called Frances. She answered.

"Baby," I whispered, "it's Walt."

"Well—" she said.

"Baby, you've got to help me. Get in your car and come down to my office right away."

"I read the papers today," she said in a dead voice. "I did more than that. I talked to Jo—"

"Frances, listen to me," I said. "Let me explain—"

"You dirty, stinking louse!" she said, and slammed the phone down.

As I turned away, the door rattled. I jumped into my office and slammed the door shut, but not soon enough to miss hearing the sound of breaking glass that was the outside door. I locked my door and I waited.

* * *

I haven't much time, and I've written this as fast as I can type. It's been about an hour since Melody broke into Edna's office. He tried the inside door, and then I heard nothing more. I know he's out there, somewhere, and I'm afraid, even though I haven't heard him.

I know he's waiting for me. But there's one way to beat him.

The window. . . .

Nobody but Manny Moon could crack a safe and kiss a blonde and thereby topple a gambling czar's throne. And nobody but Manny Moon was going to cash in on the payoff—of a . . .

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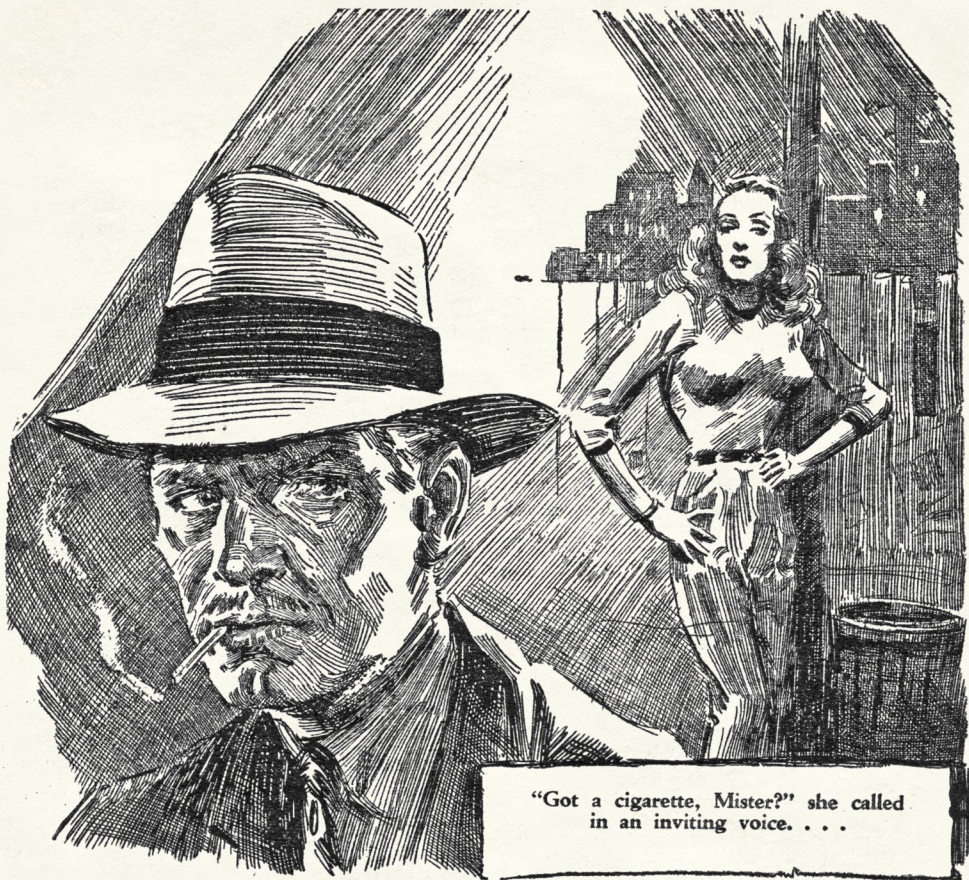
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DARK ADVENTURE

By **ROBERT ZACKS**

She stood there, slim and appealing in the dim light, as Mr. Edwards came along. Could she make him forget the deep shadows beyond the light . . . the danger that lurked there?

THE MOMENT he saw her, standing in the dim, yellow circle cast by the corner street lamp, lounging carefully against the iron base, Mr. Edwards' heart began beating faster. Although he knew it was a reaction not proper to a middle-aged man, married for fifteen years and with a thirteen-year-

old son, he slowed his steps imperceptibly.

What am I doing? he thought, in sudden panic and self-irritation, and briskly increased his pace again, resolutely staring ahead of him down the dark street in the general direction of his home.

Nevertheless as he approached closer to her and saw from the corner of his eye

that it was indeed the same girl he had seen a number of times on coming home this late, the tide of long-suppressed interest swept over the barriers of self-discipline and made him give her a direct and frankly hungry look.

She had straightened up and turned her head toward him, staring boldly, as she always did. She was about nineteen and she wore a tight sweater that outlined her figure in a way that Mr. Edwards knew could not be other than deliberately provocative. By God, thought Mr. Edwards, receiving the full impact of her insolent grin and dull, black eyes, she's looking for trouble, that kid.

She wore a pair of blue slacks, tight around the hips. Her hips were slim. Clashing feelings of desire and virtuous refusal to recognize that desire for what it really was, created an odd block in Mr. Edwards' thinking. He knew he should just continue on to where Sarah had a nice hot meal waiting for him and Jimmy would ask him questions in arithmetic and he could read his paper and listen to the radio. Suddenly, thinking of all this as he had a thousand times before, tasting the routine, getting a sense of bars around him and time swiftly ebbing, wasting preciously, Mr. Edwards winced.

"Got a cigarette, Mister?" said the girl in a harsh and intriguingly inviting voice. She had her hands in her pockets and stepped very close to Mr. Edwards.

"I . . ." faltered Mr. Edwards, his round face flushing and poise leaving him completely. It was utterly idiotic, but he wanted to run suddenly, from himself of course, from what he knew he'd been wanting to do in the two weeks he'd been occasionally seeing her standing there. "Sure," said Mr. Edwards his voice just a little shaky.

THE girl grinned at him, her eyes scrutinizing him with a sly understanding that made Mr. Edwards sudden-

ly glad it was so late and few people were on the street.

He fumbled with a pack of cigarettes and she took the pack from him carelessly, her hands touching his fingers, startling him. Mr. Edwards cast a quick look around. Nobody around, just an old woman in a dirty coat absorbed in carrying a huge parcel across the intersection. The girl waited, smiling.

"Want a light?" said Mr. Edwards, unconsciously stalling for time, then thinking swiftly that it *was* conscious and he was trying to hide that fact from himself by telling himself it was an unconscious stall.

He stood there, stupid, indecisive, not knowing what to say, not wanting to walk away, clumsy. The girl waved her hand toward the red neon glow of a saloon halfway down the block, then slipped her hand under his arm and clutched his muscle tightly, squeezing it.

"How about a drink, Mister?" she said in a confidential tone. She laughed and threw her head back. "I could use a drink; my throat's dry as the sidewalk."

"Sure," said Mr. Edwards, astonished that he had agreed so easily, after two weeks of secret condemnation of the girl's brazen waiting.

In the few steps that it took to reach the saloon Mr. Edwards' mind whirled with chaotic thoughts and a strange new clarity that stripped the petty self-deceit that had masked one part of his mind from another. In those steps he knew he had been hoping this would happen and that he was wildly excited with this sort of adventure that he'd often read and heard about, but never gone through.

Then, at the door of the saloon, he saw the glowing face of the clock and he thought of Sarah. He needed time to marshal some rationalizations, to still the feeling of guilt. He was not adept at avoiding self-honesty and . . .

"What's the matter?" asked the girl,

sharply tugging at his arm. Mr. Edwards became aware he had stopped walking. He stared at her, feeling like a fool for not being able to go ahead and seize adventure as he knew so many other men did, as a matter of course.

After all, he thought desperately, what Sarah didn't know wouldn't hurt her.

The girl felt she was losing him. She quickly moved up close to Mr. Edwards, her voice dropping to a low tone. "Listen," she said, "we won't stay in the bar long. Just for a drink, that's all."

With a sudden, remote mourning, Mr. Edwards became aware of the warmth of her body as she pressed against him, the softness and promise of her. It was strange that it reminded him of the first exciting times of his courtship with Sarah, the thrilling youngness of his pleasure and the odd sadness of its decline through the years to dull but good-humored acceptance.

Suddenly Mr. Edwards felt foolish.

I'll go with this girl, he thought, and then it'll be over, as if it had never been. And after a while I'd start searching again. . . .

"I guess," he said, turning suddenly

away, "I haven't time for that drink after all. I'm late. Sorry."

"Hey," said the girl furiously, grabbing at his arm. "What the hell. . ."

Mr. Edwards pulled away. Turning his back on her he walked steadily down the street into the darkness and, because he did not look back, because he resolutely stared ahead of him, he did not see, he never knew the little scene that took place between the angry girl and a man with burly shoulders who had stepped from the saloon.

"**M**AYBE," said the burly man, staring after Mr. Edwards, "you ought to take them straight to your place. Before they change their minds."

The girl stopped him and pointed. Another man was coming down the street, walking heavily, as tired working men do. "He's a little big," said the girl thoughtfully.

The man with her patted his chest where he kept a sharpened knife, the type used by hunters.

"Don't worry," he said softly, as he slipped away. "I'll be waiting in your hallway. I can handle him."

MURDER ON THE RECORD

THE oldest known record of a successful prosecution of a murder case, involving three men and a woman, was discovered recently by archeologists in Iraq.

The scientists, on a joint University of Pennsylvania—University of Chicago expedition, uncovered a clay tablet which graphically described, in the cuneiform script and in the ancient Sumerian language, a four-thousand-year-old trial.

The facts of the case as reconstructed showed that a temple official, Luinanna, was murdered by three men. Later the conscience-stricken men told the widow, Nindada, of what they had done. For some unknown reason she never told the authorities. Eventually the killers were caught and, along with the widow, the case was tried before the citizens' assembly at Nippur. Nine members of this group demanded the death penalty for the three men and the victim's wife, while two others spoke in defense of Nindada, pleading she had no hand in the murder. She was exonerated on the grounds that fear silenced her, while the murderers were sentenced to be killed in front of the temple chair of their victim.

—John Lane



ONE of the unsung heroes of mankind's war against crime is that gent who toils in smoke-filled cellars to find out whether somebody helped the fire demons along with a little kerosene—the fire marshal. Strangely, very few people think of the fire department in connection with crime, and yet crime detection is a major function of the fire fighters.

Probably the most celebrated fire detective is Marshal Thomas P. Brophy of the New York Fire Department. Brophy ranks with the world's greatest detectives when it comes to putting that most dangerous of all criminals, the firebug, behind bars. Where another killer will settle for one victim at a time, the firebug commits wholesale slaughter, sending hotels, railroad stations, homes, up in flame for the excitement of watching people die.

Among Brophy's arrests was one firebug who phoned in a tip to a newspaper before the fire department had gotten wind of the conflagration. Another arsonist Brophy picked up was a hotel detective who loved to set hotels on fire. But his weirdest incendiary was a woman who set fires—because she was just crazy about firemen!

What some people won't do!

Take the case of Tripp Horan, the likable killer who will make his bow in next month's DETECTIVE TALES. Around that gent centers enough red death and destruction to keep the town of Cedar Falls jumping like a kernel of corn in a popper. It's an education on murder, this gripping novel by Georges Carouso. Also, if you're interested in learning some of the more lethal secrets of the opposite sex, hang around, fellows. Take a postgraduate course from Carouso and us on black-eyed señoritas.

And in case you're the type who goes for incendiary blondes, we think we can arrange that, too. Because that's what Mason Noble specializes in, in "I Want to Die In Bed!"

Yes, sir, there's more instruction on murder and murderous blondes in one issue of good old DT than you'll find in the collected works of Edgar Allan Poe, Havelock Ellis and the New York Police Manual.

Ready for your instruction, students? Class begins on October 27th, with the December issue.

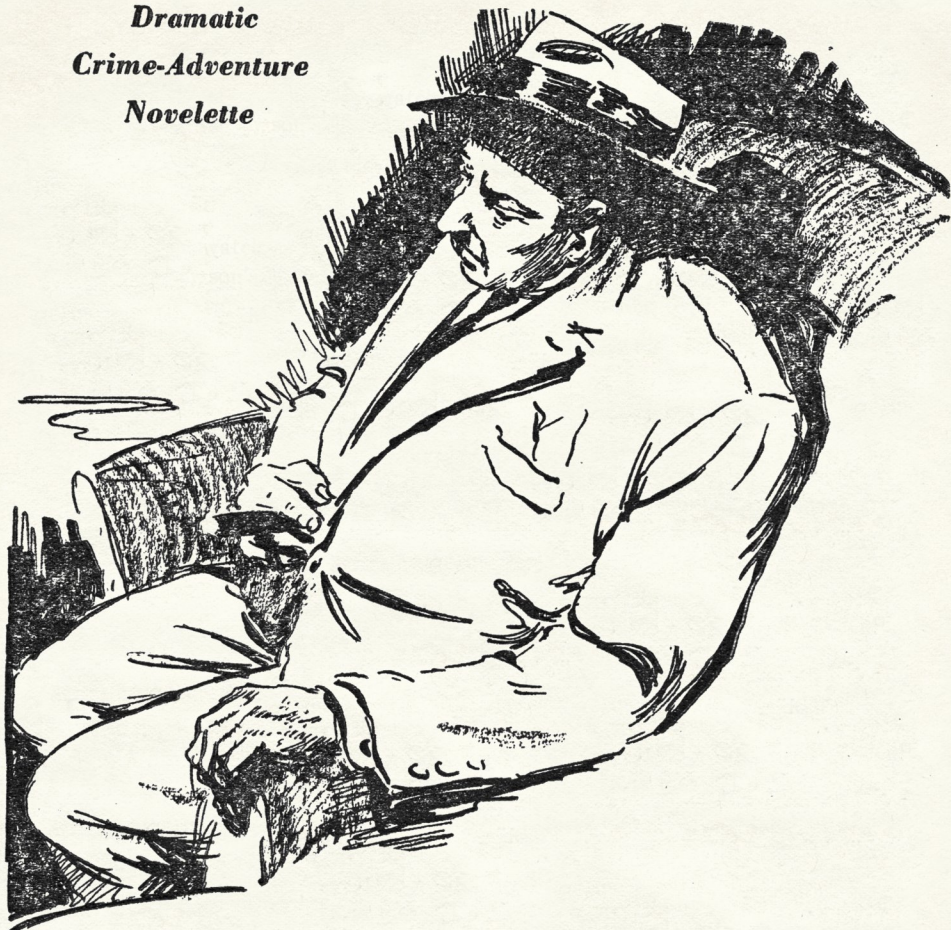
—The Editor

It was just what Tim Dant had always wanted for a going-away present—a murder frame. Tim would sure like to thank 'em—from the death house—with a “Wish you were here!”



— By **DONN MULLALLY** —

*Dramatic
Crime-Adventure
Novelette*



RAGE TO KILL

CHAPTER ONE

An Old Flame Never Dies . . .

TIMOTHY DANT had a theory about vacations. He thought a guy ought to take a couple of weeks to turn his life around—completely. New faces, new scenes, new hours, new everything.

For Dant, this meant two weeks of the wholesome life—no bars, no dames, no breaking into hotel rooms with his trusty Graflex. No lumps. It meant closing

his office, going AWOL from the Hollywood divorce wars. It meant Arroyo Real Rancho, in the hills north of Barstow. . .

Tim Dant arrived at Arroyo Real late Saturday afternoon. On the flatland below the adobe ranch buildings with their red-tile roofs, he could see the dairy herd being worked toward the milking barn—about two hundred head, fat, sleek and

sedate. Beyond a strip of green bordering the Mojave River, low foothills jutted rocky and scorched, stood on each other's shoulders until they made up into a pretty fair mountain.

But the scenery would wait. Timothy stepped out of his coupé, sniffed the desert air. Baked Virginia ham! It was suddenly important that he'd settled for a mangy hot dog in the drugstore downstairs from his office before leaving Hollywood. He rushed into the main hacienda and completed his business with the old girl who rode herd on the dudes.

Tim undressed for dinner, put on some comfortable grey-flannel slacks and a sport shirt. While he was changing, he heard the dinner bell and a rush of feet over the patio below his window. He was the last one into the dining room.

Tim felt strange, uneasy, foreign. True, he had a smog-burn he maintained by exposing the Dant flesh daily on the roof of his athletic club. But he looked positively consumptive compared to this sun-reddened mob. Everyone was talking at once, laughing, loading their plates. Dant spotted an empty place at a table across the room, started toward it. He was almost there, when someone shouted his name. An excited, contralto someone.

"Why, Timothy Dant! What are you doing here?"

HE SAW a girl with black hair and a scorched nose smiling at him. She was wearing one of those drop-shoulder peasant blouses and doing all right by it, her shoulders soft and brown, unfreckled. Dant nodded to her, "Hello, Ginger."

She laughed. "Well, come on over, Tim." She made room for him beside her at the table, giggling, "We don't mind being a little snug, do we?"

He grinned that he didn't at all mind. Timothy could feel the warmth of her thigh through her soft cotton dress and his slacks.

A waitress brought him a plate and silverware.

Ginger nodded to a scowling, thin-haired man across the table from them and said, "I don't believe you've met my husband have you, Tim? Cy," she twinkled at him, "I want you to know Timothy Dant. Cy Kane."

"Timothy used to be a beau of mine," she informed everyone within hearing.

Timothy wanted to crawl under the table. He was suddenly hot all over. Where her leg touched him, he was on fire. His smile stiffened and dried on his face.

Kane had stopped eating, looked around the table. "Are you certain everyone heard you, my dear?" he asked his wife. "I'm sure they must be extremely interested."

"Don't be a jerk, sweetheart." Ginger smiled sweetly.

Dant started to squirm. "I'm sorry, Kane," he stammered, "I—I didn't realize. . ."

Kane waved at him to sit down. "Don't apologize, old man. Ginger's been here a week, and you're the first ex-boy friend to show. Believe me, that's below par—for her."

Virginia's hand was on Tim's arm. "Ignore him," she sighed. "He adores attention."

"Because I get so little of it, sweet," Kane jeered.

Dant put some food on his plate, picked at it, his appetite gone. "How long are you planning to be here?" he asked Ginger.

She shrugged a brown shoulder. "A week, two weeks. Maybe even a month," she said cheerfully.

"Don't look so glum, Dant," smirked Kane. "I'm leaving in the morning."

"Cy writes, you know," Ginger remarked. "He has a story conference with his producer tomorrow afternoon. Isn't that terrible?"

Dant nodded dumbly.

Cy Kane's teeth flashed. "I only get to come up weekends," he said. "I'm afraid it's been awfully dull for Ginger—until now."

"I brought my father out from the East," Virginia explained hastily, her lips tightening. "He's been a very sick man. His doctor said he should have a complete rest."

Dant glanced down the table. Everyone seemed too healthy. He said, "Where is your father, Ginger?"

"We've taken one of the guest houses," she told him. "Father has his meals brought to him." Her voice dropped. "He can't leave his wheel chair—but he's so sweet, Tim. He insists I mustn't tie myself down to him, that I should try to have a good time while we're here. He has a male nurse who looks after him."

Cy Kane had finished his dinner, was sitting back with a cup of coffee in front of him. He said, "I've finally placed you, Dant. You're the private eye. The peeper. The boy with the busy Brownie."

Dant, tired of mauling the food on his plate, nodded. "Yeah. I'm a private investigator."

"Private investigator," echoed Kane, sipping his coffee. "I've always wondered what you people called yourselves."

Tim Dant stood up. "Now you know, Mr. Kane," he rapped. "Private investigator—and I agree with you. It's like calling a garbage collector a sanitary engineer—or a studio hack, an author!" He left Cy Kane gagging on hot coffee.

TIM got out of his car and drove into Barstow. The air was cool, dry, the way it gets on the desert when the sun starts down for the count. It had no effect on Timothy. He felt raw and hot. He squandered a couple of dollars on drinks in a joint on Main Street.

As he looked at the characters wrestling the pinball machines; the juke-box, florid,

ugly, loud ("R-A-G-G, M-O-P-P, RAG MOP!"); the stacks of glistening glassware, the liquor bottles behind the bar—he wondered why the hell he'd bothered to leave Sunset and Vine.

Maybe, he thought, he brought this sort of thing on himself—attracted trouble. He had a natural affinity for marriages that were on the rocks, or almost on them, and he was sick of it.

He'd known Virginia shortly after she arrived in Hollywood. If he was correct in his memory, she'd won a studio contest and been brought out under contract. The producers had paid her a hundred clams a week for six months; she'd posed for some cheesecake art, but never saw herself in a picture. When Tim met her, she was hustling chow at a drugstore lunch counter. A big, fat movie career!

Ginger had been a good-natured kid, Dant remembered—not bitter over the shake Hollywood had given her. She'd been fun, dressed well. About all she had to show for her six months under contract were her clothes.

The fourth or fifth time he'd taken her to dinner he'd asked her why she didn't go back to Kenosha, Wisconsin, or wherever it was she'd come from, forget this Hollywood thing. Ginger had bridled. She was going to be a success!

Dant had kept his face straight. He'd told her she'd better forget it, she'd never make the grade, she was a lousy waitress. Some crack like that had busted their romance. Anyway, Tim had lost track of her. Now she had turned up to hang a beautiful mouse on his vacation! Timothy swore, ordered another drink.

Before he left the bar, Timothy made up his mind. Tomorrow morning he'd do a little exploring, see if he could set himself at some other guest ranch. There couldn't be a Ginger Kane on every one of them—his life simply hadn't been that interesting.

Tim paid for his drinks, drove back to the ranch. He put his car up, started to his room to do as much for Dant. He heard his name being whispered before he was three strides from the car-port.

He knew the voice. Ginger.

She ran to him out of the dark. "I've been waiting. I have to talk to you!"

He nodded toward the main house. The living room was lighted; he could hear voices, music from the phonograph. He said, "All right. Let's go in there—I'll feel safer."

"Safer?" she laughed. "Tim, you're not afraid of me, surely?"

"Yes, if you don't mind," he told her. "I'm afraid of you. I came up here to inhibit my ulcer, Virginia. Get sunburned, saddle-sore. I hate to hurt your feelings, honey; you don't fit into the picture I've got figured out."

"But I need your help, Tim!" she wailed, her hands busy with the front of his sport jacket.

HE HELD her wrists. "That's exactly what I mean," he told her. "Dant has declared a moratorium on helping people. Two weeks from Monday, you can line up at my office door with the other sufferers."

He tried to brush past her, but she caught his arm. "Tim, you've got to listen to me. Please."

"Okay," he sighed. "Let's go inside and you can tell me the whole sad story. I may even weep a little."

"No, Tim!" she cried. "Not with all those people. I want to talk to you privately. Your room . . .?"

"Positively no!" Dant shook his head. "I don't know what kind of a shot your husband is, and I'm not about to find out—the hard way!"

"Cy's gone. Right after dinner, we had a terrible row and he left."

Tim groaned. "Great! I come to the ranch to get away from it all, and end up

a candidate for co-respondent in a divorce action!"

"Not you, Timmy," she cried. "Our fight didn't have anything to do with you."

"That's a comfort," he said. "But the room is still out. Come on, we'll find a bench."

They did. Out by the pool, a glider. He offered her a cigarette, said, "All right, honey. Let's have your story. But remember, I'm here to rest. Don't make it too exciting."

She let him light the cigarette, sat there smoking it for a moment, her face lighted by the glow. It was a handsome face—sunburned nose and all.

She said, "Tim, I hate myself for this—ruining your vacation—but there's no one else I can turn to. I'm in trouble. Big trouble. I'm afraid . . . for Cy!"

Dant nodded. "We're off to a nice, confusing beginning, Virginia," he said. "You're in trouble, and Cy's about to get hurt. Count me as a captive audience now and tell me how it happened."

"I told you I'd brought my father on from the East, Tim. That isn't true."

"Oh?"

"No. The man I've been representing as my father is really . . . Lorenz Bello." She dropped her voice on the name and, for a minute, Tim Dant looked as though he were going to bend over to pick it up. The name packed a wallop.

"Baby, you *did* say . . .?"

"I did," she said. "Bello. Now maybe you'll believe I'm not just imagining when I say I'm in trouble."

"Sweetheart, I *know* you are! Every cop in the state is looking for Bello. There's a small murder they want to ask him about—a stool pigeon his boys are supposed to have brought down on the wing. And you're covering for him." Dant shook his head. "You know what the cops'll do if they tumble to this setup?"

"Yes," she said. "I do."

"How do you figure in this mess?" Dant asked.

She ground out her cigarette under the toe of her sandal. "Do you know anything about Cy?" she asked. "What kind of a writer he is?"

"I never heard of him," Dant said. "Is he any good?"

Ginger curled her feet under her, her eyes dark blotches in the faintly luminous glow of her face. "I think he might have been," she said. "Very good indeed—if he'd ever done any writing."

"How does he keep fooling the studios?" Tim wanted to know.

"He doesn't," she said. "Everyone knows why he's kept under contract."

"Everyone except Timothy Dant," he grinned at her in the dark, "and he's very interested. He'd like to know how to hold down a lush writing job without writing."

"Sometimes it helps," she explained, "to be able to pick three or four winning horses in an afternoon. And, if you're going to do this consistently enough to be worth a thousand dollars a week to your producer, you need contacts, Timothy. Men like Bello."

"Now we're rolling," Timothy said. "Your husband held his job by passing along Bello's tips on sure things to his boss. Check?"

HHE SAW her nod in the dim light. "Naturally," Ginger went on, "he built himself quite an obligation to Bello. He tried to keep even by throwing whatever booky business he could Lorenz's way. But it wasn't enough. When the heat was on Bello, he called Cy and told him he'd have to borrow Ginger for a few weeks. Arrangements were made for us to come up here—Lorenz; his bodyguard, who's posing as a male nurse; and me."

"Cy bought this?" scowled Dant.

"What else could he do?"

"Anything else. He's got your neck out a mile."

"That isn't all," she said quietly. "When I agreed to come with him, Lorenz was supposed to stay in his wheel chair. Right away, he has big ideas for padding his part as my poor, old father."

"I'll hand it to you, baby," Dant said. "You're in a beautiful spot. But I think you're borrowing trouble to worry about Cy. Whatever happens to the lug is too good for him. Just worry about Ginger!"

Her hand closed on the back of his, cold. "You aren't being altogether fair, Tim. I've enjoyed spending the money, too. I don't believe I'd have been much of a success as the wife of a struggling author. I wanted the cars, the clothes, and the home in Bel Air, too. I'm even willing to pay for them this way—but I'm worried about Cy."

"I very foolishly told him today about Lorenz—how he was acting. Cy blew his top. After dinner, he said it was all washed up. He was through being pushed around by Bello. He was going to the district attorney in Los Angeles and expose Bello—not only where he was, but a lot of other things he knew. Bello's track and dope connections. I was frightened, Tim. I pleaded with him to let things ride for just a little longer—I could handle Lorenz, I promised him."

"I don't know what happened in Cy's funny mind, but he took it all wrong. He accused me of having an affair with Lorenz . . . and . . . and . . ."

"And blew." Timothy finished it for her. "Now he's gone to L.A. to stool on the big shot. What do you want me to do?"

"Stop him, Tim. Stop him, somehow!"

Tim raised his shoulders helplessly. "That's a big assignment, Ginger. Cy has a couple hours start on me. I wouldn't know where to find him. Even if I did, I wouldn't know how to stop him."

If he's made his mind up to talk, he'll talk. I can't advise a man to withhold evidence from the police—not if I want to stay in business.”

She shook his arms. “Please, Tim! You’ll think of something, I know you will! Some way . . .”

He shook his head. “I’m sorry, honey. I . . .”

A large figure materialized at the side of the glider. A character in a white jacket. His voice was rough, low. “Mrs. Kane, I’ve been looking for you. Your father says it’s time you came to the house.”

Ginger laughed nervously, artificially. “Oh, yes. Yes, I suppose it is. Mr. Dant, I want you to meet Father’s nurse. He takes wonderful care of Father. Mr. Caesar, this is Mr. Dant.”

Dant took the man’s large hand, shook it, remarking, “Your first name wouldn’t be Julius?”

“Yeah,” growled the man in the white coat. “Is that all right with you?”

Tim nodded up at him. “Perfect,” he said.

CHAPTER TWO

Home Is Where the Corpse Is

DANT HAD a final, solitary cigarette, then went to his cell. He imagined it was quite a disappointment to Ginger that he hadn’t leaped on a white charger and galloped off to rescue her husband. If Kane didn’t cool off, if he went through with his intention to expose Bello to the police, he was already a dead man in Tim Dant’s book.

But Virginia . . . it would be a shame for her to spend the next ten years of her life at Tehachapi for harboring a fugitive from justice. There ought to be some way to spring her away from Bello before the cops moved in. Maybe tomorrow morning they could go out on an early ride—get out of sight of the ranch

and have one of the cowhands meet them with his car. Then drive her to San Francisco, put her on a plane east.

Someone knocked on his door. Dant said, “Yeah, who is it?”

“This is Caesar,” a heavy voice rumbled through the wood. “The boss wants to see you.”

“Can’t he wait until morning?” Dant growled.

“No.”

Tim Dant crawled out of the warm sack, pulled his clothes over his goose pimples. When he opened the door of his room, Caesar was waiting for him. He said, “Come on, Dant. The boss is in a hurry.”

Tim fell in, a step behind Caesar, following the white coat through the patio, out a pepper tree-lined flagstone path, to the great house. Like the main building, it was adobe and went in for heavy wood in the door and the paneled ceiling of the living room. A chrome wheel chair stood, empty, in front of the cold, smoke-blackened fireplace.

Lorenz Bello was seated on the corner of a davenport when they came in. He bounced to his feet. He was a medium-sized man, black hair heavily shot through with grey, soft features and waist, but eyes that would cut diamonds.

“You took your sweet time, Dant,” he snapped.

Tim shrugged. “I had to dress. Anyway, what’s your rush, Lorenz?”

Bello smiled. “I want you to do me a favor, Dant.”

Tim shook his head. “There’s only one favor I can do you, Lorenz,” he said solemnly. “Forget I saw you. And I’m not sure I can.”

“Did anyone ask you to? You’re a private cop, aren’t you, Dant?”

“Right,” Tim nodded. “And if I do my job, Lorenz, I’ve got to take you in.”

“Okay, that’s the favor. I’m your prisoner.”

Tim eyed the boss hood speculatively.

"I hate to be a skeptic, Lorenz," he said, "but what's it all about? What's your angle?"

Bello drew the corners of his thin mouth down. "No angle. No strings. No mirrors. Nothing up my sleeve. I just decided the cops got nothin' on Bello, why should Bello hide out? It's a damn inconvenience. I'm payin' good money to attorneys all the time; let them spring me."

"Okay," Tim smiled. "I guess I can accommodate you."

"Good." Bello waved impatiently at Caesar. "Go upstairs and help Mrs. Kane pack."

When they were alone, Bello sat down again. "There's one thing, Dant."

Tim said, "I was afraid there would be."

"Not what you think," said Bello. "I don't want Mrs. Kane involved in this—know what I mean? About her fronting for me. She's a good kid. Nice."

"I go for that," Tim told him. "Where am I supposed to have picked you up? Got any ideas?"

"Tell you what we'll do, Dant," smiled Bello, his dark face cracking with the effort. "Let's give those Los Angeles cops a bad time. They've run all over looking for Bello, see? So what does a bright, young man like Timothy Dant do? He goes to Bello's front door and presses the doorbell. Who is there? Bello! The whole time, Bello's been at home!"

Dant chuckled in spite of himself. "It's a good story," he said, "but do you think we can make it stick, Lorenz? They've probably had a watch on your house."

"It'll stick," Lorenzo nodded. "The reporters don't love those cops. Know what I mean?"

Tim bobbed his head. "I think I do."

DANT followed Ginger's green Buick convertible to the city. She ran all the interference for him in the late traf-

fic. Dant had nothing to do but watch the twin taillights ahead of him and wonder about this pitch.

What sort of a curve was Bello throwing? All of a sudden he was hot to submit himself to the due process of law. As though he were an innocent man, or a shnook. Dant didn't believe Lorenz Bello was either.

Maybe Virginia had told him her husband was going to talk, and this play was meant to beat Cy to the punch. Or perhaps the word had come through that the fix was on, on the stooly killing.

When they got to Beverly Hills Ginger pulled into a quiet side street and Bello transferred to Dant's car. Caesar threw his boss' luggage in the rear end, got in with Bello and Dant. It made a tight fit. Bello's elbow was jabbed against Tim's side. It could just as easily have been the muzzle of a .38.

But Bello was being a good boy tonight, was trying out what he'd planned to say to the police, the newspapers. He told Dant he couldn't understand why the law was always picking on him—he was just a business man trying to make a buck; he never hurt anybody, kept his nose clean; did the best he could, running his clothing store and a few other business interests. Maybe one of these other interests was a racing scratch—was that a crime? Why couldn't the cops let him alone? Why didn't they pick on someone else occasionally?

Dant didn't attempt to give Bello a fast answer to this question. He could have, but it would have only led to bloodshed. Dant's blood.

Lorenz Bello's place in Bel Air was not the pink-plaster Italian Renaissance palace a big-wheel hoodlum is supposed to go for. As a matter of fact, standing with its movie-crowd neighbors, it was a modest little flat-topped modern—almost backward. It sat on its own private knob of landscape, with picture windows look-

ing off in the general direction of the Pacific Ocean. Inside, the furnishings were in key with the rest of the house. Simple, functional lines—polished hardwoods and textured fabrics. Bello was proud of his home. He turned on the lights in several rooms for Tim, showed him around while Caesar was getting the bags out of the car.

As Bello was conducting him through the master bedroom, he asked Dant, "How do you like it?"

Tim could be honest about this, anyway. He said, "It's the first bedroom I ever saw in Bel Air where it looked like the guy designed it to sleep in—not to hold a basketball game or a Roman orgy."

Bello chuckled appreciatively as they returned to the living room. He said, "I'll tell you something you won't believe, Dant. No interior decorator laid a finger on this place. I did it all out of my head—the colors, the furniture, the walls, everything!"

"It's a good job," Tim nodded. "You ought to go in the business."

"Haven't I got enough trouble?" Bello said, "I can't keep out of jail with the rackets I'm in now!"

"Maybe you're right," Tim agreed. "Where's the telephone? We'll call the police, if you're ready."

"What's to get ready?" Lorenz shrugged. He turned and yelled at Caesar, "Hey, bring Mr. Dant the phone."

CAESAR carried the instrument into the room and put it on a coffee table in front of Dant, plugged it into an outlet in the wall. Tim dialed the Beverly Hills police station and asked for Inspector Kurt Levee.

"Levee," he said, when the officer came on the wire, "This is Tim Dant. I've got news for you. Good news."

Levee rumbled, "If it's good news, you're a ringer. You can't be Timothy Dant."

"Scout oath," Tim chuckled. "Look, Levee, would you like to take Lorenz Bello tonight?"

He heard Levee cough, choking. "I take it back, Tim," he said. "It must be you, to ask a dumb question like that."

"This is on the level, Kurt. I'm at Bello's house. He's sitting across from me—ready to give himself up!"

"You pull some of the lamest gags, Tim," growled Levee. "I suppose you think I'm stupid enough to chase all the way to Bel Air while you sit in some bar and cackle about how you put one over on Levee!"

"Levee is putting one over on Levee," Tim remarked angrily. "Look. I'll let Lorenz talk to you."

He passed the instrument to Bello. The boss hoodlum said, "Bello speaking. What's this I read in the papers about you cops lookin' for me? I'm right here at my house, where I've been all the time. Why don't you come out and we'll get this thing squared away?"

Dant took the phone back. "All right, Levee," he said. "Are you convinced?"

He heard the inspector snort. "Which one of your drunken pals was that?"

"All right," Dant barked. "You're such a wise joker—tell you what I'm gonna do. I'll call the papers, have them send reporters out here, tell them you refused to make the arrest—unless, sweetheart, you happen to get here first."

"Look, Dant, I can go along with a gag just so far!"

"This is no gag, you meathead!"

"Okay, okay!" growled Levee. "I'll take your word for it. I'm coming out and I'd better find you and your friend, Mr. Bello."

"Are you sure you can find the address, Inspector?" Dant needled him.

"I'll be out," Levee stated coldly. "You be there."

"We'll be waiting for you, Inspector,"

Dant assured him. "I'll be the one on the right—I'm wearing the Toni!"

He hung up, shook his head. "It's tough to get yourself arrested these days, Lorenz."

Bello grinned. "Yeah. You'd think it was my idea!" He unplugged the phone, picked it up, saying, "I think, before the cops get here, I better alert my legal brain trust. I'll make the call from the bedroom, if it's all right with you, Dant."

"Sure," Dant waved. "It's your phone and your bedroom. Help yourself. Just don't take a powder on me, Lorenz. I don't think I could explain to Levee."

"Don't worry," Bello smiled. "I'll be right out." He went in the bedroom and shut the door.

DANT and Caesar exchanged a long, bleak look across the width of the living room. Dant helped himself to a cigarette from a hammered-silver box on the table. The no-brow gunsel watched every move he made, as though he expected Tim to put the cigarette box in his pocket. Caesar was probably a good man to have on your side in a gunfight, but as a companion he was nothing. They blinked at each other a couple of times through the blue smoke from Dant's cigarette.

Dant was thinking of wasting a jazzy remark on Caesar just to break the monotony. He didn't have to. The monotony broke—all over him.

He was looking at the large picture window when it happened. The window bellied like the sidewall of a tent in a high wind, then seemed to snap back and shatter. Dant and his big chair were picked up together, slammed into the wall. Lights flashed—all the neon in Hollywood went berserk and exploded in Dant's face. It got very dark, quiet, where Dant was. . . .

When he came to again, there was plenty of illumination. Red, dancing and

hot. He was lying on the lawn, Caesar bending over him. The house made a very splashy bonfire.

Dant sat up, moved his arms and legs. He felt as though he'd been worked over with a sap. He tried to flex some of the numbness out of his joints. "What was it?" he asked Caesar.

"I think a bomb."

"It sure wasn't a kiss," Dant commented. "Where's your boss?"

Caesar nodded toward the burning building. "In there."

"How do you know?" Dant asked.

"First thing I did was try to get into the bedroom. That's where the bomb exploded. It was all blown to hell!"

Dant swayed to his feet. Far away, he could hear the sound of sirens getting closer. That'd be Inspector Levee, with the Beverly Hills Fire Department panting at his heels.

Dant stumbled toward the driveway, was waiting when the inspector drove up. He leaned against the side of the police car. "Hello, Inspector. I hope you didn't forget the marshmallows."

"What've you got here, Dant? Where's Bello?" Levee wanted to know.

Dant told him—how Lorenz Bello had gone to his bedroom to telephone, the explosion. It took him about a minute and, by the time he was through, fire engines were careening into the driveway. Dant turned and looked long at the flaming building. "Who said you couldn't take it with you?" he asked.

"What did you say?" Levee snapped.

"Nothing, Inspector," he replied. "Not a damn thing." He picked his way through a maze of firehoses to his car, drove to his apartment.

There was one consolation, he told himself as he dropped wearily, without undressing, across the bed. After the start his vacation had, anything that happened would be an improvement.

He was so wrong!

CHAPTER THREE

The Patsy

IT BEGAN to get a lot worse the second he woke up. Someone was leaning heavily on his doorbell. Dant opened his eyes wide, glanced out his bedroom window—like looking at the world through a fishtank. Everything was dim, distorted.

The doorbell was still getting a ride. He groaned, pulled himself off the bed and shuffled out to see who could possibly be crazy enough to want to talk to Dant in his present condition.

It was Inspector Kurt Levee and a younger, red-headed cop Dant knew as Sammon. Between the two of them scowled Lorenz Bello's ex-number one bodyguard, Caesar. The three men crowded into the small living room of Dant's apartment. Caesar and Sammon sat on the davenport; Levee lounged ponderously in a big, overstuffed chair near Dant's radio-phonograph combination.

Dant looked at his wrist watch. It was nine-thirty. Levee obviously hadn't been to bed since last night. His thick jaw was blue with beard; eyes heavy, sullen.

Dant made an effort to be brighter than he felt, "What are we selling this morning, Inspector?"

"We're pushing a conducted tour to San Quentin," Levee growled, "and I think we can make room for you in the car."

"No interest."

"Give him the sales talk, anyway," Sammon chirped. "Maybe he'll change his mind."

"Yeah," rumbled Levee. "For a start, Dant, I'd like to hear that fiction again—about how you and Bello got together and decided to surrender him to me."

Dant shrugged. He felt sticky all over; his clothes smelled as if they'd been slept in—as they had. He needed a shave and a bath and knew he wasn't about

to get them. "I told you last night," he said. "I checked into this dude ranch on the desert, where Bello happened to be hiding out. The Arroyo Real, near Barstow. He was masquerading as an invalid—wheel chair and dark glasses—nobody there getting a good look at him. I guess Caesar recognized me. Anyway, he got me up after I turned in and took me to the private guest house his boss was using. Bello gave me to understand he was sick of being on the lam—it was time his lawyers earned their money. He asked me to come down with him and arrange the details."

"Why did he need an agent?"

Tim perched on the arm of a chair, made a vague gesture with his hands. "I believe it was just an idea he had, Levee," he said. "He told me he thought it would be a good stunt, a rib, to surrender in his own home and claim he'd been there while you cops had been tearing the state up looking for him."

"Of course, you loved the idea."

"Look, Levee," Dant said. "I went along with it. My thought on Bello was, you people wanted him in custody. I didn't see how humoring him, while he was in the mood to give himself up, could hurt."

"And so," recited Levee, "you drove down with Bello and Caesar, went direct to his house in Bel Air, phoned me. Right?"

Tim nodded.

"Then," Levee continued, "when the call had been placed, Bello announced he wanted to talk to his attorneys, took the phone in the bedroom, closed the door. Right away there was a big explosion, and the next thing you knew you were coming to on the lawn."

TIM said, "You see, Levee? There's nothing wrong with your memory. That's exactly how I told it last night."

(Continued on page 116)

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(Continued from page 114)

"And I don't like it any better this morning," Levee growled.

"Too bad," Tim said. "What's bothering you?"

"Just a couple of details," Levee remarked. "Very incidental—like this one. You said there was no one else in the house besides you three."

Tim bobbed. "Correct."

"You're sure?"

"As near as I can be," Tim said. "Before we called you, Bello showed me around. Nobody was there then."

"How long before you called me?"

"Ten-fifteen minutes."

"Has it occurred to you," Levee wanted to know, "that whoever set the bomb had to work awfully fast?"

"How complicated is it to throw a pineapple through a window?" Tim countered. "Sure, it was fast work. But if they were watching the house, saw us drive in . . . What else worries you, Inspector?"

"I'm almost embarrassed to mention it," Levee smirked. "After the fire department got through, we scratched around in the ruins, found a body. Pretty badly chewed by the blast, charred—but one hand turned out to be in fair shape. It had been doubled under the body, protected from the fire. It's a very curious thing, Timothy, but the prints didn't check out to be Bello's. Would you like to work on that for a while, tell me who it was?"

Tim's mouth was suddenly sticky—not just from sleeping with it open. It tasted like an ashtray full of rancid cigar butts. He slipped off the arm of the chair into the seat, glanced at Levee and Sammon, then at Caesar. He got no answer from their expressions—not even a lift.

"You're positive?" he asked Levee.

The inspector nodded solemnly. "We don't know who was in that room, Timothy—except it *wasn't* your friend

Bello. Now, how about saving us a lot of trouble?"

"I wish I could," Dant mumbled.

"You'll think of something," grinned Levee. "You're a glib young man. Caesar is no help at all, of course. He doesn't like cops. He'd rather do time at Quentin."

"You know better, Timothy. You're too smart to take a rap for a guy like Bello."

"Be reasonable, Levee. How can I talk, if I don't have anything to say? I told you all I know—all!"

Levee was wagging his head. "Tim, you're wasting our time. Your stunt laid an egg—a very ripe egg. You were going to give us an unidentifiable corpse and tell us it was Bello. Well, it didn't happen. Now you're in a jam on two counts. One of them, obstructing justice; the other, murder. I want you to understand your situation, Tim."

Dant shook his head. "What the hell can I do about it? I've been had. That's all."

Sammon crossed the room, leered at Dant. "I think we're bein' too easy on this guy, Levee," he said. "You can play patty-cake with him all day if you want to, but I'd like to loosen a few of his teeth. It might help his memory a lot!"

Levee said, "I'll give you one more chance, Tim. Whose body was substituted for Bello?"

Dant said, "I don't know who it was. It was a frame, and I was sucker enough to wind up in the middle."

Levee looked very sad. He turned, flipped the switch on the radio at his side, tuned it up loud. He waved at Sammon. "He's all yours."

THE young cop jerked Dant out of the chair, held him at arm's length, measured him. Sammon grinned. "This'll hurt, pal." He started throwing punches.

Dant tasted blood in his mouth,

RAGE TO KILL

staggered back across the room, Sammon after him. The first half-dozen blows he accepted without raising his arms to defend himself, remembering Sammon was a cop. Then he forgot. It was easy, with Sammon's leering, sweating face over him.

He caught Sammon coming in, with a bruising right hand to the jaw. He could feel the impact all the way to his shoulder. For a second the young detective hung there like an empty suit of clothes—empty, except for a gun butt hanging in his open coat. Sammon wrestled with him, hissed in his ear, "What are you waiting for, a written invitation?"

They broke, exchanged a couple of wild swings. This time, when they closed, Dant snaked the gun out of the shoulder holster, jabbed it at Sammon. Stopped him. He waved the muzzle of the gun at Levee, barking, "Stay where you are! Keep your hands on the chair where I can see them!"

He maneuvered Sammon across the room to a closet, made him open the door and get in. "All right, Levee. You're up!"

The big cop lumbered across the room, his hands flat to his sides. As he approached, Dant took his gun, prodded him into the closet with Sammon. He locked the door.

"Come on," he said to Caesar, "let's get out of here!"

The big hood peeled off the davenport slowly, looked dazed. He followed Dant out of the apartment, to Tim's car parked at the curb. He waited till they were under way before he asked, "Where we goin'?"

Tim shook his head. "I don't know about you, but I want to be long gone by the time those guys break out of the closet. If you've got any ideas about where we can make a hideout, now would



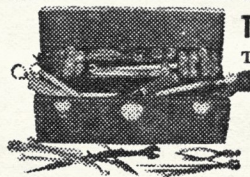
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be a good time. This car is going to be too hot to drive in about ten minutes."

Caesar used up a couple of those minutes looking thoughtfully out the rear window of the coupé. He chuckled. "You're strictly from amateur night," he said. "The phony fight with the red-headed cop—lifting their guns. Now what am I supposed to do—lead you guys to Bello?"

Tim coasted to a stop for a light. He spat blood. "Does that look phony to you?" he growled.

"Yeah," drawled Caesar. "Just like the radio car following us. They picked us up the minute we left your apartment. You might as well pull over and let 'em take us now, because we aren't going anywhere."

Tim did. The car in back of them pulled around in front and stopped. A couple of plainclothes detectives got out, started toward them. Caesar was laughing.

"What a clown you are, Dant, with that fat lip!"

THE two detectives relieved Dant of Laughing Boy. He turned around and headed for his apartment, driving up just as Levee and Sammon ran out of the building. They saw him, slowed to a walk.

"What happened?" Levee asked.

"Nothing," Dant shrugged. "Your following car got too close and Caesar spotted it. The party was over."

"Where's Caesar? What did you do with him?"

"I gave him to your boys—so their day wouldn't be a total loss." Dant emptied his pockets of the two guns he'd taken from Levee and Sammon, saying, "Here's your artillery. Better luck on your next production!"

Sammon dropped his gun in its shoulder holster, started toward the police car. Levee hung around. "You know you're

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still in a spot, don't you?" he growled at Tim. "If nothing else breaks, I'll have to throw you to the Grand Jury."

"So I should get off the dime?" Tim managed to smile through his stiff mouth. "Okay, Inspector, I'll do what I can. Only promise me one thing. Next time you want somebody to straight for you, hire a stunt man! Those guys get paid by the lump."

After Levee and Sammon had driven off, Dant went up to his apartment, treated himself to a bath, a shave and a change of linen. Maybe he was the goat in this situation, but he didn't have to smell like one! Jockeying a razor around the new drape in his lower lip was no pleasure.

He put on a tan gabardine suit, decided he'd pass—for a leather merchant who'd lost his fight at the Legion Stadium last night.

He called Cy Kane at the studio. The writer wasn't in his office and, for a finish, Dant threw his weight around and got to talk with the secretary to Kane's producer. They had a very dim conversation about the writer. The girl said she wasn't permitted to give out the addresses and telephone numbers of any studio employers.

However, at Dant's insistence, she agreed to call Kane's home and ask them to call him.

Tim thanked the girl, hung up and waited. In a few minutes his telephone rang. It was Ginger.

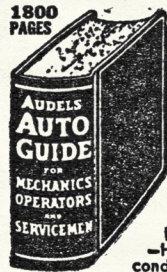
He said, "Hello, honey. This is Dant. I want to see you. Can you arrange it?"

She could, suggested he come out.

He said, "Fine. What's the address?" She gave it to him, and Tim was on his way.

The Kanes' residence in Bel Air was a large, white-brick Colonial job with a two-lane driveway sweeping past the front

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door. If there'd been a couple dozen car-hops in cute, tight-fitting uniforms waltzing around on the two-story veranda with food trays, it would have made the most colossal drive-in in Southern California. A few acres of well-tailored lawn fell away from the house to a kidney-shaped swimming pool protected from the wind by some formally cut shrubbery.

CHAPTER FOUR

When Old Friends Meet . . .

GINGER met him at the front door.

She was wearing white sharkskin slacks, a salty-looking T-shirt with red horizontal stripes, sandals. "Tim!" she cried, taking his hand. "Tim, I'll have to confess—I've wanted to call you all day. Then the girl at the studio gave me your message—well, I mean, how do you do it, Tim? How do you know?"

Dant smiled modestly. "I'm just psychic, Ginger."

She led him to the living room, across it to a mammoth davenport before the fireplace. It was just as well she did—he'd have been lost on his own. She said, "I've been worried about you, Tim. Ever since this morning, when I read the papers about—about what happened at Bello's last night. In a way, I felt responsible for you."

"It was nothing," he said, still the self-effacing type. "I was shaken up a little, but Caesar got me out before I was singled."

"I'm so glad." She squeezed his hand. "Poor Lorenz! What a terrible way to go!"

Dant shook his head. "I'm not wasting any tears on Bello."

Her forehead puckered. "Tim, I'm surprised at you! I realize Lorenz Bello wasn't what one would call a pillar of the community, but—"

RAGE TO KILL

"No," Dant agreed, "and he isn't what one would call *gone*, either."

She looked at him for a moment, perplexed. Her lips trembled. She said, "You mean . . . he's . . .?"

"Mr. Bello is still with us, honey. Somehow he arranged to get out of the room and left a body behind him to fool the police. Only it didn't quite work."

"Are you sure, Tim?" she asked, her eyes wide, searching.

He nodded, pointing to his fat lip. "The Beverly Hills Police Department informed me personally," he said. "You see, Ginger, I'm slightly involved in all this. The police think Bello and I cooked up this thing with the idea of providing Lorenz with a breathing period when the police would consider him dead."

"But you're free, Tim. That must mean they don't really think you—"

He was shaking his head again. "They think plenty, honey. I'm not kidding myself. Dant is living on borrowed time, and I've got to make an interest payment! I need information, Ginger."

"Of course, Tim. Anything I can tell you, I'll be—"

"What about your husband?" he broke in. "Have you heard from him since you got back?"

"Yes," she answered, her eyes level on his. "This morning. He telephoned me, said he wouldn't be able to see me for a few days but I wasn't to worry."

"You're positive it was Cy?"

"It was his voice, yes."

"It couldn't have been recorded?"

"No, I . . . Why should . . .?"

"Skip it," he said. "Did Cy tell you what was keeping him away from home?"

"No," she said. "No, he didn't. But at the time, I hadn't read the morning papers and I just assumed it had something to do with what we were talking about last night at the ranch. He was going to expose Bello, and—"

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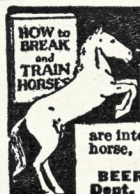
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DETECTIVE TALES

"I see," Dant said, interrupting her. He got up and walked to the French doors opening on a formal garden, turned and looked at her again. She hadn't moved. "You assumed he'd be making himself a little difficult to find for a few days, while he was singing for the police department?"

Her head bobbed affirmatively. "Yes, Tim, I thought—"

HE RAISED a hand and stopped her. "Your trouble, Ginger, is, you learn a story and you're stuck with it. That line would have worked perfectly if the police hadn't been able to identify the body they found in Bello's house as someone besides the Master. Then, what you've just said would have thrown suspicion on Cy. It would have looked like a good bet he was the one who planted the bomb. You'd already established a motive, with me. In fact, you established a lot with me, honey. Too much."

Her face had blanched, looked like a white papiermache mask, stiff. "I—I . . ." she stammered.

He smiled thinly. "You gave me a fat routine about your husband using you to work off his obligation to Bello. A very heart-rending story, Ginger. But a man who'd put his wife in the kind of a spot you told me you were in wouldn't suddenly turn around and risk his own neck over a small item like his wife's honor."

"Maybe Cy didn't think it was a small item!" she shrieked.

"I'm sorry, honey. I'm unsold on you. The only thing I believe is, you and Cy had a fight last night at the ranch—because I saw it building up, at dinner.

"Fronting for Bello was probably your own idea. At first, Cy was afraid to talk—even to object. Then, when he couldn't live with the thought of you and Bello any longer, he came to the ranch

RAGE TO KILL

to try to get you to come home. You refused. He left, saying he'd spill everything to the cops.

"You and Lorenz had to make up your minds, fast. You'd both be fugitives, once Cy talked. But there was good, old Dant, why not use him? First, you'd gain his sympathy, give yourself an alibi for being there with Bello. Then the big shot would take me on, tell me he wanted to give himself up to the cops. We'd make the arrangements from his house. He'd show me around the place so I'd know there was no one else there. Then, after I'd called the police, he'd go into the bedroom and *boom!*—end of the Bello story. The police would think a rival mob had rubbed him out—maybe they'd even come around to the idea it was Cy whose tossed a grenade through the window. If they were properly coached by Dant.

"You needed a body to be found when the ruins of Bello's house cooled off. What better way could there be to keep Cy quiet?"

"This is all your imagination, Tim. There's nothing . . . nothing . . ."

"You're right," he agreed. "It's my imagination against yours. I'll take mine every time. It's a lot easier to make sense when you do it my way, Ginger. I'm looking at the events after they happen. There isn't any chance for a slip-up. I don't have to change anything to make it fit."

She tried to speak, couldn't. Her hands were balled into hard, sharp little fists, white across the knuckles. She jumped to her feet, ran to the living-room door.

Her way was suddenly blocked. Lorenz Bello had stepped into the arch. Across the length of the room, Bello didn't look dangerous—just a short man in his late forties, carrying too much flesh under his tailored slacks. His voice changed all that—like fingernails drawn across a plate-glass window.

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DETECTIVE TALES

"Where are you going, Virginia?"

"I..."

He took her arm, marched her back into the room toward Dant. "You can't leave a guest, Virginia, just because he calls you a liar and says you're stupid—although he may be right."

DANT watched them sit down together on the davenport. He nodded. "You may not know it, Virginia, but you've just heard your obituary. Lorenz said you were stupid. He can't use stupid people, honey—they're dangerous; and what's dangerous to Bello, he ditches."

Lorenz Bello chuckled. "The old divide-and-conquer technique, right, shamus? It's okay, I use it myself. But it won't work here." He patted the girl's hand.

"I wonder what does work?" Tim shrugged. "What gives with you, Lorenz? What's your next play? You surely didn't figure to stay dead—not for long. You've got too much loot riding on too many games to be out of touch any longer than it takes to put the fix on that original killing. What do you do now, Lorenz?"

"When the time comes, I'll show up at some hospital and ask them who I am. My mind's a blank. I'm a sick man," said Bello good-naturedly.

"How did you get out of the bedroom when it exploded?"

"Who knows?" grinned Bello. "Maybe I was blown clear. The bomb could have been what erased my memory."

"All right," Time said. "How are the cops going to erase the stiff they found in the ruins?"

"Perhaps there was a premature explosion," Bello said, with an eloquent gesture of his well-kept hands. "It caught the man who was planting the bomb."

"What happens if your timing goes sour?" asked Dant. "You can pick your spot. Levee will call the Arroyo Real Rancho just to check my story. When

RAGE TO KILL

he finds out you were up there with Ginger, he'll be in this girl's hair. And he won't wash out."

Bello dropped Ginger's hand. For a moment he stared into the cold fireplace, his face as dark, expressionless, as the charred fire-brick. "Thanks for the tip, Dant," he growled. "You're a big help." He turned his head, yelled, "Max, come in here!"

A slight, pinch-faced character minced into the living room on elevator shoes. He was wearing a zoot plaid sport jacket and—no surprise to Timothy—he carried a rod. In his small fist it looked like a .45, but was, Tim decided, a .32. Still a lot of gun to argue with bare-handed.

Max whined, "Yeah, boss?"

Bello said, "Give me the gun, then get the car out. We're gonna have to move on."

Ginger jumped to her feet. "I'll throw some things in a bag, Lorenz," she said brightly.

Bello waved the muzzle of the gun at her, like a black finger. "Sit down, Ginger."

"But—but—" she pouted.

"You're staying," Bello said, "where Dant's friend Levee can find you."

"There it is, Ginger," Dant chuckled. "The first time the mighty man is in a jam, the first time he has to throw the cops a bone, you're it."

"Don't pay any attention to this jerk," Bello snarled. "I'm doing what's best for you. We run out of here together, we're both on the hook for last night. This way, the worst can happen to you is, you'll be—"

"Thrown in the can for ten years!"

Dant finished it for him. "Ten years for harboring a criminal wanted by the police and conspiring to obstruct justice. You'll be an old bag when you get out of Tehachapi, honey—an old, tired bag. It's no country club.

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DETECTIVE TALES

"The amnesia pitch, remember? It's cute. He's going to be in the clear. I'll bet you can depend on Lorenz to do the right thing—come to see you on visiting days. Bring you a box of candy or some fruit. Sure. Until he gets tired of looking at you—tired of you begging him to get you out of stir. Bello is a big man. He never lets a pal down—as long as he can use him."

BELLO was on his feet, waving the gun at Dant. "Shut up—and give me your keys so Virginia can drive your car away from here. You're coming with us."

Dant's mouth was dry. His tongue felt large, swollen as a five-pound salami. Outside, he heard Max brake Bello's car to a stop in front of the house, gravel spraying.

He shook his head. "Timothy stays, Bello. I'm swiping a line from a little brown-skinned man named Gandhi. Passive resistance. If I stay, dead or alive, Bello, you're cooked. It just doesn't make a hell of a lot of difference to me whether I get it now, with a bullet, or later have my feet put in a bucket of wet cement. Maybe it's even better to die from a bullet."

Lorenz Bello was standing a few feet from Tim, the gun steady, level with his chest. Bello's thin mouth was taut. He hissed, "I think I can spare one for you, Dant."

"Talk to him, Ginger," Dant said. "Talk fast. If he shoots me here, you're going to move up a bracket. They won't just sent you to Tehachapi; it'll be all the way. Quentin, and the little green fireless cooker. You won't like that gas, baby. First your eyes run, then you choke, and then . . ."

Bello made a sudden move with his gun, a chopping swing at the side of Dant's head. Tim dived under the blur

RAGE TO KILL

of black metal, drove a fist way south of the border. It would have cost him the round, and maybe the fight, if the stakes had been anything else but his life. But this time it paid off.

He heard Bello groan, felt him start to sink to the floor.

Dant threw a shoulder block that brought Lorenz the rest of the way down. The gun came unstuck from Bello's hand, bounced on the thick Persian rug, Dant after it.

He pounced on it, rolled over, had a flash impression of Ginger standing over the two of them with a large bronze vase upraised. He got out of the way just as she brought the vase down—on Bello's head. It rang like the temple bells of Tibet.

Dant scrambled to his feet. Ginger stood there, her face drained of color, her hands locked in front of her. "He was going to leave me here to take the rap!" she cried. "The dirty—"

Dant squeezed her shoulder. "Remember, honey, there are gentlemen present—even if one of us is unconscious!" He smiled. "Thanks for the assist. I'll see that you get a gold star on your report card."

Outside, Max beeped the horn impatiently a couple of times. Tim said, "Look, Ginger, you call Levee. I'll take care of Max."

As she walked stiffly toward the telephone, Tim reminded her, "You'll need all the points you can get. So no cute business with the phone!"

She nodded. Just the same, Dant waited until he heard her say, "Inspector Levee? This is Virginia Kane. Tim Dant asked me to call you. He has Bello here at my house."

Tim winked at her, smiled reassuringly, then went outside to unhinge little Max from that horn.

THE END

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DETECTIVE TALES

(Continued from page 8)

may have been hard of hearing, for he never took his passengers where they wanted to go. Instead he drove them to the outskirts of town where he robbed them. His mistake was trying to rob four armed constables who happened to be riding in his carriage.

THE female members of the Loomis family contributed also to the merry total of seventy-six who met their end on the execution block. Molly was the most famous of the lady Loomises. She was the half-sister of Laurence. Molly was a dimpled barmaid who could serve a mug of lager with one hand and remove a wallet with the other.

Molly almost avoided the scaffold after stabbing a customer. The judge who heard her pathetic story was very sympathetic. This sweet young thing was only protecting her honor, he thought. Molly should have stopped her tale of woe at that point. Instead, carried away by her own story, she continued: "And you see, your Lordship, when I emptied his pocket and found only a halfpence I knew the cheap scoundrel deserved killing." His Lordship did see, and ordered an immediate execution.

William Loomis was an exception to the Loomis luck. He almost died a natural death. After a lifetime of crime he bought a small tobacco shop and for nearly a year was a hard-working and respectable citizen. His kin, evidently ashamed of this honest relative, bashed in his skull and stole his stock.

With the apprehension of William's killers, the Loomises seemed to weary of the long trip up the steps to the top of the scaffold, for they dropped out of sight and out of history. But it will be a long time before English law-enforcement officials forget the "Loony Loomis" clan.

THE BIG TIME

(Continued from page 47)

ing careful not to include anything I could be tripped up on. I'd just been cruising the west side, looking for a likely new place of business, as long as I was being forced out of the investigator racket by the cops.

Nobody had seen me, and I'd seen nobody. And particularly, I hadn't seen George Taylor this morning.

When I'd finished it, in Berk's office, he looked it over and smiled.

He said, "George had a new love."

"No kidding."

"No kidding. Sylvie Jessup. You were kind of giving her the runaround, eh? She got herself a lawyer, and this lawyer wasn't much better. So Sylvie went out on her own. Sylvie went right to George, and George listened again." Berk shook his head and chuckled. He was enjoying himself.

"Funny?" I asked.

"Hell, yes. She claims he was all set to give his wife a divorce now. He was going to marry Sylvie. Three million dollars you cheated her out of, Steve."

"I cheated her?"

"That's right. She was at the living-room window of that lodge, watching you kill poor George. That's why I wanted this statement. Otherwise, you might have bluffed out of it by saying you dove in to save his life."

"That's what I did," I said. "I tried to save his life."

"The jury will never believe it, not with this statement. You know, Steve, where you made your mistake was not paying Sylvie her lousy two hundred and then combing her out of your hair. For want of a nail, a shoe, and so forth. That's what will kill you, Steve, being a piker."

And I guess it will. Because the jury brought in the verdict two days ago. And the verdict was guilty.

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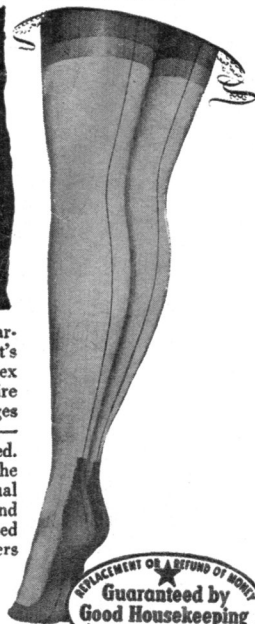
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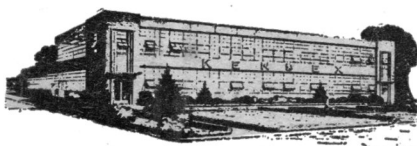


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