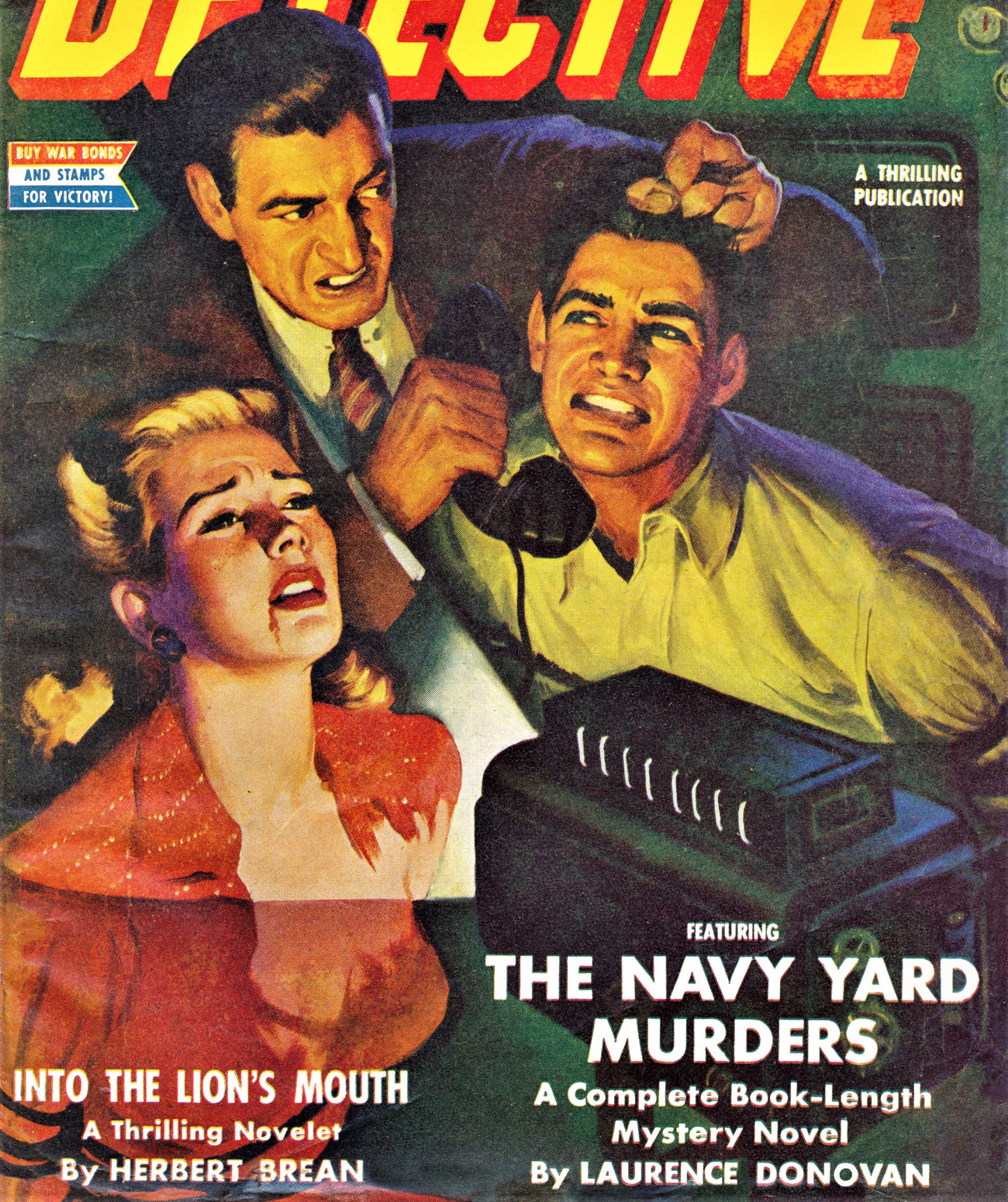


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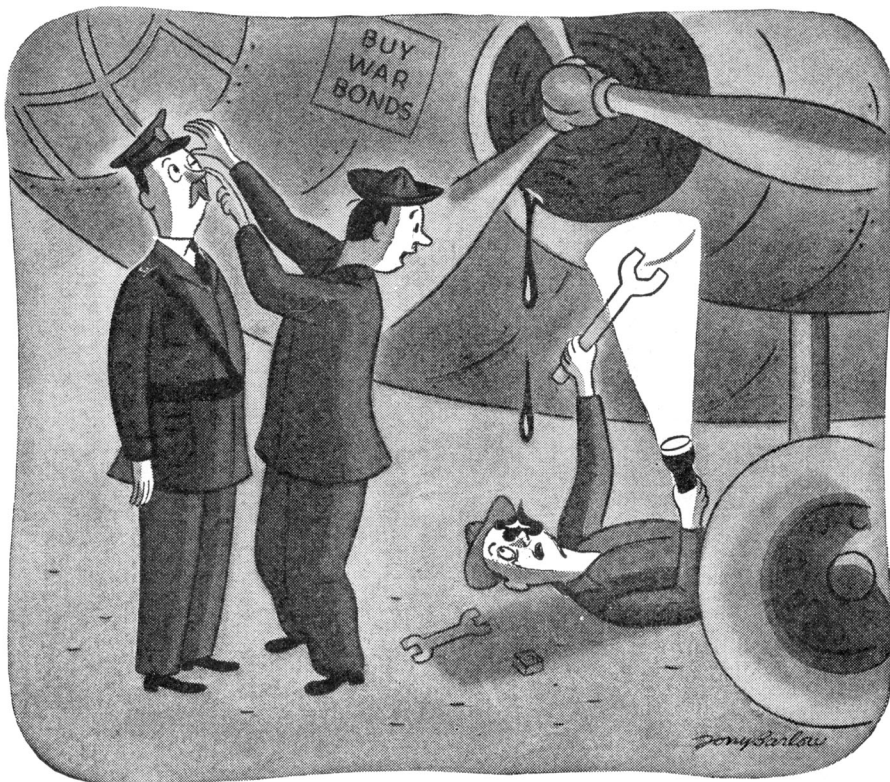
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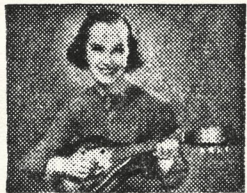
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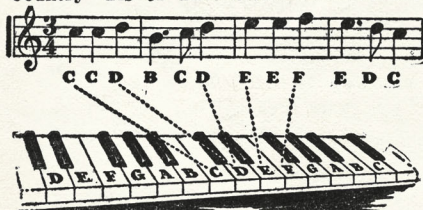


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FORCE OF HABIT

By JOHN KRILL

The Dead Man's Stepson Called It an Accident, But—

THE two quail hunters neared the rusty wire fence. White-haired Gordon Lane glanced at his stepson.

"Dick," he complained, "these darn fences are getting too hard for me to climb."

The boy's hard grey eyes were fixed hungrily on the distant farm buildings and the heavy producing acres around them. It was getting hard to stand the old man. All this fertile wealth would be his the minute Lane obliged him by dying.

He clambered over the sagging wire without troubling to answer. The English pointer leaped easily after him. The old man started to follow.

"Ouch!" he cried and fell to rubbing the leg. "These blasted leg cramps always get me."

His stepson's thin lips twisted into a snarl. He hoped that Lane would break his leathery neck. Wait! Why not? A grim smile lived briefly on Dick's unshaven face.

"Look, pa," he advised, "why don't you hand me your shotgun and crawl under the bottom strand on your belly?"

"Good idea, son. Here, take my gun."

The old man dropped to the ground

and began to inch his way past the fence. He was half way through when he looked up. A startled cry died in his throat. Dick's snarling face glared down at him. The double-barreled gun he had handed him was pointing at his breast.

"Dick! What are you—"

A charge of number-nine shot answered the unfinished question.

Quickly the murderer placed the muzzle of the shotgun into the dead man's hand, closing the fingers around the twin tubes. Through the trigger guard he placed a stout twig, driving it deep into the ground.

With unshaken calmness he stepped away from the terrible scene. He paused, checking it carefully.

Yes! It looked natural enough. The old man had crawled under the fence dragging the gun by the muzzle after him. The trigger guard had looped over the twig which had released the triggers.

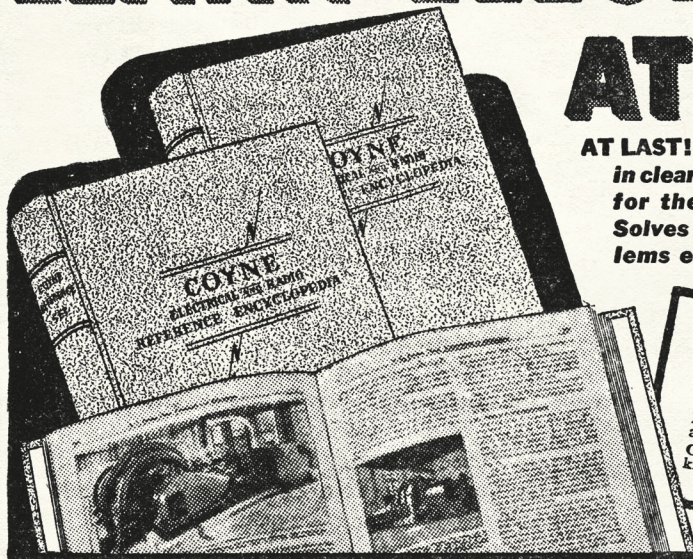
Again and again Dick's close-set eyes swept the stage of his crime. Soon the sheriff would arrive in answer to his frantic and almost incoherent phone call from the Hoskin farm a scant mile away.

Carefully he made a final check-up
(Continued on page 10)



Sheriff Fuller

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FORCE OF HABIT

(Continued from page 8)

before they arrived. Everything was exactly right. The Lane farm was finally his.

SHERIFF FULLER listened in shocked silence to the sad tale that tumbled from Dick's mouth. Tears rolled unchecked down the face of the hunter. The trembling voice broke with the horror of the tragedy. Sheriff Fuller laid a firm hand on Dick's shoulder.

"Buck up, Dick. I know this is hard to take."

Dick smiled inwardly. So far everything was going fine.

"Doc Carren will be here in a few minutes and we'll move the body," the officer said.

"Here comes the coroner, now!" shouted Hoskin pointing to a buckboard jouncing across the fields. The horses snorted violently as Doc Carren guided them close to the still form under the wire fence.

The sheriff and the coroner slowly approached the body of their old friend. The quick eyes of the officer scrutinized the scene again. Sadly, he shook his head. Yes, it was an accident.

Suddenly the sheriff's jaws clenched. He sucked in a startled breath. The gun! The grim lines purposely relaxed and a look of sorrow came back to his face as Fuller motioned the entire group close to him. He pointed a steady finger at the gun that had killed old Gordon Lane.

"It's an accident," he pronounced loudly.

Dick sobbed audibly and wished that the fools would go home and give him a chance to laugh.

"Where's your gun, Dick?" the sheriff asked unexpectedly.

In surprise, Dick pointed to where it was leaning against a sapling.

"Pick it up," ordered Fuller. Dick instantly obeyed.

"Now, then," said the law enforcer, "I want you to fire at that fence post."

His finger pointed to one thirty yards away.

Doc Carren and Hoskin protested hotly.

"Look, Fuller, this is no time for target practice."

The sheriff ignored them.

"Do as I say, Dick, then hand me the gun," he barked.

A qualm of foreboding shot through Dick as he raised the gun to his shoulder. He shrugged the feeling off. After all, his gun had no part in the old man's death. Doc Carren and Hoskins looked on in disgust.

"The old fool's gone out of his mind," they muttered.

Dick sighted the post in the groove of the double barrel. His thumb released the safety catch as he pulled the trigger. The acrid smell of the coiling smoke filled the air.

"Let me have the gun," snapped Fuller, his hands reaching for it.

Dick's thumb automatically slid the safety catch into the position that locked the triggers. He placed the shotgun in the sheriff's hands.

A PECULIAR look came into Fuller's eyes.

"I see you put the safety catch on before you handed me the gun."

"Force of habit," Dick said carelessly. "I always do it."

"It's a good habit," said the sheriff softly.

"Yes. Poor Pa taught me to." Why was the sheriff gazing so grimly at him?

A wild cry burst from Dick's lips. Turning on his heels, he bolted for the woods.

The gun leaped to Fuller's shoulder. A second later the running boy felt a charge of shot hit his leg.

Fuller motioned to his surprised companions and pointed to the gun in old Gordon's dead hand.

"It would have been perfect," he said, "if Dick had remembered to leave the safety slide in the off position when he planted the gun. With the safety on as it is here, the gun could not have discharged."

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THE SINEWS OF VICTORY

A Tribute to America's Heroes of Production

By MAJOR GENERAL E. B. GREGORY

Quartermaster General, United States Army



Photo U. S. Army Signal Corps
MAJOR GENERAL GREGORY

THE production side of this war will be won by Americans who do the small things well, whether it is making a rivet for a tank or sewing a sleeve in an Army uniform.

The casual onlooker is too apt to think of war production just in terms of big tanks, giant bombers, long-range guns and fighting ships.

These are vitally necessary. But in this war, as in every war, the men who fight are human beings. They must have food, clothing and shelter before they can be expected to fly their planes, fire their guns or sail their ships.

Throughout America today, there are millions of workers turning out clothing and tents, growing and processing food-stuffs, building barracks, raising horses and mules—all absolute necessities to the Army, all direct contributions to ultimate victory.

When historians write down the heroes of production in this war, they will spotlight those who served faithfully in the production of necessities that keep our fighting men and equipment in operation. The heroes will be the men and women who did their duty at every place in the production line.



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IT WASN'T FOR THOSE
FILTHY BLACKHEADS
OF HIS

“I'LL ASK BOB
TO TALK TO
HIM RIGHT
AWAY

“WHY DON'T YOU TRY
VACUTEX FOR THOSE
BLACKHEADS JIM? IT
CERTAINLY HELPED ME

“THANKS BOB.
IT SOUNDS
WORTH
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“JIM DARLING,
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Cat Martin swept across the desk and his iron fingers sank into Erdley's throat (CHAP. XII)

THE NAVY YARD MURDERS

By LAURENCE DONOVAN

"Wildcat" Martin of Naval Intelligence, Five Feet of Fighting Fury, Battles Alien Enemy Agents Strictly on His Own—Playing a Grim and Dangerous Hand Against Tremendous Odds!

CHAPTER I

Murders Are Merry

THEY were planning to toss Martin out upon his ear. This was the third hotel where the limit of tolerance had been reached within a few weeks. They were watching every move he made.

Yet Frederick Funston Martin was engaged at the moment in the most peaceful of games, checkers. His slate-gray eyes appeared to be sleepily tranquil. His short-cropped, rusty hair was the only feature about him that bristled.

"They" were the slick-haired night

clerk, the bulky hotel detective, the night manager and two bell-hops. They added up to five in numerical man-power. Martin was but one. And there was but five feet of him over all.

But somewhere along the line of his Navy seagoing past, the descriptive name of "Wildcat" had replaced the illustrious Frederick Funston with which he had been christened. And recently, here in Brooklyn, that had been shortened to "Cat" Martin.

Two score or more much mixed Navy Yard war workers were in the "Men Only" lounge of the Hotel Lant. Tough boys, these war builders of the world's newest and greatest fleet.

A COMPLETE BOOK-LENGTH MYSTERY NOVEL

When Fifth Columnists Stalk, a Nemesis Rides

Welders and riveters, fitters of steel, machinists with hands of leather, divers and diggers, sledge swingers and tool grinders, and loftsmen.

Cat Martin was a loftsmen. He was one of those veritable human flies who, perched precariously on skeletonized building ways, assemble the outer structure of ships.

Just now pool balls had ceased clicking. Bowling pins were no longer crashing on the two alleys. Only the one, peaceful game of checkers was being watched.

The big, black-haired welder playing with Cat Martin was six-feet-something, and above two hundred pounds. One of his hands covered half the checker-board.

Cat Martin observed the lineup of menacing hotel man-power to his rear. He showed even teeth in a broad-mouthed smile, twisted a little at one corner. His own hands, with short, stubby fingers of terrific power, rested idly upon the table edge.

The big welder had uttered two or three threatening growls at some of Cat Martin's bewildering moves. Their fellow war workers were observing Cat Martin's crooked grin, the increasing sleepiness of his gray eyes. They had seen that combination before. The slick-haired night clerk had also observed and quietly summoned aid.

A LIGHT hand touched Cat Martin's shoulder. He shrugged it off, but glanced up into a pair of wide, disapproving black eyes. The face that went with the eyes was pretty, even if too heavy a hand had been laid on the red on the curved lips. It went all right with the blue-black bobbed hair.

"Eleven o'clock, Cat, remember?" said the pint-sized girl.

She had just come off duty at the hotel switch-board, and was about the only young woman who would have

come into the war workers' lounge.

"Sure, Leda," said Cat Martin softly. "Three more moves, an' I'll be with you. That'll make three straight."

"Whadda y' mean, three more moves?" grunted the big welder.

The switch-board girl, whose name was Leda Latin, sensed it coming. Her strong, white hand gripped more tightly the handle of a beaded purse, almost big enough for a sailor's duffle bag. Her black eyes centered upon the slick-haired night clerk.

If what seemed to be in the air was about to happen, she had a little score of her own to settle with that slick-haired egg. But she wanted this date with Cat Martin more than she desired squaring a personal grudge.

"Cat, please," she said softly. "You promised we'd grab off the last show."

"Yeah, sure." But Cat Martin's gaze went over the girl's shoulder to the elevator bank. "Three more moves, Long Ears."

The girl's mouth went sulky at the name. She had more than half suspected Cat Martin had given her a play because she listened in on too many calls from some six hundred rooms.

"Listen, Runt!" she snapped. "We grab the last show!"

Cat Martin was not listening. His attention was on the man who stepped from the elevator, a man who was something of a behemoth. He was especially big about the head. His chin jutted like a battleship's prow. His fixed smile was a mockery of all little men, and all the men about him were smaller than John Widlow, war working riveter in Cat Martin's crew at the Yard.

Giant John Widlow appeared to be in a hurry now. His glance into the big lounge room was quick and furtive and Cat Martin saw that John Widlow was wearing a long raincoat that was hooked up about his throat, but that under the raincoat hem appeared cuff-

to Combat Their Evil Death-Dealing Tactics!

less, evening trousers with a formal silk braid. There were also patent leather shoes.

What an outfit that was for a riveter. Especially a hard-handed, tough mug like John Widlow.

Cat Martin spoke in a quick, low tone to Leda Latin.

"You said Widlow talked to a woman at the San Ramos an hour ago, Leda?"

"Now it comes, an' there goes my last chance to see the Two-faced Woman," said the girl through her



WILDCAT MARTIN

teeth. "Sure. Widlow talked to a dame at the San Ramos. So he's got a date. So you've got a date with me. So what?"

Big John Widlow strode rapidly toward the hotel exit and a waiting taxicab.

Possibly the huge welder playing checkers with Cat Martin made a sneak move as Martin's eyes shifted. Perhaps he did not. But Cat Martin bellowed in a bass roar, incredible in a man of his size:

"You cross-eyed, cheatin' son of a

sea worm! Thought I didn't see you slip that man—"

THE big welder was coming to his feet. But the checker-board came up faster and slammed into his face. That might not have stopped him, but the heavy table came along with the checker-board. The welder went down, cursing.

One reason for Cat Martin's recent monicker became instantly apparent. No cat could have turned quicker. The hotel detective being the heaviest of the night staff all set to toss Cat on his ear, Martin picked him.

The detective probably never would know why he followed his own fast right hook on over Cat Martin's rusty head, to crash into the table under which the big welder was kicking his way out.

"Boy, howdy!" That was red-lipped Leda Latin, and she addressed the slick-haired night clerk. "You would play rough, huh?"

The clerk was trying a sneak punch with an ink bottle as Cat Martin slapped two bell-hops' ears together and dropped the boys gently to the floor. Little Leda's swinging purse became a cosmetic crash upon the slick hair of the night clerk. After which, she proved she was a fitting date for Cat Martin by doubling the clerk's stomach over the hard heel of her kicking right foot.

"C'mon, Long Ears!" called Cat. "Let's go!"

With four down and one to go, the night manager was diving for a phone to call the police. Further vengeance by Leda Latin upon the night clerk was averted, she being enclosed in the crooked right arm of Cat Martin.

He set her down as they reached the sidewalk. She glared at him, and then she smiled. He was bare-headed and his rusty hair stood up. He grinned back at her crookedly. Leda had a quick idea.

"Well, I hope you know what you're supposed to do when you kick a little girl's job right out from under her?" said Leda.

"Sure, bein' a deferred draft risk, I know," said Cat Martin. "But in the meantime, maybe there'll be an opening on the PBX board at the San Ramos Hotel. Anyway, we'll drop in for a while."

"That high-nose dump?" said Leda Latin caustically. "I've about as much chance of a job there as I have of coppin' off one of the Navy Yard brass hats. We'll drop in at the San Ramos, says you?"

Her black eyes snapped as she looked at Cat Martin's heavily muscled throat in the unbuttoned collar of his blue shirt.

"The San Ramos it is," he said quietly. "We'll look in on the swanky goings-on of the top boys and gals, Long Ears."

She didn't believe him until he parked the worst battered jalopy in Brooklyn not far from the brilliantly lighted San Ramos Hotel, with its two thousand rooms, its immense swimming pool, its great ballroom, a dozen or so dining rooms and other appurtenances of one of New York's oldest and most elite hostleries.

Leda made a futile effort to get some of the red smear off her lips when Cat Martin pushed a sawbuck at a dazed attendant, which paid for two tickets to one of the biggest events of the season at the San Ramos. It was the night of a much publicized Naval Benefit Ball and Entertainment.

The ticket taker at the entrance to the immense auditorium surrounding the San Ramos swimming pool glanced at Cat Martin's workingman's attire and started to protest. But he loomed into Cat Martin's half-closed, sleepy gray eyes, and accepted the tickets.

FOR ONCE, Leda Latin was subdued and speechless as they finally

crowded with others at the railing above the long, green-watered swimming pool. Cat Martin had shouldered her into this spot, as if the eagles and bars, the strapless evening gowns and other accepted attire of the San Ramos social strata had nothing at all on his blue shirt open at the throat.

"It's a dummy launching, Long Ears," explained Cat, as Leda stared at the miniature destroyer poised on model ways at the end of the big San Ramos pool. "An' we're just in time for the big blow-off."

His searching gray eyes were taking in all of those clustered about the big pool. Leda hung onto his arm, wondering how long it would be before Cat Martin invited trouble and had them both tossed out on their ears.

The little switch-board girl from Flatbush would have been amazed to know that Cat Martin was swiftly identifying the principal figures in the beginning of the Naval Benefit drama. As he saw a tall glamour girl with gleaming, white shoulders about to smash a heavily wrapped champagne bottle across the prow of the miniature destroyer, he was apparently relaxed, enjoying himself, but inside he was as tight as violin strings.

For he had identified the girl as "Jolly" Doran, a leading society actress, and big publicity for the Benefit. And beside Jolly Doran was a slender, dark-haired young man in the summer white uniform of a pharmacist's mate. He was Tom Graham, this man with the eagle and the double Vs on his shoulder.

"And what in all Hades would he be mixing in any crowd for?" Cat Martin thought. "Even if Jolly Doran is wearing his ring, Graham should know better than to leave the yard now. Hang it all! Joe Marchant got it on account of a dame, too."

"Let's beat it, Cat," murmured Leda Latin, "before somethin' happens."

Cat Martin gripped her arm tightly,



Martin threw the house detective on top of the struggling welder (CHAP. I)

and his eyes narrowed. For he had just seen big John Widlow, the welder from his own Yard crew.

All dressed up in the proper tux, the giant riveter with the jutting, battleship chin and the mocking smile for smaller men, was standing not far from the small group active in the sham launching ceremony.

There was something here that Cat Martin should have known. Something sinister. He was sure of that. And yet there seemed no jarring note in the gaiety. Everyone here seemed determined upon contributing merriment along with their money for the benefit of the Navy boys.

The naval band was muted, then ceased playing. There was a sudden fanfare of trumpets. Then there was silence. A tall Navy captain started the launching ceremony. As Jolly Doran lifted the champagne bottle to crash it, scores of colored balloons floated down to the surface of the long swimming pool.

Cat Martin could not hear the captain's words. But he saw Jolly Doran crack the bottle on the miniature destroyer's prow as it started to slide into the pool.

Perhaps Jolly Doran screamed. Cat Martin could not be sure. For many women suddenly screamed. A blue haze abruptly obscured the prow of the miniature destroyer.

Jolly Doran flung out her hands and dived into the pool. Tom Graham, pharmacist's mate who should not have been here, sprawled clumsily and splashed into the water just as the blue haze sent others near the sliding destroyer staggering back.

"Hold it, right here, Leda!" Cat Martin's command grated.

He had seen that some of those who had been enveloped in the blue haze were falling, their knees buckling. Shrill screams, curses and shouts of alarm filled the spacious gallery about the San Ramos pool.

Even as Cat Martin went over the rail in a clean, long dive, he was con-

vinced that merriment had abruptly given way to murder.

CHAPTER II

Secret of Murder



QUICKNESS of eye and hand and brain had made Frederick Funston (Wildcat) Martin first a jockey, then a Navy seaman, then a high steel man. That same quickness fixed his objective as he

plunged toward the San Ramos swimming pool.

Tom Graham had fallen as limply as if he had been shot, probably dead before he struck the water. But if there was life, Cat Martin had to save it. For Tom Graham, pharmacist's mate second class, was one of an original six experts trusted with what might become America's fastest and most effective secret weapon of the War. That secret weapon was even now in process of completion.

Because one of the original six trusted experts, Joe Marchant, had been found dead, murdered in his car, with only the scent of a woman's perfume as a clue, Cat Martin had become a locksmith in the big Navy Yard.

Marchant apparently had died of untraceable poison, and for days Martin had been seeking some lead that might have been overlooked in Marchant's murder. Until tonight he had come upon nothing of value, although as a locksmith, working his daily shift on the skeleton structure of a warship being laid within closed and guarded walls on the new Wallabout Land of the Navy Yard, he had contact with all war workers trusted on this job.

Even those workers, welders and riveters, fitters and painters, steel men and locksmiths employed on the outside of a "destroyer" not regularly listed were unaware of the secret thing in-

side it. That required the work of only the few experts, chemists, engineers and machinists, all of the Institute of Technology brand.

Joe Marchant had been murdered, and there was no clue to his killers. If Tom Graham also was dead, that left but four men on the important job. Moreover, it must be learned, if possible, whether any part of the secret had been stolen by enemies. Or was this sudden new strike of murder part of an effort to compel someone to yield the secret?

Cat Martin hit the water and went under cleanly. He had pulled in his breath when he jumped. But as he had shot downward through the blue haze he had detected a faint odor that had the bitterness of some cyanic emanation. He had a flashing thought that Tom Graham was a chemist, and that experiments were being made in more deadly and instantly fatal gases than ever before.

But even the Nazis and the Nipponese had refrained from using gas in this war. Because they were aware of the deadliness a war of chemistry could now be, destroying thousands.

Because his dive had been directed by his quick senses, Martin knew when he gripped Tom Graham's uniform under the water. Then Martin was compelled to pull Graham's body below the surface, for the young pharmacist's mate was floating upward. Which informed Martin sickeningly that Tom Graham must have been dead when he fell, so had taken no water into his lungs.

There was just a slight chance, though, that a spark of life was still in Graham. If so, and he breathed in the blue haze rising above the water's surface, it would finish him.

"They've murdered others to get Graham," was Martin's bitter thought. "Jolly Doran undoubtedly is dead, as are some of the others who fell when the champagne bottle crashed. Something could have been substituted for the champagne, and that bottle could

have released the death gas."

MARTIN was keeping close to the bottom of the pool, towing Graham's body. He was sure now, however, that Graham was dead, but one duty must be performed anyway.

"That murder haze, whatever its origin," Cat Martin thought swiftly, "must have been concentrated around the end of the pool where the miniature destroyer was launched. That may leave the other end of the pool clear of gas. It was a light gas, for it appeared to rise at once."

Cat Martin had many times witnessed death by violence. But never had he encountered what was all around him now, and he cursed in his throat as he fought his way to possible safety along the long pool that was illuminated by bottom lights. He turned his head away as he saw the bodies of two women in evening clothes, half submerged, and ghostly in death.

He was half-way the length of the pool now. In all not thirty seconds had passed since he had hit the water. Then he saw someone swimming close to him, and groaned inwardly.

He had not known much about the slangy Leda Latin from Flatbush. He had been interested principally because she could be of possible use to him, since her curiosity led her to listen in on calls at the Hotel Lant, where many war workers lived, any one of whom might be a potential saboteur or enemy agent. Now, suddenly, the hard-boiled girl became something more than someone to be cultivated because of what aid she might unconsciously be to a lone wolf, a fighting agent of Naval Intelligence.

Whether blind loyalty, or an impulse to save human life had sent her after Cat Martin, Leda Latin was swimming close to him under the surface of the pool. He could see her clinging to the body of a woman, the inert figure of Jolly Doran.

The Flatbush girl could swim with

the best of them, Martin saw instantly. But he feared she could not possibly understand that he was trying to reach the far end of the pool before emerging. She was so close that her black eyes glowed weirdly in the varicolored illumination under the water and Martin attempted to signal her to keep under and stay close to him.

But his gesture was wasted. For even as he lifted his hand, the water went black. And from the sudden opaqueness of the surface, Martin realized that all of the lights in the pool auditorium had been blacked out.

He had to chance coming to the surface. He was suddenly divided between what was his stern duty and the desire to try and save Leda Latin. Coming up, Martin's first breath informed him he was clear of the deadly gas.

Bedlam prevailed through the San Ramos auditorium. Women were still screaming, probably had not ceased during the minute Cat Martin had been bringing Tom Graham's body the length of the swimming pool.

Above all other voices, however, Martin heard a rasping, nasal one.

"No one leaves this gallery! Everyone stay right where you are! No one is in any danger!"

Only one man in the borough of Brooklyn had a voice like that. Only Inspector Walton, of the Police, could make himself heard in any pandemonium.

Martin's hand went quickly to Tom Graham's chest. The touch was unnecessary, for the man was dead. Now it was Martin's duty to search the corpse of the pharmacist's mate who should not have been away from the Navy Yard tonight.

HE FOUND Graham's wallet, his identification photo and some soaked papers. Darkness had never been more welcome than now as he stuffed everything inside his own shirt as he permitted the body of Tom Graham to float away. Cat Mar-

tin knew that he had performed the only service possible, for the naval expert he was convinced had been murdered. There was just a possibility that something in Graham's pockets might point to the identity of his killers.

Others were swimming, splashing about in this end of the pool now. Men's voices called out names in hopeless, stricken tones.

In the darkness, Martin called out softly:

"Long Ears?"

Leda Latin had kept close to him.

"Yeah, Cat!" she answered in as low a tone. "Here! I have the girl who—"

With a swift stroke, Martin was beside her. His hands trapped her wrists and jerked them free from clinging silk.

"Let her go," he whispered hoarsely. "We have to get out of here. Why didn't you stay put?"

The girl's reply was half a sob and half furious resentment.

"An' who give you all the right to try an' save somebody? Whadda y' mean we have to get out? We ain't killed—"

Martin clamped his hand over her mouth.

"Just don't talk," he commanded. "You're swell, Long Ears. But swim to this end, and climb out. Stick by me, but if the lights come on, you're not with me, see?"

"Say! Listen, Cat! Maybe you're in on this rubout? Why'd we have to beat it here so fast? You knew—"

Martin heard Inspector Walton shouting again. And two flashlights appeared, shooting white beams down upon the pool. Martin had but one out. He slapped Leda Latin's words back with a hard hand.

"You get out alone, keep your mouth shut, and go back to my car," he ordered, as a flash beam sliced close to them. "What I'm doing is on the up and up, get that. An' I'm thinkin' you're just the kind of a baby who can play ball all the way."

That slap must have been more convincing than Martin's words. Oh perhaps Leda wanted to believe Cat Martin was square.

"Okay, Cat," she said. "You're the first mug that ever done that to me, and you're the only mug that'll ever get away with it. I'll meetcha at the car."

Martin ducked under until the flash beam passed. Rescuers were at work now, beginning to get some of the victims out of the pool in the darkness.

From the continued blackout, Martin guessed that someone had shorted the whole swimming pool light circuit. The short could not yet have been found, so that a new fuse could be placed.

As Leda Latin went up the ladder at the end, there was another quick brilliant flash. That was a magnesium bulb. Martin heard Inspector Walton swear. A flashlight swung fully upon a slender blond girl working a newspaper graflex camera.

"Hey, you Malloy! Cut out the pictures! I told you that!"

The blond girl, who must be "Malloy," ducked away from the flashlight beam as Martin made the ladder and climbed out. He lunged for the girl with the camera.

If she had been on the job here, as the inspector's words seemed to indicate, she must have been shooting other pictures while Cat himself had been trying to save Tom Graham. And the pictures might be more important to Naval Intelligence than to any newspaper.

CAT MARTIN almost had his hands on the girl's camera when the lights blazed. He dropped back before the girl suspected his intention. He would have to take another way of finding out what the camera might tell.

One of the first things that Martin saw when the lights went on was that the miniature model of a destroyer still floated in the middle of the pool of death. But he was no longer interested in that, and he had had all he



As Martin hit the big riveter, he felt as if his fist had bounced off concrete
(CHAP. III)

wanted of this business now. He had encountered Inspector Walton twice recently, and because of those encounters he could not hope to escape unquestioned, if Walton's eagle eye spotted him here.

Cat Martin must not be questioned by the police. Whatever jam he might be in, he had to play things out in his own way. So far as Naval Intelligence was concerned, he was an unknown who could spend the duration in some jail, if he hadn't the wits to keep himself out.

Martin kept an eye upon the Malloy girl with her camera. He saw her glance furtively at the tall, gaunt figure of Inspector Walton, up near the gallery exit from the swimming pool.

Uniformed policemen and plainclothes men were up there, and others were scattered around the pool. When the Malloy girl slipped to one side in the crowd, headed for a small door, Martin followed with all the quickness of movement that had given him his name. He had been smart. The Malloy girl was just leaving a small locker room through another door, a room where half a dozen young women were changing from swim suits to other clothes.

Under normal circumstances, those young women might have screamed when a man barged in as Cat Martin did. But perhaps because there had been so much real cause for screaming during the past tragic minutes, no alarm was created when Martin, averting his eyes, rushed through to the other exit door.

Outside it, the Malloy girl was hurrying along a narrow corridor that opened into one of the numerous San Ramos lounges. There was less confusion here than at the scene of death. But the crowd of formally clad socially elite and guests of the big community hotel, in street clothes, were all discussing the swimming pool tragedy in shocked tones.

"I tell you, I saw them burst!" A little man with a lot of voice was talking. "That was killin' gas that come from two of the ballons on the pool!

I saw a big man shoot at the balloons with some kind of a gun that didn't make either smoke or noise. I bet it was an air pistol, an' that he's the murderer!"

Martin paused. The Malloy girl evidently was all the newspaperwoman. She had her camera on the little man and was fixing a magnesium bulb.

"What did the big man who fired the pistol look like, Mister?" Martin heard her ask.

As the little man turned toward her, the Malloy girl pulled the magnesium flash.

"Don't do that!" the little man shouted. "Hey! I was just talkin'! I didn't see anything happen! There wasn't any man with a pistol! You can't put me in the paper!"

There may or may not have been a pistol in the swimming pool deaths, as the little man had said, but there was a real pistol here in this lounge. The little man's head jerked back as the spiteful crack of a silenced weapon made just a little sound above the bedlam and confusion of voices in the big room.

And Cat Martin knew, as the little man fell, that he would never describe the big man he said he had seen. That slug had split his spine at the base of the skull.

CHAPTER III

Strange Playboy



HERE may have been swiftly rising blue smoke from a murder weapon. But even Cat Martin's quick eyes failed to find it in the thick haze created in the lounge by scores of cigarettes.

All he had to go on was the direction from which the silenced shot had come. Screaming women and cursing, panicky men cut off practically all possibility of putting a finger on this

new killer, who might also be the murderer at the Benefit launching.

Cat Martin searched keenly for one man who already was in his mind. John Widlow, the giant riveter, had been close to Tom Graham and Jolly Doran when they died, and Widlow was as big a man as could be picked out. And if John Widlow was in this lounge, Martin was sure he could not have missed him.

With water dripping from his soaked clothing, Martin could not linger here for long. He was overlooked somewhat, however, because others who had plunged into the pool had not yet changed into dry clothing. And the general excitement helped.

However, Martin did not care to be present when Inspector Walton or some of his men should arrive in the lounge. He probably would be singled out immediately, for his previous two contacts with Walton had been the result of brawls which Cat Martin had deliberately provoked.

The inspector could not know, of course, but Cat Martin found it greatly to this advantage to be regarded as a tough and generally undesirable citizen from the standpoint of keeping the peace. That certainly was the last possible manner in which an undercover man could be expected to act.

Even here in the San Ramos, if it came to being pinned down for questioning, Martin was prepared to start the kind of roughhouse that would bring about charges of being disorderly, and of having entered the exclusive hotel for the deliberate purpose of assaulting and battering someone he disliked. Right now, he did not know how unexpectedly he was going to need that excuse.

Martin was keeping his eye on the Malloy girl, keeping as near her as possible, when he heard a pleasant voice say:

"Hiya, Molly darling! It's a sad affair, but I suppose from your point of view it has been a grand evening!"

The young man who spoke had the

bronzed skin of an outdoors man. His brown eyes were clear and twinkled with humor. Martin liked the "cut of his jib," for his features were stronger than they were handsome, and he showed the effect of clean living. His clothes were tastefully simple, though expensive, and Cat Martin recognized their quality, though Cat himself had never been classed as a Beau Brummel.

"Yes, Jim," Cat heard the Malloy girl who had been called "Molly" reply. "It has been a killing for the newshounds. I suppose. But Jolly Doran was a swell person, and if I never shoot another picture I don't want to see another such sight as that right after those balloons burst."

So the gas had come from the toy balloons, thought Cat Martin. And it was something to remember that such little balloons might float anywhere, with the right wind direction. And over on Wallabout Land in the big Navy Yard, there was that secret enclosure where the two mammoth dry-docks were being built for the 58,000-ton super-dreadnaughts, the *Maine* and the *New Hampshire*, soon to be under construction.

Gas in toy balloons, handled as efficiently as tonight's terror had been might play several kinds of blazing fury with key figures on the work. What if poison gas had been kept almost entirely out of the war in general? Hired saboteurs were far more ruthless than fighting men on land or sea or in the air. A fact which Cat Martin well knew.

MARTIN still wanted the plates in Molly Malloy's camera. But while he considered how he might go about getting them he studied the young man she had called Jim.

"How about a drink, Molly?" he heard the man say. "I'll admit that Mrs. Sarlon's boy James is a bit sick after what's happened. And there's something I want to talk over with you."

Martin could see the way Jim Sarlon looked at Molly Malloy that he had meant it when he had called her "darling." And it was in the young fellow's mien as well as his voice that he was a regular guy. Also Sarlon seemed to be covering up some deep anxiety.

"Okay, Jim, for a drink," said Molly Malloy. "I got a shot of that poor little man over there, and I'm trying to believe I didn't bring on this new shooting. Anyway, I don't want Inspector Walton demanding the pictures I already have."

As the two moved away toward an elevator bank, Cat Martin was still trying to figure just how he might get a crack at the girl's camera. He saw that Sarlon and the girl were the only persons in the elevator going up. It stopped at the fifth floor. Martin was moving over toward it when Inspector Walton came into the big lounge, heading for the latest murder victim. This was no place for Cat Martin in his soaking clothes. He stepped quickly into the elevator as the door clanged open.

The operator, a colored girl, frowned at him with disapproval. But he only grinned at her as he took Tom Graham's water-soaked wallet from his pocket.

"Fifth floor, sister," he said briskly. "Mr. Sarlon told me to bring his wallet right up if I got it out of the swimming pool. He dropped it when he helped out an old man who had fallen in."

The operator looked at him, unimpressed, but she said, "Yes sir," laconically, and the cage shot up.

As it was stopping, he said:

"Now what did Mr. Sarlon say? I guess it was five-o-eight. I never can remember numbers."

"Five-eleven, sir," said the operator.

Martin turned an ell in the silent corridor before he reached Suite Five-eleven. A blond girl collided with him with such force that he staggered back to the wall. In the dim light, he

mistook her for Molly Malloy, since she was tightly gripping a newspaper graflex camera.

Martin's hand went out instinctively, vising upon the girl's shoulder, and whirling her around. Why should Molly Malloy be running away from Jim Sarlon so suddenly?

Only when the girl spoke, furiously, did Cat Martin see that he had made a mistake.

"Let go, you stupid fool!" she rasped. "Who do you think you're grabbing?"

The girl was as blond as Molly, but she was older, and her face was harder. And something in the way her hands tightened on the camera told Cat Martin she believed he meant to grab it from her, or that she had just taken it herself, without permission of its owner.

Martin's grip tightened.

"I don't know, so you tell me who I've grabbed," he said, his voice low, but incisive. "And I'll take Molly Malloy's picture box."

"Like fun you will, you—" the girl exclaimed furiously. "Why, you're one of the porters!" You let go, fast! I'm Sela Erdley, and I'll report you! My father will see that—"

ANOTHER elevator door opened down the corridor. Martin slapped a hand over the girl's mouth. He didn't know or care who Sela Erdley might be, but he was sure enough about that camera.

Someone was coming along the corridor from the elevator. Martin swore resignedly, and let the rather faded blonde have it on her chin, just hard enough to prevent any squawk. Catching up the camera, he darted along the wall as Sela Erdley slid to the floor.

He heard a door opening ahead of him. A man coming out was swearing lustily.

"You say you haven't got it! A girl was hiding and grabbed it! All right, baby! If you're lying, I'll come and get it and you, if I have to take the

Sentinel Building apart! You saw what happened to your boy friend, so don't try squawking for the cops or any help while I'm still in the building!"

The giant figure of the man was half out and half in the doorway ahead of Cat Martin. He permitted the camera to slip to the floor and never had moved faster.

He had never punched a man quicker or harder than he hit the big riveter, John Widlow, the man who had been the original cause of Cat Martin's unexpected visit to the San Ramos Hotel. And for one time in his hard fighting career, Cat Martin felt as if his fist had bounced off of concrete.

Big John Widlow had all the appearance of a slow moving and slow thinking riveter, blessed with more muscle than brain. In short order Martin discovered the deceptiveness of this.

Few men, big or little, stayed on their feet after Cat Martin delivered a straight jaw punch. In slamming into Widlow, Martin had felt sure of the result, that Widlow would be laid out, unconscious, with that one blow, or he would have refrained from open attack.

He had no desire whatever to have John Widlow see Cat Martin, loftsmen, here, or to connect him with more serious activities than his daily job called for. He had counted on removing the giant riveter with a sleep

producer before he could be identified.

But things did not work out that way. When Widlow whirled to the attack it seemed that his knee was as big as a barrel. It was delivered with a sickening thrust into Martin's groin and from that moment clean fighting was out.

Martin's hard-knit body doubled in spite of himself. Widlow's fist, like some swinging ham, smashed into his face, and Martin had a stunned, confused sense of going for a ride on an air-cushioned roller coaster.

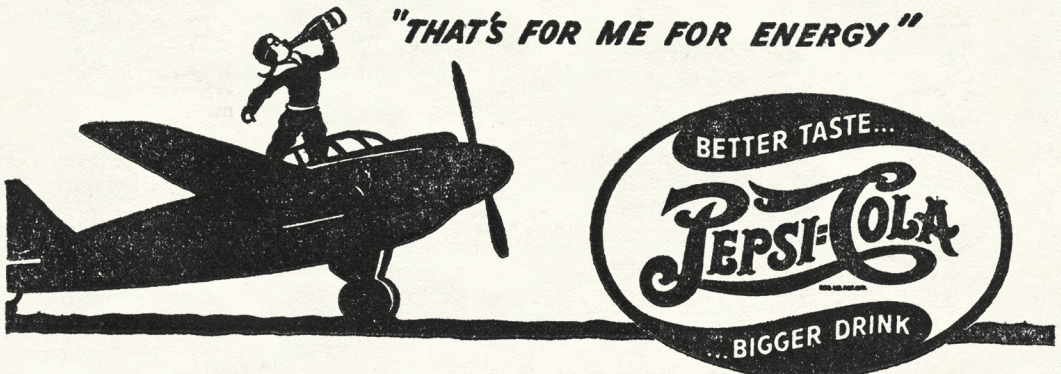
He landed inside the room Widlow was leaving. As his hand went out to bring himself to his feet, his stubby fingers came in contact with silky, soft hair. He had a glimpse of Molly Malloy lying on the floor with a bruise marring the sweet line of her rounded jaw.

Martin came to his knees, setting himself. He was more worried by having Widlow see who he was than over his battling debacle. But big John Widlow was already gone from the open doorway.

Martin heard steps coming along the corridor. Then there were voices, but none of these was the slow, mocking voice of John Widlow. Perhaps, after all, Widlow had not recognized him.

"The light was dim outside," he quickly reasoned. "I didn't put Widlow out, but I jolted him. He gave me the old knee instinctively. Then

[Turn page]



he heard someone coming and lammed. There's a fair chance he didn't recognize me."

THE voices outside were arguing. Martin heard the harsh accents of Inspector Walton.

He also heard another well-known voice.

"Who? Me? Listen, copper! If I was up here to frisk the joint, would I be dressed like a drowned rat! I've got a girl friend lives here, an' I'm on my way to borrow some clothes! Some egg knocked me into the swimmin' pool downstairs, tryin' to save his own skin!"

Little Leda Latin! She had followed him, thought Martin, instead of going to his car. That meant she probably had sighted him trailing Molly Malloy and had not liked the idea.

"All right, Miss Erdley." That was Inspector Walton. He was talking to the faded blonde from whom Cat Martin had seized Molly Malloy's camera. "You say someone knocked you down! Can you describe him?"

Cat Martin swiftly considered the windows of the room he was in. Something was due to happen, quickly. His presence here had to be explained somehow.

The girl from whom he had seized the camera was talking.

"All I saw of the big tramp was his fist," said the blonde who had said she was Sela Erdley. "I guess he thought I was someone else. He must have kept right on going."

That partly eliminated Cat Martin. But not altogether.

"Okay, girls!" said Inspector Walton. "I'll see what happened in Mr. Sarlon's room, where the phone line has been opened."

This was a little hot for Martin. Molly Malloy was just opening her big, blue eyes, staring at him. Then he saw a pair of feet. They were in an inner doorway. They were Jim Sarlon's feet.

CHAPTER IV

Queer Protection



CAT MARTIN debated hurdling Jim Sarlon's body in the inner doorway and trying for a getaway from some other window or possibly a door of the suite. But was too late.

Inspector Walton, accompanied by another man or two, already was coming toward the corridor door. And at that moment Jim Sarlon's feet moved. Martin breathed a little easier. At least he would not be on the spot for murder.

Molly Malloy cried out. She scrambled up, staring at Martin, but she went directly to Jim Sarlon.

"Jim, darling! You hurt? Jim!"

Martin guessed the feeling that attractive Jim Sarlon had for the newspaper girl was not all one-sided. But that was not helping his own position. In one or two more seconds, Cat Martin would have to make an accounting to hard-bitten, skeptical Inspector Walton who had already rated him as a disorderly character.

Jim Sarlon was on his feet, his fingers rubbing at a bruise under one eye, when Inspector Walton stepped into the doorway, one of his men at his shoulder. Behind the inspector, Martin could see the angry face and glowing black eyes of Leda Latin.

"Well, what's this?" Inspector Walton fixed Cat Martin with a cold eye. "We have wholesale homicide downstairs. We have women being slapped around up here and . . . okay, Martin! Spill it! How did you get into a respectable hotel? And why? You're under arrest! Well, whassay?"

Martin's face felt swollen all over where John Widlow had punched him. His clothes were soaked and sticking to him, making it plain that he must have been in the swimming pool.

Right now he was in the rooms of Jim Sarlon, who was undoubtedly a young fellow with plenty of money, which meant influence. And this was the moment that it came to him that his previous arrest for disorderly conduct, for which he had paid heavy fines, could be to his advantage, rather than against him, if he used his head at all.

"This big lug," he growled, with a short oath, "shoved me into the swimming pool downstairs! So I followed him and his girl friend up here! I ain't bein' pushed around by any guy tryin' to save his own hide! I smacked him down, and his girl friend got punched accidentally when she got in the way!"

Inspector Walton glanced from Martin to Jim Sarlon. His eyes went to Molly Malloy, who started to speak, but Jim Sarlon stopped her.

"Come again, Martin!" snapped Inspector Walton. "You're a pain in the neck, but you're not that tough! What did happen, Mr. Sarlon?"

Cat Martin was estimating the distance to Walton and the other policeman blocking the doorway. There was no fire-escape outside the room windows, and a five-floor dive was a little more than even his tough, rawhide body could take.

Jim Sarlon took Martin's breath away.

"I guess that's about the way of it, Inspector Walton," he said quietly. "For a little guy, this fellow packs some wallop. It happened the way he says, except that it was an accident that I jolted him into the swimming pool in the panic, and I wasn't exactly trying to save my own skin just at that time."

"So, Martin, at last you're bucking one that'll rate you a nice vacation over on the Island," said Inspector Walton. "Fighting in your own cheap hotel lobbies and in the street, and entering a man's room are two different charges on the book. You'll not pay out of this one."

MARTIN was holding back speech, staring at Jim Sarlon. That good-looking rich guy, evidently an outdoor sportsman, was being a lot more sporting than could be expected. Especially since Cat knew he was lying, and had been knocked cold by big John Widlow.

Then, Jim Sarlon was handing out a further surprise.

"I'll have to pass up this one, Inspector," he said calmly. "Any little fellow that's game enough to tie into a big buy like me, and put me down besides, isn't going to jail on my word. I have no charge to prefer, and I'm sorry we had this trouble on top of your other worries down at the swimming pool."

"Well, I'll be—"

Inspector Walton started to explode, but choked back his language. Cat Martin felt the same way about it, but all he could do was wait this one out. There had to be something more behind Jim Sarlon's protecting him than showed on the surface.

He caught Sarlon's eyes then, and oddly he could have sworn that Jim Sarlon recognized him, that in some manner he knew who he was. If so, what did that mean?

John Widlow had been here, wanting Molly Malloy's camera. That camera might contain a shot of the murderer of Tom Graham and others with poison gas.

The faded blonde calling herself Sela Erdley also had been after the camera, and had got it ahead of Widlow. That carried Martin's mind back to the camera which he had dropped in the corridor.

Inspector Walton apparently had not seen it. So John Widlow must have taken the camera after all.

Inspector Walton indicated further then that Jim Sarlon had both money and influence.

"I don't like it much, Mr. Sarlon," he said. "But if you want it that way, I guess that covers it. But mind you, Cat Martin, being a war worker and

valuable at the Navy Yard has kept you off the Island about all the times you rate. And now—" He gestured with a big hand. "Get out, Martin, and keep going. I have other business here. I'll send an escort with you to the street."

Martin heard Jim Sarlon speaking in a low tone to Molly Malloy. She glanced at him and smiled at Inspector Walton. That newspaper girl, Cat Martin could see, was smart as well as pretty. The kind with honey and vinegar on her tongue, the blarney of the Irish.

"I'm afraid, Inspector Walton, your other business here is my camera," she said now. "If I had only known you would want it, I wouldn't have sent it and the shots I took down-stairs on into the *Sentinel* office."

Martin could hear Inspector Walton's teeth grinding together.

"That's right, Inspector," Jim Sarlon said easily. "Molly called a messenger and sent the pictures of the tragedy to her paper. Probably the city editor will give them to you."

Molly Malloy was smiling sweetly at the inspector. Walton had the appearance of a hooked fish just pulled out of water and gasping for air. It was plain to Cat Martin that Inspector Walton was compelled to respect the influence of this Jim Sarlon. And if what Molly Malloy had said were true, he hadn't a chance in a million of getting first crack at the murder pictures as police evidence.

"I guess that's all then," the inspector said shortly. "Okay, Martin! Come on!"

"Just a minute, Inspector," interrupted Jim Sarlon. "I would like to have Mr. Martin stay a while. I have thought of a little favor a fellow with his nerve might do for me."

INSPECTOR WALTON had to bow to that one, like it or not.

Cat Martin could guess at several answers to all of this. He managed to pass along a peremptory signal to

Leda Latin, meant to send her back to his car, for he could see that she had her own doubts about this situation. And when Leda Latin had doubts, she was more than likely to start spilling them in some highly un-diplomatic way.

Martin was relieved to see her fade out as Walton went out, closing the door.

Martin faced around, taking in Jim Sarlon. Before Sarlon could speak, Martin chose his own line.

"Well, thanks, Mr. Sarlon," he said. "That was swell of you. You see, I was just passin' your door. A big mug came out. I had a glimmer of your girl having been treated rough, so I tried handin' the big ape one on the button. I didn't do so well, an' the next thing I was flat on the floor right in here. I guess I'll go along now."

Jim Sarlon's brown eyes were studying him thoughtfully. Molly Malloy was whispering. There was that good-natured glint in Sarlon's eyes that Cat had to like.

"There was a camera taken, Mr. Martin," said Sarlon. "Perhaps you saw a girl outside with it. That was before this big man you mention came in here."

Martin did not want to admit that he also had been after the camera. He had to choose the words for his story carefully.

"There was a blonde girl bumped into me," he admitted. "She had a camera. Maybe that big lug caught up with her and took it. I was knocked out, so I wouldn't know."

Jim Sarlon nodded. But plainly there was something here beyond what had been brought out. Sarlon cracked it at last, cautiously.

"You would be Cat Martin, a loftsmen, working on a special job on Wallabout Land at the Navy Yard," he said, as a statement. "And undoubtedly you have seen Tom Graham who was killed tonight? Isn't that true?"

For all his liking Jim Sarlon, Martin was instantly on guard. Jim Sarlon, wealthy sportsman and playboy, had no business knowing that much about his job on Wallabout Market Land. Or his possible acquaintance with the dead Tom Graham.

In fact, Jim Sarlon should have no knowledge whatever of Tom Graham having been one of a few selected experts on the secret job.

There were times when it was to his advantage, even as a lone wolf Naval Intelligence agent, to play along with someone outside. That could be true of Molly Malloy, the girl who had taken pictures which might have become valuable. But not with Jim Sarlon.

And then Martin followed the sudden direction of Molly Malloy's blue eyes. They had flicked toward a radio-phonograph in the corner of the room. The cover of the record plate was partly up.

Martin had part of an answer then. He could not be mistaken about what he saw. Half a dozen flat plates taken from a graflex camera had been thrust into the phonograph side of the radio, and the cover had failed to drop all the way.

Replying to Jim Sarlon's leading question, Martin phrased his answer carefully.

"Sure, I'm a loftsman in the yard, and I've been on several special jobs," he said. "As for the man called Tom Graham, well, I heard his name mentioned tonight, as I was watchin' them put on that phony launchin'. That stunt was what brought me—"

CAT MARTIN had been rubbing his bruised face, and moving a little closer as he spoke. He jumped from his toes. Even as his short punching left caught Jim Sarlon's jaw, and he got him solidly just under the breastbone with his socking right, Martin regretted it had to be this way.

Molly Malloy screamed. Martin had had about all the slapping around

of women he wanted for one night. He caught the girl, clamped her mouth, and half a minute later he had her tightly bound and gagged with cords pulled off a doorway drapery.

Jim Sarlon was out for the second time, but he might not remain long that way. It was Martin's move, and it had to be fast now. Sarlon would not go to bat for him the second time.

Just for luck, he made a swift search of Sarlon's pockets, making sure that Molly Malloy was not in position to see him. And he came up with a reward in a little, brown notebook.

Jim Sarlon had listed there the names of all the experts working secretly on the special government Navy Yard job. There were some other items also. And Martin noted that Sarlon wore a tiny gold college pin.

Martin did not make the mistake of taking the book. But when he returned it, the contents were firmly fixed in his memory.

CHAPTER V

Heart of a Lone Wolf



POLICE cars hedged in the block-long San Ramos Hotel. Cat Martin, avoiding contact with the law, glided silently toward his own battered jalopy in a narrow, side street.

He paused several cars away from his own coupé. That old inner instinct told him he was being tailed. Perhaps by some of Inspector Walton's boys. Or it might be something much more sinister.

"Big John Widlow got that camera," he said musingly. "He's found out the plates had been removed from the holder. It is possible he's had his own or some other eye on Jim Sarlon's room. Widlow isn't playing a lone hand, whatever or whoever he is

representing. But darned if I'm glad I found out what I have about Jim Sarlon."

He was a motionless shadow now. Many persons were moving about. For the swanky San Ramos Hotel was suddenly the object of the most and the worst publicity it had ever received.

Standing there waiting, Cat Martin considered the most recent items stored in his memory. As a fighting agent for the Naval Intelligence, he should have been delighted with what he had.

"But can I help it if I'm one-tenth human?" he complained in a whisper. "I'm not often fooled, and I'd have said off-hand that Jim Sarlon and Molly Malloy are real folks. But look!"

He was recalling the way Molly Malloy's blue eyes had watched him leave Jim Sarlon's room. They had mirrored a mixture of hate and fear. He did not like to be hated or feared by a girl like that.

He recited several names softly, names he had read from Sarlon's little notebook.

"Joseph Marchant, the first of the secret experts to die mysteriously. Thomas Graham, the second expert, murdered tonight. Jason Harvey, Charles Wilson, Curtis Davis, Kenneth Arthur."

As he muttered the names, he recalled that after each one were notations of their M. I. T. class, and their home town addresses. And the tiny gold pin on Jim Sarlon's vest was of a class of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Nothing more illuminating could have been found on any outsider, Cat Martin well knew. Added to this had been Jim Sarlon's unexpected revelation that he knew something of what special work was being carried on in the new Wallabout Market Land division of the immense Brooklyn Navy Yard.

He must know, or he could not have

asked so directly if Martin was a loftsmen working on the special job.

"And only one man in the whole United States is supposed to know why I have been working there," considered Martin. "And he wouldn't admit it, even if I faced the hot seat—at least for the duration of the War. I'll have to contact him at once."

He moved again toward his old jalopy. Its special rumble seat space contained several items he must employ within the next hour. One of these could make the contact he wanted, the direct communication with the man known only to a few lone wolves like Cat Martin as the "Red Chief."

It had to be that way. There were certain inner secrets of this deadly War of the World where the slightest chance of a leak had to be avoided. If it included the unpublicized death of such lone wolves as Cat Martin, or the sudden execution, personally, of certain ruthless enemy agents who could be handled in no other way, then only the Red Chief must be informed.

The Red Chief, in turn, conveyed all such intelligence in his own way to the greater organization.

STILL with that indefinite feeling that sinister, watchful eyes were upon him, Cat Martin came up alongside his coupé. He had parked in the darkest spot possible between street lamps.

Leda Latin's head and shoulders were suddenly outlined. Martin heard her utter a little gasp of surprise, and then he saw she had clamped the back of her hand to her teeth.

"Take it easy, Long Ears," said Martin. "Glad you hung around, but I'll have to sent you home in a taxi. And—"

"Yeah?"

The word was a choked whisper of terror in her throat. But Leda Latin tried to cover it up. Wasn't she from Flatbush? She apparently did not want Cat Martin to suspect she was

nearly jellied with fear.

"Yeah?" she repeated huskily, a little louder. "An' maybe you've got an idea you can give this—this guy here—taxi fare home, and—"

Her assumed toughness could not hide her terror. Her eyes glowed in the reflection of a laugh on the windshield. She was staring downward.

Martin had seen she was sitting under the coupé wheel, but he had not thought there was any special reason. There was.

The crumpled body on the coupé floor was that of a youngster, of an age to be working on his first job. And he was, or had been. Martin flicked a light of the instrument board on and off.

"Carl Randall? What in all—"

"He was here like that," whispered Leda Latin. "I thought he was switchin' wires to steal the jaloppy, an' I was about to bop him, but—he had already—"

"Been bopped," supplied Cat Martin. "I can see that. And it does look as if he was trying to switch the ignition wires of the bus. Great glory, Leda! He was the monkey on the loft job in our gang and he's been riding in my bus several times with me. So maybe he was trying to borrow the job."

"Cat, please, I think we'd better scram," said Leda. "I've stalled the cops three times, sitting here as if that wasn't on the floor. And that Inspector Walton has put the eye on your car."

Martin saw that. He noticed a uniformed policeman coming along the block. Leda Latin shivered as Martin moved her over and got under the wheel. He had the jaloppy jumping out before the policeman came along.

The queer position of the body of the young loftsmen, Carl Randall, appeared to be accounted for by his probable effort to borrow Martin's car. He had been gripping pliers and fooling with the ignition wires.

The method of murder was not ap-

parent. The youth's face, greasy and black from his recent shift at the Navy Yard, showed no marks. Only his blue eyes were open and staring, so he had died quickly.

Martin suspected there might have been an odor of rotten eggs about the car at the time of the murder. He would have to discover the means of death later.

"I'll stop and put you in a taxi, Leda," he said as he drove into a deserted narrow street that headed down toward the night-fogged East River section. "You stay home until I give you a ring, Long Ears. I'll have that switch-board job at the San Ramos Hotel for you by tomorrow night. You can count on it."

HE PARKED the car near a taxi stand corner.

"Cat Martin, you've got to come clean," said Leda tensely. "You an' me have been stallin' each other some way. Maybe I ain't as tough as I talk, an' maybe you ain't as tough as you play. Either you're a low-down, murderin' heel, or you're an F.B.I., or somethin'. If you haven't a big drag, how could you crash a San Ramos job for a dame like me?"

"You'll take the taxi at the corner," Martin said quietly. "You proved tonight you could play ball. Put this on ice, Baby. I'm not a murderer an' not much of a heel, I hope. But I'm no F.B.I. or any other kind of copper. I'm on my own, and that's all I'll ever tell you."

The girl got out of the car as if her neat legs were stiffly bound. She tried to keep her eyes off the body inside the coupé. Her cold, little hand suddenly touched Martin's cheek.

"Okay, Runt," she said hoarsely. "I can't help it if you're Murder Incorporated itself. I never thought I'd go for a mug that slapped me down like you did tonight. But I can't get sore. I'm sold all the way. San Ramos an' the high-brows, or gun mollin' on the side, I'll be waitin' for you to

ring."

She whisked away toward the lighted corner. Cat Martin swore under his breath. Uptown, downtown—East Side, West Side—Leda Latin from Flatbush, or Molly Malloy, newspaper girl . . . Jim Sarlon, who made you like him, and was in something up to his neck, or big John Widlow who made you hate him, and might even be on the square at the finish?

That was the kind of thing, and these were the kind of people a lone wolf turned up from this cock-eyed world.

The kind of people, good and bad, highbrow and lowbrow, whose liberty had to be saved by just such tough eggs as himself, playing all on his own for the old U. S. A.

Cat Martin slapped sentiment out of his mind and heart. He saw Leda Latin get into a taxicab. From there he drove carefully, making no mistakes, edging down the final slanting streets toward the glowing night lights of the nation's great Navy Yard.

His car was dark in an empty block. He flashed on instrument lights. His guess had been correct. Young Carl Randall had died of quick poisoning. Again there was the slightly bitter odor of cyanide, as there had been when Tom Graham had died. But Martin saw the tiny, blue puncture where a hypodermic needle had been punched into Randall's neck under one ear.

But what could be the reason? That Randall might have been in this old jalopy, which he could have identified, was not too great a coincidence. Coming off shift, he could have strolled past the San Ramos. Undoubtedly the news broadcast of the San Ramos tragedy and the murder of Tom Graham would have brought many of the Navy Yard boys up that way. Then Randall could have seen the car and planned a ride.

Martin held an open letter, taken from Randall's coat. He had found it in the lining, where it had gone

through a pocket hole. And it was the only scrap of writing upon the body.

"Whoever bumped him off made sure to leave nothing," reasoned Martin. "This being overlooked was an accident. And it's one of several letters, evidently. It has to be, seeing that it says this is the third and final notice that Randall had to pay up on a loan . . . Great glory!"

THE exclamation came sharply from Cat Martin's lips as he made out the scrawled signature. That was surprising enough, but from the body of the letter it seemed that young Randall had borrowed a hundred dollars some time before, and that he'd had trouble about it. How much illegal interest he had paid did not appear, but this note said emphatically that he now owed more than two hundred dollars, interest and principal.

A few lines were significant.

You were given a chance to become one of us, and you refused. We phoned you that such a decision would double the amount which must be paid. Your failure to reply leaves us no alternative but to act. As usual, a different agent will contact you once more.

Martin studied these lines. His reasoning read between them. Randall undoubtedly had been a victim of more than loan sharks. Loans apparently had been used to compel him to join some organization. That organization probably was subversive, and it meant that Randall, as a war worker, could have been forced to commit sabotage.

"A different agent?" muttered Martin grimly. "That means that borrowers do not meet the chief lender, and do not become too well acquainted with any agents by meeting them often."

He studied the flowing signature. He had a quick thought that the letter had not been signed by the person directly responsible for what amounted to a threat of violence or

murder. Especially when he saw that the signature was:

Madame D'Yle

CHAPTER VI

A Camera Condemns



FREDERICK Funston Martin's thoughts made quick connections when he saw that signature. He recognized that name at once, for of all the thousands employed in the Navy Yard, few were unacquainted with Madame D'Yle.

The ancient Brooklyn mansion that now was the rooming house conducted by Madame D'Yle, stood not far above Cumberland Street, which marked the boundary between the Federal property of the Brooklyn Navy Yard and the city. One of the oldest residential sections, the district now was anything but exclusive.

Madame D'Yle had the reputation of being the friend and sponsor of scores of poor, hopeless refugees. Martin recalled now that young Carl Randall had arrived in Brooklyn as a British refugee, but that American birth years had been established. After the youth had proved up as a citizen, he had moved away from Madame D'Yle's rooming house, which was really a refugee center.

But more was jumping through Martin's keen mind now. Soon he must dispose of Carl Randall's body somehow. In fact, he had risked too much already by keeping the corpse with him. It must be found in the ordinary routine of police affairs.

About one more connection of Cat Martin with murders and violence, and there would be no more stalling off Inspector Walton.

In his mind's eye Martin was seeing a few little items he had discovered in Jim Sarlon's notebook. One of these had been more condemning than others.

Memo—End all relations between Madame D'Yle and Peter Erdley.

Another was:

See that Curtis Davis receives the key to the deposit vault, in case there is trouble.

Martin recalled that the girl calling herself Sela Erdley had tried to steal Molly Malloy's camera. The girl had mentioned her father. He must be Peter Erdley.

And Curt Davis was one of the four key experts left alive to complete the new secret weapon. Connecting that fact with this note to the murdered Carl Randall, signed by Madame D'Yle, the status of Jim Sarlon was becoming more involved.

Martin glanced at his watch. He discovered he had little time now. He was due as locksmith on the six o'clock shift. That duty must be filled come what might. He had but four hours to do what must be done, then he must report to the Yard, without rest or sleep.

Ten minutes later, Cat Martin regretfully left the corpse of Carl Randall in an empty parking lot. Not far away the roaring hum of the big Navy Yard and its blue night lights filled the air and the sky.

Martin could see the skeleton outline of one of the Brooklyn bridges. Often he had thought of the position of the lower bridges with relation to the hundreds of millions in warships coming from the cranes, the docks and the ways of the yard.

He drove away hurriedly, and again had reached a lonely spot when he opened the rear compartment. In a few moments the flat films from the graflex plates from Molly Malloy's camera were having their acid bath under a red light.

IN THE meantime, Cat Martin connected up a compact shortwave radio set. He tuned in on a special wave and waited. A sleepy, almost surly voice replied.

He simply said "MFF," his initials reversed. The growl that came into the switch-over indicated the one known as the Red Chief had been on edge for that call.

"About T. M. and those murders?" snapped the Red Chief.

"I have been through everything on T. M., and he had only a permit for absence from the Yard, Chief," said Martin. "In my position I cannot go back of it, except to check outside. The permit was signed by Curtis Davis, in charge of the special job, and countersigned, as required, by the Commandant of the Yard. I have other matters of vital interest, but none are fully cooked."

"Okay, MFF," said the Red Chief. "But from the reports made public, a fire has to be built under that cooking fast. I see Cat Martin has been mentioned in the news broadcasts as involved in trouble during the San Ramos affair. One of these days—"

"Right, Chief, I know," said Martin quickly. "I want a certain young woman put on a PBX switchboard at the San Ramos Hotel. Her name is Leda Latin, and I will mail her address to the usual number."

"Okay, MFF. The San Ramos will have a job open for Leda Latin. Contact as usual."

Martin switched over the special short-wave connections. He judged an hour and a half had passed since he had laid Jim Sarlon cold. So now his short-wave made direct contact with a Brooklyn police precinct station.

In due course he had Inspector Walton himself, swearing at a short-wave contact he could not identify. Martin muffled his voice.

"About that complaint made by James Sarlon against a man named Martin," he said.

He let it hang there. He got results.

"What complaint?" Inspector Walton was enraged. "The blasted soft guy wouldn't permit a complaint. Who are you?"

Martin smiled as he switched off. That was piling up the score against Jim Sarlon. The rich sportsman had been knocked out and Molly Malloy had been tied up while camera plates were stolen. Yet still there had been no complaint made.

Martin turned to the films in the developing bath. He brought them up carefully to the red light.

He passed two, then whistled softly at the third. If ever an unexpected murder had been faithfully portrayed, it was here.

He could see a floating balloon on the surface of the swimming pool. A faint haze showed just where it had burst.

A tall, bulky figure showed close to the prow of the miniature destroyer where a champagne bottle was being smashed by Jolly Doran. Young Tom Graham stood tall and straight beside her.

What Molly Malloy could not have seen was what the reliable camera eye had caught. A pistol gleamed in a human hand close to the side of the destroyer.

The weapon showed neither smoke nor other evidence of being fired. Yet it was pointed directly at the bursting toy balloon. And a little man had died for boasting he had seen a big man firing what might have been an air pistol, then denying it!

Or had he died for that?

For this pistol was being pointed by a woman's hand and her slim, bare arm showed. But her face was well concealed, perhaps with intention. Only a ring glowed on one finger of the woman's murder hand. That would take enlargement to bring up, if it could be done, though Martin's magnifying glass indicated a square stone in the ring.

CAT MARTIN grunted with disgust. He picked up another film. He was instantly aroused and swearing to himself over his discovery. Here was more than a mere murder.

This film could be disaster!

He studied it, but there could be no mistake. He was looking at a small scale model of the secret weapon being constructed with such elaborate precautions inside the big Navy Yard.

This small model was on a table, and that table was not inside the Navy Yard. It was backgrounded by the cement wall of a basement. An oil furnace proved this must be in some private residence.

"And that's why Jim Sarlon and Molly Malloy were so anxious to protect the camera plates and to keep me out of the hands of the police!" Cat Martin thought grimly.

Cat Martin debated whether to contact the Red Chief again, but decided against it. That mysterious figure, the Mr. X, the unknown brains of the lone wolves' section of Naval Intelligence, was but a blind phone number that changed constantly, a special wave call on the radio that also was altered and could not be traced.

Martin himself could not have identified the Red Chief. Though he knew that this key figure of Naval Intelligence had the ear of the powers in Washington. How he had become what he was, the director of a tight little army of tough fighters of the Cat Martin brand, was known to none of those he commanded.

Martin was hot on the trail of something big, and he knew it. It was something that might mean calamity to one of the latest and most daring of experiments. But he was making progress only in discovering some angles of a new and deadly form of sabotage and murder.

But the Red Chief did not want reports of progress. All he wanted was the final results, the finish, the write-off. Cat Martin would have been worthless as a lone wolf, acting on his

own, if he had lacked the experience, wit and fighting ability to carry through alone.

Right now he was facing the catastrophic discovery that a secret war weapon for which two scientific experts already had been murdered, and the completion of which must be accomplished by four others who might be equally menaced, was no secret whatever to at least one man and one young woman.

"And they *would* have to be the kind I'd say were among the most worthwhile people I've ever encountered," Martin decided grimly. "Which would mean nothing whatever to the Red Chief. The quiet disappearance of others has been ordered for much less than shows on this camera plate."

No time now for gloomy thinking. Martin's immediate course was laid out.

He sent the battered, old jalopy along Cumberland Street. Here it scarcely seemed that the nation's greatest naval war industry was in full swing. The old stone wall separating Federal and city property might have been the facade of some vast country estate.

THE old-fashioned ovular entrances through the twelve-foot walls, now well-guarded, had the appearance of gates leading to some great private park. Only the slowly pacing guards, the camouflaged weapons and the deadly secret contrivances protecting that wall indicated the use made of the acres inside.

In three shifts, more than twenty thousand war workers were building and repairing ships of war within those acres. On wharves and docks, under cranes projecting out into the East River, the challenge of cold steel to Axis Powers was being constructed.

Martin turned up a hill. From a public telephone he made a quick, muffled call. When he came out, his gray eyes had that sleepy look that

went with the hard, crooked smile across his broad mouth.

A distant precinct station now knew where to find Carl Randall's body. Within a few minutes, a half hour at the most, the word of this latest Navy Yard murder would be news.

CHAPTER VII

A Woman of Parts



DURING the half hour Cat Martin dozed over the wheel of his car. Soon he would be aloft where lack of rest would become a serious hazard. Also, there would be much to do, checking on the safety of four key figures, of whom Curt Davis, engineer, was the leader.

When Cat Martin drove on again, he finally parked his car a short distance from a rambling house that once had been a private mansion. Its four stories loomed against the side of the hilly street. Its decadence and its use now as a rooming house were marked.

Martin went up broad, stone steps. He was watchful. But if he had been shadowed from the San Ramos earlier, surely he had long ago lost his trailer.

He glanced reflectively at the construction of the old house, noting two windows of the basement, which was set into the rocky hillside. Then Cat Martin grinned as he heard a deep, grumbling voice uttering distinct oaths with a foreign flavor. His finger on the buzzer had produced what amounted to an apparition.

An immense shadow covered all of the inside of the frosted glass of the door. When the door opened, Martin was looking at a mound that was as shapeless as a circus tent.

Madame D'Yle was enormously fat. She appeared even more spread out in the frayed bathrobe she had hasti-

ly donned. Still, although she was fat, Martin could see at once that there was nothing soft about her.

Madame D'Yle dropped her foreign accent with her deep bass growl of question. Her rumbling voice added to the impression that she was about as sentimental as a huge block of concrete.

"You know what hour it is, young man?" Her hard mouth showed little movement as she spoke. "There isn't any vacancy, and this is one heck of a time to be gettin' a body out of bed. Now go away and don't drink any more tonight."

The light hit Cat Martin's gray eyes, his twisted smile, and his bristling, rusty hair.

"I ain't looking for a room, Madame D'Yle," he said. "I had a friend who told me he had left some things here. He wanted me to get them if anything happened to him. Well, I heard on the radio that it had happened. He told me he was afraid he might be bumped off, and he has been."

"What on earth are you talkin' about, and who are you, young man?" demanded Madame D'Yle, one large, square hand brushing back her iron-gray hair. "And who's been bumped off? Talk sense."

There was a diamond on her hand the size of a dime. It was real. Her face was much wrinkled, but each fold seemed to make her features harder.

"My name's Martin," said Cat. "Frederick Funston Martin is all of it. My old man fought with Funston and he named me that. You know, the general that might have been another MacArthur?"

Martin was killing time deliberately. He had seen a door open quietly at the top of the first flight of stairs. The head of a man that poked out and ducked back was greasily black in the hall light. He seemed to have started out and then been surprised to see Madame D'Yle at the door.

"Great blazes!" Madame D'Yle's ex-

pletive was strictly Americanese. "Will you come to the point, young man?"

"Sure," said Martin softly. "Young Carl Randall was given the works to-night, according to the police. He lived here as a refugee and he left some things. He was my friend."

"Carl? That little Carl? No! *Merci!* It could not be!"

MADAME D'YLE'S tone changed to a low exclamation. It might have been simulation, but it sounded a lot like the real thing in grief to Cat Martin.

"Little Carl?" she said again. "Come in, Mr. Martin. Carl left nothing here, but he was so young and so scared when he came over. Tell me about it."

Martin thought of the threatening letter he had taken from Carl Randall's coat lining, a demand on a loan and signed by Madame D'Yle. He thought of the notation in Jim Sardon's little book about Madame D'Yle and a Peter Erdley.

He followed Madame into a kitchen that might have been an old curiosity shop, it was so filled with a variety of objects. Scores of objects, from vases to statuettes, from tapestries to bits of sculpture, had a foreign touch.

This business of sheltering refugees might be paying off for Madame D'Yle, concluded Martin, as the fat woman lumped down into a chair. Her black eyes were like shoe buttons in rolling wrinkles.

"Perhaps you have heard from Carl Randall since he moved from your place?" suggested Martin.

"*Oui!* Yes!" She said it both ways. "I have heard, Mr. Martin. He was owing me some money. He came twice on pay-days to make it up. Most of my poor people are honest like that. But why—little Carl?"

She might have been a great character actress judged Martin. He was seated close to an old desk. Several addressed letters ready for the mail

lay close to him. He could see the return address in the upper corner of one—"Madame D'Yle."

Without comparing, he knew the flowing hand was the same that had signed that demanding letter to the dead Carl Randall. For the moment, that gave him all he wanted here.

It would appear that Madame D'Yle was conducting an illegal loan shark business outside the law. And she was going to be a woman hard to shake in any story she might tell, or attitude she might assume.

"Poor little Carl," she repeated softly. "He was so overjoyed when it was proved he was born American. He had enemies, Mr. Martin?"

Suddenly it came to Cat Martin that Madame D'Yle might be merely stalling for time. And for some other reason. She had accented his own name too loudly just then.

Then he heard the murmur of voices. It seemed to come from the floor. He saw the hot air register right beside Madame D'Yle's chair, and realized the murmur must have come from there.

Madame D'Yle evidently had heard also. The murmur suddenly was louder, just for seconds, then it was cut off. Martin was on his feet. He had seen Madame D'Yle's flat, slippered foot move.

There was a slight metallic click as the hot air register slats closed and cut off the murmuring voices. But Martin had identified one familiar tone in the few louder words he had heard.

"You say Randall left nothing here, Madame D'Yle," he said quickly. "Okay, then. I'll be going."

The mammoth woman was on her feet.

"But I did not say that," she interposed. "There was something. Yes, it was here. In one of the little trunks."

Her big hands, with the diamond flashing, were moving suitcases piled against the wall. She was moving

them with a vigor that created noise. And some came sliding down with a little crash.

Martin looked around for, but could not find what might be a door leading into Madame D'Yle's basement. And the immense woman was covering up something now with her clattering of the suit-cases.

THEN, from outside in the hallway, came a queer bumping sound. It was as if something were being dragged downstairs. Madame D'Yle's big head went back, her ears alert.

"Wait, Mr. Martin! I will find what it was that little Carl left with me! I will be back! Wait! Just a minute!"

Martin purposely permitted Madame D'Yle to crowd her huge figure past him to the hallway door. But he was just behind her when she got outside.

"*Senor Caracal!* What are you doing?"

She cried out the words in Spanish. Martin saw the greasy black head of the man who had been upstairs. He was a gaunt figure, and he was dragging a small leather trunk that bumped along the stairs steps.

Beside the tall *Senor Caracal* was a small witch of a woman with a white oval face. She cried out, putting her hands over her eyes.

Madame D'Yle's Spanish was quick and expressive. Martin understood some of it, enough to know that the fat woman was angry, and yet sympathy was running through her tone.

Senor Caracal spoke in English.

"I go, for I have not with which to pay more. You will not stop me this time, I warn you, Madame D'Yle."

He moved quickly, dragging his trunk toward the door.

"You are one big fool!" cried Madame D'Yle.

But *Senor Caracal* had the front door open now.

"Come on, Maria!" he said to the little woman on the stairs.

It scarcely seemed possible that a woman of such immense size as Madame D'Yle could move so fast, or that she could have such speed and strength as she sprang forward. She seized *Senor Caracal* and his small trunk with a swooping movement of her big hands.

"You will do as I have said!" she commanded, and *Senor Caracal* and his trunk went hurtling all the way back onto the stairs. "There is the money for you from Peter Erdley, as I have told you! No one leaves my house so big a fool and so helpless!"

Madame D'Yle was holding the struggling *senor* as easily as though he were a child. He was fighting, screaming that he would not accept this money as a charity.

"It is not charity, you so big fool!" Madame D'Yle shook him as she might a small boy. "Others in my house accept what comes to them as a reward for their suffering! Peter Erdley is like one of you, and he is repaying from a fortune he gained after he came to America as a refugee long ago!"

Had Cat Martin not had the condemning evidence against the woman that he did have on his person, he would have judged the ponderous woman to be an emotional mountain of kindness. But he had to accept the hard reasoning of cold facts.

And now he saw a rear hallway door that seemed as if it must lead to the hillside basement from which voices had murmured. He moved with the quickness that always marked his decision for action.

He was set, too, for trouble. It might be killing trouble this time for he was convinced that, through that basement hot air vent he had heard the voice of none other than Jim Sardon, the rich young sportsman of the San Ramos.

Martin's movement was timed with Madame D'Yle's engagement with her fleeing lodger. Her reference to Peter Erdley had been convincing and convicting. It would seem that Madame

D'Yle's charitable aid to refugees must be something of a racket.

That brought Martin's thoughts to the faded blonde, Sela Erdley, who had been fleeing with Molly Malloy's camera. And that camera had been supposed to contain two condemning pictures, one of which had also been sought by the giant riveter, John Widow.

IN SPITE of what Martin had judged to be Madame D'Yle's at-

flesh crushed him into the basement door.

If he had desired to use violence upon the enormous Madame D'Yle, that opportunity was denied him.

Arms of bearlike strength enclosed his head and squeezed. A great knee was in his backbone, flattening him to the door panel. Whether it was her fist or a weapon of some kind that descended, he did not know, when he was permitted to slide to the floor in a whirlpool of dizziness.

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tempt to warn whoever was in that basement, he was certain they could not have had time to escape. Possibly the only exit was this door in the hallway.

His hand reached for the doorknob. And again it seemed impossible that the enormous woman could move so silently and quickly. Martin heard her scuffling rush, but she was upon him before he could turn, with all of his liteness.

He felt as if a smothering ton of

Not quite out, Martin closed his eyes, feigning unconsciousness, rather than employ one of several fighting tricks that could have removed even the weighty Madame D'Yle. He desired only that the powerful woman quit, give him space, and then, if it must be, he would have to get her out of the way.

The old house suddenly jarred with a thudding crash. The basement door cracked from its hinges and slammed down upon Martin. He was lifted

and flung several yards along the hallway, aware that he had encountered and rolled over Madame D'Yle's falling body.

Acrid smoke came belching from the basement along with the flying door. There was a second grinding crash. This was outside. The whole structure of the old mansion jolted again.

Martin heard *Senor* Caracal cry out in fright. Then other voices joined, and a woman screamed somewhere upstairs.

Madame D'Yle appeared to roll to her feet rather than arise. Martin could see her vaguely through the choking smoke that smelled of burned powder. She was swearing lustily. Her oaths were rounded and American, and they were fervid.

Martin expected flame to follow the explosion, but there was only smoke. Outside the house there were shouts, and another crash sounded, as if a couple of trucks had collided.

"Come back, you young fool!"

Cat Martin heard Madame D'Yle cry this at him. He had made quick judgment of the explosion smoke, and had seen that it had no fire behind it. His movement was half a dive that carried him onto the basement stairs.

He landed sprawling, bounced, and came to his feet in smoky blackness. A blast of cold air struck his face, coming from the outside, and it turned him. Through what had been a double door of a basement garage he could see street lights.

More than one car was moving. But there were shadowy figures just outside the smashed doors of the basement garage. Martin saw one man lift a hand and throw something. He heard a metal object strike the concrete floor of the basement.

MMARTIN skinned his knees jumping and sliding toward the object that had landed in the darkness. His groping hands failed to find it. Blinding fire suddenly flared

a little to one side.

"Incendiary bomb!" he grated, forced to shield his eyes.

Ignited magnesium and powdered aluminum were starting a swift job of spreading a blaze. Martin could have made it through the broken garage doors, but he sprang back toward the inner stairway.

"Fire!" he shouted. "Get everybody out! Madame D'Yle! Save your lodgers! It's thermite! Get them out!"

For flashing seconds, Martin had a photographic view of the lighted basement. He saw a concrete wall at the back, and an oil-burning furnace. Near the furnace was a long and heavy table.

And on the table was a scrambled mass of steel and shining aluminum. Apparently that first explosion had wrecked what Martin had guessed might be there.

"The model of the secret weapon!" he muttered. "Someone did a fast job of that! Jim Sarlon? He was down here!"

CHAPTER VIII

Puzzling Jim Sarlon



WHATEVER her part in all this, Madame D'Yle, was fighting back panic-mad men and women on the lower stairs. But for her immense size and strength, Martin judged many screaming and cursing men and women would have been piled in a hopeless mass.

Madame D'Yle was holding back the stream of humanity. She was swearing with the same vigor she had been when Martin had dived for the basement.

"Use your heads, you dumb cattle!" the big woman yelled. "The fire's down below! You'll all get out! The

basement's fireproof!"

With only the heat and no flames coming up the basement stairway, Martin judged that all in the house would be saved. To help for the moment and make it more certain, he seized the broken basement door and jammed it back into place, propping it there with a heavy chair from the hallway.

He was in the stream of fleeing refugees, all shouting and screaming in several foreign tongues. Madame D'Yle made her voice heard, booming at him.

"Mr. Martin! The basement! The girl! She's down there! Help her!"

There was no getting back down the fire-blocked inside stairway. Martin wedged through escaping lodgers on the outside steps. From the direction of the Navy Yard he heard a siren sounding an alert. Other police and fire sirens were wailing not far away.

Martin had one chance, the smashed garage doors. As he neared them, he saw a small new car wrecked, and lying on its side. There was a press sticker on the wind-shield.

Cat glanced at the basement opening now filled with white fire to which he could not expose his eyes fully. He was sick. If there had been a girl there, and she had not escaped before that explosion, there was no hope of reaching her.

He had a grim idea that the girl might be Molly Malloy. And if that were true, she had been in there with Jim Sarlon. It was impossible to determine what might have happened, but his brief view of the basement had revealed no evidence of any bodies.

"I'd say that Jim Sarlon himself set off that explosion," Cat Martin thought grimly. "And if so, then Molly Malloy was with him, and they were out before the blast. But that car?"

Sirens were in the block now. Martin risked getting to the press car's steering post. He tore off a strapped driver's license. Then he saw that

Madame D'Yle had been truthful when she had said the basement was fireproof. For the fast burning thermite bomb was expending itself, and otherwise the fierce fire would have communicated through the lower floor. As it was, the bomb had lacked sufficient heat to destroy other than the material with which it had come directly in contact.

Martin glanced at the driver's license from the press car. It was Molly Malloy's all right.

Men were coming from cars arriving from the Navy Yard and the nearby blocks, and that was Martin's cue to duck all this. With the apparent rescue of all of Madame D'Yle's lodgers, the disappearance of Molly Malloy and Jim Sarlon, no purpose could be served by his being seen here.

HAVING parked his old jalopy some distance away, he glided through the shadows, avoiding everyone. He was not far from his own car when he saw what appeared to be two bodies which apparently had been tossed into the ell corner of an old vacant house.

There was no doubt but that the first man was dead, Martin saw when he reached the bodies. The top of his head had been crushed. An identification card marked him for a war worker named Howard Ramsey. Martin had never seen him before.

The other man was still alive, his breath coming in heavy gasps. A long welted bruise across the forehead showed he had been hit hard.

"Nothing seems to make sense," muttered Martin.

It seemed impossible, but the unconscious man was the rich sportsman, Jim Sarlon!

With confusion being centered upon the still smoking refugee rooming house, Martin took a long chance. Jim Sarlon was no lightweight, but Martin carried him easily across to his own car. And he got his second surprise — and shock — when he

glanced up to see Leda Latin crouched on the coupé's running board.

"Okay, Long Ears," he said snappily. "Start spillin' it, while I get us out of this jam."

All that Cat Martin could do, hurriedly, was put the unconscious Jim Sarlon in the trunk of the coupé, leaving the lid slightly open for air. Leda Latin, with her disordered hair, her staring black eyes, and her hard-lined mouth, watched him steadily.

The girl from Flatbush waited until he had the car rolling.

"Cat," she said then, "you have to try and save a dame I was burned up over when I thought she was trying to beat my time. But a mob of guys from the Navy Yard got her and put her in a truck. They conked this Jim Sarlon, then they bumped off that other guy when he let out a squawk he wasn't in on any snatch or murder. He yelled he'd pay off something he owed them in his own way."

"That accounts for the dead man, Howard Ramsey," muttered Martin. "Like Randall, they hooked him in on that loan shark racket. It all ties up. So they have others they have put the pressure on. You're sure, Long Ears, those men in the truck were from the Navy Yard?"

"Yeah, I'm sure," Leda said. "But there's some other things for me to say first. After you tossed me out I went back to the San Ramos with a hackie friend of mine, and picked up this newspaper dame and that Sarlon guy leavin' in her car. I wanted to know how you fitted in, so I trailed them here, Cat. When I saw your bus parked down the street, I figured you was pullin' a fast one, so I let the hackie go an' then camped out by the bus."

"Trustin' little girl, huh?" said Martin. "I asked about the boys from the Navy Yard."

"Sure, Cat. There were half a dozen cars here and this truck I saw. John Widlow—he's from the Navy Yard all right—he got out and sneaked up

alongside the big house. The other guys surrounded the house, an' they are Navy Yard because I know some of the others besides John Widlow that live at the Hotel Lant, see?"

Cat Martin's mind snapped to the murder of Carl Randall and that note that was an apparent demand to pay up or carry out some order.

"You've no business chasin' around all night, Long Ears, but you've done a good job of it," said Martin. "You'll go home this time, for I'm seeing you there. That PBX job at the San Ramos has been cinched. And while you're there it might be an idea to pay special attention to Peter and Sela Erdley."

"That drug-store blonde?" sniffed Leda Latin. "An' what's the answers I'm supposed to get?"

"Finding out numbers called by the Erdley's and possibly sticking an ear into some of the incoming conversations," said Cat. "Now we head for Flatbush. An' I've got no time to fool around. I'm due on shift at six o'clock."

"Sure, Sleepless!" snapped the girl. "An' maybe you're taking this Mr. Sarlon along on the job with you? You s'pose the grabbin' off of his girl friend has anything to do with the nice new Murder Incorporated we seem to have dug up?"

"Probably," said Martin, his own mind upon what disposal might be made of Jim Sarlon. "I'd like to be sure of where Widlow stands."

THEN he had his idea. He braked to a stop in a dark street. He went swiftly through Jim Sarlon's pockets. The notebook that had been there was missing. The only paper to be found was a folded sheet with a few typed lines. It read:

Sarlon—Certain specifications delivered according to our order will possibly save Molly Malloy her useful ears, or better still, her pretty blue eyes. We have learned you have planned to destroy the model. If that is done, only the complete plans, with the key intact, will prevent you from hav-

ing a little blind girl on your hands. You wouldn't want that. Await instructions. Madame D'Yle cannot help you now. It would be well to advise the loftsmen known as Cat Martin to take it easy, for the girl's good.

"That seems fairly explicit," said Martin through set teeth. "Everything ties up with Jim Sarlon having possession of something he should have avoided having. It even appears I have been suspected."

"Meaning what?" demanded Leda Latin.

"Meaning you're getting out here, Long Ears," said Martin. "And you're walking over to that women's hotel on the corner and registering there under another name for the night. Make it Mary Smith, just plain Mary Smith. I'll buzz you as soon as I'm off shift this afternoon."

"Me? In a dames' roost?" The girl from Flatbush was scornful. "Say—"

Cat Martin leaned over and kissed her ear.

"Take that along for company," he said, and grinned. . . .

Finding a spot in the fogged early morning where traffic was dead, was not difficult in this section of Brooklyn. Especially, close to the San Ramos Hotel.

Cat Martin lifted Jim Sarlon from the coupé trunk and deposited him gently in a doorway. The sportsman was still out, but he was breathing regularly. Martin slipped the snatch note back into Sarlon's pocket.

Lacking time to return to the Hotel Lant and change clothes, Martin headed directly for the Brooklyn Navy Yard. The whistle would be blowing for the six o'clock shift in another half hour.

He stopped once. Then, having contacted the San Ramos Hotel and made sure Jim Sarlon would be picked up quickly, he decided that orders from the Red Chief now were necessary once more.

For long minutes he worked the short-wave call without result. He had just time then to reach a public

phone and call a blind number. Again he got no response.

"That's almighty funny," mused Martin. "With all that's been cracking, the Red Chief should be at one spot or the other. We all may be playing a lone hand on this deal, but if he has some other agent in on it, there's no telling how soon we'll be crossing each other up."

Cat Martin put his battered coupé in a parking lot. He rode a bus to the Navy Yard, showing up just in time to get in line for identification, and to reach the crew going on the special job in the Wallabout Market Land.

One of his first jobs this morning would be to employ his own listening post to check up on four experts now left in charge of a secret war weapon that somehow appeared to have ceased to be secret.

Inside the ovular entrance, Cat Martin surveyed the crews separating for the various divisions. He avoided mixing in with the groups whose sole topic of conversation was the murders of the night.

MARTIN detected fear among the war workers that had not been evident before. But with it was a grimness of purpose on the faces of some. With others, there was something that Martin did not like—a furtiveness, an effort to avoid discussing the night's tragedies. Martin marked a couple of men coming into his own outside crew who appeared to be afraid of something.

"That's the blasted bad part of it," he thought grimly. "It's a cinch that more than one of these boys has been trapped by that easy loan idea. It would seem that I have another call to make upon Madame D'Yle."

Beyond the teeming yard where the two immense drydocks were being constructed for the super-dreadnaughts planned for the coming two years, a wooden-walled enclosure shut off a smaller shipways and a huge crane.

Cat Martin watched the double checking here of the few men especially picked for the final work upon a new destroyer. Yet the men entering that enclosure knew as little about the inside of the nearly completed warship as any citizen who never had been within a thousand miles of the Brooklyn Navy Yard.

Martin's first look around was for the possible appearance of big John Widlow. Though it was inconceivable to him that the giant riveter would be on the job after the night's happenings.

Cat Martin had to admit he had been mistaken, though. For, with his jutting chin and his mocking eyes, John Widlow was inside, all ready to swing to his place where a few outside plates remained to be placed.

Cat Martin walked deliberately close to him. Widlow gave no sign that he had seen Martin at the San Ramos. He had the same scornful smile for him as he had for all men smaller than himself.

Martin went up the outside rigging, divided in his mind as to what his next move toward Widlow should be. For the moment, he was intent upon seeing four men buried inside the new destroyer.

CHAPTER IX

Death from High Up



RUFF GRIDDLEY, rigging foreman, had a jaundiced eye upon the swollen face and all-night-out appearance of Cat Martin. Martin gave him his broad-mouthed, crooked grin and escaped up the skeleton irons of the huge arm on the mobile crane.

"I'd lay off any other monkey with a hangover like that," he heard Grid-dley growl after him. "He can cause

more trouble than a nest of hornets, and still do twice the work of any other loftsmen."

Waiting for the hooks to swing up a deck plate, Cat Martin had a glance at a *Sentinel* he had grabbed at the gate. Headlines blazed the red murders of the night.

"But not a word about Molly Malloy or Jim Sarlon," he mused thoughtfully. "They've found her car, but keeping quiet would be smart. What's all this?"

A paragraph in the *Madame D'Yle* fire story caught his eye.

Peter Erdley, retired millionaire shipping man who has aided many refugees, aided in housing those who were temporarily without homes at the *Madame D'Yle* place. Mr. Erdley, who resides with his charming daughter, Sela, at the San Ramos Hotel, is said to have sponsored *Madame D'Yle* in her effort to find homes for many refugees.

Cat Martin wondered if he might have not been more valuable outside than on the job today, but he went swinging out on a hooked load of deck plates.

Looking down, he could see the inside of the incompleting warship hull, its middle deck still being open. Near the forward end, framed along the bottom, was a long closed structure. Four men were passing in a number of workmen. Martin identified the four experts, the survivors of murder who were left on the job of the secret war weapon.

Curt Davis, tall and thin, was the head of the four. Beside him was Jason Harvey, a little man, with a prematurely bald head. Jason Harvey had been associated with Tom Graham, the murdered chemist, in the testing of materials of the secret weapon.

Charles Wilson and Ken Arthur were both blond, husky engineers. They had been football stars within the past three years.

Martin's sharp eyes missed nothing as the crane arm swung him to the

partly completed deck. He saw big John Widlow raise his huge head, glance at him, then quickly drop his gaze. He wished he could definitely place John Widlow's relation to the murders of the night and the kidnapping of Molly Malloy. And as his feet touched the forward deck, it was just as well that John Widlow missed the sudden, sleepy narrowing of Martin's gray eyes and the twisting of his broad-mouthed grin.

"So help me," whispered Cat Martin, "whatever Widlow knows of the Molly Malloy snatch, he's going to tell, and the hard way. I don't know how, but it will have to be soon."

He was swinging aloft again on the empty hooks of the giant crane arm. He could see the full shape of the warship under him, that had been mentioned as a destroyer. The flare of its hull was, however, far from the regulation slimness of a tin can of the Navy. That was because of the secret weapon—if it still was a secret—enclosed in that framed structure.

Martin could but guess the emotions of the four engineer experts. By this time, although the news had not hinted it, these four men must realize they were on the list of a ruthless, mysterious killer or killers.

CURT DAVIS, directing the changing crews of machinists and fitters who were not retained long enough to learn too much, might be the one most in danger, thought Martin. It was tall Curt Davis who had been mentioned in Jim Sarlon's little notebook. Something about Curt Davis being furnished with a key to a deposit box, in case something happened.

Curt Davis had passed Tom Graham out of the Yard last night to his death. Davis and the other three experts had been bunking inside. In fact, at least two of them had always been present in the structure of the secret weapon, having their meals sent to them, or eating in one of the Yard

cafeterias.

The crane man signaled he was moving back to pick up a steel beam. That swung Cat Martin directly above the closely guarded superstructure inside the queerly proportioned warship. He could see that the Navy Yard police and Marines had been doubled in number this morning though none of these guards were permitted inside the framed housing.

Cat Martin was one of the few who really knew what was being constructed, and he had learned that his own way, not being supposed to know. His one spot of observation and listening was an unfinished ventilator shaft, when he had opportunity to get to it.

"Cat! Watch out! Hey! You asleep?"

Griddley, the rigging foreman, was bellowing at him. The crane arm hooks had just missed smacking into a temporary cage mast. His eyes and mind upon murder, Martin ducked just in time to avert being jammed into the steel mast, fending himself off with a quick hand.

The cursing crane man, whose nerves likely were jangled, let the arm cable drop abruptly, evidently fearing Cat Martin would be caught. Martin grinned at him, looked down again, then swore sharply.

He had seen a row of lunch boxes and thermos bottles along the secret weapon framework. It appeared to Martin as if one of the containers had been hit by something and knocked over. The shining metal container was rolling toward Curt Davis and the three men with him. Because of the staccato riveting hammers and the clangor of other steel on steel, it was impossible to determine if a shot had been fired.

But it seemed that little Jason Harvey, the chemist, had seen or heard something that caused him to hurl himself against one of the other men. This happened to be Charles Wilson, one of the two blond engineers.

Cat Martin asked for no more warn-

ing than that. He was still close to the cage mast his body had just missed. He twisted, jumped, and turned in mid-air, fingers gripping the steel lattice of the mast.

Martin was dropping, hand over hand, headed for the inside of the hull and the engineers' group when he saw the shining vacuum bottle explode.

Perhaps Ken Arthur, the other blond engineer, had seen what was happening and had thrown himself upon the rolling container. Because as Cat Martin saw it, Ken Arthur's hurtling body knocked Curt Davis to one side. Then Ken Arthur had fallen, and his heavy body was almost upon the vacuum container as it let go.

GUARDS and Marines, bewildered, were turned that way, uncertain as to the cause of the strange explosion and the position of the men whose safety was their responsibility. Martin dropped from the cage mast, turned over and landed on his feet. His eyes were fixed upon the row of lunch boxes and half a dozen other vacuum bottles ranged along the side of the superstructure.

Curt Davis, staggered by impact with Ken Arthur, and apparently confused, was staring down at Arthur who had not moved. Although a Marine thrust out a rifle barrel, Cat Martin dived under it and hit Curt Davis at the knees.

The collision had carried both men across the planked floor and just beyond the corner of the frame superstructure when there was another crackling explosion. Fragments of steel and wooden splinters stung Martin's legs.

But he was up, pushing Curt Davis toward the door of the frame building around the secret weapon, when a Marine and a guard jammed into him with their rifles. Perhaps it was only his slow, famous grin that saved him from a bullet.

"What is it? Ken! Hey, Ken!"

Curt Davis, eyes upon the fallen engineer, attempted to free himself. Up above, the riveting machines and the other clangor died down. A swearing Marine sergeant held Martin to the wall.

To his profane demand, Martin made a short reply.

"Stay away from the blasted vacuum bottles over there! Look, you cross-eyed lug! That man there is either dead or badly hurt! I saw a vacuum container let go, and I started down just as Curt Davis here missed being killed by a thin hair!"

Attention being turned then fully upon Ken Arthur who had not moved, Curt Davis gripped Martin's arm.

"You mean . . . Good Lord! Why, Ken Arthur jumped between me and that thing! He—"

"That's right, Davis!" Martin's gaze was swinging along the upper edge of the high walls enclosing the warship job. "And if Jason Harvey hadn't jolted Wilson out of the way, there could be at least three of you dead!"

It had been but seconds. The engineer, Ken Arthur, had died instantly. His ribs had been crushed in, and his body had been mangled by the thermos bottle that had so suddenly been converted into a deadly bomb. He had taken the full force of the of the blast.

"Okay, Sergeant!" Griddle, the foreman, was down now. "Cat Martin's clear. I saw the whole thing, and he made a jump that nothing short of a jungle monkey would have tried! I don't know how, but he saved Davis from that second explosion."

Released, Cat Martin said tersely:

"I'd dump all those thermos containers, or have them examined, and quickly. They may have been opened at the gate all right, but it wouldn't be too much to expect that high explosives could be found under false bottoms."

"But how—what set them off?"

That was Curt Davis, and behind him, his face as white as chalk, Jason

Harvey, the chemist, probably supplied the right answer. His thin hands locked together against his chin.

"Bullets did it!" said Harvey. "Fellows, when they can get at us in the heart of the Yard when we're under guard, we're licked! We couldn't hear a shot in all the racket."

Cat Martin was acting directly upon that belief. He went up to the surface deck, eyes intent upon all workmen there. Big John Widlow was his immediate goal.

BUT Widlow was standing there, his pneumatic riveter still gripped in his hands. His helper was beside him, and both were standing in the same spot where they had been working. Martin's quick survey showed that big John Widlow was not and had not been in position to see the row of lunch boxes and thermos bottles which had exploded into one more murder.

Cat Martin expected and heard the order coming from higher up. All work on the new destroyer job and the secret weapon had been ordered ended for the shift.

Both Yard police and Marines were taking over the enclosure. Every workman was being searched from shoe soles to his hair.

And the searchers found exactly nothing that might have been used as a weapon to set off the thermos bombs. A shot could have been fired by any one of more than a hundred men who had been within range of the murder explosives.

Because of his quick thinking, Cat Martin was summoned by Curt Davis. He was called into a small office adjoining the workroom in the hull.

Charles Wilson, who had been a buddy to Ken Arthur, was white and sick. Jason Harvey had taken a stiff drink and passed a flask to the others.

"That was a brave thing you did, Martin," said Harvey. "We'll have Naval Intelligence here in force in a short time. Could you recall see-

ing any smoke, or anything that looked like a gun being fired when you jumped?"

"If I had, I'd never have lost the killer who did it," said Martin. "I can't tell Naval Intelligence more than that I saw the thermos bottles explode. Except the first one rolled as if it had been hit once and knocked over, then hit a second time before the explosive was set off."

There were times when Cat Martin had been tempted to pass along to Naval Intelligence some of his inside information. Such a time was now, when he was fully aware that other lives might depend upon more than individual, lone wolf action being taken.

For one thing, it seemed that he alone knew that there was the matter of a few war workers possibly being coerced by loans into acts of sabotage. It had seemed a good theory when he had found a letter upon the murdered Carl Randall. Yet Cat Martin had almost discarded this lead. It would have to be a ratty kind of an American, he had all but decided, who could be forced into sabotage and murder to save his own skin from a loan shark.

Then it had come to Martin that the loan idea might be a cover-up. That letter apparently overlooked in the lining of Carl Randall's coat could have been planted there. It might have been desired that it be found. Which made Madame D'Yle's signature doubtful.

And from the kidnaping note left on Jim Sarlon, it was evident the saboteurs, enemy aliens, criminal killers for pay, or whatever they were, knew something of Cat Martin's activities. Otherwise Jim Sarlon would not have been warned to call him off.

That line of thought also suggested that he was suspected of being in league with Jim Sarlon, however Sarlon might be implicated. Or was he off again on a wrong lead thinking that?

Suppose Jim Sarlon was behind all this, as possession of a model of the secret weapon indicated? His being knocked out at the Madame D'Yle fire could have been faked. Even the snatching of Molly Malloy could be a red herring.

MOREOVER, considering the exploding thermos bottle, the latest murder weapon, in some detail, Cat Martin had still another and more amazing angle to review. There might be a good reason why a search of all the workmen from the secret warship had not turned up any kind of a gun.

"There's just a possibility that an air pistol could fire an explosive projectile with such force as to set off those thermos containers," he told himself grimly. "But there are three gazabos mixed up in this thing who are due to talk, one way or another."

As these ideas flashed into his mind, Curt Davis, a solemn, scholarly man, thanked Martin again for saving his life.

"And," he said, "I've been given to understand you make a habit of that sort of thing. If the cause of his death had not been so quickly effective, I was informed you might have saved the life of Tom Graham last night, Martin."

That came as a shock. How did Curt Davis or anyone connected with him know that he had tried to save Graham? He had believed he had escaped the attention even of tough Inspector Walton in that.

He thought again of Jim Sarlon, and of the possibility of a connection between Curt Davis and Sarlon. But Sarlon had not known of Cat Martin's action in the swimming pool. Or had he?

So many odd angles now were crossing him up, that Martin did not trouble to deny what Curt Davis had said.

"I did try to get Tom Graham out of the pool," he said. "But I was

too late. I've been wondering, Mr. Davis, who is so hot after what you fellows are doing that he's ready to commit wholesale murder? It's none of my business, except as a guy who works here, but there seem to be alien enemies planted everywhere. Suppose an enemy got hold of the plans of whatever it is you fellows are experimenting with down here?"

"That would do no one any good," Curt Davis said promptly. "If an enemy had a complete model of what we are building under cover, there would be one vital thing lacking. He couldn't make it work. No one of us alone could make it work. That takes—"

Jason Harvey cut him off shortly and angrily.

"Aren't you talking a little too much, Davis, to a workman whose only recommendation is that he saved your life? I think, Martin, we can tell your story to Naval Intelligence. Don't think your saving Mr. Davis isn't appreciated, but all of our lives seem now to depend upon everyone keeping quiet."

Cat Martin gave them his hard, crooked grin.

"Well, I hope I'll be seein' you all here on my next shift," he said. "And Mr. Harvey, I don't think I like you worth a hoot. In fact, if you were a little on the tougher side, you might have more respect for a workman when I finished with you."

He left Jason Harvey with his mouth hanging open. He saw a slow smile light up Curt Davis's bony face, and wondered why it appeared that all the good guys had to be on the wrong spot, and snooty eggs like Jason Harvey were on the up and up?

For as he made his way out of the big yard, he was thinking of what Curt Davis had said.

"There would be one vital thing lacking—"

And Curt Davis was down in Jim Sarlon's notebook for some kind of a key to a deposit box, in which pos-

sibly reposed that "vital part" of the secret weapon.

CHAPTER X

Order for a Song



OUTSIDE, Cat Martin got his parked jalopy and headed for midtown Brooklyn. Within the hour he had called "Mary Smith." He had already put through a call to the San Ramos Hotel and found out that the Red Chief had somehow arranged for Leda Latin to go on the private switchboard at the big hotel.

"Keep a special check on calls to and from Peter Erdley," Martin instructed Leda. "Also, anything in the way of calls put through by Sela Erdley might be of interest, Long Ears."

"Now it's that cosmetic blonde!" snapped Leda. "Okay! I'll probably burn the ears off some of them hotsytotsy dames at the San Ramos! How about Molly Malloy, Cat? Any word?"

"None," said Martin wearily. "Get on the job, Long Ears, and I'll give you a buzz as soon as I've had a few hours in the hay."

He made a quick call to the Hotel Lant without giving his name. He discovered that big John Widlow apparently had not gone from the Navy Yard to his hotel after the shift was cut off.

He called a blind number. This time he got the Red Chief.

"About time, MFF!" snapped the Red Chief. "It begins to look as if the regular boys will have to clean this thing up! With this new murder at the Yard, where are you getting? What have you up your sleeve, if anything?"

Cat Martin chuckled softly. When the Red Chief admitted the regular Naval Intelligence might have to cut in, he was burning.

"I have enough to start getting tough in one or two places, Chief," he said. "First, I'm out to make a big mug sing about a snatch that doesn't seem to have reached the public prints. If I can find a certain missing newspaper girl, we may be able to save for Uncle Sam what he believes to be a new secret weapon. Otherwise, that secret weapon might as well be exhibited in the Dodgers' ball park."

"What?" The Red Chief's voice crackled. "A newspaper girl? You referring to an M. M., of the *Sentinel*?"

"Exactly, Chief! How about my making a bird sing, even if he never comes back?"

There was sudden, angry fervor in the Red Chief's voice.

"Okay, MFF! Only see that he comes back—alive! Then call me! I may want to interview your bird personally!"

Cat Martin was puzzled. There was a personal feeling in the Red Chief's voice which he had never before heard. Usually the Red Chief's tone was about as wooden as that of a police operator.

And the Red Chief had evidently been given a line on the kidnaping of Molly Malloy. Cat Martin swore under his breath. That came of playing the lone wolf game. It was a part of the system that you never knew any other of the "lone wolves." Even some man who seemed to be fighting you might be one of the Red Chief's men.

The other lone wolf would not know it either. That sometimes brought amazing results. It was the one system of espionage that had no chance either of a leak or a sell-out, unless the lone wolf was ready to cash in.

Cat Martin had one warmly satisfying thought, though. He had the Red Chief's assent to getting tough with a mug to whom he felt he owed everything he could hand him.

Martin stayed away from the Hotel Lant. He was as fresh as a daisy after

three hours sleep in an obscure hotel.

His first call was to the San Ramos Hotel. Leda Latin was already on the job.

"And here's a payoff, Cat," she said quickly. "John Widlow is meeting Sela Erdley in his car in half an hour. At the chain drugstore at Fifty-Ninth and Fourth Avenue, Bay Ridge."

"You're okay, Long Bars," said Cat. "I'll be seeing you."

H E HUNG up and hurried out to find a messenger to meet Sela Erdley before she could keep her date with big John Widlow.

"When you see a blonde who is trying to look like a glamour girl ten years too late come out of the San Ramos, looking for a taxi," Cat Martin told the "boy" he found, "you ask if she isn't Miss Sela Erdley. Then tell her that Mr. Widlow sent you to tell her to take a taxicab to four-sixteen Southwest Shore Road, at once. Tell her Mr. Widlow said his car will be parked at the side, and for her to dismiss the taxi and come right on in."

"For that kind of dough I'd tell Dorothy Lamour she's being paged by Gargantua," said the wizened aging messenger boy, folding two sawbucks.

Cat Martin was in a doorway near the chain drug-store where John Widlow was to meet Sela Erdley when Widlow's huge head showed in the driver's window of the sedan Martin knew he sported. Martin watched Widlow back carefully into a parking space half a block from the drug-store.

That there should be something between Sela Erdley, daughter of that publicized philanthropist, Peter Erdley and John Widlow, was of itself an important break. What might come out of bringing big John Widlow and Sela Erdley together under circumstances they little expected remained to be seen.

Widlow was watching the curbing

as he got his sedan almost placed in the parking space. Cat Martin crossed the street with light steps. He opened the car door just as Widlow heard him and turned.

Except for a few youngsters loafing up by the drug-store, the sidewalk and street were empty. Even if it had not been, Martin's entrance into the sedan was accomplished so quickly and quietly that it would not have attracted attention.

His best punch had failed with the giant Widlow the night before. This time Martin made sure. He swung a weighted leather sap solidly and conclusively behind Widlow's right ear.

Martin pulled Widlow's slumping bulk over on the seat, letting him slide half-way to the floor. He got out, went around the sedan, and was quickly under the wheel. Now to discover whether Sela Erdley had kept her revised date with John Widlow, accepting the instruction from the messenger as genuine.

"That depends upon how the blond daughter of Peter Erdley happens to be involved with Widlow," mused Cat Martin. "Anyway, my gorilla friend, we'll see what comes out of the bag."

Half an hour later, Cat Martin drove alongside a small bungalow. The address was four-sixteen Shore Road. But the cottage was at a rocky, beach dead-end, with the nearest other house two long, vacant blocks away.

Martin parked Widlow's sedan alongside a side door, where the car remained visible from the end of the street. He made sure that Sela Erdley, if she had come in a taxi, could not miss seeing it.

Widlow's huge head was rolling. He was slowly coming out of a fog. Martin applied the stimulation of hard slaps with his strong, stubby hand.

As Widlow's pale eyes opened, he was looking at the business end of a blue steel automatic. It was pointed at his thick neck.

"This baby won't make much noise, an' there's nobody to hear it, anyway," stated Martin. "Crawl out of the bus on your hands and knees, Widlow."

WIDLOW'S growl was bear-like and he tried to display his usual mocking smile.

"You ain't got the nerve, Martin," he said. "If I don't move, you don't dare to shoot. I think I'll stay here and wait it out."

Martin's grin was crookedly cheerful, and his gray eyes were suddenly sleepy. The automatic jumped and flamed. The bullet just scored Widlow's big neck, the powder searing the side of his face.

And the muzzle was jammed back into his throat. Martin smiled.

"Don't move your hands, Widlow," His voice was coldly quiet. "I don't intend to kill you. Not yet. That would be dumb. But before you can stop it, I'll crack both your collarbones. A guy with two busted collarbones isn't worth much. Start crawling."

Widlow's battleship chin actually seemed to recede. He ground his teeth together, turned over slowly, and started crawling. The gun was still in his neck as Martin used one hand to unlock the bungalow door.

"Down the stairs to the left, and stay on your hands and knees," he warned, as he glanced up the street and saw that it was still empty.

That cottage had been rented and occupied by Cat Martin at odd times for the past six months. He knew that the coal bin was solidly built, with a cut-off door of oak planks.

"Just what in thunder is all this?" Big John Widlow's huge body was shaking, as if his powerful muscles were tense for some quick effort. "You can't—"

Martin heard a car coming toward the bungalow in the dead-end Shore Road. His free hand swung the handy, weighted leather.

"I don't like to take advantage," he

muttered, as Widlow's figure sagged and went down on his face. "But several poor devils have died without a chance. And Molly Malloy had honest blue eyes. I'll apologize, Widlow, if I've made a mistake."

He shut the unconscious riveter behind the thick door of the coal bin. Thirty seconds later he was standing just inside the front door of the bungalow.

Sela Erdley's belated, cosmetized glamour looked terrible in the afternoon sun. Only a tight silk net kept her blondined hair from going stringy. She was studying the bungalow door with narrowed, greenish eyes as she pressed the buzzer.

Martin surveyed her through the slit of glass at the side of the door. He saw the hackie turning his cab and pulling up as if to wait. He imitated Widlow's heavy voice as he fumbled with the door's inside knob.

"Send that cab back to town," he growled. "I'm not wantin' anyone spotting us together."

He was set for quick violent action, even if it involved holding the hackman for awhile. But the faded blonde turned and sent the taxi on its way.

"All right," she said then. "What's all the sudden idea of a new place?"

Sela Erdley's voice was a revelation. She was on edge, and nervous. That "new place" struck home to Martin. He snapped the door open.

SELA ERDLEY struck and clawed at him, but Martin's stubby fingers had the facility and strength that came of pulling ropes, climbing high rigs and other exercises. One hand clamped the girl's mouth firmly, while the other took care of her clawing hands.

He whipped half a dozen hitches of light rope around the society daughter of Peter Erdley, laid her gently on the floor, then she turned loose the most venomous tongue he had ever heard.

"You'll take your last rap for this,

Cat Martin!" she wound up. "You see I know who you are! And you won't be sitting it out in stir either."

"Thanks, Miss Erdley," said Martin, smiling down upon her. "You are unexpectedly informative in your choice of language, and in identifying me. You wouldn't want to save your boy friend from the licking of his life, now would you? As the daughter of the apparently well-known and respected Peter Erdley, you keep queer company and talk a strange lingo."

"Widlow? Is he here? Why did he send for me? How—"

"No time to draw pictures, Miss Erdley," interrupted Martin. "Yes, Widlow is here. But I sent for you. Do you want to tell me something that might save both of you? Like what have you done with Molly Malloy, of the *Sentinel*?"

Her teeth clicked shut. Her greenish eyes roved, apparently seeking some evidence of Widlow's presence.

"I don't know what you're talking about," she muttered thinly, embellishing her denial with a curse. "If you're a copper or an F.B.I., you haven't anything on me, and you'll pay for—"

Martin caught the hitched rope around her with one hand. He carried her, squirming and cursing fluently, down the basement stairs. He propped her up against one wall, went back and bolted the basement door.

He went over and dropped inside board covers upon the two small windows. The only light now came from a single bright bulb.

Sela Erdley was staring at him. She had apparently run out of bad words. Martin heard movement in the locked coal bin. Then big John Widlow was kicking the heavy, locked door, grumbling oaths.

Cat Martin's half-lidded gray eyes smiled down at the girl. He lifted each of her hands below the ropes around her wrists, looking at them intently. He ignored Widlow's kicking and raving profanity inside the coal

bin.

"That's a swell ring you have, Miss Erdley," he said softly. "By the way, do you happen to be left-handed?"

The expensive stone in the ring on the third finger of her left hand flashed up at him. The setting was odd, a long, clawlike piece that extended all the way from her knuckle to the base of her finger.

"No, I'm not left-handed, you punk!" The girl was staring at him. "Maybe if you take that ring you'll—"

"I don't want the ring," he said, turning it on her finger.

The undeniable mark of long service on that finger was evident. Fingers of the right hand showed no trace of any ring having been worn.

"Just what are you looking for?" demanded the girl stridently.

"I'm looking for a hand that pulled a sneaking murder, a killing that took in women and children," said Martin. "The owner of that hand would want the picture in Molly Malloy's camera, which you tried to steal."

"You think that's why I grabbed that dame's picture box?" Sela Erdley's voice was shrill. Then she laughed loudly. "Why, you're not half as smart as I was afraid you might be. That isn't the reason—"

CAT MARTIN knew she must be telling the truth. But the splintering of wood warned him and he pivoted. Big John Widlow was coming out of the coal bin, his huge head lowered, shoulders in a crouch, his hamlike fists low and ready.

He looked much like an infuriated bull roaring into an arena.

"You—"

The giant riveter resembled a great gorilla about to annihilate a small and helpless monkey, in comparison of size between him and Cat Martin.

"I'm going to kill you, gun or no gun!"

Cat Martin stepped lightly to one side, his hands hanging at his sides. He flew over John Widlow's head, strik-

ing at the far end of the room.

"There goes the gun, you girl-snatching ape," said Martin. "You're not killing anybody, you sneaking traitor. You're going to sing now, John, and I mean sing."

Big John was upon him with a rush. Cat Martin merely evaded one swinging fist by just enough to feel the breeze of it across his face. He went under big John's arm, twisting, and still he waited.

Roaring, big John turned with remarkable agility for his size. This time he feinted as if for another knockout swing. Then he changed his attack abruptly, as Cat expected.

Once a man knows a fighter uses his knee and his feet, that's what he looks out for. Big John's foot was as fast as his punching fist. Only Cat Martin was a split second faster. His stubby hands flashed down as his cat-like body moved only the number of inches to carry big John's foot past his belly. Then big John's foot continued on upward and Cat Martin went all the way under him.

The cement floor was jolted so hard by big John's weight that it seemed it must have cracked. He landed flat on his back, rolling.

"You are going to sing, John," repeated Cat Martin. "You can tell where Molly Malloy is now while you're conscious, or your girl friend will talk watching you crack up."

CHAPTER XI

Heart of a Woman



BIG John Widlow, ominously silent, moved more warily now. He had discovered that brute strength was a handicap if it could not be applied.

Cat Martin was still smiling at him, almost sleepily. Cat Martin's hands

were slightly extended, as if he had no intention whatsoever of using his iron fists.

"You fool!" cried out Sela Erdley. "Stop rushing him! Don't you see that's what he wants! Make him come to you! Break for the door!"

"Smart girl," approved Cat Martin, as the warning halted big John. "One way or another, baby, the big ape will sing. It may sound like the devil after he's had his teeth kicked out, but still he'll sing."

His taunt failed to bait big John whose heavy feet were planted wide apart as he waited. Martin could see Sela Erdley strained forward, watching. He had to admire her for her brain.

Then he went off his toes, apparently heading into a dive that would strike big John's knees. It was the fastest, trickiest feint a fighter could have employed. For his downward lunge pulled big John over, his fists striking from above.

Cat Martin literally turned with feline quickness in mid-air, shifting to one side, alighting on his feet and shooting in a straight left to big John's lowered face. That brought big John partly upright. Again it was a fist, Cat Martin's right, that smashed into an ear and staggered big John. Coming around, cursing, big John was in a bad position, for Martin's speed had carried him all the way behind him.

"Look out, I told you!" the girl's voice shrilled, trying to prevent big John's new rush. "Don't—"

Having been smacked by Cat Martin's left and crossing right, big John thought he saw his chance. For Cat Martin was close to the concrete wall. Big John must have judged he could crush him there like some small bug. And Cat Martin seemed to realize his bad position, and had crouched swiftly, his hard left starting upward again.

This time though, without apparently making any move to dive, Martin dropped low and jumped. His

bristling, rusty head went deep into big John's stomach, and one of his darting hands gripped big John's right toe.

Big John's head was not as hard as the concrete against which his skull crunched as he went over Cat Martin's head. This time big John fell, tried to get to his feet.

Sela Erdley screamed out once, then was quiet during the following ten or fifteen seconds. Cat Martin's fists were hardly more visible than would have been the steel teeth of a flying buzzsaw.

Big John's front teeth partly choked him as they went back into his throat. His enormous nose flattened. One ear was crumpled. And still Cat Martin's knuckles ripped lefts and rights from forehead to chin, beating big John to the floor, where his ham-like hands dropped at last and were motionless.

"And that's partly for the use of a knee and dirty fighting, and partly for Molly Malloy," said Cat Martin, stepping back. "You can still hear, and you can still talk. Start singing, or so help me, I'll save the nation the job of standing you against a wall. What have you done with Molly Malloy? Sing, blast you, sing!"

BIG JOHN started to mumble through bloody, crushed lips, trying to get to his hands and knees.

"You—"

Martin pretended not to hear the vituperation that poured from Sela Erdley's scarlet mouth. Big John's words were incoherent and had no clear meaning. Martin waited until the girl paused for breath.

"You know, Miss Erdley, if he won't loosen up, I intend to kill your boy friend," he said with icy calmness. "And I then will leave you here with his corpse for someone to find. You will have a lot of explaining, Miss Erdley, and I have the good sense to be all the way out of the picture by that time. Have you any ideas of

something better?"

The faded blonde was staring at Cat Martin. His crooked smile was the same as always. Big John groaned, managed to sit up.

"Blamed if I don't believe you would do it, too," said the girl. "Okay. I don't think John will ever sing, because if he does, he would be bumped off just the same, so I'll—"

"Curse you, Sela!" Big John's voice rumbled. "You talk, an' they'll give you the same dose they're giving that other dame! After you're blind, you won't be playing Peter Erdley's high-brow daughter! You'll—"

Cat Martin caught something then in Sela Erdley's greenish eyes, the way she looked at big John, that was deeper than mere collusion between them, criminal or otherwise.

"You're a rat, a big one, but still a rat, John," the girl cut in with a quietness she had not before shown. "But when I play, it's all the way, and you wouldn't know about that. Cat Martin, if I tip off all I know about this newspaper dame, will you give John a break? Even if what I can tell you isn't enough to save her?"

Big John shook his head, with its swollen, bleeding face. He cursed, started to get up. Martin slammed him back to the floor, and he stayed there, still mumbling oaths.

Cat Martin had thought he had plumbed all the depths, and come in contact with all the heights of human emotion at one time and another. But there was always something new in this cock-eyed world.

Like the flaming-eyed girl from Flatbush, Leda Latin. Saying she was sold all the way, whether it was a job at the San Ramos or becoming a gun moll, whatever way Cat Martin turned out.

He was fairly convinced that John Widlow might fear death. But he was also sure that John Widlow was more afraid of the kind of death he would invite by singing, than he was of dying here and now. Martin felt

he had to take what he could get, and quickly.

"It's a deal, sister," he said to Sela. "I'll let it go at what you're willing to spill. Only, I'll have to make sure you're not trying a little doublecross to save yourself or Big John."

The girl's green eyes were half closed.

"Then you'll have to take the tip and dig for the rest, Cat Martin," she said. "I don't know the big guy who's bought in with a little bunch that used to be Bundists. But if you make my father—er, make Peter Erdley believe it is to save me, I think he could name someone posing as a refugee who can tell you where to find the dame."

CAT MARTIN was only partly satisfied with that. A glance at big John Widlow showed that he must have lost consciousness. And he had told the girl this was a deal.

"That isn't much," he said. "You just tipped me off to something though. You're not Peter Erdley's daughter. So if Erdley happens to find out about you and John Widlow—"

"Okay, then! I'm not Sela Erdley! But, oh, give John a break! I know what you've been thinking, but you're in the wrong alley! I'm Sela Widlow and John's my brother! Now will you—"

"Well, I'll be—" Cat Martin smiled a little, shaking his head. "What a mess this war has made of some people. I'm following your lead. You're staying here with John. I'll come back tonight, and what happens then depends upon what comes out of the bag."

"But John — he'll die, like that! Can't you do something? You hurt him bad. I think you did mean to kill him!"

"I'll do something," muttered Martin. "I'm not in any war on women, especially sisters, unless they come asking for it. By the way, just what

did you expect to find in Molly Malloy's camera?"

He shot the last question suddenly. He expected almost any kind of an answer. Every angle he had followed had taken abrupt turns. As for example, when Sela Erdly had not been wearing a square stone in a ring. There had been a square-cut jewel in the ring on a woman's hand that had caused the murders at the San Ramos Hotel.

"I don't know what was supposed to be in the camera," said Sela. That's something you might ask Jim Sarlon. Maybe that's why they snatched his girl friend. The *Turnver* . . . They don't let anyone know too much."

"What *Turnverein* were you about to name?" Martin said quickly.

The girl's teeth clicked. Her face went white. Martin knew she had told all that she would.

After Cat Martin left the cottage, he had a vague sense of being trailed when he reached midtown Brooklyn. He had seen the same green coupé three times since he had left John Widlow's car and changed to his own old jalopy up on Bay Ridge.

"It could have been someone spotted there watching out for John Widlow and Sela," Martin reflected. "I hope they missed getting a line on the Shore Road cottage."

He had left John Widlow, somewhat restored, but tightly bound and gagged, at the cottage. He accepted Sela's word that she would remain quiet and did not employ a gag on her, but he locked the basement door of the bungalow.

Out there he had seen no evidence of anyone having followed the Widlows or himself. However, he could not be sure what Sela might have told the taxi hackman who had driven her out there.

"It's sure the devilishest thing the way life and people turn out," thought Martin, as he ducked into a drug-store phone booth. "When it comes to this kind of a war, you can't trust your

own sister or brother. And that's why the Red Chief insists upon this lone wolf idea. It's okay, but brother, when it comes to gambling a little girl's eyes against a World War weapon, I'd feel better off with some advice."

LEDA LATIN was just about to leave the San Ramos switchboard when Cat Martin called her.

"Okay, you runt, spill it," she greeted him. "You've been out with the bleached blonde. What's cooking?"

"She fooled me," said Cat Martin mournfully. "You know, she has a boy friend. I have to find that out after she proves to be somewhat of a swell egg. I sure have all the hard luck."

In succinct and most inelegant Brooklynese, Leda Latin informed him of several kinds of luck she wished him, all bad.

"And how's about a date tonight?" she snapped finally.

"No can do, Baby," he said. "But go back where you were last night, and later I may call Mary Smith."

He had to interrupt another flow of adjectived opinion.

"The number and location of Peter Erdley's suite is what I need most," he said. "Can you figure where it might be located—I mean from the outside?"

"Okay, Cat, I'll try, but my heart ain't in it," said Leda. A minute later she told him, "The tenth floor, six corner windows on the southeast of the hotel."

"Thanks, and I'll maybe give Mary Smith a ring," he promised.

"Listen, Cat," she said quickly, in a low voice. "A couple of muggs have been putting the eye on this switchboard for the past two hours. They look like flatfeet to me."

"Here's hoping they are, Leda," said Martin, suddenly serious. "Listen. Don't leave the San Ramos. Have yourself a snack in the Greenroom

Coffee shop, and stick there until you hear from me."

CHAPTER XII

Murder Rolls Along



IT WAS shortly before four o'clock in the afternoon. It seemed impossible that so much tragedy could have been crowded into the past fourteen hours.

Cat Martin left his old jalopy three blocks from the San Ramos. He thought he saw that green coupé again, crossing a street ahead of him. But then there were many green coupés.

Martin stood on the street looking up at the San Ramos. A tiny figure swinging up there before a window gave him an idea. Peter Erdley's suite was on the tenth and top floor and not far from his windows Martin saw another window washer apparently just quitting for the day. He was carrying his pail, his leather safety straps and his brushes.

Not many minutes later, Cat Martin had the window washer's equipment. Besides the safety straps for the windows, Martin also had an extra coil of rope. The window washer had the price of a big night out.

The operator of the service elevator stared at him curiously, but apparently was not well acquainted with the window cleaners. He took Cat Martin to the top floor.

Shortly afterward, Cat Martin slid down a rope. He was equipped with pail and brushes. Glancing down from the dizzy height of the tenth floor with a grin, he fastened his safety strap and went to work.

The room inside this window was dark, but light glowed through from an inside door. Martin saw a short, extremely fat man moving about. He

judged this man must be the well-known Peter Erdley.

He had no more than spotted the man he wanted than Martin was inside the window, letting the pail clatter to the floor. Erdley came to the door with quick steps.

"What's going on here?" Erdley's manner was pompous, but his voice had a slightly foreign tinge.

"Excuse me, sir, but a strap buckle broke, an' I almost took a header," apologized Martin. "I'm afraid I'll have to go out through your rooms."

"All right," said Erdley shortly, turning away.

Cat Martin uttered a few quick, short words in German. They had but little meaning, but Peter Erdley whipped around. "What was that you said?" rapped Erdley.

Martin saw that he was a man who had lived too well. His paunch overflowed his belt. He had bright, blue eyes and his hair was a fading yellow, and long. But it seemed to Martin there was a tendency of the hair to want to stand up at the roots, as if for years it might have been closely clipped, a strictly military cut, German style.

Martin could see all of the lighted room, with the two doors leading out of it. There was a flat-topped desk covered with papers. Martin spoke again in German.

"They have taken Sela and put her with the newspaper girl," was what he said suddenly. "I heard them talk-

ing. Sela's brother John has slipped, sold out. Unless John Widlow tells who paid him, Sela is to be given the same as the other girl."

Peter Erdley went the color of a fish's belly. His blue eyes were round and staring. He spoke in concise English, "You are crazy," he said. "This is a holdup. I will call the police."

Cat Martin judged that was a bluff. He smiled sleepily.

"I would not call the police," he said in German. "I do not lie. I thought you would want to know about Sela, and where she is. I would even help you."

ERDLEY spoke then in German, his fat throat working with his fast swallowing. Martin knew when he had struck pay dirt.

"They have trapped John Widlow then? You know for sure?"

Martin took a chance and made a direct play.

"They are on the boat together," he said. "They took Sela and John Widlow there, too."

"You mean they moved Molly Malloy? They are on a boat?"

Martin went clear over the desk. He landed with his stubby, iron fingers sunk into Erdley's fat throat. The man gurgled, his blue eyes beginning to stand out.

Martin came back to straight-out Americanese.

"All right, you loan shark! You [Turn page]



tipped your hand then! So if Molly Malloy is on a boat, they moved her? Now you're telling where she is, or you haven't as much chance as a free Frenchman in a Hitler camp! Talk, and fast!"

Peter Erdley was a quaking bundle of gross flesh.

"Yes, yes," he tried to say, but Martin waited until his tongue started to stick out.

"Now you bloody butcher! Where is Molly Malloy?"

"You'll—let me go? You'll—"

Martin gave him another dose of how a man feels when the hangman's noose fails to break his neck. This time Erdley gasped out an address.

Cat Martin swore softly. The street named was almost under the shadow of the Navy Yard wall. It could not have been more than three blocks from Madame D'Yle's rooming house.

Having Erdley subdued, here was a chance to get other information that might be useful. Martin's fingers were tightening again when the door buzzer sounded loudly, insistently.

Martin held Erdley helpless, hoping the visitor would go away. But there seemed to be more than one person. Martin eased up.

"Ask who it is," Martin whispered, "and if you yelp once, so help me they'll find a corpse when they break down the door!"

Erdley cleared his throat and obeyed with an effort.

"And you know well enough who it would be, as if you haven't been calling me for the past hour!" the voice of Madame D'Yle boomed from outside. "I have come with those you sent for me, you were so much in a hurry!"

Martin glanced quickly about. One door led into a bedroom. He could see another door beyond that. His blue automatic was a flash of cold color under Erdley's protruding eyes.

"You will talk with Madame D'Yle," he said. "Act natural and don't slip. When your tongue crooks,

so does my finger. You will have been shot for resisting, and it will be in the line of duty in finding a kidnaping victim."

Martin backed toward the bedroom door, his gun upon Erdley.

"You make any break at the door, and I'll get you in the back, so help me," he promised.

Mountainous Madame D'Yle stalked into the room, if three hundred pounds of waddling woman can be said to stalk. The door closed behind her, and Martin did not see any other person, although he imagined Madame D'Yle had been accompanied by someone.

"Well, *Herr Erdley!*" greeted Madame D'Yle, and continued in German. "You have betrayed me, your friend. You have used my refugees as loan agents. I have seen letters to which you have forged my name. I have so trusted you. Now I should kill you, *Herr Erdley.*"

MARTIN could see the dime-size diamond flashing. But he was so intent upon this unexpectedly juicy conversation that all of his attention was upon the fat Peter Erdley and the huge and angry woman confronting him that he missed moving feet behind him. They must have been muffled by the rug.

Then the ceiling seemed to have fallen upon his hard skull. Lights went out. . . .

Cat Martin sensed that he could not have been unconscious for long. The late afternoon sun still slanted through the windows. He was lying upon the soft rug of Peter Erdley's bedroom.

Swearing under his breath, Martin tried to shake the fog of pain from his brain. A soft and pulpy egg was buried in his rusty hair over one ear.

"That's funny," he muttered, getting cautiously to his feet. "Maybe it's too funny."

His blue automatic was touching his hand as he moved. There was the

sharp tang of recently burned powder. He snatched up the gun. It had been fired.

He saw the pillow from the bed as he got to his feet. The white slip showed the undeniable stain and burn of powder. That gun had been muffled in the pillow.

Even before he reached the door to Peter Erdley's office room, Martin was sure of what he would find. Peter Erdley was sitting grotesquely on the floor, his fat body leaning back against his desk. His head lolled and his dead blue eyes seemed to look accusingly at Cat Martin.

Martin's eyes went to the desk. There had been a stack of letters there, ready for mailing. They were gone. The outer door was closed.

Martin had no doubt but that the bloodless, blue hole in Peter Erdley's forehead was backed up by a bullet from his own automatic. Still he thrust the gun back into his clothes.

Two letters had fallen to the floor. He picked them up and moved over to the window.

Cat Martin looked from that tenth-story window. It was a long jump to the street below, too long. The rope on which he had come from the roof was still there, but not within reach.

"Slick as an eel!" he grated. "And if I make a break out through the corridor, they've probably planted someone to make the frame good!"

His smile was crooked, but it was also fixed and cold now. He had two letters in his pocket. They were addressed to men in two hotels that he knew to be filled with Navy Yard workers. The envelopes had no return addresses on them. He had a good idea what he would find in the letters, but the time for that was later, if he would have the time.

His neck turned a little cold when the Peter Erdley telephone buzzed loudly.

"Sure, that would be the play," he decided. "They would go outside, call Erdley's room, then insist upon know-

ing why he does not answer. Well, Cat, if you can't go up, perhaps you can go down."

The phone was still ringing. He worked with lightning speed getting the sheets off the bed and twisting them, after restoring the bed's smoothness. He made a seaman's bow-line hitch over the radiator at a window.

THE window on the ninth floor just below was dark. That was a break. Clinging on the ledge before that ninth floor window like a human fly, he had only time to take a long chance and smash the glass of the locked window, dragging the twisted sheets after him.

He was inside with the tinkling crash, poised, listening. Then he ran across the room to an outer door.

If watchers were planted on the tenth floor, the ninth floor had been overlooked. Cat Martin scooted along the corridor toward the fire stairway at the rear. He was down to the fifth floor before he began figuring the rest of a possible way out.

Then he thought of a room number—five-eleven, Jim Sarlon's room.

The corridor on the fifth floor had a clerk at an end desk. Cat Martin trudged into view, moving briskly. He went straight to the desk.

"That busted pipe in five-eleven," he said disgustedly. "Why don't they pick out working hours to have trouble?"

"Five-eleven?" The floor clerk looked puzzled.

"Sure, buddy! An' I ain't got all night! A guy named Sarlon called, and they pick on me 'cause I'm new on the job!"

"Mr. Sarlon called?" The clerk looked at Martin along his nose. "Mr. Sarlon has been out all afternoon. How could he call?"

"Well, then what is this?" rasped Martin. "Either somebody give the repair shop a buzz or they're ribbin' me! Where is this five-eleven? Maybe

that guy Sarlon come back!"

The clerk grumbled and got up. He produced his keys and led the way around the ell where Martin knew five-eleven to be. There was no light showing over the transom.

"You see, I was right," said the clerk.

"Listen, buddy, I got called up here, an' I want-a look, see?"

The clerk looked at him, hesitated, then put a key into the lock. Martin's fist traveled only six inches. When he entered Jim Sarlon's rooms, the floor clerk accompanied him, under his arm.

Martin locked the door. From this point on he had to think fast. But he never would have a better chance to give Jim Sarlon's suite a once-over that might hit the jackpot.

Making sure the two letters he had taken from Erdley's room were in his pocket, Martin probed deeper into that same pocket. His hands went quickly through all of his other pockets.

"Sweet mother!" he exclaimed. "Either those mugs took my Yard identification badge, or it got lost up there when I was knocked out. Either way, it's a ten spot to a dime my card, picture and all are right there in that dead man's room. Now won't that be cozy for my good friend Inspector Walton?"

He could only guess whether the silence of Erdley on the tenth floor was being investigated. It might be several minutes before the murder room was entered. But when that happened, the heat would be on, and for Cat Martin, unless the mugs who had knocked him out had taken his identification badge along, which was unlikely.

But he could not worry about that now. There was too much else to do. The floor clerk was coming too, but was still groggy. So that he would not be able to interfere, Cat Martin tied him up securely and gagged him with his handkerchief.

CHAPTER XIII

Cat Leaves a Note



ALERT work was necessary, Cat Martin discovered. Before a search through the hotel for the killer of Peter Erdley was started, he had three rooms to cover.

One of Jim Sarlon's rooms was like a working den. Martin cracked open a big desk there. And at once his suspicions that Jim Sarlon, wealthy yachtsman and sportsman, was something more than that were confirmed. There were blueprints of revolutionary models of racing yachts in one drawer, and one of these blueprints was convincing.

It was a scale blueprint of an imagined motive power for an auxiliary engine schooner. And if it had been drawn for the secret war weapon now building at the Navy Yard, it could not have been more accurate!

"It could be that somehow this Jim Sarlon has learned of that new motive power, and has amused himself by applying it to a pleasure craft," thought Cat Martin. "But on the other hand, it isn't under the heading of amusement or pleasure for him to be in possession of these plans."

He replaced the prints as he had found them. Any moment might bring commotion outside, evidence of a search of the hotel, and if he should be caught, certainly these prints must not be found in his own possession.

On the desk, he noticed a small photo of a girl. It was well done, and it seemed to Cat Martin that Molly Malloy's blue eyes looked right at him.

He swore sharply as he noticed an inscription on the bottom of the photo. It recalled the way Jim Sarlon had looked at Molly Malloy, and the way she had looked at Jim Sarlon.

It was at that moment that Martin

heard the first sounds of excitement in the corridor outside. Someone was looking for the missing room clerk. Martin had a look-see from one of the windows.

With satisfaction he saw a terrace projection only two floors below. Jim Sarlon's windows fronted a quadrangle. It was just beginning to grow dark, and escaping that way carried only a fighting chance, but it might be the only possible avenue, at that.

Martin speeded up his search, rifling through the drawers, examining the contents of several files of letters and papers. He found nothing of consequence, yet instinct told him that there was something in that room which seemed to make a search imperative.

It was definite now that Jim Sarlon was directly connected with those who had learned too much about the Navy's secret weapon. It had been fairly well linked up before, by Sarlon's note-book, his presence in the basement of Madame D'Yle, and the destruction of a machine model there before the fire.

Up to this time, though, Cat Martin had been undecided whether it had been Jim Sarlon who had wrecked that model, or others who had been outside Madame D'Yle's with big John Widlow. It was fairly conclusive now that Jim Sarlon himself had blasted the model.

In all, Martin had been less than five minutes in Sarlon's suite. Still that something he had felt from the start seemed to compel him to continue his hunt, probably the only chance he ever would have at Jim Sarlon's private possessions.

He was standing in the middle of the den room when his search came to its end. A group photograph had been there on the wall all the time. It was under a pair of pennants of the M.I.T.

Cat Martin walked close, studying the figures of the little group. The shot had been taken following a class play of senior graduates. Names and

numbers of fourteen persons in the group were noted underneath.

Almost instantly Cat Martin was back in memory on the swinging hooks of the Navy Yard crane. Again he could picture the rolling thermos bottle that had exploded. Clearly etched were the figures in that tragic scene, and their movements.

A GAIN, for seconds of memory, he was standing in the little office with the surviving experts in charge of the work on the secret weapon. Low, bitter oaths came from between his clenched teeth.

"As simple as that," he said grimly. "This would seem to be all of it."

There came a sudden buzzing of the push button in the outer room. It was followed by a pounding. This ceased. In desperate urgency, Cat Martin reached the window, then turned back from it to scribble something hastily.

"No betting how I'll come out," he muttered. "And wherever you stand, Jim Sarlon, by the holies you're entitled to this much of a break. Anyway, it's for Molly Malloy, and a police alarm now probably would mean her finish before she could be reached."

He had to gamble that if and when Jim Sarlon returned, he would use the phone in a short time. In fact, Martin planned that Sarlon would be called to the phone, if one Cat Martin had the chance to make a call later.

When he returned to the window, a slip of paper under the displaced phone instrument bore the address Peter Erdley had given as the place where Molly Malloy was being held. Martin felt he owed Jim Sarlon and the girl that much, however guilty Sarlon might be.

The pounding at the outer door had ceased for the moment. Again Cat Martin dropped down the San Ramos outer wall on twisted sheets from a bed. But this time he did not delay to remove his means of escape.

"Inspector Walton will be given my description by the floor clerk, anyway, and he'll be hotter than the hinges of Hades over the whole thing," he decided, as he poised on the edge of the terrace.

He was prepared to swing down the remaining two stories into the quadrangle when a woman screamed. She was in a window only a few yards across from him. Her hand pointed, and a man's face showed behind her shoulders.

Then Martin knew they were racing for their room phone. But by then he was down, had found an alleyway and reached the street outside.

Sirens of squad cars were wailing all over the place. And Martin realized that by this time his old jalopy would be too hot for him to handle.

Inspector Walton was a thorough policeman.

Martin crossed the street in the dusk, making the best speed he could under the circumstances, but keeping away from lamp circles. And speedily then he was convincing a tough hackman that there are ways to make money fast and still stand in with the law.

At least a lone wolf of the Red Chief was provided for any such emergency. Martin shoved two hundred in good U. S. notes at the hackie.

"You're insured, anyway, but I guarantee not to wreck your bus," he said. "You get the two hundred bucks, and half an hour from now you can call the cops and report your taxi stolen."

Two blocks from the San Ramos Hotel where the murder of Peter Erdley had become a new and undesirable sensation, Cat Martin parked his newly acquired taxicab.

"If they have a gander at the short-wave and the other junk in the compartment of my old jalopy, the cops will have enough to turn me over to the F. B. I.," Martin thought, with a grim chuckle. "I'll be ticketed as everything from a Nazi spy to a slant-

eyed agent of the Nips in disguise."

THE cashier in the Green Room coffee shop at the San Ramos liked his voice and his line when he called Leda Latin from a cigar store phone booth. Leda was explosively direct when the cashier spotted her and she answered the phone.

"Cat? Listen! I come from Flatbush, but I ain't stickin' my neck out for a murder! I didn't know you really would—"

"Cut it, Long Ears!" Martin was terse. "Okay, Erdley was bumped and the heat's out for me! I didn't do it, and it ain't important, but this is! You still under the eye?"

He had pressing business, but he was anxious about Leda, and could not leave her on a spot.

"Nope, I guess not, Cat!" she told him. "Them two flatfeet trailed me here, but when this Erdley blowoff come along, they faded fast! Maybe they're lookin' for you, and if they are—"

"Good, Baby!" Cat talked fast now. "Get this! You can be in that women's hotel in less than ten minutes, by taking a taxi. Go in and right on through to the entrance on the side street. If your flatfooted friends are tagging you, they'll maybe miss that one. I'm picking you up for your own good."

"That's what I hoped once, but I ain't so sure," said Leda Latin. "But I'm just dumb enough to keep on playing."

Cat Martin had the hackie's cap pulled low over his rusty hair as he waited at the side entrance of the women's hotel. His scrutiny took in every car, every passerby. Leda Latin should be here in another three or four minutes and he wanted to get her out from under pressure. He was fairly sure the so-called "flatfeet" were not operating with or for the police.

He was strictly on his own now, for he had tried without success to contact the Red Chief on a blind phone number. His short-wave in the old

jalloppy might have picked up the Chief but Cat was sure the jalloppy was in the hands of the civil law by this time.

Waiting, he tore open the letters he had taken from Peter Erdley's room. They were addressed to two Navy Yard workers, and they were the usual notices of a loan shark who operates privately and far outside the law.

Martin's teeth clicked. Both letters were signed in ink with a free flowing hand. The name was the same as had been on the letter he had found on the murdered Carl Randall—"Madame D'Yle."

"And that's what was sticking in the big dame's craw when she came to Erdley's rooms," mused Martin. "That of itself may furnish motive for a little matter of murder, but somehow I don't believe now Madame D'Yle has been playing that kind of a game."

He reflected, though, that refugees quartered at Madame D'Yle's evidently had been supplied with some funds by Peter Erdley. And there were ways in which some of those grateful refugees, with all kinds of European ideas, might be useful.

Moreover, there was no doubt but that Peter Erdley had been lending money to war workers. For that matter, there were many slick loan sharks in on the grab for all they could take from war wages. In recent weeks the loan shark business had seemed to become a national pastime for several varieties of crooks.

"But in this deal, it's as red a her-ring as was ever dragged across dirty murder," muttered Martin. "It might slap circumstantial evidence right into Madame D'Yle's lap. And when they have one suspect on the spot, it provides all kinds of holes for the real killers to slip through."

HE SAW Leda Latin's small, shapely person crossing the sidewalk from the women's hotel then. He signaled. She had no sooner than come up in answer to his signal

than he had the girl from Flatbush, over her protest, riding in back as a passenger.

But that slight handicap could not quiet her loose tongue.

"Okay, Murder Incorporated," she began. "Now that you've taken on stealing taxis, what dump are we on the way to hold up first? Or ain't you got a rod? Maybe the same rod that bumped this guy Erdley? Cat, I don't like it!"

He was sliding the taxi along smoothly. He gave her a twisted grin over his shoulder, but his heart was not in it.

"I hope we're on the way to dig up the real motive for Peter Erdley being killed, Long Ears," he said. "I'm giving you a ride because I'm afraid I've put you on kind of a spot."

"Kind of a spot!" the girl from Flatbush shrieked at him. "Say! I've even been tryin' to imagine what I'll be thinkin' while I'm waitin' for them to lead me to the hot seat! Cat! How's it with us? We playin' for keeps or only for marbles?"

He hadn't the right answer to that one. No Naval Intelligence lone wolf had any right to play any little girl for keeps. He wished he could put the black-eyed pretty straight. It might be a good theory to believe that later she would be contented to know she had been doing a swell bit for her country. But Cat Martin doubted it.

"All I can say, Long Ears, is that I hope you won't be sorry," he said humbly. "Now, along out here, seeing that we're apparently in the clear, I'm sending you over to the subway. Have you got a girl friend you can spend the night with, and a number where I can ring you later?"

"Sure, I got all kinds of girl friends!" flared Leda Latin. "But you just try brushing me off now, an' I'll go to work on your scrubby red hair! I'm stickin' along, Cat!"

He would have insisted, but he got another hunch. He had seen times when only a woman could start an-

other woman talking. It might work that way with Sela Widlow, and with Peter Erdley dead, Martin had to know now all that Sela could tell.

The shock of Peter Erdley's murder might loosen up Sela. Even if it might be hard to convince her that Cat Martin himself was not the killer.

"Okay, Long Ears, you're askin' for it," he assented. "You're on your way then to meet our little pal, the supposedly rich and swanky drug-store blonde. Only she isn't snooty now, being handicapped by a couple of hours or more in a basement, tied up with a few neat sailor's hitches."

Leda Latin's eyes glowed at him.

"Sometimes I think I'd like to go out and commit me a nice little murder myself," she said. "Cat, what's the dope on Molly Malloy, if any?"

"That's another item we'll get to, but this comes first," he said. "I want to be sure that Sela gets a break she deserves for what she cracked open in one plenty big mess of murder."

CHAPTER XIV

A Corpse Can Sing



STREET lights were widely spaced on Shore Road. Moreover all those on the ocean side were blacked out. The result was a shadowy driveway as the street reached its dead-end at the rocky beach.

Traffic had faded out. Only a few lights showed in the last few residences before Cat Martin sent the taxicab bouncing toward the dead-end and that last, isolated bungalow.

Leda Latin had climbed into the seat beside him. She was snuggled close to his shoulder. He tried to keep his mind off her, but her warm closeness made him think of Jim Sarlon and Molly Malloy.

He hoped he would have a chance at the bungalow to call Jim Sarlon's suite at the San Ramos. Perhaps Sarlon had returned even before this and found his phone cradle out of place. If so, then he had given Sarlon a break to find Molly Malloy.

He did not want Sarlon to act too quickly on that either. Thinking of this, he speeded up the taxi. At that, a car that was running without lights swerved into view, coming from the dead-end of the Shore Road.

Only the cottage for which he was headed remained down this way. Martin hoped that the car might contain some couple on a petting party. When it came under the bright side of one of the street lamps he saw that a couple were in the car. But they were not petters.

Cat Martin jerked his own face low. He jammed on the brakes. Here was the unexpected answer to something, and only the stopping of that speeding car could supply it.

For Martin had seen the bony face of Curt Davis, engineer on the secret war weapon, and the heavier cast features and bare blond head of Charles Wilson, a companion engineer. Both were in the front seat of the sedan.

Martin gave them the horn quickly, holding out his hand. Curt Davis merely turned his face toward him and stepped harder on the gas.

Too late, Martin swung the taxi sharply, trying to rip his rear bumper into the side of the leaping sedan. Leda Latin cried out as metal crashed and tore apart. The taxi skidded and went into the gutter, but the other car was clear.

Martin swore sharply as Curt Davis fed the other bus all it would take and shot away fast. He realized that even if he could turn in time, the taxi lacked the power to overtake the sedan, which already had a lead of a full block.

"What's it, Cat?" cried Leda. "Whatcha tryin' to do? If we ain't got the heat on us good, it'll be be-

cause them mugs in that car ain't on the up an' up!"

The Flatbush girl was wiping blood from her chin where she had been bumped into the windshield.

"Those two guys won't add any to the heat," muttered Martin, making sure Leda was only scratched. "And then again, it may be they have already."

He had a sick hunch that caused him to send the taxi rolling recklessly to the lone cottage. His order to Leda to stay in the cab got no result.

"I'm afraid there's something you won't like, Long Ears," he said, as he went through the door onto the basement stairs.

Leda Latin didn't like it. Cat Martin liked it less.

LEDA relieved her feeling with elegant Brooklynese mixed up with racking sobs.

"The poor little dame!" she cried out. "The lowdown mug that would do a thing like that! Cat! Don't cross me! Sing your song fast if you knew about this!"

"I couldn't have known what happened less than half an hour ago," he said, kneeling beside the corpse of Sela Widlow. "I've been away nearly three hours, an' the blood isn't dried, Leda."

The blood was red and glistening where it had drained out Sela Widlow's life from a straight stab wound in her throat. She was doubled down, still bound by the ropes Martin had placed around her.

Cat Martin expected John Widlow to be gone, and he was.

"Big John Widlow threatened to kill her," muttered Martin. "But he wasn't that low. He was her brother, Leda. I left him tied up down here with her, so it was someone else got to her. An' that would be the same one who rubbed out Peter Erdley. Long Ears, I don't like to think—"

"You mean you don't want to put the finger on the mugs who passed

us in that car like greased lightnin'," said Leda. "Cat, for the first time I guess I don't want to tag along. You put the poor little dame here, so—"

"So they had the eye on me all the time, and they got her," supplied Martin. "Sure, Leda. It's that way. And underneath she had one of the streaks of real people. She took a chance for her brother, and that's what it got her."

Curt Davis and Charles Wilson, he was thinking, had been in that car. They were engineers not supposed to be outside of the Navy Yard. Yet Davis had the say-so about that. He could check others out, so he was pretty much on his own. And he was the one who must be connected directly with—

He was about to mention Jim Sarlon, in telling Leda this, but he checked it. No reason to pass along names to Leda Latin. But it did remind him that he should call Jim Sarlon about the Molly Malloy note.

Then it came to him that that might not be too smart. Perhaps he had been soft, leaving that note. That Molly Malloy snatch, and Jim Sarlon being found knocked out still could be a frame-up.

One thing that was worrying him now was that he would have to leave Sela Erdley's body here.

"Anyway, they knew a corpse can't sing," he muttered.

"But lamp this, Cat!" exclaimed Leda. "She—she musta wrote it with her own blood! Cat, I can't stand it!"

The girl from Flatbush passed out in Cat's arms. He put her down gently, and then he saw the scrawled, bloody letters in the dust at Sela Widlow Erdley's side. Her arm was bound, but her forefinger was caked with bloody dust.

Martin read the words by holding his cigarette lighter.

"The square little dame!" he swore fervently. "It was the last she could do! If she had only named her murderer!"

He read in the dust, roughly traced with the bloody finger now cold and dead:

BERMANN TURNVEREIN—
BOAT—JAM—BAY—

The dying girl evidently had known she would not last to finish it all. She had left for Cat Martin all that she could.

She had not quite finished what must mean, "Jamaica Bay."

Cat Martin straightened up. And even as he moved the basement light went out. Something like the hard steel of a rifle barrel across his skull sent him spinning into blackness . . .

IN ONE sick, passing moment of consciousness, Cat Martin could see fire lighting the sky. His head felt disconnected from his body. It was being rolled around on a rumbling bouncing surface.

The space through which he could see the light in the sky was at the rear end of a moving truck. Canvas flapped back there. The truck was mounting a hill.

Voices cursed in German close to him. One man spoke in English, and his voice seemed familiar. By it, Cat Martin identified the man in the darkness, and the knowledge was startling. It was convincing proof that the Red Chief's system of lone wolves, fighting on their own, was the only possible method by which absolute assurance could be had that dangerous information did not leak.

For the voice he heard was that of Ruff Griddley, rigger foreman on the warship that enclosed the secret war weapon. Griddley who had played his role so smoothly that he had even come to Cat Martin's defense at the time the thermos bottles had exploded.

"I thought all the time Cat Martin knew too much," Griddley was saying now. Anyway, that little bonfire won't leave anything of that Widlow dame for the F.B.I. to work on. Curse all

dames!"

Martin's agonized brain went under again. He had understood a few words spoken in German. When he had another fleeting moment of consciousness, his memory was checking.

Even speaking German, two other voices had a familiar ring. He realized they must be men from his own crew at the Navy Yard. With all of the checking and double checking, identification, birth certificates and records, enemies and saboteurs still were planted in the heart of the war industry of the Navy itself.

In his conscious moment, Cat Martin tried to recall what had happened last. He thought of Leda Latin. What had become of her?

He was sick all through now. Perhaps they had left her back there in the bungalow to burn. Then why had he not been destroyed in the same manner?

A German phrase that was spoken then supplied the answer. In English it was, "When he talks over the phone, telling how the newspaper dame is having her eyes slowly burned out, we will have what we want. We must burn from him the truth of who is at the head of those who work alone, for he is one of them."

His head bumped and pain put him out again. This time he must have remained asleep a long time, for cold water was slapping into his face when he awakened. Biting brandy was being poured into his mouth.

Cat Martin awoke with the feeling that he must already be in the Hades for which he probably was headed. His body burned with blistering heat.

When his eyes opened, he blinked against an infernal glare of light.

"Turn that carbon back on the dame," said a voice in German. "And everyone remain in the darkness. I will handle this."

While the words were German, that was Ruff Griddley speaking. Perhaps Cat Martin's sheer rage at discovering Griddley to be an enemy agent

finally snapped Martin back to his full senses.

All around him was a basement with thick walls. There were apparently no windows. A house furnace that supplied steam heat had a roaring oil fire under its boiler. Intense heat was coming from this.

Martin looked into Ruff Griddley's black eyes, took in his flat face. The name he called Griddley was the foulest he could utter, and it was not half low enough to voice his opinion. Ruff Griddley smiled coldly.

"Being a fool won't rate you anything now, Martin," he said. "You wouldn't want to save yourself and mention your boss' name would you?"

CAT MARTIN tried to spit in Griddley's face but his mouth was too dry. Griddley rocked Cat's head with his flat hand. Not until then did Cat Martin find out he was tightly bound and that he was placed against a post close to the oil furnace.

"Possibly this will give you a rough idea of what is soon to happen to you," said Griddley. "Look over there!"

His hand twisted Martin's short, rusty hair, turning his face. Martin saw the once pretty face of Molly Malloy. Her blue eyes now were swollen with reddened lids and blood-shot veins on the eyeballs.

Molly Malloy was bound to a post as Martin was. Her head drooped, but as Griddley spoke, a hand came from behind and pulled her face upward by gripping her yellow hair.

The fierce, white light of an ultraviolet ray carbon lamp blazed into her eyes. Her oval face was burned until the blood seemed ready to burst through the skin.

"You rats!" raged Martin. "What under heaven could be worth that?"

"Just this, Martin," stated Griddley. "I have a connected phone here. It is cut in. It could be traced, but it won't be. For Jim Sarlon has been informed that tracing this phone means he will have Molly Malloy left for him to

find with her eyes burned out."

Then Cat Martin saw Leda Latin. She was tied tightly and lying on the cement floor near the hot furnace. Her black eyes were glowing coals, as her face turned toward him.

"I will get Jim Sarlon on the phone, Martin," said Griddley. "You are hooked up with him some way, and he will listen to you. You will tell him only what you are seeing, that hard way, and that we don't intend to kill her either. He can send what we have demanded to the space we have indicated before midnight, three hours from now, or the boss will waste no more time."

"Just like that, huh?" Cat Martin's voice was sneering. "Guess again, you bloated, loathsome yellow traitor! You have to have what you're asking for, or you wouldn't dare do this! You can burn that newspaper dame, and you can fry me, but I'll not tell Jim Sarlon anything!"

He was thinking desperately as the heat of the oil furnace increased. There was no doubt but that pretty Molly Malloy would be blinded for life, even if she were permitted to live. But with Ruff Griddley identified, Cat Martin was convinced that Molly Malloy, Leda Latin and he were to die. It could be no other way.

CHAPTER XV

The Heat of Death



MOLLY Malloy was moaning, turning her head from side to side. With that white, penetrating carbon light it was no protection to her eyes for her to close her eyelids. They were nearly burned

through now.

Griddley's big hands moved. Leda Latin screamed. A cursing German unknown to Martin came out of the

darkness, and slapped her mouth with his flat hand, crushing her lips.

The iron from under the furnace was white hot. Griddley drew it slowly across Cat Martin's legs, letting it smoke through the cloth of his trousers. It was as if the fire was a liquid that followed all of his nerves to his brain.

Everything was going black when the iron was withdrawn. Griddley thrust the phone in front of his face.

"Jim Sarlon is on the line, waiting," snarled Griddley. "Tell him we're not fooling. Tell him just what you are seeing."

Martin wanted to shout, to tell Jim Sarlon what to do. He was thinking—why was Jim Sarlon waiting if he had found the note left for him, telling where Molly Malloy was supposed to be held?

Ruff Griddley laughed harshly. It was as if he could read Martin's mind.

"If you've an idea that Jim Sarlon got that address Peter Erdley gave you, Martin, you can forget it," he said, ending Cat's one faint hope. "You boys misjudge us. We don't leave any loose ends. Jim Sarlon ain't in his hotel rooms, and he won't be. Not until he gives us what we want. Your little message was picked up."

Then Martin was thinking . . . If they had Jim Sarlon a prisoner, then why this fooling around with phone connections? And who could have taken that note from under Sarlon's phone or know of it?

That last answered itself.

"That floor clerk!" raged Martin. "He's one of your—"

He almost said, "*Bermann Turnverein*." But there was still a chance that his knowledge of that, written for him in blood, might be made to serve.

"You're almost smart, Martin," said Griddley. "Seeing you'll never do anything about it, our man was the San Ramos floor clerk. Want to assure Jim Sarlon he is getting the truth? His girl friend has nerve and

she hasn't been any good on the wire."

Martin looked at the moaning, half-conscious Molly Malloy. Probably blinded for life, facing death, she had been too much for these Hitlerized rats. And they imagined they could make him, Cat Martin, serve their fiendish purpose.

He laughed bitterly, fighting the pain in his burned legs.

"Why don't you bring Jim Sarlon here?" he demanded.

"No reason you shouldn't know, Martin," said Griddley. "Because Jim Sarlon is with the duplicate hundred-miler torpedo boat that has been completed ahead of that experiment in the yard. And there is one little thing, just one little thing, Jim Sarlon can show our boys about that secret weapon."

Then, thought Cat Martin, the secret, tubular-powered torpedo boat, designed to revolutionize all naval warfare, was already in the hands of enemy aliens! That would mean the experiment in the Brooklyn Navy Yard would undoubtedly be destroyed before or at the time of its completion.

For the secret war weapon was so designed that it could leave the special warship carrying it, travel under or on the sea at more than one hundred miles per hour, deliver knockout blows and escape. Against it, once turned out in numbers, enemy submarine fleets would be powerless.

SOME of the details of this had been revealed to Cat Martin by the Red Chief. Others he had guessed. Some he had added when he had seen the blueprints in Jim Sarlon's rooms.

Yet that secret war weapon, Martin knew, had been presented to the United States Government by Curtis Davis, engineer, as his contribution to the cause of the Allied Nations.

All of that fitted in with what Cat Martin had learned the hard way. It fitted in, too, with the one murderer he was sure he now knew. And that

murderer, in all probability, was the mind, the boss of this group of enemy agents.

Ruff Griddley had the white-hot iron in his hands.

"Here we go again, Martin," he said. "We're sure your word of what you see will change Jim Sarlon's mind. After that, we have need of some other information you can supply, like what has become of the plates taken from the newspaper dame's camera?"

Cat Martin got that now. Perhaps the top killer, a man ready to sell out to the enemy for high dough, had not even guessed what was on one plate in that camera. It was Molly Malloy's picture of the destroyed model that really was wanted.

Perhaps it was believed the secret Jim Sarlon would not divulge would be on that plate.

The model had been in the basement of Madame D'Yle. Martin wondered where the duplicate of the tubular speedboat could have been built? He could make a good guess.

"Bermann *Turnverein* — boat — Jamaica Bay—"

No other place would be as likely. Not that his conjecture could save him now, or save Leda Latin, or Molly Malloy.

Griddley cursed and again the hot iron scorched cloth and raked along the thin skin over Martin's shins. But there was a sudden end to that when a door opened and shut.

"You are to bring the girl to the place!" a voice cried out in German. "The Kommandant has changed his mind! Cat Martin and this other Fraulein know too much! You are to fix the furnace as planned! With that fire, it will be but a short time! Martin and his girl friend are of no further use to the Kommandant! We've picked up Davis and Wilson!"

Griddley slammed the hot iron to the floor. He kicked Martin's ribs, then laughed loudly.

"That's what I wanted done at first!" said Griddley. . . .

For what seemed interminable hours after his torturers had left, Cat Martin stared bleakly at the oil furnace. At any minute now its steam pressure must burst the old boiler. With its safety valve closed, and the roaring oil fire cut off from thermostatic control, the steam boiler was now filled with terrific power, and it could only increase until relieved by a shattering explosion.

Martin tried not to think of what that meant. Leda Latin's dark, pretty face was livid from the heat. She was lying much closer to the furnace than Martin.

Martin was still bound to the post, which prevented him from moving. He had tried all his strength against the binding knots but had failed to budge them.

The temperature was far above one hundred. He could make out the lighted face of the steam pressure gauge. The needle had swung far beyond the figures that were marked with red for danger.

That needle was crawling farther around. Nothing could check the flaming oil that sent the needle toward a mark that meant more than doom. It would be death in scalding steam that would burn the flesh from their bones, even while they were still conscious.

"I guess we're playin' for keeps this time, Cat."

MARTIN looked at Leda. And if she wasn't trying to smile! He forced the crooked grin to his broad mouth.

"Maybe it's only for marbles, Long Ears," he said. "But either way, I want you to know I wasn't going to let you down. If I could only get away from this post . . . Leda, listen! Start rolling, and get over to the farther end of the basement. That way you'll have a chance."

"An' watch you burn, fellow? I'm not havin' any, Cat. Anyway I'm wise now to the swell guy you really are."

Leda Latin rolled toward Martin.

Half a minute later she was speaking breathlessly behind him.

"No can do, Cat! The rats have you knotted too tight!"

She had attempted to loosen the post bindings with her even white teeth. Martin's seared legs were exquisite agony. But that could not compare to his state of mind.

"The German that called them out with Molly Malloy said they had Curt Davis and Charles Wilson," he whispered. "That may mean all of the experts surviving, including Jason Harvey, have been taken to the place where they have Jim Sarlon. It's a grand finale, a rub-out. And I have to get into a jackpot without even a pair of deuces!"

Leda Latin lay beside him. She moved and touched her cheek to one of his hands. The girl from Flatbush had tagged along, even when circumstances seemed pushing Cat Martin toward the hot sea for murder. She was still tagging along, playing the game.

The pent-up steam in the old-fashioned steam boiler could be heard hissing slightly where the safety valve had been fastened down. Cat Martin could almost imagine the rusted iron of the boiler already quivering from the explosive force being increased by the roaring, unchecked oil flame.

A glance at the oil burner pipe showed that the valve key had been removed. If it had not been, perhaps Leda Latin could have turned that with her teeth, but—

Martin's eyes roved around the walls. He could see a couple of black, barred spaces in one wall.

"Listen, Long Ears," he said. "If you roll over under one of those air vents, it's possible they lead to sidewalk gratings. You might scream loud enough to be heard, if there is street traffic."

Cat Martin did not believe any scream could be heard from inside the basement. Otherwise Molly Malloy

would not have been tortured down here. But the barred air vents were considerable distance from the roaring inferno of the furnace, and Leda might have a chance when the boiler let go.

"I'll give it a try, Cat," assented Leda. "Say! You ain't ribbin' me into leavin' you?"

"I'm not ribbing you, Long Ears, but—"

Cat Martin chopped off his own speech. He was staring at a little cylinder of shining glass on the outside of the steaming boiler. The glass was about four feet from the cement floor.

The water gauge!" his words rasped hoarsely in his dry throat. "Only an old-time boiler would have that! By holy! It's a chance!"

But how could it be possible to smash that water gauge, break the glass? If that were done, an outlet for the deadly steam would be provided, with an outpouring of scalding water.

FOR a minute he battled desperately with his bindings. His strength gave out. If only Leda could get on her feet! No. Her arms were bound tightly to her sides. She could not lift any object solid enough to break the water gauge.

"If I could only get at that glass water gauge, Leda, and smash it!" he burst out. "If you could—but you can't!"

"You're meanin' that tube thing on the boiler, Cat? If it breaks, it would help?"

"No, forget it, Long Ears! You'd have to reach it with something of wood or metal and hit it hard! Leda, roll over to the air vents and scream! Go on! Start rollin'!"

Leda Latin rolled, but not toward the air vents. She moved toward the frightful heat of the furnace. Cat Martin's oaths, his commands got no response.

"Leda! You can't! You'll pass out

an' burn to death!"

His words hung upon the heated air. Leda Latin performed an amazing contortion of her lithe, shapely body. With her arms and legs tightly bound, she twisted to her back.

Her curved legs lifted. Cat Martin groaned as he saw the heat start her thin stockings smoking. But Leda Latin was quick. She shot her feet upward until she was balanced on the back of her neck.

She kicked out at the boiler with her heels. And fell over, as she missed the glass water gauge. Cat Martin cursed from his heart. He commanded, pleaded and protested. But she was back again, with her clothes scorching.

She balanced deftly. Her legs were as nice as any that ever came from Flatbush. Up went her feet and she kicked. There was a tinkle of broken

as axes crashed the planking of a door somewhere behind Martin.

Masked firemen smashed open a basement door.

"Find the dame!" a battalion captain was shouting. "She was yelling for help! Get the lights into this mess! Hold off the chemicals! There's only steam! But lookit! There's a fellow tied to that post! Look for the dame!"

Cat Martin simulated half consciousness, bewilderment. He permitted himself to be helped to the street, making sure he was close to Leda Latin. Their ropes had been cut off.

MARTIN saw a police car and uniformed officers coming toward them. He knew the heat was still on him, but perhaps in his present condition he would not be iden-

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glass, a hissing, then a spouting of mixed water and steam down upon her body.

Cat Martin yelled hoarsely and Leda was rolling away from the scalding mixture. The steam came hissing, louder, and with increasing force. It was relieving the pressure, but filling the upper air of the basement with its thick white cloud. Cat Martin knew what to do then.

"Over to the vents, Long Ears! Yell fire! Keep yelling it! Hurry!"

Perhaps she need not have yelled fire. That hissing cloud of steam was pouring through the air vents and upward through the vents to the sidewalk gratings.

Cat Martin drew a full breath as he heard the weird wailing of fire sirens. The pouring steam must have brought an alarm and that Leda Latin's cries for help were being heard was proved

tified quickly. There would be questions and he had to evade them.

"Didja get them two dead mugs back of the furnace?" he muttered hoarsely, so the two policemen from the squad car could hear. "They was bumped off! In the old wooden bin, back of the furnace!"

The two policemen acted with the celerity of uniformed men desiring to be in on homicide. The firemen released Cat Martin and Leda Latin, and plunged back into the basement.

"They bumped 'em off!" Martin cried, for the benefit of a gathering crowd. "They're bringin' 'em out!"

That turned the crowd's attention just long enough. With Leda Latin beside him, Cat Martin passed between a car and fire truck. He saw the white police car double parked, and heard the low hum of its running motor.

CHAPTER XVI

"Get Cat Martin!"

OW many minutes Cat Martin might have was a problem, but with Leda Latin calling him names, he shot the police car away without being noticed.

"Cat, ain't we had enough of a jam?"

Leda Latin pleaded, as she gripped his arms.

His seared legs hurt like all sin. He suspected Leda's shapely extremities were not much better off.

"This'll raise merry hullabaloo, Long Ears," he said, spinning the police car around the first corner, and fixing his location. "And that's just what has to be raised. Baby, within the next hour or so I hope to have the whole gol-darned police department hot after me. But I'll let you out of it."

"Now I know you're nuts! Why'n't you tip the cops off to the truth? Why'n't—"

"They'll be tipped plenty, but not to the truth, Long Ears!"

He swung the police car into the hilly street above the lights of the Navy Yard. With what he had uncovered, he could have had the police, the whole Army, including the Marines, to back him up.

"And if I had, I'd finish with a grand orgy of murder that would rub out everyone connected with this deal," he murmured hoarsely.

"Hey, Cat, that's the dump where Madame D'Yle had the fire!" exclaimed Leda Latin, as Martin suddenly pulled to the curb.

"Yeah! Sure! An' I've got to take a chance on finding her here, if she hasn't been held on the Peter Erdley murder rap!"

There was a light behind the door glass of the rooming house of Madame

D'Yle that had been damaged by fire and explosion. Martin pushed the buzzer and also kicked the door.

Madame D'Yle was there. She appeared quickly. And she jerked open the door, whipping a gun from under her voluminous skirts. She stared at the bruised face, the ragged figure of Cat Martin.

"Well, an' what would you be wantin'?" she demanded. She saw the police car at the curb. "Oh, and they have so quickly come for me!" she boomed. "I will be so much pleased to tell them what I know! I . . . Why, you are that Frederick Funston Martin!"

She had just identified him. He lunged and knocked the gun from her hand. It was a .38 automatic. He pocketed it.

"No time to explain, Madame D'Yle," he exclaimed. "You're on the spot the same as I am for the Peter Erdley murder. I know he was forging your name to illegal loan letters, maybe planning to pin something on you. He was faking his aid for refugees, and using some of them, enemy agents who came in under cover. Now—"

"Then what is it I can do?" interrupted Madame D'Yle. "You are a so crazy fool, but you are smart."

"Don't ask questions, but come along," said Cat Martin. "You can help me save the lives of Molly Malloy and Jim Sarlon."

That did it.

Leda Latin was squeezed between the mountainous woman and Cat Martin as the police car whirled up the hill toward midtown Brooklyn, then turned off into a maze of side streets which slanted toward the Grand Central Parkway and Jamaica.

"In a few minutes, Madame D'Yle, you and Long Ears here will have but one job," said Cat Martin. "You will put all the police in Brooklyn and Queensborough on the trail of Cat Martin, who is now wanted for murder."

THEY had been riding swiftly through Long Island for some time when at last Cat Martin sent the stolen police car along the hilly back streets of Jamaica. Soon he would be compelled to abandon that car somewhere. Its own radio was sounding the alarm to get the car and "an unidentified girl and man."

"You are of so much mystery, Mr. Martin," said Madame D'Yle. "I have told you Jim Sarlon has come to question my roomers, and then from me he rents the basement for his shop. And then this sweet one, Molly Malloy, comes with him for a story of my refugees, and she is his girl."

Cat Martin's mind probed but one part of this. Why had Jim Sarlon been questioning refugees? It looked like a linking of the rich sportsman with possible enemy agents.

Then Madame D'Yle was going on, telling of what had happened in the San Ramos when Peter Erdley was killed.

"I am talking with Peter Erdley, so," she told them. "I have become mad to take letters from his desk, for he has been using my good name badly. All of at once I hear some noise in other room. I am quick to want to leave, knowing Peter Erdley is with wrong people. Then, before my eyes, Peter Erdley is fall, and I hear a pop and see some smoke in door of other room."

"And you had told Erdley you should kill him?" asked Martin.

"Yes, yes, it is so," said Madame D'Yle. "I am alone, and others go out some other way. It is I am so afraid now, for Peter Erdley is one big man, so I hurry away. There is a noisy party in the elevator with which I go down, so I am not paid attention, and I leave San Ramos right away."

"You know the police are looking for me?" said Martin.

"That I have heard on the radio," said Madame D'Yle. "If it is so that you have killed Peter Erdley, I do not

so care, for that one was of no good to many."

Some things were cleared up. But Martin was sure a terrible finale of murder was being prepared. Somehow he must spike those plans.

"It's like this," he said, as he swung the car into a darker street. "In a short time we separate, as soon as I have found a phone we can use. There is something I must know before I can tell you where the police must come to find Cat Martin, wanted for murder."

"You're off the beam, if you think I'm batty enough to tip off the cops!" flared Leda Latin. "I'm taggin' along, Cat!"

"Get this, Long Ears," said Cat Martin, his gray eyes sleepy and cold. "At this moment Molly Malloy is undoubtedly being tortured more, perhaps blinded. Jim Sarlon may survive and he may not. Others will die, and if they do, it will mean that the last brave effort of Sela Widlow goes for nothing. Understand?"

Leda Latin nodded, and a sob choked her. She understood.

"But they'll kill you, or the cops will pin the Erdley rap on you!" she cried.

"If it saves Molly Malloy and several other persons, who in sweet thunder cares what they pin on me!" rapped Martin. "Get it, Long Ears! They can't make anything stick! And here's where we ditch the police bus and take a chance! Wait!"

The police car remained in a dark street. A cigar store clerk stared at the bruised, ragged, apparently drunken little man who staggered into his place and entered the phone booth. He judged the fellow had been beaten up.

CAT MARTIN dialed a blind number. The buzz came back again and again. No answer. Martin cursed fervently.

"Just when I want the Red Chief! He could find out what I must know,

and quickly!"

But the Red Chief was out of contact. Cat Martin was strictly on his own, in the tightest spot he had ever known.

He had one out now, and he took it.

He made a call to the headquarters of the U. S. Coast Guard nearest to Jamaica Bay. Not much to go on, but it was a chance.

"Bermann *Turnverein*?" the man who answered repeated. "On a boat in Jamaica Bay? Who wants to know?"

"Government business! F. B. I. and no time to prove up on anything! This is an emergency! The location of the boat's all I want!"

It seemed to Cat Martin that the next minute was an hour. He could picture Molly Malloy's burned face, her seared eyes. He could see others facing death, and a general alarm he was sure could only cause lookouts to bring about quicker murder.

Then it came.

"The Bermann *Turnverein* was investigated and broke up a year or so ago," said the Coast Guard officer. "It met in an old hulk of a beached German freighter in a bight of the bay at the foot of Lansing Street. Two old boat builders took over the freighter and converted it into a rowboat and fishing launch factory. That ended our interest. Say, what—"

Cat Martin slapped up the receiver on, "Say what?"

The cigar store clerk did not know the location of Lansing Street, so Martin had to look further.

Mountainous Madame D'Yle and Leda Latin were waiting. Acting on Cat Martin's order, they found a taxicab. The driver, incurious about a fare who handed him a sawbuck, knew the shortest cut to Lansing Street and the bay.

They got out of the taxicab, the three of them, in a deserted warehouse and abandoned dock section up toward the Rockaways. The air reeked with salt and sewage from the mud

flats of the bay. The hackman waited with the cab.

"Ten minutes," said Cat Martin. "No more. You and Leda separate, Madame D'Yle call for the police from different spots. Tell the cops I bragged I'm Cat Martin, and that I said they would never find my hideout on the old ship beached at the foot of Lansing Street. Make it strong, Long Ears. Like you're sore because I slapped you down somewhere. Don't forget, Lansing Street and the bay, and say I bragged I'm ready to fight off all the cops in New York, single-handed."

The girl from Flatbush sobbed again, her bruised lips clinging to his. Then she was gone with Madame D'Yle.

Cat Martin was starting a murder-manhunt for himself. Yet his crooked grin was in place, and his gray eyes were sleepy and cold.

Not one twinkle of light showed from the huge hulk of the old German freighter when Cat Martin sighted it. Partly imbedded in the mud, the ship lay with half its hull projecting into the high tide of the bay.

Cat Martin started wading in the salty, cold water and soon was up to his waist. He moved silently in the darkness, repressing oaths of pain when the salt water bit into his burned legs. The .38 he had taken from Madame D'Yle was dry inside his shirt.

TEN minutes had passed since he had left Madame D'Yle and Leda Latin. He judged it would be another ten minutes or more before the police in Jamaica and Brooklyn precincts came to life.

He could see a gangway across the mud from the old ship at the landward end. Small launches and rowboats were moored close to it.

Martin waded slowly, seeking some means of climbing to the ship's deck from the bay side. He had seen no

one. He had heard no sound that indicated that anyone was aboard the ship converted into a small boat factory, or that any lookout was posted.

The old ship's portholes were blacked out. Martin smiled grimly. It was a perfect setup for what he believed was taking place in the bowels of that one-time German freighter.

Martin saw some old ropes trailing near the stern of the ship. He waded among some rowboats, making toward these.

Then he froze stiffly, gripping the automatic.

A rowboat was moving among the other boats. He could hear the swirling of water as an oar was being used quietly as a paddle. The rowboat was gliding toward the stern of the old ship.

"If it's a lookout, it's too bad," muttered Martin, crouching and preparing to cut off the boat before it touched the ship.

Then, in the semi-light over the water, a huge figure stood erect in the boat. Cat Martin stopped, unbelieving.

"No mug but John Widlow is that big," he whispered. "But if it's him, why is he doing the sneak act?"

For he saw now that big John Widlow, but a few yards away, was near the trailing ropes. And he was starting to climb.

CAT MARTIN lifted the .38 then he waited.

From somewhere in the far distance, toward the lights of Jamaica, came the first faint sounds of police or fire sirens. It could be a fire or any other kind of a call, but Cat Martin knew it could also be the sounding of the alarm that he himself had caused to be spread.

As John Widlow went over the rail of the old ship, Cat Martin was ascending the trailing ropes hand over hand.

He landed on the deck lightly, crouching close to a hatchway.

There was a door in the superstructure of the old ship a few yards away. John Widlow was in the shadow now, hidden, but Cat Martin heard a rapping tattoo of knuckles on wood. Two and three, two and three, like that.

Voices growled. The door creaked open, but there no light showed. Then the heavy voice of big John Widlow rumbled. There was another voice, as if in protest, followed by a crunching blow.

Cat Martin was moving fast as that happened. He kept low. The door swung open and blackness yawned beyond it.

But he heard a dull thudding as if a body was rolling down steps.

Almost immediately another door opened at the bottom. This time there was light. And Martin saw two men. One of them exclaimed sharply in German.

It seemed to Martin that big John Widlow must have slammed the two men's skulls together. Widlow's rumbling voice rolled out. He was speaking German, which Martin understood.

"Stand back! I have come for only one!"

FROM inside the ship's hull a radio sounded. Almost with the thundering threat of John Widlow's voice, came a news bulletin. Evidently the killers and their commander were trying to keep informed of what might be happening outside.

"All Jamaica and Brooklyn police are hunting the suspected murderer of Peter Erdley in the vicinity of Jamaica Bay. Frederick Funston Martin, known as Cat Martin, is reported to have stolen a car, kidnaped a girl and is believed to be headed for a hide-out on a ship."

Cat Martin missed the rest of it, for at that moment he jumped, the automatic ready.

He saw big John Widlow hurling himself into a group of a dozen or more men, roaring curses.

CHAPTER XVII

When Justice Strikes

LOVELY Molly Malloy might have been dead for all the life she evidenced. Cat Martin spotted her first in that tragic, swift moving drama of death.

Molly Malloy was blissfully unconscious, at last. Her yellow hair was hiding her burned face and blistered eyes.

Cat Martin's first movement inside the old freighter carried him over and to one side of two bodies, the men dropped by John Widlow at the door. There seemed no doubt but that their skulls were cracked.

And John Widlow was walking straight into a little knot of men that divided. The men jumped away, but with guns snapping into their hands. Martin saw at least three guns pound slugs into big John Widlow, and yet the giant riveter neither flinched nor deviated from his straight walk.

Attention had been diverted, and Cat Martin crouched by the wall. He saw Jim Sarlon, manacled and restrained by having his hands behind him around an iron stanchion. Sarlon's face and eyes evinced that his one and only thought was for Molly Malloy.

Curt Davis and Charles Wilson, engineers of the secret war weapon, were bound at one side of the boat hull that appeared to be part submarine and part torpedo chaser. Only its power seemed to be the six-inch tubes that projected from either end.

Martin knew that was the secret being sought. This strange new craft, it was claimed, could develop incredible speed from a compression pump system that sucked in the sea at the bow and expelled it with terrific power at the stern.

It was the compression pump, operated by a newly discovered chemical combination of atomic origin, that was the secret sought.

Cat Martin absorbed this in ten seconds as John Widlow walked through pounding lead toward one man. This one appeared to be the commander who had been named, and Cat Martin was not in the least surprised when he recognized the man.

John Widlow's goal was the baldish Jason Harvey, expert chemist, engaged with the secret weapon work in the Yard.

"Stop him!" Jason Harvey cried out desperately. "For God's sake, stop him!"

But the slug that would do it did not seem to have been made.

Then Ruff Griddley, the traitor and rigging foreman, saw Cat Martin.

"It's the finish!" he cried out, cursing. "Rub them all out! We're trapped! Get Davis and Wilson and the girl! I'll take—"

Ruff Griddley whipped out an automatic, jerking it around toward the helpless Jim Sarlon. Cat Martin triggered his .38. Griddley's gun dropped. He staggered and pitched into the commander beside whom he had been standing.

At that, at least four guns turned toward Curt Davis and Charles Wilson. And the automatic in Martin's hand played a tune of crackling death.

MARTIN cursed as he saw that Charles Wilson had been wounded, but every killer of the four was down, two still, and two writhing in death throes.

Yet Cat Martin made no move to end that final march of big John Widlow, not even when the man he sought screamed, was lifted in Widlow's huge hands, and his neck cracked like a dry stick.

"Guess it's better that way," muttered Cat Martin.

One man had aimed deliberately at Molly Malloy, but his gun had not

been fired. Cat Martin's slug took him just under one ear.

Two men sprang toward Jim Sarlon. One held a long knife. Martin's .38 clicked empty. He jumped from his toes. The man with the knife jerked around under Martin's crushing hands, so that his companion was literally spitted upon the knife. A terrific smash to the knifer's jaw laid him out cold.

A commotion broke out on the deck above. Men cursed. Feet pounded. Four survivors of the carnage in the cabin broke for the door through which Cat Martin had entered.

Cat Martin's fingers were locked in big John Widlow's hair. Widlow's eyes were partly glazed, his hands still locked about Jason Harvey's neck.

"Why'd you kill him, Widlow?"

Martin shook John Widlow's head until it rolled. Blood flecked the giant riveter's lips, but Widlow was muttering. A burst of words came with fierce eagerness to talk ahead of death.

"Jason Harvey killed Sela—he killed her because Sela said Peter Erdley might take half of money or he might take all of it. Erdley got money from Berlin—loaned thousands to Harvey to finish tube boat—"

Big John Widlow gasped for breath, then he went on.

"Harvey's men shot me—left me for dead. I saw Curt Davis and Charles Wilson hunting Jason Harvey—Harvey left men to kill them. They ran out quick when they saw Sela—was killed. I played dead—got out when cottage burned—"

Again big John Widlow, his huge body literally riddled by slugs, paused for hoarse breath through blood-foamed lips.

Harvey used *Bermann Turnverein*—Erdley bossed us—I killed little man at San Ramos. Harvey hired him to put finger on me—he was saying he saw big man shoot off gas in San Ramos pool—"

Cat Martin lifted big John Widlow's head. He was going fast.

"Jason Harvey—told Madame D'Yle—Erdley used her name in loan letters to get—Yard workers under his—control. Wanted Madame to kill Erdley—Harvey wanted all money from Germany—for tube boat. She wouldn't kill Erdley—he killed him—left card and picture—Cat Martin for police—"

Cat Martin had the complete picture now. Peter Erdley had been head of the *Bermann Turnverein*. He had used money loaned to war workers to influence sabotage. Because some had refused to be coerced, they had been killed.

That accounted for young Carl Randall and Howard Ramsey. There probably were others unreported. Perhaps Erdley bought some shady workers, but anyway, it was apparent he had his own agents in the yard, such as Ruff Griddley.

Martin realized then that John Widlow did not recognize him. Then Widlow was seeing no one. He was dead. His huge face seemed at last to wear a satisfied smile. He had avenged the murder of his sister.

The voice of Inspector Walton rang out harshly outside. Shots sounded. The lookouts of the *Bermann Turnverein* were mixing it with police hunting for Cat Martin.

MARTIN'S hands darted into Jason Harvey's clothes. He found a peculiar, flat instrument that could be palmed in one hand. It was a powerful, compression pistol. Now he had the final link to the puzzle he had almost unraveled in Jim Sarlon's rooms at the San Ramos. For this was a weapon capable of shooting an explosive bullet.

Martin sprang over to the completed duplicate of the Navy's secret war weapon as again Inspector Walton's voice rang out. Guns cracked and men crashed in combat on the deck of the old ship.

"Cat Martin's in there somewhere!" shouted the inspector. "Wrap these others up! Get that killer!"

Martin found a shining thermos bottle planted under the long hull of the tube boat. He held it up, with the small air pistol.

"Sweet mother!" he exclaimed. "He was prepared to blow the whole thing to Kingdom Come and everyone with it if there was a showdown!"

Martin got to Molly Malloy. Her eyes opened. She could still see. She tried to smile. Cat Martin looked at Jim Sarlon and started talking.

"Tell Inspector Walton that Jason Harvey is the commander of this so-called Bermann *Turnverein*, for which Peter Erdley was the German agent," he said. "It will be passed along to the proper Government authorities. I saw Harvey's picture and yours, Jim Sarlon, in a college group. He wore a woman's costume for a class play.

"I knew then who was the killer at the San Ramos pool. For there is a square emerald in the ring on Jason Harvey's left hand, and he is left-handed. I'll send the police a camera plate showing that same hand firing the air pistol that freed the murder gas at the San Ramos.

"Jason Harvey used this same air pistol to explode a thermos bottle that killed Ken Arthur in the Yard. He intended to kill Curt Davis, but Arthur got in the way. Harvey covered himself by apparently saving Charles Wilson from the blast."

The fighting was now in the stairway leading into the cabin.

"You're a good guy, Jim Sarlon, and Molly Malloy is tops," said Cat Martin. "Me? I'm only a rigger that happened to run into these things. I hope Molly Malloy will be all right. From what Widlow said, I guess Curt Davis and Charles Wilson were tricked to follow Jason Harvey so his men could rub them out."

"That's right," confirmed Davis. "Harvey left a message for us to meet him at that cottage on Shore Road.

We saw the body of the girl and we were scared off. We were bumped by a taxicab as we left the place."

"Sure," Cat Martin grinned. "And about Madame D'Yle. Peter Erdley was forging her name to loan letters, as you've heard. He was using German money for a lend-leech system of his own. Madame D'Yle's one hundred per cent."

Cat Martin was moving toward an open wall in the bottom of the beached hull. He heard Curt Davis speak up.

"Good glory, Jim Sarlon! You invent this thing, you try to pass it along to us fellows because you have a fortune. You want us to have a big reward and the name and look what happens! Jason Harvey is one of the enemy."

Cat Martin heard Jim Sarlon's reply, as he slipped away.

"I think Harvey was only using enemy aliens for his own profit," Sarlon said. "He figured on rubbing out all of you, and me also, once he discovered the chemical combination required for power in the secret boat.

CAT MARTIN grinned. He saw bay water shining below the well in which he had lowered himself. He heard Inspector Walton, followed by an army of policemen, arrive inside the cabin. Inspector Walton halted, staring at the carnage.

"What in all—"

"Get us free, Inspector Walton," said Jim Sarlon. "Molly Malloy needs quick medical care. You can't do much about the others. You will no doubt receive evidence soon that Jason Harvey over there was the leader of all the murderers."

"I will receive evidence?" roared Inspector Walton. "What I want now is this killer, Cat Martin! He run us into this mob of alien rats! We're hunting him! Where is he?"

Cat Martin was half submerged, ready to slip under the old ship. Again he heard Jim Sarlon's reply.

"All evidence, photos and other

proof will be sent to you, Inspector Walton. Jason Harvey killed Peter Erdley. Much of this must be kept from the press. It ties up with a Navy Yard secret. I'm not sure how Cat Martin ties into it. Perhaps it's because he can't keep out of a fight.

"Cat Martin? Cat Martin?" Inspector Walton was raging. "I am supposed to depend upon that brawling, low-life, no-good bum for murder evidence? And who killed all of these men down here?"

"Cat Martin, Inspector," said Jim

Cat Martin waited to hear no more. He dived, swam low, and came up quietly among moored rowboats. Policemen on shore and on the old ship failed to notice the rowboat glide into the darkness.

Cat Martin landed half a mile away. He was talking softly to himself.

"And I had to suspect Jim Sarlon, when all the time he was passing along big profits and the credit to his college buddies," he said disgustedly. "I'm pretty dumb. Jim Sarlon was investigating Madam D'Yle's refu-

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Sarlon gently, as he lifted Molly Malloy into his arms. "Cat Martin's probably saved the lives of all of us. That thermos bottle over there is a bomb. It would have been exploded by an air pistol in Jason Harvey's possession."

"And where's the air pistol?" roared Inspector Walton, eyeing the thermos bottle bomb warily.

"I imagine Martin took it along as a souvenir," suggested Jim Sarlon.

The New York Police Department narrowly missed losing one of its best inspectors and Homicide men by apoplexy.

gees. He got into jams. Every time he did, I couldn't contact the Red Chief. Sweet mother! Jim Sarlon is the Red Chief!"

* * * * *

THEY were planning to toss Cat Martin out upon his ear. This Hotel Standard had reached the limit of tolerance. In three days, Cat Martin had been the violent center of as many free-for-all fights.

Yet Frederick Funston Martin was engaged at the moment in a peaceful game of checkers. His slate-gray eyes were sleepily tranquil. Only his rusty hair seemed belligerent.

Members of the hotel staff were assembling in strategic positions. A light hand touched Cat Martin's shoulder, and Leda Latin's black eyes glowed upon him.

She had a pretty face, even if the lips were a little too red.

"We have a date, Cat, remember?" she said hopefully.

"Yeah, yeah, Long Ears, in about three more moves," said Cat Martin.

His eyes were upon two big men

who were talking in a corner. The men were furtively watching other guests of the Hotel Standard.

Leda Latin gripped the handle of her beaded purse firmly. She sighed resignedly, picking out the bald head of the night manager as a likely target.

"Here we go again," she whispered, as she saw Cat Martin grin crookedly, his eyes upon the furtively conversing strangers.

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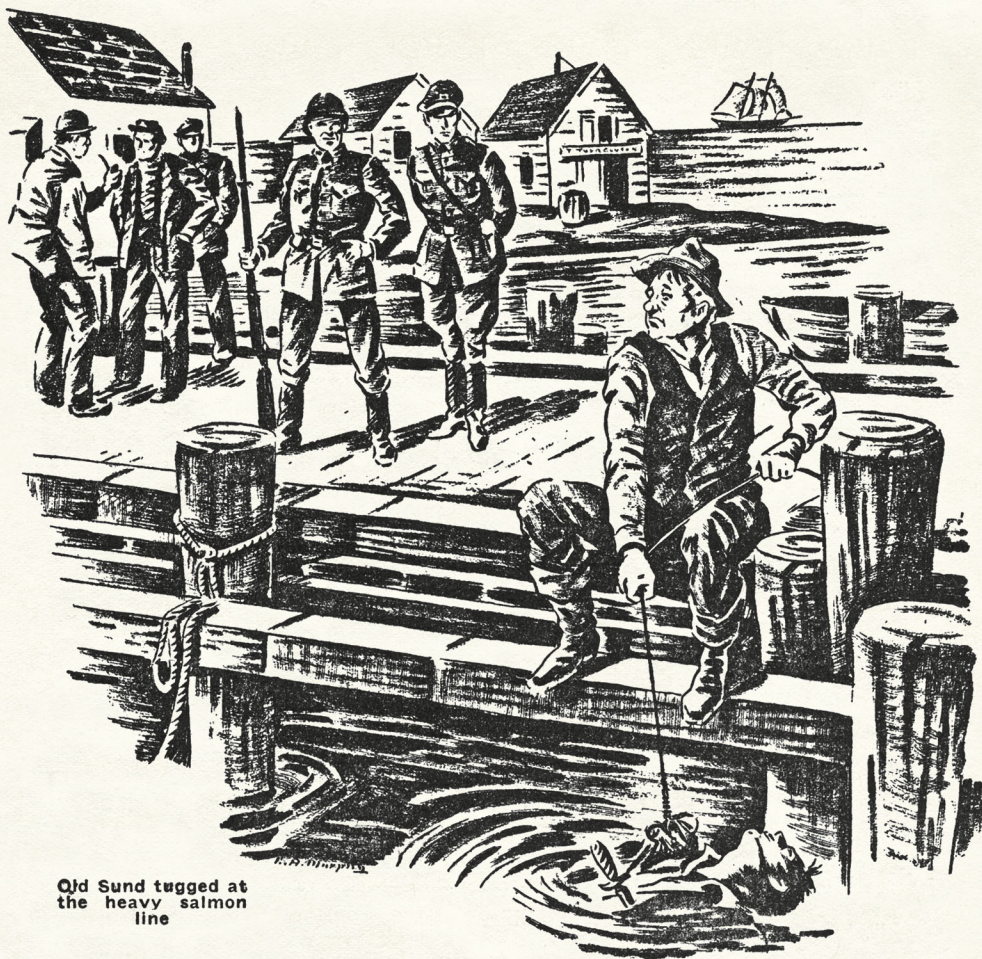
2. APPLY LATHER or brushless shaving cream while face is wet. If lather is used, dip your brush in water frequently



3. TWO EDGES double blade life. Marks indicated above identify edges, enabling you to give both equal use and get extra shaves



4. CLEAN BLADE in razor by loosening handle, then rinsing in hot water and shaking. Wiping the blade is likely to damage the edges



Old Sund tugged at the heavy salmon line

BLOODY FLOOD TIDE

By C. K. M. SCANLON

Old Sund Fished the Northern Seas for Salmon and Cod, Until One Day He Hooked a Quisling and Knew Just What to Do With Him!

OLD SUND feigned near-blindness and did it well. His twisted, calloused hands played the heavy salmon line on the strong tide and he appeared not to notice Selma Helvard.

Blond and slender, she halted where the old wharf planking had rotted away, a dozen yards from him.

Sund muttered an ancient Viking curse. He lifted his salmon line up and down, up and down, its polished

brass spoon whirling with the tide.

His keen old eyes could see the pacing Nazi guard a hundred yards away at the landward end of the rotted wharf of Hell-Deep Fiord.

Selma quietly signaled to him but he pretended not to see. He lifted the spoon and baited its hook for cod.

"She loved the pretty things, and she would not wait," he said to himself. "Now that Eric's boat is in, it is she would cover up for Olaf Rand-

sen, and for herself."

Old Sund spat disgustedly into the green rushing tide. He glanced out at the squat, square-rigged lugger, anchored on the lone island shoal in Hell-Deep Fiord.

Eric Lunt, absent a year, had left Selma Helvard laughing and loyally loving him in the face of all the Quislingites and the Gestapo. It would not be so now that he had returned. All of the Bodoë Peninsula, from Trondheim to Narvik, had been reduced to misery.

Old Sund once had regarded Selma as a sort of god-child, given to him through Eric, his stepson and only kin. Had he not carved her toys of tide-hardened teak? And that fishing knife with the dancing dolls on the handle that everyone so admired?

Had he not given his blessing to her when, with Eric, she had come to tell him of their vows? He had even spent his hard-earned money to buy them linen and silver for their wedding. To Selma he had been both father and mother.

HE THOUGHT bitterly of these things. With Eric away but a few months, Selma had gone into that place of drinking and carousal and music to sing for Olaf Randsen, the Quislingite and spy. And it had been for this reason that she remained aloof from Old Sund.

"And now what is it she would want?" Old Sund whispered the words through his four, snagged teeth. "With forty-two in the old smuggling cave under my house, ready for Eric to make this break through the Nazi coast patrol, she must come spying for Olaf Randsen. I will not see her!"

Eric's dory was coming in, laden with fish for the hungry people of Bodoë. The Nazis had to trust Eric and others like him. That fish was now vital to them, short as they were on food.

To be sure there were Quisling spies aboard Eric's lugger. But their disposition had been arranged. The shifting underground short-wave had made its contact. British commando boats would be at hand.

"And Selma's own brother, hating her, is with those who will go," whispered Old Sund. "It would be well if I could draw that fishing knife I carved for her across her treasonable white throat. Perhaps she hopes to get around Eric again? Olaf Randsen, that seller of lives, may have had a hint. If so, who better to send than his favorite singer, to fill Eric with drink, and intoxicate him with herself?"

Rage and grief coursed through Old Sund's hardened veins. He swore deeply, silently.

The dory bearing Eric was pulling into the old wharf. He saw Eric, tall, bareheaded, and straight, standing in the bow. Selma stood there too—waiting.

"In her heart now that knife would be quicker," muttered Old Sund. "Eric does not know. There, she is in his arms. He is kissing her. No one will tell him but myself. Old Sund, I will tell him."

Old Sund reeled in his trolling line. The Nazi guard and gossipy Quislingites paid the old wharf fisherman no heed. For what could a half-blind, half-demented old fool think or do that might be a danger to their master, Vidkun Quisling, and his adored idol, *Der Fuehrer*?

No. Old Sund was of no interest, except that he brought them good, pink-fleshed salmon when the run was in Hell-Deep Fiord, or fine codfish steaks for winter when the salmon were out.

How could they know that Old Sund had schemed and contrived to have those forty-two boys of Lengaard, the small village outward from Trondheim, equipped to board Eric's unsuspected fishing lugger when the short sun was drowned in Hell-Deep Fiord?

Eric, with luck, would ride out on the flood tide in the short day of tomorrow, with the forty-two loyal ones under the hatches.

Now Old Sund could see the tall Eric calling good-by to Selma. But that wave of Eric's hand betokened a promise between them. Perhaps Eric, unwittingly, had given his word to meet Selma later.

It was in the house on the rock ledge above Hell-Deep Fiord that Old Sund awaited Eric Lunt, the lugger captain. Eric's hearty hand upon Sund's shriveled shoulder made him wince. It gladdened and saddened his heart at the same time.

"They are ready, Father?" said Eric, when the shutters were drawn.

"All ready, son. I have the drunken fishermen who will make the noise, draw the guards, and leave us a clear field."

Eric nodded, his face alight with eagerness.

"It is well prepared then?" he said. "I am taking on ice for the hatches, but it is slipping into the sea from below. I could manage a hundred. What about this disturbance, Father?"

THE fishermen will be drinking in the Olaf Randsen place," said Old Sund. "There will be the fight. A dozen or more are to be engaged. They risk shooting by the Nazi guards. Then the boys will come from the caves and go to the two dories anchored down by the rocks."

Eric's weather-burned face flushed. He shook his head.

"But not in the Randsen place, surely?" he said. "Selma is to have a short time with me near that place. I would not want to be involved in the brawl and upset our plan."

Old Sund pondered silently. He could not smash Eric's faith at one stroke. He could not say to him that their danger lay with Olaf Randsen. Randsen would have the short-wave contact with the patrolling Germans in Hell-Deep Fiord.

Sund judged now that if he did not speak, some Quislingite would take delight in telling Eric the truth. The traitors and the Nazis counted Eric on their side. To them he was a good fisherman and a dumb-headed tool for their own ends, supplying them with needed food.

The old fisherman had a decision to make. Eric must not meet Selma again. He must not be with her when the brawl started.

No doubt, thought Old Sund, Olaf Randsen would know Selma was

meeting Eric. The fighting fishermen would arouse his suspicion and Eric would be in a trap.

Old Sund sliced bread and stale cheese. Eric was wolfing this land fare, washing it down with roasted bean coffee.

Sund knew the fishermen undergrounders now would be only waiting his orders in this night, this half-light of the Midnight Sun.

His mind made up, the old fisherman slowly maneuvered around the table. He knew his fist would not be enough so he had wrapped a cloth about the blade of the hard-handled cutting knife he had been using.

"The end justifies the means," he whispered as he struck. The heavy knife handle cracked on the bone of Eric's skull behind his ear.

"You will go out with the flood tide, son," he said to the unconscious youth. "Olaf Randsen must not learn through Selma of what means the life of her brother Val and forty-one others."

Then he swung aside the door to the old kitchen cupboard and started down stone steps into the coldness of the caves. Forty-two pairs of young eyes looked questioningly up at him.

"I have two dories placed in a protected spot near the rocks," said Old Sund. "This loudspeaker in the wall connects with a microphone under the plank walk in the street. When you hear shooting and trouble, then you will row in the dories to the lugger on Hell-Deep island shoal."

He glanced at Val Helvard. The boy was eighteen, eager and unafraid.

"Yes," was Old Sund's thought. "For our country, a knife in her heart when she would betray her people, and her brother."

* * * * *

The dozen fishermen were well drunk, it seemed, when they pushed into the place of Olaf Randsen, the Quisling traitor.

Like other buildings on the fiord side of the village street, Randsen's place jutted over the Hell-Deep water.

Old Sund carried two hump-backed salmon he had caught. His near-blindness caused him to walk haltingly in the middle of the street. His

ancient legs were stiff-kneed. Nazi guards scarcely glanced his way.

"You will take how much for the fish?" called a Quislingite.

"They have been ordered by Olaf Randsen," said Old Sund, and the offer was not repeated.

CLUMP, clump went Old Sund's boots as his stiff legs carried him along. His right hand touched the butt of the cut-off shotgun he was concealing along one leg in the flaring rubber top of his boot.

The Northern Lights bathed the single street with an eerie glow. The few lamps outside were dimmed out. But in Olaf Randsen's place of music and beer and entertainment for the German guards and their Quisling friends, electricity was permitted.

Coming close to the wide doors leading into that brightness, Old Sund's apparently unseeing eyes were watchful. He saw the red-cloaked figure of Selma suddenly. She was waiting in the shadows.

"Sund?" she called hoarsely, breathlessly. "I wait for Eric. Did he say he would come?"

Old Sund was of a mind then to act. But he knew he must not.

"Eric is the fool," he said, low-voiced. "But he tells me he will keep the rendezvous with you. He is but starting the ice boats to the lugger to be prepared for the flood tide. He will be along, unless some friend speaks to him of you and what you would do to our people."

Selma uttered something like a sob, but Old Sund did not heed. He saw that she started toward him, but he clumped doggedly toward the bright doors of Olaf's place. He had all but reached those doors when the curses and the crashing came from within.

He halted uncertainly, dangling his two salmon. The splintering of glass told him bottles, and perhaps the longest mirror on Bodø Peninsula, were being smashed.

The brawl was warming up. It was a free for all, rough-and-tumble squabble in which the German guards seemed to be having a great deal of fun. This unexpected encounter with some drunken Norwegian fishermen

was providing a needed diversion for them.

Old Sund huddled to the side of the warped frame building. He saw other Nazi guards come hurrying along the street. They did not want to miss any of the fun. Martial law was not in force here as at Trondheim and down at Oslo.

Then Sund heard the first crackling shots inside Olaf's place. Through the doors he saw that one of the supposedly drunken fishermen had made a bold play, one that probably would cost his life.

The fisherman had laid a Nazi guard flat, taken away his rifle and was firing openly. Bullets put more spidery cracks in Olaf Randsen's prized mirror.

"They will hear it now," murmured Old Sund, thinking of the boys waiting at the loudspeaker in the caves.

Then a small hand seized his arm, shaking him.

"Sund! Tell me! Where is Eric? That trouble . . .?"

Enraged Nazis inside now were going into action. Shooting was difficult because of the crowded space. But Nazi rifles and pistol butts were being swung. The dozen fishermen were yelling loudly, fighting back with chairs and bottles.

Old Sund started through the wide, bright doors, Selma's questions still ringing in his ears. He saw a fellow townsman go down with life blood streaming from a wound in his throat. Sund dropped his salmon and reached for the butt of his sawed-off shotgun.

"Sund, please! You fool! You will be shot!"

While suspecting the girl, he was unprepared for her violence. Selma struck him with a heavy weapon that might have been a club and as he fell, he saw her grab the gun from his boot. Then she dashed toward the side door that gave entrance to Olaf Randsen's office and living rooms.

SICK and stunned, Old Sund got to his hands and knees.

"It's the underground!" grated a German voice. "Here is one of them! I'll—"

A rifle muzzle prodded into his ribs.

He felt sick and wished only to die. By this time, he was sure the dories were moving toward Eric's lugger on Hell-Deep island shoal. Dying would be easy now.

But the other Nazi guard kicked away the rifle held against him.

"Shoot away our food, you fool?" he yelled angrily to his compatriot. "That man is Old Sund who gets us the big fish from the wharf! See! He was bringing fish!" Then he added in a lower voice, "Throw them into that corner. We will feast when this is over!"

Old Sund's head whirled. He had been spared. He could not guess what had become of his shotgun. Selma had disappeared. The inside of Olaf's place was a bedlam of fighting.

"If only Olaf does not guess, or Selma does not inform him . . ." Old Sund whispered his fading hope. Randsen could bring down the whole patrol of Hell-Deep Fiord if he suspected all of this was but window dressing for a bigger plan of the underground.

Left out on the walk, Sund got to his feet and staggered back to the doorway of the inn. Across the lighted interior he could see the heavy door leading into Olaf Randsen's private office. The place was a shambles. Some of the fishermen, his friends, lay where they had fallen. Sund knew that some of them were dead.

But it must be that way. A few lives, a few prisoners perhaps, a few more shot ruthlessly against the sea wall. What were these in exchange for forty-two boys? Forty-two fighters with youthful blood?

"Forty-two pilots for the commandos of the British and for the Americans," whispered Old Sund. "If only Olaf Randsen does not suspect! Why did I not strangle Selma when there was the chance?"

Then there was Eric, towering over him, raging at him.

"You would not tell me of Selma and of Olaf Randsen buying her away from me!" Eric's voice was cold, deadly. "You would keep me from breaking this Quisling sympathizer with my hands! Go home, Father! I have learned! I will kill them both!"

Old Sund cried out. But Eric was gone. Then Old Sund, bitter within, desperate, thought of reaching Olaf Randsen and Selma through that other side door.

He was turning when he saw Olaf, his handsome features twisted with hate and anger, open the inside door of his private office. Eric was flinging himself toward that door. A Nazi guard swung for Eric's head with a rifle barrel only to have the rifle twisted from his hands and hurled away over the heads of the crowd.

Then Old Sund witnessed a strange thing. Olaf Randsen was halfway through his door, a pistol in his hand. The Quislingite seemed to have a quick change of mind. His pistol dropped. He retreated inside the room and his door swung shut.

Realizing he could do nothing now to reach Eric who was close to that inner office door, Sund went back along the outside of the building. He was sure that Olaf Randsen had guessed at the truth, or had been led to it by Selma.

There was a blue flash. The lights in Olaf's place went out. It was like pouring the oil of darkness upon a storm of fighting and killing. Norsemen and Nazis, the embattled fishermen and the guards, and all others came tumbling into the lighted street.

"Drunken fools!" the Nazi captain raged. "They will break out like that! It is good for them when they fight each other!"

The undergrounders were scattering, except for those who could not walk away and three or four who had been held as prisoners.

"See as to Randsen!" ordered the captain. "Like all the Quislingers, he's not such a fighter! He is smart to stay out of it!"

OLD SUND hobbled along outside. He watched as the guards battered down the door leading to Randsen's office. Lights flashed on.

"*Verdammt!*" roared the captain. "Randsen is the smart one. See! He has the way through his floor to the water and a boat that is now gone. They will not fight, these Quislings. You!" he ordered one of his men.

"Stand by Randsen's radio for any messages until he returns. We will now drink some of his *schnapps* as pay for our trouble."

Sund hurried, crabbing along in the pale, eerie light of the street. His thoughts were in a turmoil. What should be expect? The brawl had served its purpose.

But Olaf Randsen and Selma were gone. If only the girl did not know? Then a hard hand gripped his arm.

"Father! Selma? She is gone with Olaf! I will find her! The plan is lost and they will know! I must stay to find Selma!"

A sudden fear came to Old Sund. But at the same time he thought of something else. His shotgun. It had not been found. Yet he could not pin any faith on such a shred of hope. Could Selma have taken it to save him?

"My son," he said to Eric. "Forty-two have by this time reached your lugger. There is nothing as yet to show it is suspected. Only the warning that might be given by Olaf Randsen can stop you in Hell-Deep Fiord before you reach the sea and the waiting commandos.

"You will stay for her, for such a woman as would bring about the death of her own brother? That is not love, boy! Why—with all my soul I say it—if you fail or delay one minute reaching your command, your lugger, it is I, as old as I am who will try to take the boat from Hell-Deep."

Tall Eric stood there a moment, his hot eyes glowing in the half-light. He bowed his head and his shoulders sagged. Then suddenly he looked up.

"I will take the lugger from Hell-Deep at flood tide, the gods willing," he said. "If I come back, I will then deal with the two of them. Go home, Father. I have but little time. We will sail when the sun comes on the flood."

Old Sund's eyes misted. He walked slowly away.

* * * * *

The short day of sun was at hand. Old Sund went to his salmon lines left trailing in the tide. Green water rolled shallow on the rock shelf where the rotted wharf was built. A

few yards out it dropped to a sheer four hundred feet.

A dozen Nazi guards and twice as many Quislingites were at the landward end of the old wharf. They jabbered of the night before.

"Olaf Randsen went away with Selma Helvard in a boat," said a gloating voice. "Knowing that, Eric Lunt puts to sea with quickness!"

The men laughed uproariously, looking up at Old Sund. Sund ignored the jibes that continued to be thrust at him. He pulled on a tarred line that seemed to be snagged. His pale, deep eyes peered out at the tall masts of the square-rigged fishing lugger.

The tide was near its flood. Its rush would carry the boat outside within an hour or so. Not one German patrol boat appeared.

The old man tugged at the heavy salmon line. Its big spoon hook came up slowly.

Suddenly Old Sund freed the line a bit, letting it run.

"A big one, Sund?"

A narrow-eyed Nazi guard came closer.

"I baited last night and a great ling cod is caught and tangled in the piling," said Old Sund calmly. "I will allow the tide to work him free."

THE old fisherman played the heavy line gently back and forth. Other Nazis and Quislingites were watching him, and the lugger. The sun built a pattern of brief daylight on the top of the great flood tide. The green water was still, as if taking breath for the coming rush to the sea.

Old Sund's hand moved slowly. The watchers thought he was trying to loosen the trapped line. But Sund knew otherwise. Slowly he was rubbing the tarred line back and forth across an old spike down there in the piling. Back and forth, back and forth . . .

"It is a great ling cod," said Old Sund to the nearest Nazi. "If I save him, you will have him for the bake."

The chain of the fishing lugger grated through the chocks as the winch started weighing anchor. Old

Sund shaded his eyes to see Eric's boat swinging slowly with the turn of the top tide.

"You can see," he said to the Nazi guard, pretending that he could not see the boat. "Tell me, is it my stepson who is making sail for the flood?"

"He is making sail," replied the Nazi. "He brought to us ten tons of good fish. If we had more like him . . ."

Old Sund appeared not to see his salmon line, rubbing, rubbing on the rusty old spike. He must lose this great fish.

His eyes went to the deck of the lugger as it started drifting off the island shoal half a mile out in Hell-Deep Fiord. He saw the tall figure of Eric in the little wheelhouse. And—yes—there was her scarlet cloak, like the blood of many lost loyal ones, there beside him. A red cloak that but one in Lengaard had ever worn.

The greatness of his joy caused Old Sund almost to hurry too much. The Nazi guard was very interested in saving the big ling cod. He put down his rifle, came next to Sund.

"I will help you, Sund," he said. "It is heavy for an old man."

The lugger moved, caught the first seaward turn of the flood tide, and glided down the narrow fiord. The tall figure of Eric was merged with the scarlet cloak.

"My children," said Old Sund under his breath, as if pronouncing a sacred rite.

"He is heavy, that fish!" exclaimed the Nazi guard, a hand gripping the tarred line above Old Sund's twisted fingers.

"He is so heavy," said Sund. "See!" He uttered a sharp Norse oath. "Help pull, with quickness!"

The Nazi guard gave a great heave on the line. Old Sund was the picture of utter despair.

The line broke off where it had worn through on the rusty spike. The Nazi cursed.

Now the lugger's sails caught the canyon breeze and the full flood tide. Old Sund glimpsed a last flash of Selma Helvard's scarlet cloak.

"Gone, on the flood tide!" exclaimed Old Sund. "Well, no matter," he said to the Nazi guard. "The ebb will bring more salmon and cod. Thank you for trying to help me. My poor spoons are growing scarce."

"I will get for you the new salmon spoon," the Nazi generously offered. "You will give me for it six salmon."

Old Sund nodded. The great ling was gone—out on the green flood tide that never returned even its driftwood.

"Selma," whispered Old Sund. "Eric. The boys will bring you back to me some day. As for Olaf Randsen? He may call for his patrol from four hundred feet down, but he will not be heard."

The old fisherman surveyed his broken line. In his memory he could still see the body of Olaf Randsen dangling on the salmon spoon before he had quickly submerged the line again. And in Randsen's breast had been a knife that Old Sund could never mistake . . . the knife he had carved for Selma.

Olaf had died with dancing dolls over his riven heart. The world seemed good to Old Sund.



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INTO THE LION'S

CHAPTER I

Two Sinister Men

SHE had hair the color of pale old gold and enormous grey eyes. Her simple wool dress revealed a lithe figure. Bill Drake, sitting late over a cognac in Omar Khayyam's restaurant in San Francisco, wished fervently that he knew her.

Whereupon the girl looked at him,

smiled and nodded.

"Hello, Bill!" she said.

Drake felt stunned. Yet his expressionless face did not betray it. He had a memory for faces and knew he had never seen this girl in his life. But he waved and smiled back.

"Imagine meeting you this far from Chicago," the girl called. The two men at her table looked at him. Drake returned to his cognac.

Curious. Obviously it was not a case of mistaken identity. The girl

Bill Drake Takes a Chance Even Though It



Bill Drake kicked, putting everything into the upswing of his sinewy legs, while Janice Morse looked on with new hope

MOUTH

A Gripping Novelet
By HERBERT BREAN

knew who he was and that he was from Chicago. Nevertheless he could not place her.

Then he remembered something.

A month ago he had cracked the Mimi Agarron murder and the Merchants Bank holdup in Chicago. One of the national magazines in its current issue was carrying a four-page picture story on Chicago's famous Drake Investigation Agency and its sole operative. Anyone who had seen that would have little trouble in rec-

ognizing Bill Drake. Undoubtedly that was the answer.

Temporarily, he was news, and glamor of a sort. The girl had pretended she knew him to impress her friends. Drake felt disappointed.

He looked up, hoping to catch her off guard. She smiled again, wrinkling a pretty nose. Again her companions followed her gaze. This time Drake sensed hostility.

He lighted a cigarette. The magazine theory seemed sound. But it

Leads Him into the Jaws of a Death Trap!

did not square with the proud lift of that comely chin, the self-reliant poise of her trim personality. The girl did not look like one who hung out in bars. Yet she. . . .

Then another explanation occurred to Drake. It brought every nerve in his body to the tingling alert. The men with her radiated an air of menace. Supposing the girl was in trouble and wanted her companions to think she had a friend nearby? Might not she seize such an opportunity to let them know she was being watched over by a detective.

FANTASTIC perhaps, but quite possible.

At her throat was a pin which spelled her name in scintillant crystals. "Janice." Drake decided to test his theory. At least he could give her a chance to tip him off.

He walked over to her table. For a second her glance went toward her companions, dark with fear. Then she smiled at Drake.

"Nice seeing you again, Janice," he said. He spoke to her but he watched the two men.

"What are you doing here in San Francisco, Bill?"

The words they spoke then were casual, pleasantries such as are sometimes offered by chance met friends. Nothing she said contained the slightest clue. The smaller man listened with averted head. He was dark and dapper, with flat snake eyes. The other man, big and paunchy, continued to stuff food into a surly mouth.

Drake strolled on, bought cigarettes at the bar and returned to his table.

They were leaving now. She moved away and Drake watched her go with a sombre glance. Something about her had appealed to Drake with no uncertain terms, the smiling lips, the fear-haunted eyes and the vivid impact of grace and beauty. What a companion for his brief vacation! Would he ever see her again?

Then the big man came back

through the door, walking heavily. Something in his face told the detective the "fantastic" theory was right.

The big man loomed over Drake's table, screening him from the restaurant's few remaining customers. His large white fedora slanted belligerently over his low brow.

"Your being here is fery stranch," he said, with a thick accent. "Bedder keep oud of what does not concern you, my friendt. *Ja*, you may Miss Morse trouble cause."

He thrust his hand into the inner pocket of his coat. Drake caught a glimpse of a gun butt.

Drake made a move as if to get to his feet. The big man did not hesitate. He snatched up a glass of brandy from the table and dashed it into the face of the detective. Drake only had time to put up his hand. It did not ward off the fiery liquor that blinded and stung his eyes.

Brandy does not blind one permanently. Yet for a few minutes the detective flinched as if hot coals had been pressed into his brain.

When ice water, daubed with his napkin, partially restored Drake's vision, the big man had gone. Curious patrons of the restaurant gathered around to help him.

Later the hat-check girl wondered why the lean, athletic-looking man seemed in such a hurry to get his hat and stick, and at the tense, cold fury of his face as he left.

Drake walked up to the first taxi in line outside the restaurant.

"Two men and a girl just came out of here. Did they take a hack or have their own car?"

"Hack," said the driver.

"When does the hackman check in with the company?"

"Midnight, but if you want to know where he went, hang around. This is a good stand at night. Unless it was a long run, he'll probably be back."

"You wouldn't have noticed his number?" said Drake and offered him some money.

"Number 700," said the driver, promptly taking the money. "Jack Conway, a pal of mine."

Cab number 700 pulled into the end of the line in ten minutes. Drake gave five-dollars to the cabman.

"The same place you took your last fare. Don't waste any time!"

A FEW minutes afterward the taxicab swerved into a side street, close-packed with brownstone houses that had been converted into apartments. In front of one of them Drake saw a white fedora.

A certain watchfulness in the way the wearer slouched against the doorway railing checked Drake's first impulse to leap out and begin a massacre. Obviously, Janice Morse, since that must be her name, was in trouble. Somehow the girl with fair hair and frightened grey eyes bulked larger in Drake's mind than his own revenge.

"If that's the place on the left, keep going around the corner," he said.

"That's the place," said the driver.

Drake paid him off. There was an alley behind the brownstone houses. Drake walked its dark length to the rear of the house White-Hat was guarding. The back door had a rickety lock. Drake drew out a bunch of keys and presently walked in.

A dim hall led to the front door through whose glass he saw White-Hat's back. None of ten brass letter boxes bore the name of Janice Morse.

After listening at each door on the first floor, he ascended the stairs. Nothing important could be heard on the second floor, either. But outside the door of a front apartment on the third floor stood a small trunk with "Janice Morse, Urbana, Ill." painted on it. Through this door he heard two voices conversing. One was that of a woman. The other, that of a man, had the accent of a cultured Englishman.

"Really, Miss Morse, you are wrong on insisting in going to the police.

Haven't I explained that—"

"But, Mr. Kaye, I don't see why my father didn't meet me," answered a soft voice. Drake felt certain it was the girl he had seen in the restaurant. "I wired him the time of my arrival and he knew I didn't have very much money. If Betty Feathergill hadn't been going to Seattle and let me use her apartment I don't know what I should have done."

Drake turned the doorknob softly. He had stepped into the room, a modestly furnished apartment, before either of the speakers saw him.

"Hello, Janice," he said. "Small world, isn't it?"

Kaye's eyes gleamed. He leaned over to get up from his chair. Drake caught the flash of a large ruby ring as Kaye's hand strayed to a breast pocket.

"Oh, hello," drawled Kaye. "How did you get in?"

"Don't try it," snarled Drake. To the girl it seemed his hand had not moved, yet now it held an automatic pistol. "Reach another inch toward that shoulder holster and I'll blast your eyes out."

Kaye, slight and dark, stood half in, half out of his chair. Then he smiled.

"Really, it is not necessary to be melodramatic, Mr. What's-your-name."

His hand dropped to the table beside his chair. With a sudden flip he tossed a small vase backwards through the open window behind him.

Drake heard it crash, faintly, down in the street. He laughed.

"Fine," he said. "I wanted to interview your friend."

He pushed the door shut, then reached into Kaye's coat and took a small, efficient Luger from under his left arm.

"Go over and face that far wall, and keep your hands up. If you make a sound, I shoot!"

Kaye obeyed. The back of his neck was white.

Stealthy footsteps sounded, ascend-

ing the stair. Drake waited.

"Get behind me near this door, Janice," Drake whispered. "What's the big palooka's name?"

"John," she murmured. Her voice was tremulous.

The footsteps paused outside the door. Drake, imitating Kaye's accent, called:

"If that's you, John, come in. It's quite all right."

THE door opened. A large, bulky man slid into the room.

"Sure, Mr. Kaye," said John. "I thought you signaled."

His back was toward Drake. The detective, grinning wickedly, shoved the barrel of his automatic into John's ear, hard.

"Turn around," growled Drake.

He kicked the door shut, passed his hands over the big man. The man had a gun in his coat pocket. Drake dropped it on the floor and stepped back.

"Miss Morse," said Kaye, speaking quietly, with his face still to the wall, "I hope for your own sake you will remember our business is confidential. The intrusion of outsiders can have only the unhappiest effect for—"

Drake heard a sob. Without relaxing vigilance, he ventured one quick look at the girl. She was staring at him. Her face had grown white. Then her lips straightened.

"Stop it!" she said. "Don't you see what you're doing?"

She moved closer. Suddenly she sprang between him and the others, and wrenched the hand holding the automatic toward the ceiling.

"Look out, you little idiot!" Drake snapped.

But it was too late. The burly man, John, chanced a quick look behind him. He saw his opportunity and dived for the gun on the floor. Drake tried to side-step and wrestle free but the girl clung like a leech. He caught a glimpse of her pleading face. Then the burly John had his gun again and

his eyes glinted.

"Now, schwein," he grunted, and the gun came up.

By an effort Bill Drake wrenched himself loose and swept Janice Morse behind him. Then he stared into the big man's piglike eyes, holding gun against gun. John hesitated. Only his heavy breathing broke the silence of the room. Kaye had turned and was watching tensely.

CHAPTER II

Into a Death Trap



JOHN'S eyes seemed to spit hate out of a face black with rage. His gun jerked. Yet he was afraid to pull the trigger.

"Schwein!" he screamed suddenly.

Drake chuckled with grim mirth.

Then Kaye, the smaller man, intervened.

"John!" he said, walking across the room. "Put away your pistol." Drake felt reluctant admiration for Kaye. He had nerve.

John stared from Kaye to Drake and back again.

"Put down that gun," Kaye rapped. "We don't want any shooting, now."

John's gun sagged to his side. Slowly Kaye turned toward Drake and gave him a tight smile. He sighed.

"That's better." Kaye seemed cool as ice. "Put up your weapon, Mr. Drake. Gun play is not necessary."

"My gun is all right as it is," barked Drake, watching John.

"As you wish." Kaye frowned with annoyance. "I don't know why you followed us tonight, Mr. Drake. It may have been Miss Morse's fault. She said she knows you. Perhaps she has been indiscreet."

"No," said the girl. "I haven't told him anything."

"Splendid." Kaye beamed upon her. "Mr. Drake, your interference has been a most unfortunate error. Professor Morse is this young lady's father. He and I have important business to finish." His tone grew sardonic. "I'm sorry about your curiosity but it really is private. Right, Janice?"

"Yes," said the girl.

"Let me apologize," Kaye continued in smooth tones, "for the behavior of my bodyguard."

"Bodyguard?" said Drake.

"Yes. You see—" Kaye coughed delicately—"I'm in the service of the British government. Not that it's any of your affair, you know, old chap. My death might be of value to the Nazis and my Government appointed John, who is of German birth and familiar with the methods of Nazi agents, to accompany me on this mission. John is sometimes aggressively loyal."

Drake looked at the scowling German.

"My word! Are you doubtful?" laughed Kaye. "Ask Miss Morse."

Drake turned to her in mute inquiry.

Her face had flushed. She looked at Drake angrily.

"It's true," she said. "How about getting out of here right now and minding your own business for a change?"

For a scant fraction of a second Drake almost took her at her word. He did not believe Kaye, of course. The story had been too smooth. Neither was he deceived by the strange alteration in the girl's demeanor. He had a hunch that he chanced upon the fringe of some type of some political or international intrigue.

The memory of the look in the girl's eyes decided Drake now. He would help her whether she wanted it or not. These men had some hold upon her. He felt sure of that. What it was he hoped to find out later. Just now she

wanted him to go, so he feigned a look of anger.

"Sorry," he said stiffly.

In leaving the room Drake passed the grinning John. The burly man had a bitter sneer on his face.

Drake did not even break his stride. Yet his right hand pistoned across his body and caught John squarely under the jowls. There was a heavy thud of a pile-driver blow. The big man catapulted over a chair and lay still.

DRAKE continued on out of the room. He never wasted a second glance at John. But he remembered the look in the girl's eyes as he left.

They were no longer angry. They had grown embarrassed and frightened!

Drake slammed the door. He stamped down the stairway like a man in a towering rage. Once outside he turned several corners to make sure no one had followed him.

Then he stopped at a barroom and ordered another brandy. The last one, in the restaurant, had been wasted.

He wondered what this affair was all about. Drake had an idea that whatever the business involving Janice Morse might be, it was not a situation that the smiling, silky Mr. Kaye should be allowed to control. Obviously, the girl feared Kaye. Yet she had insisted that Drake leave.

He wondered if Kaye believed he had abandoned the matter. For some reason, he did not think Kaye had been deceived.

Drake lit a cigarette and sipped brandy. A half hour later, he left the bar and studied a telephone book. "Betty Feathergill's" apartment, Janice Morse had said. Drake remembered noticing a telephone on a table.

He found the number, dialed it, then he hung his handkerchief over the mouthpiece. Kaye's brittle accent said "Hello?"

"Hell-oo," said Drake in a drunken

drawl. "Betty there?"

"Sorry, she's not here," said Kaye.

"Whad-ya mean, she's not there?"

Drake demanded. "Who are you? What you doin' in little Betty's apartment this time o'night?"

"Miss Feathergill is not here," Kaye repeated, in exasperated tones.

Yet he did not hang up and this confirmed Drake's suspicions that something was dead wrong about the entire situation. Kaye was afraid to hang up. Such an action might arouse curiosity and cause investigation. He hoped to prevent it by a semblance of patience and courtesy.

"Listen, brother," said Drake, slurring the words, "I'm pract'clee engaged to Betty Feathergill and nobody's gonna be up in her apartment telling me she ain't there at 11:30 at night. Put her on or I'm comin' right up there!"

"Just a minute, please," said Kaye. Then Drake heard him speak to someone else. "You talk to this drunken fool. He's Betty Feathergill's friend."

Drake grinned to himself.

Janice Morse's voice said "Hello?"

"This is Bill Drake, and I'm pretending to be a drunken pal of Betty Feathergill," explained Drake. "Act it out. Are you in trouble?"

"Why no, not exactly, Jack," said the girl instantly. "Betty's in Seattle."

"Do you need help? When could I see you?"

"I'm not sure, but I know Betty will be anxious to see you."

"Tonight?"

"Why don't you write her tomorrow after you've got a little sleep? You know she doesn't like you to drink."

Drake smiled in approval. Smart girl!

"Call me as early as you like at the Mark Hopkins," he said. "I'll come to your apartment or meet you where you like."

"Now you be a good boy and don't drink any more tonight," said Janice Morse. "Good night."

Drake chuckled, paid for his brandy

and left. Apparently she had no need for him tonight. Perhaps her troubles were not serious, after all.

YET thoroughness was a passion with him. It made him tops as a private detective. He stopped in a telegraph office and wired a night letter to his girl assistant at the office in Chicago.

"Helen: Find out all you can about Prof. Morse and daughter Janice of Urbana and why visiting San Francisco. Wire me soonest at hotel. Having fine time. Glad you are not here. Bill."

A bellhop awakened Drake next morning. The boy had the answer to his telegram.

"Dear Boss: Morse is highly respected retired chemistry professor, formerly University Illinois. Been experimenting since retirement with synthetic rubber. Daughter unmarried, keeps house for him. No money, no enemies, no scandal. No one knew they were in San Francisco. Why not you say specifically what kind of information you want, you dope? Love and kisses. Helen."

"Because I don't exactly know myself, sugar," Drake said softly.

It was almost eleven o'clock. Janice Morse had not called. Drake considered telephoning the apartment again, but their arrangement had been for her to call him. He did not know what risk changing the plan might entail.

After leaving word with the telephone operator to transfer his calls to the dining room, he went to breakfast. The headwaiter brought him an early edition of the afternoon paper. Over his ham and eggs he glanced at the front page.

Staring out at him from the paper was the lovely face of Janice Morse. The caption above it read: "She Found Her Father Dead." The picture had probably been taken by a staff photographer for the hand of another person rested on her shoulder, as if to comfort her.

The hand wore a ring with a large

stone. Drake suddenly recognized that stone. A ruby. He had seen the ruby only last night!

Drake read the story. Janice Morse, 22 years old, had arrived in San Francisco two days ago, seeking her father. He had come here two weeks before. Officials of the British International Rubber Development Company, Ltd., had planned to discuss his new and better method for the manufacture of synthetic rubber. Dr. Morse had vanished. Nothing had been heard from him since he left home.

At his hotel she was told he had not occupied his room for more than a week. At that time the rubber development company had decided his method was impractical. They had turned it down, according to the com-



pany manager. The name of the manager was Wilson Kaye. Prof. Morse had not visited the offices of the company for at least seven days, Kaye said.

This morning she had gone to the police. They recognized her description of the missing man as that of a suicide who had leaped to his death from a downtown building during the night. She and Kaye had identified him at the morgue.

Drake grimly ate his breakfast as he finished the account which had been rushed into print by the enterprising bulldog staff of the press. Events of last night were now understandable. A few other things also were becoming clearer.

Seeking her vanished father, the girl had met Kaye and her woman's instinct had sensed something omi-

nous. Perhaps Kaye had made some minor slip.

Alone in a strange city, she had been afraid of her two dinner companions last night. Possibly she suspected her father was in the power of the pleasant but sinister Wilson Kaye. It seemed plausible she had been afraid to antagonize Kaye by revealing her suspicions. At Kaye's veiled threat, she had sent Drake away, hoping to be able to ask his advice later.

That was clear enough. So was a great deal more!

Wilson Kaye was nobody's fool. Had he sensed Janice Morse's suspicions? When Drake intervened, did Kay grow desperate? Drake thought so. He believed Kaye had played on Janice's fears to stall Drake off for a few hours, while he worked out a clever way to murder his victim. A way that would leave him in the clear.

That it was murder, Drake did not doubt. Pitching a man off a tall building might be an unusual method of killing. But it was safe! It also could be an excellent way of disguising other things, such as the marks of torture which one's victim might bear if he had been tortured for information.

All of this added up to a grim conclusion. Drake's mouth hardened into a stern, hard line.

Why should anyone commit murder to obtain a synthetic rubber formula? Why should he wish to keep it secret? Especially when it might be a better, easier, simpler way of making rubber? There could be an answer to that.

Bill Drake believed he knew the answer!

HE GULPED down his coffee and left the dining room. No use waiting for Janice Morse's call now. The newspaper story had said she was leaving immediately for the East with her father's body. Probably the shock of his death had driven everything else from her mind. Probably Wilson Kaye would urge her to leave town

as quickly as possible.

Drake gave the cab driver the address of the rubber company which the newspaper had mentioned.

A plan had formed in his mind. There must be no mistake. That would be dangerous—much more than an old man's murder, or even his own life, depended on the next few hours.

Drake got out before a dingy office building. A battered elevator took him up to the second floor. Here he found a porter removing the lettering, "British International Rubber Development Company, Ltd.," from the door of a vacant office.

"They moved out late last night," the porter said in answer to Drake's questions. "Only moved in two weeks ago, too."

The elevator took Drake down to the street again. That was that.

Only one thing left to do, now. Drake knew what he would do if he were Mister Wilson Kaye. Also he suspected what Wilson Kaye would expect of Bill Drake.

By doing it, he would be putting himself squarely and deliberately into the lion's mouth. But, he told himself grimly, that was the surest way to get close to the lion.

At a drug store, Drake obtained some wrapping paper. In it he packaged his beloved .38 calibre automatic. This bundle he addressed and mailed to his hotel. No sense in losing his pet gun for he well knew he would have no chance to use it. In a drug store telephone booth he dialed Betty Feathergill's apartment.

"That you, Janice?" he asked when a woman's voice answered.

"Janice stepped out just for a minute. She'll be right back," said the voice.

"Tell her Bill Drake will be up in ten minutes," said Drake.

As he settled back in a taxi, he found himself hoping that Kaye's burly bodyguard, John, was not trigger crazy enough to start shooting without any reason.

CHAPTER III

A Ruse That Failed



TALL woman with bright red hair and heavily mascaraed eyes stood in the doorway of the Feathergill apartment.

"You're Mr. Drake, of course," she said. Her smile glittered. "Come in. Janice is here now."

He followed her into the apartment and the door banged behind him. The room he faced was empty.

"Where's Janice?" he asked.

A gun dug into his back. A man spoke. It was Kaye's big bodyguard.

"So; you come back after all, yah, Mr. Drake? Better not moof!"

The red-haired woman picked up her hat and purse with nervous haste.

"That's all," she jabbered. "I done my part. I'm goin'."

"You haf your money," John told her. "Dere it iss, on de table. Now get owdt."

"It's a shame," the woman said. "I feel sorry I done it now. Poor fellow. Thanks a lot for the money. G'bye."

Without a second glance at Drake she left the apartment.

"Now, Drake," said John, triumph in his voice.

Drake could hear the big man breathing heavily behind him. He kept his hands in the air, wondering why John did not at once yank his arms behind his back, tie them up, thrust a gag in his mouth. But something else happened — something Drake did not expect.

The heavy butt of an automatic thudded against the back of his head with terrific force. A million stars flashed before his eyes. A sharp pain seemed to envelop everything. The world faded as he dropped forward

into nothingness.

A deep, throbbing ache along the top of his head was the first thing Drake felt when he regained his senses. He was dizzy and ill, weak as a child. Yet some subconscious instinct warned him not to groan. He kept his eyes closed. A numbness in his arms and feet told him they had been tightly bound. From near at hand came the sound of heavy snores.

Very slowly he opened one eye. He was lying on dirty linoleum in the large kitchen of an old-fashioned, apparently untenanted, house. In a chair tilted back against the gas stove, and slouched over the stove itself, Kaye's bodyguard, John, nodded and drowsed. Six empty beer bottles on the floor mutely explained his drowsiness.

A bare bulb illuminated the grimy kitchen and a curtainless window revealed that it was night. Drake closed his eyes and waited.

John's snores became deeper, more rhythmical. Drake tried moving his hands, bound behind him, and his feet, which he could see were corded with clothesline.

He studied John and smiled unpleasantly. Slowly he worked himself to a sitting position. Then with a sudden forward roll, he got to his feet and inched to the stove. Turning around, his bound hands found the little handle that controlled the burner nearest John's head. Gas began breathing softly into the big man's face.

Drake crouched low to avoid the gas that soon tainted the air. John's snores deepened still more and his face grew crimson. Then Drake shut off the burner.

WHEN he was certain the bodyguard had passed out, Drake wriggled his way back across the kitchen floor, propped himself up with his back against the window and despite his bound hands, managed to raise the sash. Cool air poured into

the reeking atmosphere of the room. Drake had to school himself to patience until the air was pure once more. Next he hopped back to the stove.

There were matches in a wall container, low enough down for him to reach. He ignited one, lighted a burner and held his rope-fastened wrists over the flame. Seconds dragged by and Drake was forced to grit his teeth to endure the torture of scorched wrists. But at last the ropes parted and he was free.

He gave John more gas and relieved him of the automatic, and a well-filled billfold which identified the bodyguard as "John Johnson." Then Drake explored the place. Other rooms of the apartment were empty. The sole furnishing seemed to be that telephone in the front hall. The dial tone told him it was connected.

Next he tied John up with the ropes in the kitchen. But Drake did it in such a manner that the bodyguard could not roll around and free himself. Nothing to do but wait, now. Perhaps the hall would be the best place. He could not be certain whether anyone would come here or not.

The telephone rang.

"Hello," said Drake, imitating John's guttural.

"John!" It was Kaye. "Everything all right? Listen. In twenty minutes I'll drive up in the alley with the lights out. I have the other. Bring Drake and we'll do what we planned. Don't forget anything. Have everything we need."

"Yah," said Drake. "Sure, boss."

Kaye paused. Drake knew he was supposed to say something.

"Anything you want to ask me?" said Kaye casually.

Stall him! Drake thought fast. He emitted a guttural chuckle.

"You know vot dot iss I would ask, yah?"

Kaye laughed.

"Well, it's all right," he said. "I

broke the cipher this afternoon. We've got everything now!" His voice was exultant.

"Goot," said Drake. His forehead went damp with perspiration.

"Twenty minutes, remember."

"Ja! Sure boss."

Drake hurried into the kitchen. John was losing some of his crimson complexion. Drake smashed him behind his ear with the gun. Remembering how hard John had hit him he took vicious pleasure in doing this.

UNTYING the big man, Drake stripped off his outer clothing, and then removed his own. He put his clothing on the limp giant, then dressed himself in John's. Except for John's bigger midriff, they did not fit too badly. Fortunately for the success of the masquerade, both of them were tall. In the darkness, with John's overcoat to lend bulk and the white fedora to identify him, he hoped to fool Kaye. For a little while at least.

He gagged his prisoner. The towel he found was dirty but it was the best thing available. Next, Drake dragged the limp body to the door. Just in time. His ears caught the throb of a motor and he saw the glint of a sedan in the alley. He switched off the light and carried out his burden.

"In there," said Kaye, at the wheel of the sedan. He jerked a thumb toward the rear seat. Drake muffled his mouth on John's shoulder.

"I vill back wid him sit," he growled. Then he shoved the unconscious man on the cushions in back.

Getting into the back of the car, Drake stumbled over someone lying on the floor. His hands found cords and a gagged mouth. The car started.

"The ambulance trick got him out of the apartment all right, eh?" said Kaye.

"Yah!"

Kaye chuckled. "These smart Americans."

The first street light showed Drake

who was on the floor. It was Janice Morse.

Drake, slouched in a corner of the seat with his hat well over his eyes, felt his blood run cold.

His plan had not provided for this complication. She should have been safe aboard a train, bound for home. Instead, the careful Mr. Kaye, the careful, ruthless Mr. Kaye, was taking no chances at all. Drake did not know where Kaye was heading, but he knew well what that suave, smiling gentleman had in mind.

Something clanked on the floor of the car and Drake found it was several iron bars. The highway they were on seemed to be taking them toward the ocean. Well, that was clear enough.

For the first time Drake felt his self-confidence badly shaken. He had walked into this with his eyes open, because he had considered that the stake was worth the gamble. And it was.

But he had had no way of foreseeing this complication. Besides bluffing his way in and fighting his way out, now he would have a defenseless girl to protect!

He wished he dared light a cigarette, but he did not know if John smoked them.

The car sped on. Suddenly it squealed to an abrupt halt, then turned and started lurching down a side road with lights out. The sedan jolted along for several hundred yards and stopped before a deserted boat house. From out of the darkness came the heavy wash of surf.

"No lights!" said Kaye. "I'll take the girl. You take Drake."

Hiding his face with John's body as best he could, Drake followed Kaye into the boat house. Kaye thrust the girl carelessly into the cabin of a dimly seen cabin cruiser and said, "Get the iron."

When Drake returned, the motor was chugging softly. Dim running lights faintly revealed a low, fast-

looking craft in the well of the boat-house.

Kaye backed the little craft out into deeper water. Then he brought it about. The prow began knifing through heavy swells. As Kaye strained his eyes to see through the pitch blackness Drake ducked into the small cabin without drawing a glance.

A muffled gasp startled him.

BENEATH the hat Janice Morse had caught a glimpse of his stern, set features. She recognized him. Her expression of delight brought a glow to his heart.

He felt his courage come surging back.

He would win out somehow, Drake told himself. He could not afford to fail now. He had to save Janice Morse!

"Get those weights on," Kaye ordered from the wheel. "What are you doing down there?"

Drake said "Yah," and attached four of the big iron bars to the unconscious John's ankles with wire. Then he tied two on Janice's slender ankles, loosely enough so she might kick them off if need be. While he did so, he also unfastened the rope that bound her hands and feet.

"Stay as you are," he whispered. "Pretend you're still tied. Kaye thinks I'm John. Both John and Kaye are Axis spies. Whatever it was they wanted from your father they have stolen now. We're on our way to meet someone who's to receive it. I could stop Kaye, but if we play it out a little longer there's a chance we can find out how this whole espionage system is operating.

[Turn page]

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We may even get the rest of them. You understand, don't you?"

He thrilled at her response, at her loyalty and patriotism. For behind her gag, she tried to smile and nodded her head. Drake patted her small shoulder. He liked nerve.

"Stop pawing that girl and come up here," snapped Kaye.

Drake came up the companionway slowly, head down. The masquerade would soon be exposed. But he would try to make it last long enough for Kaye to lead him to the headquarters of the Nazi plotters.

"Come here!" Kaye ordered. "See that light?" He pointed to the black horizon.

Drake had been trying to stay a little behind him. "I don't see it," he said, approaching cautiously.

"Of course not," said Kaye. "But you see this, don't you?"

His hand held a Luger trained on Drake's stomach.

"Good of you to weight down the girl for me, Mr. Drake," said Kaye in ironic tones. "Really, you are clever at impersonation. Ah! No! Don't try anything. Unless you want to die right now. A rather small

error made me suspect you, Drake. John always uses the expression 'Sieg Heil' when we're alone. Part of a code. You couldn't know that, of course. When you didn't say 'Sieg Heil', I became suspicious and took a second look."

The gun never wavered. To jump Kaye would be suicide.

"Turn around," said the spy. He searched Drake thoroughly, taking the automatic.

"Now, untie John. Remember I can watch you through the companionway."

He notched the throttle to top speed and the little craft jumped forward in the black, starless night.

IN SPITE the vigilance of Kaye, Drake managed to whisper in Janice's ear as he bent over.

"Keep your chin up and lie low," he told her.

Then he dragged the bodyguard's body up the small companionway, and undid his bonds.

"Thank you," fluted Kaye in his delicate accent. "Now be so good as to climb up on the cabin roof where I can watch you."

He waved the gun, and Drake scrambled up on the deck-like roof, his face grim.

Drake did not know where they were going, except that they were seemingly headed for the open sea. The waves were getting longer and more powerful now. Sometimes they almost halted the churning little craft. But wherever they were headed, whatever happened, a break must come. So far he'd had few enough.

Kaye had hooked the wheel into position so he could devote himself to John, lying supine in the stern. He began methodically slapping the big man's cheeks while he kept his gun and his eyes on Drake.

"Wake up, you thick-headed fool," he growled.

But John did not wake up. Drake thought with satisfaction of the



strength with which he had wielded the gun butt.

Kaye drew a pen knife from his pocket and opened a blade. Then he jabbed the blade into the quick of John's forefinger under the fingernail.

The big man whimpered.

Drake watched. In the darkness Drake could sense what happened.

Kaye smiled sardonically. He selected another finger and jabbed again. Suddenly John moaned and his small pig-like eyes opened blankly.

"Er, Mr. Kaye?"

Kaye slapped him contemptuously in the face.

"You flabby fool," he grated. "Get up and make yourself useful. I suppose you know you almost wrecked everything? If I hadn't noticed, we would be in a jam."

John scrambled to his feet.

"Vat iss? Vere am I?" He seemed confused.

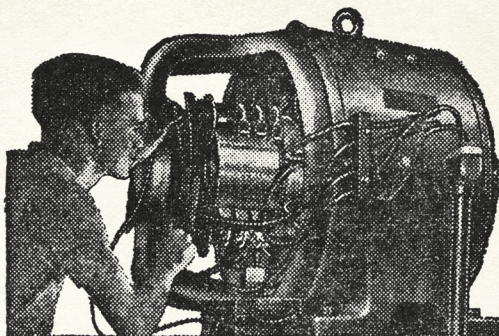
"Never mind, idiot!" Kaye spat viciously. "There's Drake. Tie him up. Weight his feet with some of the iron down in the cabin. The girl's there."

(Continued on page 107)

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THE DESK SERGEANT

A Department for Readers



BEFORE court goes into session this issue to try the present array of criminal cases for you reader jurors, while you sort of break the ice and get settled more comfortably in the jury box, we might glance over the blotter and see what is booked with the old Desk Sergeant and scheduled to come up for trial next issue.

Uumm—this is a queer and perplexing case. Jeff Bailey . . . seems to me that name is vaguely familiar. Oh, yes—he's the young chap who inherited that broken-down private detective agency from his deceased aunt.

All the facts are not in and every witness has not yet been subpoenaed, but the case that Author Norman A. Daniels calls **QUEST FOR A KILLER** promises to be one of the most unusual and gripping detective-mystery novels that we have booked in a long time.

A Stunning Shock

Jeff Bailey was a likeable young fellow, temporarily draft-exempt, and living with an elderly spinster aunt who was quite wealthy. Jeff, secure in the belief that he would be wealthy, sincerely mourned the death of the old woman when she died. However, when the will was read, he received a stunning shock.

Instead of being wealthy, the old lady died practically penniless, despite her big house, her charities and all the money she had showered on her favorite nephew. The only thing Jeff found himself left with was that

cheap and tottering detective agency which she had mysteriously purchased a short time before her death.

Of course, this didn't make good sense, and there had never before been any question of his aunt's sanity. Nevertheless, Jeff was faced with the alternative of accepting that decrepit detective agency and making a go of it to earn his living, or set out totally unprepared and broke, to make his way in the world.

Wait a minute! Don't get the wrong impression of Jeff Bailey. He was quite capable of making his own way, and he was genuinely sorry about the death of his aunt. But this queer set-up presented a challenge to him. And he accepted it. He decided to take over the agency and either run it successfully or ride it on into the ground.

From this moment on things began to happen—and happen thick and fast. Jeff meets the one and only girl, who proves to be a special sort of employee in the agency. He takes on a case which, the deeper it goes, the more involved it becomes—until Jeff is up to his hairline in a mystery the outcome of which will astonish you jurors.

By all means, be on hand for the trial next issue. **QUEST FOR A KILLER**, by Norman A. Daniels, is a fast-moving and baffling full-length mystery novel. So we'll just take it from the blotter and docket it on the crime calendar as the big case for next issue.

Besides the foregoing complete



novel, there will be an exciting novelet and several quick-action short stories. All in all, it looks as though you jurors have a busy session ahead of you. Be sure to get yourselves impaneled so you can render impartial verdicts. And when you have reached your decision, write in to the Desk Sergeant and submit your ballot.

Which cases do you like best? What suggestions have you to offer for future cases to be tried in the court of **EXCITING DETECTIVE**? Believe me, the old Desk Sergeant is sincerely anxious to have your criticisms and comments.

Verdicts by Mail

We have here a report from one of our jurors, formerly of Brooklyn, who is now working on a very big case for Uncle Sam somewhere in the Pacific.

The last copy of **EXCITING DETECTIVE** I saw mentioned the coming of "The Orange Festival Murders"—which same I never got a chance to see. Was it a good story? "The Chain of Murders" by John S. Endicott was swell. Lee Fredericks also had a good yarn about Nazi espionage down in Mexico. Getting a chance to read an issue of your magazine is certainly a treat. —*George T. Fordley.*

Sure glad to hear from you, George, and best luck to you! Carry on! We're deeply grateful for your letter.

Here's word from down Texas way:

Just finished the March issue of **EXCITING DETECTIVE**. The whole issue was good, but that short story about the last zoot suit by Sam Merwin, Jr., was a howl. Let's have more funny stories like this. A big belly laugh now and then in the midst of this war effort is mighty good medicine. —*Roger Mason, Dallas, Texas.*

Roger, I definitely think you have something there. In fact, that story you mention had this entire editorial office talking jive for a whole day after the yarn went through. Sure, there'll be other stories by Merwin and many other of your favorite authors. So watch out for them. And thanks for writing in.

One more excerpt from a plainclothes detective-reader in the Windy City:

[Turn page]

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I've never been to Florida, so I can't comment on the local conditions, and I guess "The Orange Festival Murders" was fair for a change, but I prefer stories hot off the griddle about crime in our big cities like New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles—and Chicago. How about a hot novel of mystery and crime in Chicago? I haven't seen one lately in your books, and I read **THRILLING DETECTIVE** and **POPULAR DETECTIVE**, too. — **Thomas K. Mitchell, Chicago, Ill.**

Your request, Tom, is right down the center alley for a strike. Next issue you will find just what you are asking for in **QUEST FOR A KILLER**, the novel mentioned at the beginning of this department. Be sure to write the old Desk Sergeant and tell me how you like it, won't you?

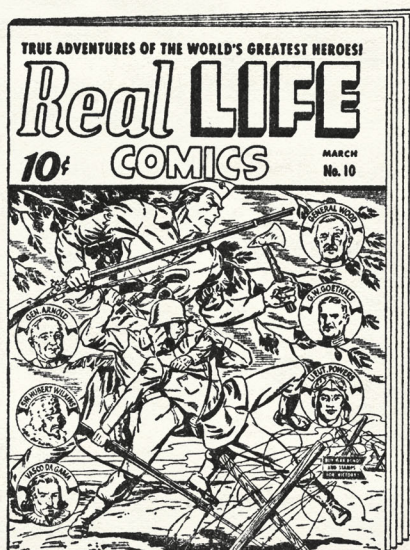
As for the rest of all you readers, whether I print excerpts from your letters or not, won't you write in and render your verdict? Just address your postcards or letters to The Desk Sergeant or The Editor, **EXCITING DETECTIVE**, 10 East 40th Street, New York, N. Y.

Meanwhile, good reading to you.

—THE EDITOR.

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INTO THE LION'S MOUTH

(Continued from page 103)

We'll get rid of them both before we reach the rendezvous. We're almost at the rendezvous."

Rendezvous!

CHAPTER IV

A Desperate Chance



YES, that was it. There were several meanings to that word, Drake knew. One of them was a meeting place at sea of ships of war!

He had tried to guess earlier where they might be going.

He had considered the possibility of their meeting a foreign ship, but had dismissed it. A hostile vessel would hardly dare approach this close to the California shore. Too great a danger of detection.

John pulled Drake roughly back into the cabin. The big man chuckled. It was not a pretty sound. Then his heavy fist caught Drake behind the ear and sent him spinning to the floor. John followed it with a heavy kick. Pain flooded Drake's side. He strove desperately to keep his head.

"Ged oop!" snarled John.

He tied Drake's hands behind him, jerking the rope so it bit deep into the flesh. Then he wired pieces of iron to the detective's untied ankles.

"You like to swim, yah?" he jeered. "Pretty soon you go swimming." He did not examine Janice's bonds, and Drake breathed a sigh of relief. His mind worked at top speed, sorting possibilities, considering plans. Unknowingly, John and Kaye had provided him with a weapon. It seemed little enough of a weapon compared with the ugly automatics they carried. But it was a weapon that would be of inestimable value in a rough-and-

[Turn page]

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tumble fight. Every inch of Drake's lean, six-foot frame ached for a fight, a last desperate fight to prevent failure.

Now, he thought, if only he could have a minute alone with Janice. At that moment Drake got the break he had longed for. John snarled, kicked him again and stumped heavily out on deck.

Instantly Drake lurched over to Janice. Her bunk lay out of the companionway's line of vision.

"Untie me fast," he breathed.

A desperate chance. Little time remained at best. Any minute John might return. Drake could feel nimble fingers tearing at strong knots. Ropes began to loosen. Simultaneously the cruiser came about in the heavy, slapping sea. The motor idled down, and he heard Kaye speak to John.

"This is it, I think. Bring them out and get rid of them. Then I'll start signaling."

Gun in hand, John appeared in the companionway. He appeared eager.

"Come on," he told Drake. "Now you swim."

Drake stood up, hands behind him. The rope that bound them felt loose but he was still tied. In another few seconds he could have worked his hands free. Now there was no time. His eyes watched John as the big man lumbered forward. Eight feet away. Six feet, then four. . . .

Now Drake kicked, putting everything in the sudden upswing of his sinewy legs. John fired but the bullet drilled the flooring harmlessly.

For Drake's leg carried with it the iron bars, heavy enough to weigh him down but not heavy enough to impede him. He had measured the distance accurately. The bars caught John under the chin with bone-crushing force. The big man sagged to his knees, his jaw strangely mishapen.

Drake yanked at the cords that still held his wrists. Another yank, in a ferocious burst of strength, Drake's hands slipped out of the loops. He grabbed John's gun from the man's

limp hand and trained it on the companionway just as Kaye leaped down, his automatic blazing.

A slug burned Drake's left arm. Then he pressed the trigger of his own gun, kept pressing it. The small cabin roared with the explosions. Kaye staggered, his gun flew from his hand, and he cursed savagely.

Drake kicked again. The iron bars flew free as he leaped for the fallen Luger. An iron bar thudded against Kaye's shoulder and the man screamed in pain. He slumped to his knees as Drake trained both guns on him. Janice Morse removed the weights from her ankles.

"Listen," Drake told Kaye as he stood over him, "I know why you're out here. This girl's father had found an improved method for making artificial rubber. This country needs that method. And so do the gangster nations you're working for.

"You lured Professor Morse to San Francisco. You posed as a British rubber expert, and tried to force his formula from him, probably by torture. He wouldn't talk, but you got his notebook from him. That note-

[Turn page]

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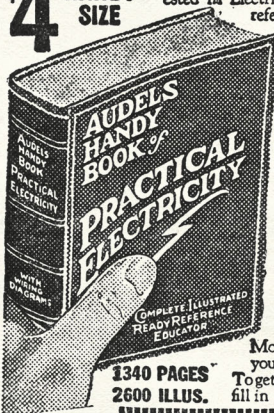
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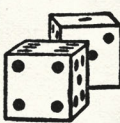
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book he kept in cipher to preserve
his secret. That reminds me—"

He felt Kaye's pockets, then pulled
from one a worn black leather note-
book. Its pages were filled with ap-
parently meaningless syllables.

"Time passed. You couldn't break
the cipher," went on Drake. "Miss
Morse, alarmed at not hearing from
her father, came out to the Coast to
find him. Mistrusting you, she pre-
tended to know me in the restaurant
where you took her to dinner. And
later, because she was already sus-
picious and fearful for her father's
safety, she let you bluff her into mak-
ing me get out of the apartment.

"But her father knew what you
really were. She herself felt suspi-
cious, and you knew I might start
checking back.

"So you killed her father, disguis-
ing it to look like suicide. Then you
kidnapped her, planning to get rid of
her."

"They told me they'd drive me to
the train," said the girl.

"But I knew the kind of trap you'd
logically lay for me," Drake went on,
"I walked purposely into it. As you
told me on the telephone, you've
solved Professor Morse's cipher and
now you're out here to deliver the in-
formation to the right quarters."

Drake paused and lit a cigarette.
It tasted good.

"All right, Kaye," he concluded.
"Listen to this. I want to grab the
people you were to meet. Signal them
so I can get my hands on them. If
you do that I'll ask a break for you
when I turn you over to the F.B.I.
You'll get off with prison for the dura-
tion. Refuse and I'll tie those bars on
to your ankles, and I won't make any
mistakes."

All the spirit seemed to seep out of
Kaye as Drake was speaking. He
sagged down on the floor of the cabin
in a sullen heap.

"Suits me," he snarled. "I know
when I'm licked."

"Who are you meeting out here?"

"Another boat," said Kaye.

Drake jerked him to his feet and marched him out on deck.

"Start signaling," Drake said.

"What kind of boat is it?"

"Oh, it's just another cabin job."

Then they both saw it.

Out in the pitch blackness ahead a dull blue light gleamed on, off, on and off again.

"That's it," said Kaye. His voice held a note of suppressed exultance.

Drake spun the wheel and advanced the throttle slightly. Kaye picked up a flashlight and winked it on, off, on and off.

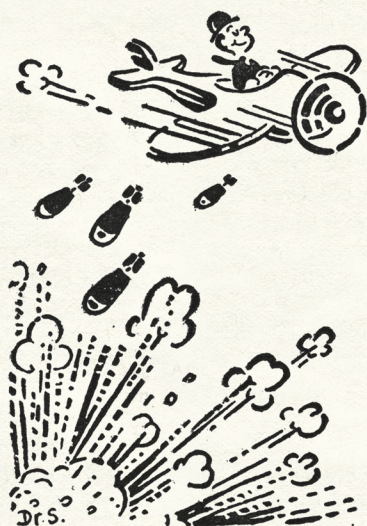
Presently the blue light winked on again, closer, low in the water. Drake's hand tightened on his automatic as his eyes tried to pierce the utter blackness. The cruiser inched along. He could see nothing now.

"Make a false move," he muttered to Kaye, "and I'll shoot you."

They were almost on top of it when Drake did see it.

A low black shape in the black night, just a few feet above water so that waves washed its deck. The shadowy mass seemed incredibly long. And then Drake saw the loom

[Turn page]



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of a conning tower and periscope. A submarine!

"'Allo, Captain Kurth," said a voice, close by. The voice had a strange oriental accent. Then came a low murmured command—in Japanese!

The cruiser bumped a bulgy side and Kaye threw a line to the dimly seen officer. At the same instant, Drake, gun in one hand and flashlight in the other, leaped desperately for the submarine's slippery deck.

"Look out! It's a trap! Kill him!" screamed Kaye.

Drake kept his promise.

He wheeled and his first shot hit Kaye, outlined against one of the running lights, squarely in the breast. His body splashed overboard as Drake snapped on his flashlight. Two dwarf-like Japanese sailors in dungarees stood on the wet deck. Beside them was the smaller figure of their officer in neat blue and gold braid.

"I'll kill the first man who moves," barked Drake. "You understand English, Captain. Tell your crew."

The light picked out the officer's almond-eyes, his high cheek-bones, his brutal face. A torrent of unintelligible Japanese poured from him in a high voice.

Another voice from the conning tower above Drake's head, screamed down into the submarine's interior.

Deadly calm, Drake shot the sailor standing inside the conning tower. He slumped forward, his body blocking the circular opening.

Drake brought his gun down savagely against the officer's skull, then caught him as he slumped senseless to the deck of the submarine. Keeping the flashlight beam on the two men in dungarees, he boosted the small officer's body up the conning tower ladder and wedged it in with the sailor's. It was impossible now for the thick lid-like cover to lower and close the opening.

"Okay, down there," he yelled. "If you want to submerge, go right ahead. But you'll get wetter than I will. And

if you try to come out I'll pick you off one at a time!"

Descending the ladder he searched the two sailors. They carried nothing more lethal than monkey wrenches. Then Drake pushed them toward the end of the drenched narrow deck.

Janice Morse suddenly jumped from the cabin cruiser to the submarine in a flurry of silken legs and splashed sea water.

"John started to wake up," she said.

"Grab a wrench and slug him hard!" snapped Drake.

"That's just what I had to do," she said with a shudder. "Say, it looks as if the Marines have landed and have the situation well in hand."

"Well," grinned Drake, "they can't submerge without drowning themselves, because they can't close the conning tower. And they know they can't come up without being picked off. I think we've captured an enemy vessel."

"What do we do now?" she said.

"I'll tie those two guys in place there in the tower, so it's impossible to dislodge them. Then we wait until daylight. A patrol is bound to sight us. We're not far out."

"If I can get back to the cruiser," said Janice Morse, "I'll make some coffee on the stove in the cabin. Will I have to hit John again?"

"No, I'll do the hitting," said Drake grimly.

Drake was sipping his fourth cup of coffee when a patrol bomber pilot sighted them. Sighted them, stared unbelievably, and then grabbed his microphone and started to burble a radio message that his base headquarters at first refused to believe.

EDITOR'S NOTE

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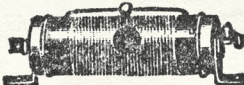
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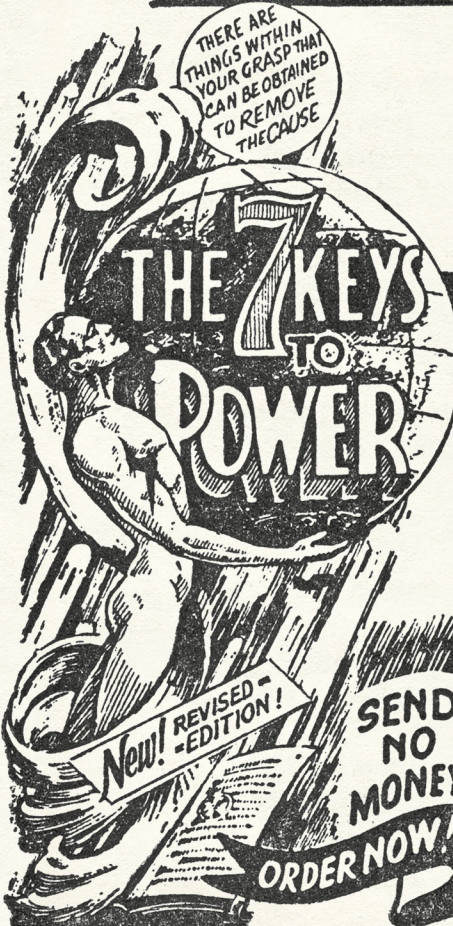
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