

**MAMMOTH**

**DECEMBER 25**

IN CANADA

# MYSTERY



## NEMESIS

By **WILLIAM P. McGIVERN**



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# MAMMOTH MYSTERY



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Front cover painting by Arnold Kohn, suggested by a scene from "Nemesis."

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MAMMOTH  
MYSTERY  
DECEMBER  
1946

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VOLUME 2  
Number 6



# THE CALL BOX



## REPORT BY THE EDITOR

**I**F THIS is the first time you've picked up a copy of *MAMMOTH MYSTERY*, it's dollars to doughnuts you were influenced into doing so by a glimpse of the front cover. We have an idea it is one of the most unusual paintings ever to appear on a newsstand shelf, and a lot of credit goes to Arnold Kohn, the artist who conceived the idea all by himself, did the job like the genius he is, and came trotting in with it for our approval . . . and a check. You can bet he got both.

**O**RIGINALLY, this month's cover was intended to adorn an issue of *Amazing Stories*, *MAMMOTH MYSTERY*'s oldest brother. But your detective magazine editor (who has a more or less carefully concealed weakness for symbolism on magazine covers) screamed loud and long that this artistic creation had no business being in anybody's hands but his. More to shut us up than any other reason, the art director handed it over . . . and here it is!

**W**ITH the painting safe in our possession, we called in one of our top writers—William P. McGivern—and shoved it in front of him. Bill became no less enthusiastic than your editor; and a few cups of coffee later, the story was plotted and titled. Two weeks later, the finished manuscript was on our desk. McGivern really spread himself, too. For an indication of what he can do when inspiration hits him, turn to page eight and start reading. You're in for a lot of enjoyment.

**B**RUNO FISCHER is back again—and that always means tops in entertainment. This time "Death's Bright Red Lips" are lifted for kisses . . . and there's a guy waiting to sample them. Here's a story that should reform a lot of "wolves"—the kind who drive cars and take more than an academic interest in trim ankles.

**A**FTER a long absence, Alexander Blade is back in these pages—this time with one of the best novelettes we've ever had the good fortune to read. A lot of action and dialogue has gone into this story . . . and you'll live every moment of it.

**T**HIS month's off-the-trail short story accolade goes to Ken Kessler for his yarn, "Her Master's Choice," which begins on page 110. This is one of these stories that keeps on going after you think it's finished . . . on to a totally unexpected

ending. You'll meet some unusual people in it, particularly Letitia, who knows how to handle a broom!

**O**NCE again, Larry Holden gives you the further adventures of Dinny Keogh—one of the best-liked private detectives in mystery story fiction today. This time Keogh gets involved with a couple of teen-age boys who are trying to save the sister of one of them from a horrible fate. Just what form this "horrible fate" is supposed to take, is something nobody is very clear about . . . but every sentence brings it closer. We think the ending of this one will jar you just as much as it did us.

**W**HEN Berkeley Livingston sits down to write a mystery story, it has a habit of taking unexpected twists that even he hasn't foreseen. "Just Like in a Book" refused to go down on paper the way he had planned it, but he admits the change is for the better. It's the story of a writer who gets fed up with a summer heat wave and the nagging tongue of his wife . . . and decides to do something about both. What comes of his decision takes 9,000 words to tell, and not one of them is wasted.

**M**ARK HEWLETT intended to do murder—for profit. His idea of profit, however, was certainly not what the average person thinks of by that name. And the smarter the police were in handling the case, the better suited Mark would be. But he forgot one thing: the police can only arrest a man; they have nothing to do with sentencing him. . . . Leonard Finley Hilts weaves an incredible story with that theme in "You Take the High Road."

**L**OOKING ahead: Your editor is just back at his desk after two weeks in Hollywood—a small town in Southern California that produces lemons and motion pictures. The trip was taken purely for vacation purposes; but it seems a great many fine mystery story writers inhabit the place (attracted there by the climate, or something), and we met some of them and asked for stories. As a result, you readers of *MAMMOTH MYSTERY* and *MAMMOTH DETECTIVE* are going to see some famous names on the contents pages and covers of those two magazines before long, and it might be a good idea to reserve future copies now.

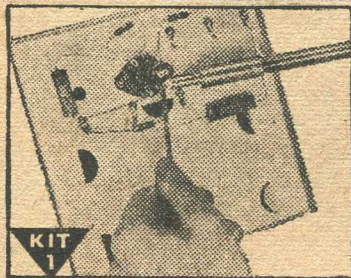
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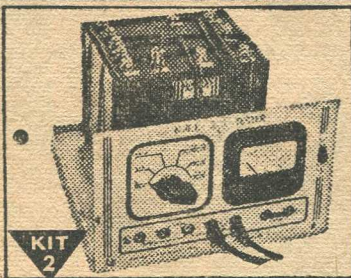


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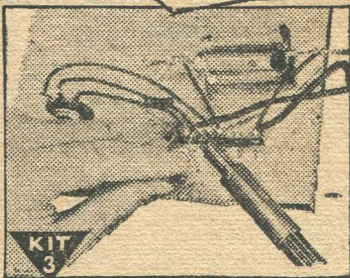
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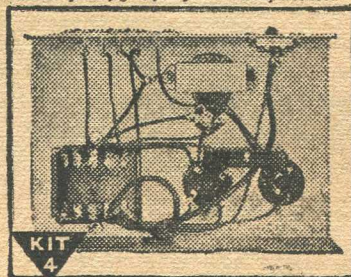
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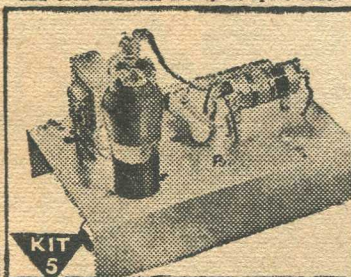
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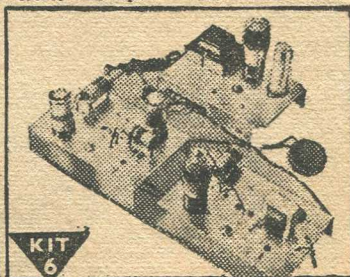
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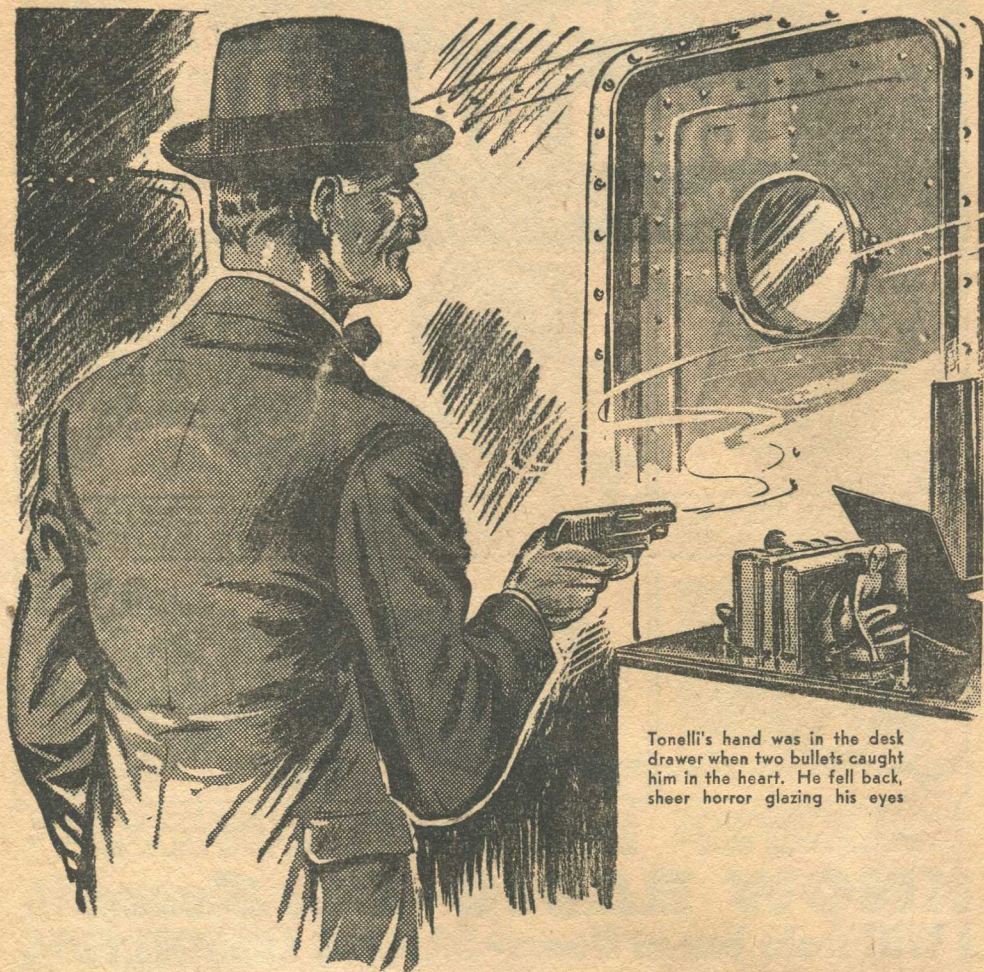
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Tonelli's hand was in the desk drawer when two bullets caught him in the heart. He fell back, sheer horror glazing his eyes

# NEMESIS

By WILLIAM P. McGIVERN

Larry Kent stalked out of the house, determined to punish his wife by sowing a few wild oats. Then came the dawn—and with it a chance to reap the harvest . . .





THE argument was pretty silly. It started over a dinner. Not an ordinary dinner, but a very special one.

Larry Kent was tired when he sat down to eat and he didn't notice how special it was. He propped his paper against a catsup bottle and ate his shrimp salad without glancing from the story he'd started on the train.

When his wife cleared the salad dish and brought the roast in from the kitchen he didn't notice the triumphant expression on her face. The triumphant expression of a bride who has worked all day on a dish and is slightly amazed and very proud that it turned out the way the cook-book said it would.

She stood in the arched doorway that led from the kitchen waiting for

his admiring approval. And when he didn't look up she said, "Look, Larry, isn't it wonderful?"

He had been working hard all day on a tough set of figures for one of the company's new clients. He was hungry and he felt a little quirk of irritation. There wasn't any reason for it. It was just the way he felt.

"Well, let's eat," he said. "Don't stand there with it. I'm hungry."

He didn't notice that her lips were trembling as she served the rest of the dinner. He ate in silence and finished the paper. Then he felt a little better.

He lit a cigarette and it tasted good. He pushed his chair back a little from the table and smiled at his wife.

"That hit the spot, hon," he said.



"Funny, how a little thing like a meal picks a guy up."

She was very young and very lovely and her feelings were hurt.

"I'm glad you liked it," she said. Her voice was stiff with the effort she made to keep it steady. "I worked all day in the kitchen getting it ready."

"Well, I said it was good, didn't I?" he said.

"You didn't even know what you were eating," she said. "You read the paper all through the meal."

He felt a quirk of irritation again. "Of course I read the paper," he said. "It's the only chance I get to read it in peace. Let's don't argue about it. The meal was fine. Is that what you want me to say?"

She stood up then, and her voice shook a little.

"I don't want you to say anything. I'd just like a little appreciation when I work all day trying to fix something you'll like. I don't want to be treated like a piece of furniture."

He stood up then, and he felt a pang of guilt, for he realized how badly this little thing had hurt her. But a stubborn streak in him wouldn't let him say the things that would have made it all right. If he had taken her in his arms then and told her how pretty she was and how well she ran the house and what a louse he was everything would have been smoothed over. But he didn't.

He said, "Stop making a mountain of it. I'm tired as hell and I don't feel like arguing. I feel like a quiet drink and a little peace."

She started to cry then. She looked so helpless and vulnerable that his stubbornness melted. He started for her with the right words ready on his lips, but she ran past him into the bedroom. He heard the door slam behind her and then the house was quiet except for the

sound of her muffled crying.

She was lying on the bed, he knew, face buried in the pillow, waiting for him to come in and apologize.

This had never happened before and it made him feel nervous and irritable. What the hell was she crying about?

He loved her. She must know that. They had been married only two months and it had been perfect. And now this damn thing.

HE LIT another cigarette and walked into the living room. He stopped mid-way between the closed door of the bedroom and the front door of the apartment and tried to decide what to do.

The idea of a drink came back to him and it was just what he wanted. He went to the kitchen cabinet where he kept the whisky, but the bourbon bottle had only about a quarter of an inch left.

That was a big thing in his life but he didn't realize it. If there'd been a drink in the bottle a number of things might never have happened. But he had no way of knowing that.

He went back to the front room and the two doors were like magnets trying to pull him in opposite directions. From behind the bedroom door the crying had stopped. That made him feel a little better.

He decided then that she was just acting silly and that she needed a good lesson. If he didn't take a firm hand right now she might make a habit of this sort of foolishness.

He put on his hat and coat, put his cigarettes in his outside pocket and walked to the door. There, he almost weakened. He didn't want to go out for a drink. He wasn't that kind of a guy. He loved his wife, but he thought she needed a lesson.

So he opened the door and was very



careful to close it with a loud, defiant bang! He wanted her to know he was going.

He went down the two flights of stairs quickly, because he knew if he paused once, he'd go back. Outside the cool autumn air was bracing.

He turned his collar up and walked down the street. A gusty fall wind was stirring the leaves and making a harsh whisper through the dead limbs of the trees. It was almost dark.

They lived on Chicago's North Side in a neighborhood that had once been very good, but it had slipped down in the Thirties and now it was about half-and-half. Cafes, apartment houses, great, sleepy mansions and the red neon signs of cheap bars winking everywhere.

He headed for one of these bars, but at the first intersection a cruising cab driver saw him and stopped. The cabby opened the back door and stuck his head out.

"Cab?"

"No, I'm just—," he stopped. The door was open and he changed his mind. "Yes," he said, and stepped in, slamming the door shut behind him.

The driver put the cab in gear and then looked around.

"Where to?" He was a cynical looking young man, with sharp, hard features and a cigarette hanging loosely from his mouth.

Larry didn't want the cab in the first place and he didn't have any idea of where he wanted to go. He would have liked to climb out again, but he didn't want to look foolish.

"I don't know," he said, and then irritated by the driver's expression, he said, "make it the Loop."

"Anywhere in particular?"

"No just drop me down town."

Most of the traffic at this hour was headed the other direction. The Outer Drive was closed during the rush hour

so the cabby used Clark street.

LARRY lit another cigarette and wondered why he had decided to go down to the Loop. No reason at all. He spent five days a week there and that was plenty.

He was worrying about Fran now. He wondered if she had discovered he had gone and what she was thinking about. Probably she'd run into his arms when he came back, and that would be the time for him to say all the right things. He wasn't feeling so masterful now. He was feeling a little like a heel. He had wanted to teach her a lesson, but now that seemed pretty small.

Any guy could worry his wife by barging out of the house without any explanation. A woman couldn't do that herself, and she couldn't follow him. All she could do was sit there and stew. Probably torture herself imagining that he'd been hit by a truck or something.

The cab stopped at Madison and Clark and the meter registered fifty cents.

The driver said, "This all right?"

"Fine," Larry said.

If the driver hadn't been such a wise looking guy Larry would have told him to take him back home, but he didn't want to act like a fool.

"This is okay," he said coolly.

He paid the fare and got out. The lights were on in the Loop and there was loud blaring music coming from loudspeakers in front of the bars and cafes. Although it was a little past the rush hour, and not quite the time for the evening jam the streets were crowded.

Larry walked West on Madison street, with no particular destination in mind. He was ready to go home, but he was not feeling the same re-



morse he had in the cab. The crowds and the music cheered him up a little, and he decided to have at least one drink.

He turned into a bar and ordered a straight bourbon. He found a foot of space between two sailors and a tired looking old man and lit a cigarette. He drank the drink and listened to the noise coming from a three-piece orchestra. The sailors were talking about a girl they had met that afternoon, and the old man just stared at himself in the mirror above the bar.

He stayed long enough to learn that the sailors thought the girl was a two-timing wench and then he picked up his change and left.

Outside again in the crowd he walked West. The drink settled comfortably on the dinner that had started all the trouble and he felt fairly complacent. One more drink, maybe two, and he'd look for a cab.

He crossed the bridge and continued past the gloomy bulk of Northwestern station. The opposite side of Canal street was honkey-tonk neighborhood. There were garishly lighted dance halls, burlesque shows and the men were too-well dressed and the women wore too much make-up.

He passed a bar called the *Pink Giraffe* and then his eye was caught by a blinking neon sign which simulated the antics of a balking donkey. Underneath was a bright, foot-high string of letters that spelled out the words, *The Kicking Horse*.

THERE was music coming from inside. It was loud blatant music, but Larry went in anyway. The door opened on a narrow, carpeted corridor. There were restrooms on one side, a hat-check booth on the other. The hat-check girl was a redhead and the mascara made her eyes look purple. She

was wearing a jockey's cap, a white silk blouse that was two sizes too small, and red silk shorts.

She took Larry's hat and topcoat and gave him back a brass check and a bright, mechanical smile.

He followed the corridor to double glass doors, pushed them open and walked into the main room of the *Kicking Horse*.

The place was large and dimly lighted. A bar stretched half the length of the room on his right and beyond that there were booths and tables. At his left there was an orchestra and a tiny dance floor. Flanking the band were several dice tables operated by girls dressed in the same outfit the check girl wore—jockey caps, silk blouses, red shorts.

The place was only half-full. But the air was thick with smoke and the band played as if the SRO signs were out.

Larry found a place at the bar and ordered a bourbon. The bartender filled the shot glass with the careless dexterity of the professional. He said, "Do you want me to leave the bottle?"

Larry said, "No. I'll call you when I want another."

The bartender nodded, picked up the dollar bill that Larry had put on the bar, took it back to a cash register and brought back forty cents. He spread the coins on the bar so they could be counted at a glance.

"Some people like the bottle left," he said. "Like to pour their own." The bartender was a small dark man with lively brown eyes. His hair was combed straight back from his forehead and at the hairline there was a long thin scar that might have been made by a knife. "You all alone," he said conversationally.

Larry nodded. "Just stopped in for a quick one."



"You looking for something? A little company, maybe?"

Larry smiled and shook his head. "I don't think so. I've got to be getting along pretty soon."

"That's okay," the bartender said. "Just thought I'd ask. You look all right to me and if you was lonely I'd fix you up with something."

Larry felt the need to talk to somebody and the bartender was still standing there with his hands on the bar so he said, "I've got to go home pretty soon. I had a fight with my wife tonight and I walked out. But I'm going back now. She's an awfully nice kid."

"Sure," the bartender said. "But it won't hurt her to worry about you a little while. She'll be all love and kisses when you walk in. Take my word for it."

"I guess you're right," Larry said. The bourbon was warm and smooth inside him and he felt fine. He was anxious to get home. He knew what would happen when he got home and the anticipation gave him a pleasant feeling.

He ordered another drink and then walked over to one of the dice tables. The girl behind the green felt table was a small brunette with a carefully made-up face and a bright, empty smile.

He put a quarter on the table and picked up the dice box. The game was twenty-six, and the odds were about seventy to thirty in favor of the house but no one seemed to care. He played three games and didn't win. The girl kept score and glanced at him occasionally.

Finally she said, "My name's Corinne. What's yours?"

"Why?" Larry smiled.

"I just wondered. You don't seem like the rest of the guys that come in here. Most of 'em ask my name before they start playing. Then they

ask for a date before the first game is over. You seem different."

"Maybe I should say thanks," Larry said.

"I meant it for a compliment," the girl said very seriously. She glanced at his shoulders and at the lock of black hair that hung over his forehead and gave a little sigh. "Just my luck. A guy comes along that I like and he don't even ask my name. Fifty guys will be trying to go home with me tonight and they'll all be lady-killers with padded shoulders and eyes like shoe buttons."

LARRY felt a little uncomfortable, but it was a vaguely pleasant sensation. He had always done all right with women but since he'd been married that was something he considered a part of his past. He grinned at the little brunette and said, "Thanks for all the kind words. If I ever need a shoulder to cry on I'll look you up."

"I got more than a soft shoulder," the girl said, and she was stating a fact, not being coy. She took a match folder and scribbled a number on the back, then pushed it toward Larry. "You can reach me there if you ever get lonesome."

Larry picked up the match folder and dropped it into his pocket. He smiled at the girl and made a mental note to get rid of the folder before he got home.

"Thanks," he said.

The brunette sighed and shook her head. "You won't get lonesome. I can tell. But thanks for acting so polite about it."

After another game Larry went back to the bar. He ordered a final drink and drank it quickly.

He was ready to leave when the bartender came over and put another drink in front of him.



"On the house," he said with a smile.

Larry hesitated. He didn't want the drink, but he didn't want to appear unfriendly, so he said, "Thanks," and sat down again.

There was a blonde sitting two stools from him and the bartender gave her a drink too, and then he looked from her to Larry and said, "You two people ought to know each other. You're both alone and I just bought you both a drink and that's as good an introduction as you'll ever get."

Larry glanced at the blonde and nodded amiably. She looked at him and said, "Hello," without any particular expression and went back to her drink.

Larry felt a little piqued. He looked at the girl again and he realized that once she had been quite lovely. She was about thirty-five now, he guessed, and she was still all right. Her features were finely chiseled and she wore enough make-up to make her look interesting but not cheap.

Her clothes looked like money. The steel gray suit she wore was a hundred dollar model and it fitted her slim body as if it enjoyed the job. She wore nylons and ankle strap sandals and her legs were the kind that would have looked good in anything. Even hip boots.

He felt unreasonably annoyed that she didn't consider him worth more than a brief, uninterested glance, so he moved the next stool beside her and tapped her on the arm.

She looked at him and said, "Yes?"

"Look," he said, "I don't chase young children or have coughing fits. My hair lip is practically unnoticeable and I have a pound of butter in my back pocket. So I'm really a nice guy and you should be nice to me. Or don't you think so?"

SHE looked at him for a moment with a puzzled expression and then she smiled. "You win," she said. "You're a nice guy. For a pound of butter I'd write mash notes to Rasputin."

"That's better. Can I buy you a drink?"

She shrugged. "We still have one, but you can buy another if you like."

Larry waved to the bartender. "Two more of the same."

"Fine," he grinned. "I knew you two people would get along."

They finished the drink and then had the next one. And that was when Larry realized he was getting a little tight.

His face felt hot and when he lit a cigarette it took him a long time to find the end of the cigarette with the lighted end of the match. He laughed about that and he wondered who was making all the noise.

When the girl told him to be quiet he realized that he had been listening to himself.

A little while later the girl suggested that he come home with her. He didn't even know her name and that struck him as funny. Here he was being propositioned by an absolute stranger. Ridiculous.

He couldn't go home with her, of course. He tried to explain very logically that it was simply impossible. Fran was getting dinner for him and he had to be there to tell her how much he enjoyed it. She didn't understand. She told him to stop mumbling and finish his drink.

There was another drink in front of him and he didn't know where it came from. He put it to his lips, but he couldn't force it down. He wasn't feeling so well now. He had to go home. Dinner was ready and Fran wouldn't like it if he stayed out all night.

He felt cold wind on his face and



he knew he was outside. His top coat was over his arm and someone had put his hat on his head at a crazy angle. The blonde was standing beside him, holding his free arm.

He didn't remember getting into the cab, but its lurching motion almost made him sick. He leaned forward and tried to tell the driver to take him home, but the blonde pulled him back beside her.

"Just put your head on my shoulder," she murmured. "We'll be home in a little while."

He tried to tell her he couldn't go home with her, but he had trouble with the words. They choked up in his throat and stuck there like tennis balls.

He put his head on her shoulder and he knew he was going to pass out. His head was spinning and his body felt numb.

He made a last attempt to tell the blonde that Fran was waiting for him and then he gave up. He sank back against her and that was all he remembered.

## CHAPTER II

HE WOKE up by degrees. For a long interval he hung in a limbo that wasn't sleeping or waking. Just a hazy in-between state.

Then his mind started to work. He had no physical sensation at all. All he had was disconnected thoughts that came out of white space.

He remembered things in strange sequence. There was Fran and a blonde. Drinks that made him sick and a wonderful dinner. A wise looking cab driver and a little brunette dice girl that liked his looks.

His first physical sensation was of lying down. On his left side with a pillow under his head. That meant he was in bed.

He tried to open his eyes and he couldn't. He was becoming aware of pain in his head. A splitting pain that stretched across his forehead.

Finally he managed to get his eyes open but it didn't help much. The room was almost dark. It smelled of liquor and stale smoke.

There was someone lying beside him. There was enough light for him to identify a head of silvery blonde hair and a finely chiseled profile. His right arm was flung across her chest.

More sensations were coming back. He raised himself on one elbow and the physical effort brought a black siege of nausea. When it passed he looked down at the girl.

She did not look pretty. Her lean features were twisted in a smile. But the smile had no humor in it. It was set and stiff and it wasn't a smile at all.

Her face looked like cold wax. Her eyes were open, staring blandly at the ceiling.

Larry saw this and it didn't register. He didn't know she was dead until he saw the knife. The knife was buried hilt-deep between the cup of her naked breasts. And the fingers of his outflung arm held the handle of the knife in a tight grip.

He lay there and stared at his hand. As if it were something he never had seen before. Something that didn't belong to him. He saw the blood then, dark and crusted, on his hand, on his shirt sleeve, on the girl's naked chest.

Something was crawling in his throat. He felt sick and shriveled inside.

He got off the bed and groped for a light-switch. The light showed him a cheap, small bedroom, with a curtained window, a chest of drawers, two chairs and an open door leading to a bathroom.

And the bed. That was all. The girl on the bed was naked, but the sheet



was pulled across her hips. Her clothes were in a pile on the floor.

The thing was crawling in his throat again and he stumbled into the bathroom. He was sick for a long time. Then he tried to wash the blood from his hand. It stuck like glue. He got it off, but he couldn't do anything about his sleeve.

He came back into the bedroom and sat down in one of the chairs. He stared at the dead body of the girl. He didn't think. There was nothing but white horror in his head.

**H**E WAS sitting there when the loud knock sounded on the door.

He turned to the door and his breath made a scratching noise in his ears. His heart was pounding as if he'd been running up-hill.

The knock was repeated, and a shrill, feminine voice said, "I got to have this room at ten o'clock. Keep that in mind. You don't lay around all day in my house." The knock sounded again. "Do you hear me in there?"

Larry prayed for the woman to go away. He wanted her voice to stop. He wanted the knocking to stop. If she knocked on the door again he knew he'd start screaming.

He said, "I heard you," and his voice was a whisper. He tried again and it came out louder. She said, "See that you're out of there by ten, that's all."

He heard her feet shuffle away and he got up and put on his suit coat, top coat and hat. He wasn't thinking yet. But he had the blind instinct of flight.

One flicker of reason made him take out his handkerchief and wipe the hilt of the knife clean, and then he went to the door. He heard nothing on the opposite side and when he twisted the knob and pushed it open he was look-

ing out on a gloomy, empty corridor.

He stepped out, pulled the door behind him and started down the single flight of steps. As he reached the front door of the house he heard someone coming down from the upper floors. He pulled open the door and ran down a flight of stone steps to the street.

He started walking. The street was in a cheap neighborhood. There were ashcans on the sidewalk and the houses were ancient structures, with brown-stone fronts, bay windows and gold lettered street numbers.

At the first intersection he saw a street sign. Nelson Boulevard. That was on the South Side. About four miles south of the Loop. About a mile West.

He kept walking. A clock in a pawn shop said seven-thirty. There weren't many people on the street. He passed a colored couple, a gray-haired man with a metal lunch box, an old woman who looked like she was coming off a gin hangover.

He kept walking. He had no idea of direction. But there was a hopeless horror building inside him and he knew that soon he would have to think. He was afraid of thinking. As long as he could walk on blindly he felt invisible and anonymous, but he couldn't go on forever. Sometime his thoughts would catch up with him.

At eight-thirty he turned into a restaurant. It was a cheap Greek eating place and there was no one at the counter. He sat down and ordered coffee from the proprietor, a fat man, with skin like leather and mustache that looked like a dirty scrub brush.

The coffee was in a thick white mug and he couldn't drink it. He sat and looked at the cup. He tried to light a cigarette but his hands were trembling too much.

He started thinking. He tried not



to, but it was no use.

HE REMEMBERED the blonde girl he'd met, he remembered that she wanted him to go home with her. And he remembered how she looked lying on the bed with a knife stuck into her, and her blood crusted and dark on her white breast.

He thought of Fran. And he made a noise in his throat like an animal.

How long he sat there he had no way of knowing, but when he felt the hand on his shoulder he learned something. He learned about fear.

He looked up and there was a big man, with a hard, gray face, a gray overcoat and a gray hat standing beside him. The hand on his shoulder was big and business-like.

Larry tried to say something, but the words stuck. He couldn't meet the big man's level gaze.

"Let's see your wallet," the big man said.

Larry heard the words. He knew what they meant, but he didn't have any muscular coordination. He started fumbling with his tie. The big man said again, "The wallet. And fast. I'm from the Bureau of Detectives."

He got out the wallet and handed it over. The big man looked at it, thumbed through the papers, then handed it back.

"Get up. We're taking a trip."

Larry got up and went outside with the big man. There was a police car parked at the curb. The big man opened the front door, climbed in after Larry. He started the car, put it in gear and drove toward the Loop.

He didn't talk much.

He said, "What did you do it for?"

"I don't know."

"They all say that. Do you think that helps her any?"

"I don't know."

"Guys like you should get the book."

Larry shook his head slowly and then he pressed his hands against his face. He couldn't think anymore.

The copper said, "We were lucky to get you without any trouble. Usually you guys keep us working for a week."

He shut up then and concentrated on driving. They were on a through-street now leading into the Loop. When they reached State Street the copper pulled up beside a Subway entrance.

He reached over and opened Larry's door.

"Now get this," he said. "Go home and stay there. You got no cause to be worrying your wife like you did. She's been on our necks all last night. Lucky I got a flash this morning before I started back to work."

Larry felt his throat crawling again. He was afraid he was going to be sick. "You're letting me go?" he said.

"Sure. We got nothing to book you on. Your wife called the cops, the fire department, the Missing Persons Bureau, and just about everybody else when you didn't come home last night. She thought you'd been hit by a truck. We don't care how many times a guy walks out on his wife, but when she starts squawking to us, that's just another headache. Now take my advice, when you go on a bat the next time, cover up in advance. Tell her you got to work, or got a business trip to make. Then she don't worry, and we don't get no headaches. Get on home now. And you'd better think up a good story to tell her."

Larry didn't trust himself to talk. He felt like laughing. But he was close to hysteria. This copper was practically shoving him out of the car. Giving him advice about being a good husband, keeping out of trouble. Saving the police headaches.

In another hour this copper and



every other one in the city would be looking for him. And not to give him advice.

He got out of the car and the copper leaned over and looked at his hand.

"Hurt yourself last night, didn't you?" he asked.

"I fell, I guess," Larry said.

His heart was pumping again, heavily, painfully. He wanted to turn and run, but something told him nothing would be more fatal. And then he felt a leaden despair. What did it matter?

The copper said, "Want me take you down to the station and have it fixed up?"

Larry shook his head and stepped back into the car. He pulled the door shut and said, "You may as well take me down to the station anyway."

"What's the idea?"

"I don't know how to say it," Larry said. His voice sounded a million miles away, flat and expressionless. "When I woke up this morning there was a dead girl lying beside me. She had a knife stuck into her. My hand was holding the knife. I guess you'd better take me in."

### CHAPTER III

THE copper looked at him for a moment and then shook his head. He pushed his hat back on his head and fumbled for a cigarette.

"If this is a gag, it ain't a funny one," he said.

"It's no gag," Larry said.

The copper lit a cigarette and stared straight ahead with a gloomy expression on his face.

"So you picked up a tomato last night and stuck a knife in her. Is that it?"

"I didn't kill her," Larry said. He stopped and wet his lips. He didn't know whether he had killed her or not.

"I got a drink that had been doctored some way. It knocked me out. I don't remember going to bed with her. When I woke up she was lying there dead. She had a knife driven into her chest."

The copper frowned. "Now let's go through this once again. I'd take you in, but I don't want to get laughed out of the station. I got an idea you got the shakes. I think your imagination is running as wild as a woman's poker game. You tell me a story that may be true. And it may not. There's no percentage in it for you to lie to me. That's why I'm listening.

Larry shrugged wearily. "I wish to God I was lying. But I'm telling you the truth, as far as I know it. I had a fight with my wife last night. A little thing, but it seemed big, so I barged out of the house to get a drink. I went down town and stopped in a bar on Madison street. I—"

"What bar?"

Larry thought a minute. It was hard to sift through the tumbled thoughts in his head. "The *Kicking Horse* was the name of the place," he said finally. "There's a neon sign out in front with blinking lights that look like a horse kicking."

"I know the place. Go on."

"I met a girl in there. A blonde. We had a couple of drinks. I didn't have more than four or five all night, but I started to get tight. But it wasn't a drunken feeling. It was a sick, knocked-out feeling."

He stopped and licked his lips. The copper looked at him steadily.

"I took her home. Or she took me home. That's about all I remember. When I woke up she was lying beside me. She was dead. I wasn't thinking very well. I walked out of the place and just kept walking. I stopped for some coffee and that's where you found me."



"Where did she live?"

"I don't know."

"Well, where did she take you?"

"It was somewhere on Nelson Boulevard. I didn't notice any street numbers."

The copper turned the ignition key and stepped on the starter. He was still frowning.

"We can check that story easy enough," he said.

"Can I call my wife?" Larry asked.

"Maybe from the station," the copper said.

He put the car in gear and moved away from the curb. He was still frowning.

#### CHAPTER IV

THE cell was small and airless.

There was a cot, a chair, a basin of water. There was a uniformed policeman standing in the corridor with his back to Larry.

Larry sat on the edge of the cot, hands twisted together.

For six hours he had been telling and re-telling his story. And answering questions. Polite questions, tough questions, insulting questions. Questions that were simple, involved, ridiculous and shrewd.

He had dictated a statement and signed it.

His tongue was parched and his brain was numb. He didn't care what happened. He wanted Fran. He wanted to talk to her. He had begged them for that much and they had looked at him as if he were speaking Hindustani. And had gone on asking questions.

He looked up as a key sounded in the door. The uniformed policeman was admitting the big copper, the big guy in the gray clothes, whose name was Meyers. Larry had learned to hate him in the last six hours.

He stood looking at Larry a moment, his hard face impassive. Then he sat down and brought out a crumpled pack of cigarettes, lit one, blew smoke at the ceiling.

"Still playing the same tune?" he asked.

"Go to hell," Larry said weakly. "I'm not answering any more of your questions. I've told the truth. I haven't lied about a damn thing. Now I'm through."

He put his hands to his face and tried to keep from making a weeping fool of himself. "Have you called my wife?" he asked. He tried to keep his voice steady and it sounded like a croak.

"We called her," Meyers said. "She's on her way down."

Larry looked up at him, waiting for a laugh, but it didn't come. Meyers was dead-pan.

"Is that right?"

Meyers nodded. "I talked to her myself. As a matter of fact we called her this morning."

"You bastard," Larry said.

"Shut up," Meyers said mildly. "That kind of talk ain't going to help. This isn't a kindergarten we run here. This is a police station. We aren't interested in being nice to people. Your wife to us is just another witness. I called her trying to find out if you'd lied to me. She backed you up. She said you had a fight and you walked out. That much of your story we know is true. But the rest of it stinks."

"Oh, for God's sake," Larry said wearily. "Why should I lie? I've told you the truth."

"No, you ain't. But we been asking ourselves one question all day. Why should you lie? We know you're lying. We know damn well you're lying. But we want to know why. Either you're buggy as hell, or you're covering up something else."



HE BLEW more smoke at the ceiling and frowned. His face was gray and hard and his eyes were puzzled. He was a big man, a solid, careful, cautious man, with gray clothes, graying hair and a gray soul. He liked to know the answers. He liked the feeling of all the details of a case dove-tailing together and giving one result. That was his passion. He didn't like to be puzzled. And he was puzzled now.

"Why should a guy lie like you have?" he said. He wasn't talking to any one in particular. He was thinking out loud.

"You keep saying I'm lying," Larry said. "How the hell do you know? Do you look in a crystal ball? Do you have a private ouija board up in the Captain's office?"

Meyers looked amused. It made him look grimmer.

"We don't have anything like that," he said. "All a copper has is a pair of legs. And the benefit of a little experience. That's one copper. Now do you know how many cops we got in Chicago? About fifteen thousand. That's thirty thousand legs, walking here and there, looking for things. All of those coppers have some experience and when you lump it all together that makes a big lump of experience. When you got thirty thousand legs you don't need a crystal ball.

"Now the funny thing about this case of yours is this; we haven't found the body of this girl you keep talking about. No corpse with a knife in it. No girl lying on a bed with blood on her chest. That's the funny thing."

"You didn't tell me that before," Larry said. He tried to say it calmly, but hammers were beating inside his skull.

"You didn't ask," Meyers said ironically. "Now let me explain just how funny that is. Supposing you're telling

the truth. We started out this morning believing you. We started looking for a body. That's where those thirty thousand legs go to work. All of them, looking for this dead girl. We know where you said she was. Nelson Boulevard. Good. We send a few hundred legs out there to start looking. They found out that you was out there. We got people who saw you. But nobody saw a body. We found out the block you stayed in last night. Not the house, but the block. That's close enough, because we got plenty of legs. The legs went through every house in that block. Every room. And they didn't find a body."

He looked through the smoke at Larry. "See what I mean? We know you're lying. Now we'd like to find out why you lied. If you just had the shakes and a bad dream we want to know that. If you're covering up something else we want to know that and we intend to find out."

"There was a dead girl lying beside me when I woke up," Larry said. "I didn't dream it. I was sick and half-drunk but I didn't imagine it. I tell you I saw her. You saw the blood on my shirt, didn't you? And there's not a cut on me, is there? How do you explain that away?"

"We don't do Sherlock Holmes stuff here," Meyers said. But he frowned. "The blood we can't figure. We took a test of your blood and it ain't the same type as on your shirt sleeve. And anyway you weren't cut anywhere. So the blood came from somebody else. We'd like to know about that."

Larry felt a shiver of terror. He might have been dreaming. Maybe there wasn't a girl. Maybe there wasn't a knife stuck into the cup of her breasts. Maybe the blood had come from someone else. What *had* really happened last night?



IF IT was just a horrible dream he was in the clear. But until he knew what had happened he'd never sleep. Not with something dark and horrible and unknown hanging over his head.

Meyers was still looking at him thoughtfully.

"I believe you," he said finally. "That makes me a fool. But I can't help it. Maybe I do use a crystal ball. Maybe thirty thousand legs ain't enough. But there's got to be a body."

Larry said, "Give me a cigarette."

He took one from the pack Meyers extended and inhaled gratefully. He wasn't feeling better. But he was intelligent enough to know that there was a reasonable explanation for this mystery. And whether it incriminated him or not, he had to know.

"Look, Meyers, nobody has found the body yet. Let's suppose I'm not lying. And that I wasn't dreaming. What could have happened to it?"

Meyers looked gloomy. "Bodies are hard to get rid of. When people find an ordinary body they generally call a doctor. Or maybe the fire department. Some people call a priest first. But they call somebody. Just so they can talk about it. And when they find a body with a knife stuck in it, they call everybody. They call the police first though. We know that from experience. Nobody wants to get mixed up with a murder case. This is normal, innocent people I'm talking about. Now a murderer has a different problem. He's either got to make it look like somebody else did it, which is the way most of them figure, or else he's got to get rid of the body. No body, no murder, that's the law. He can burn the body in a furnace, he can throw it in the river, he can stuff it down a sewer, he can bury it, he can hide it in a trunk, or he can toss it into a barrel of acid.

"All them things have been done.

But none of them was done in this case. Because we had our legs out there fast. And they been all over the place. They looked in furnaces, they looked in trunks, the neighborhood is miles from the river, and nobody saw any vats of acid around. So they did something else. That's not what's bothering me though. I want to know why they did it. If you're not lying or crazy you fell into a nice frame. Why you were framed I don't know. You ain't important enough to frame. You got no enemies. You don't know anybody. So you beat the frame. You wake up and walk out. Maybe that's what they wanted you to do. I don't know. If I had a nickel for everything I don't know about this case, I'd retire."

He stood up and sauntered to the door.

"I'll send your wife in when she gets here. If we ain't got a body by six o'clock tonight the captain says to let you go. He says you're a nut or blind drunk. Maybe both."

"What do you think?" Larry asked.

Meyers grinned sourly. "I don't use my brain. I use my legs. So I think I'm going to use 'em a little bit on this case." He shook his head disgustedly. "My food don't taste right when I'm all mixed up. The old lady has ham hocks and cabbage tonight and it'll taste like sawdust to me. Hell of a note."

He went out and the uniformed copper closed and locked the door behind him.

## CHAPTER V

THEY let Fran in at four thirty.

Larry stood up when she came in and for a moment they stared at each other. Her eyes were red, but she tried to smile.

"Larry," she whispered.



Then he was holding her close and she was crying, her face buried into his chest.

"Don't, honey," he said.

"It was all my fault. If I hadn't acted like I did you wouldn't be here now. Oh, darling, what are they keeping you for? They wouldn't tell me a thing."

"Sit down here," he said. He sat beside her on the cot and held both her hands. "I'm in trouble, honey. How bad I don't know. Until about fifteen minutes I wasn't sure of my name. I was lost. I was dead. I thought I was insane." He squeezed her hands and met her eyes steadily. "I'm not much better now. A little, but not much. I'm thinking now. It's not getting me anywhere, but it's a start. The most important thing, darling, is that you believe me. No matter what you're told or how screwy my story sounds. You've got to believe me."

"Oh, I do, darling."

"You haven't heard the story yet. Last night I had a few drinks. I'm not going to tell you what a fool I was for storming out last night. Some day I will."

"Don't, darling," she whispered.

"After a few drinks I met a girl. I had one drink with her and it was doped. I passed out. I woke up this morning in bed with her and she was dead. That is the God's honest truth. That's all there is. But you've got to believe me."

Her eyes were widened with horror.

"Oh, my darling," she murmured.

"And here's the twist. They can't find her body. Not a trace of her. Not one thing to prove I'm not just lying."

"But, darling, are you sure?"

"Dead sure. They almost talked me out of it. Had me convinced I was dreaming or crazy. But I know I'm not. Somewhere in this town there is a dead

girl. And somebody is covering up her murder for some reason."

"Darling, it just doesn't make sense."

"I know it doesn't." He looked at her and then down at her hands. "The only alternative," he said slowly, "is that I'm insane. That's why I won't admit it."

Fran put her head against his shoulder and murmured, "I believe you, darling. That makes me crazy, too, doesn't it?"

He smiled at her. Not much of a smile but it was the first time he'd felt like smiling since last night.

"Crazy as a coot," he said.

They sat close together without talking much for the next hour. The copper in the corridor had turned an elaborately indifferent back to them, and was engrossed in a paper.

They sat there until six o'clock.

And then Meyers came back. He opened the door and frowned at Larry.

"The verdict is in," he said.

"What is it?"

"Get the hell out of here. You're nuts!"

He walked away, a puzzled, angry man, with gray clothes, graying hair and a gray soul.

\* \* \*

"Somebody tried to frame me, Fran. Why, I don't know. I wouldn't know him if I passed him on the street, but he can hold this thing over my head like a rock. He can crush me anytime he feels like it. That's why I can't just sit around and do nothing."

They were sitting in their kitchen over empty coffee cups. He lit another cigarette and went on:

"I've got to know all about what happened last night or I'll go insane. I can't live with this thing on my mind."

"Darling," Fran said, "there's nothing you can do." She tried to make her voice soothing, but she couldn't elim-



inate the note of strain and tenseness. She put her hand over his and held it tightly. "You're out of it now, darling, you're in the clear. It could have been horrible, but by some miracle it's turned out all right. Please don't try and stir up anything."

"I've got to," Larry said. "This morning I woke up with a murdered girl beside me. Can I forget that? Can I go back to the office as if nothing had happened? I've got to find out who murdered her and why it was done."

"What are you going to do?" Fran asked. She drew her hand away from his and her voice was despairing.

"I'll start at the beginning," Larry said. "At the *Kicking Horse*." He put his cigarette out and stood up. "Call the office tomorrow morning and tell them I have a cold. Or anything."

Fran sat with her hands in her lap as he straightened his tie.

"When will you be back?" she said.

He leaned over and kissed her on the forehead.

"As soon as I can, honey. You get to bed and try and sleep."

She buried her face in his sleeve and said, "darling, be careful."

"I will," he promised.

\* \* \*

It was nine o'clock. Madison street was crowded and noisy. The lights were on and music blared from loudspeakers. The blinking neon signs advertised bars, cafes, dance halls and burlesque shows.

Larry stopped in front of the *Kicking Horse*.

He felt cold and afraid. He wasn't the heroic type. He was just an ordinary guy. His throat was dry and the fear he felt was something he could taste.

The trouble he was in had started here, and now he was walking back in, without any authority, without any

backing, without even a clear idea of what he wanted, and it was like sticking his head into a noose. But it was something he had to do. He was old enough to know that you had to do the tough things by yourself.

He pushed open the door and walked into the vestibule. The hat check girl was the same red head of the night before. She smiled at him without recognition as she took his hat. She handed him a check and he went into the bar room.

The place was half-full. The orchestra was playing, a few couples were dancing and there was a little play at the dice tables that flanked the band.

There was smoke in the air and the pervading tavern smell of perfume and stale beer. He sat down at the bar and waited for the bartender.

He was the same one. The dark haired guy with the lively brown eyes and the scar running across his forehead. Larry couldn't be mistaken. Not with that scar. That was as good as a finger print.

The bartender was talking to a couple a few stools down. When he saw Larry he came over and put his hands on the bar. His face was expressionless.

"What'll it be?"

"A beer," Larry said. "But there's no hurry. I want to talk to you."

"You can have the beer," the bartender said.

He moved away, came back in a moment with a glass of beer with a neat collar.

"Anything else?"

"I want to talk to you," Larry said.

The bartender leaned a little closer. "I speak English," he said. "I understand it, too. But I guess you don't. I'm busy. I haven't got time to talk. Do you get it now?"

"This won't take long," Larry said. "I was in here last night. I talked to



you. Remember?"

The bartender's brown face was expressionless. But his lively brown eyes looked wary.

"I get paid for tending bar," he said. "I serve hundreds of drinks every night. I don't look at the people who buy the drinks. I just look at their money. And you owe me a quarter for that beer, bud."

"You must remember me," Larry said. "You asked me if I wanted to meet someone. I told you I had a fight with my wife and was anxious to get home. Don't you remember that?"

"No. I got trouble enough without listening to other people's. I never seen you before."

"Any trouble, Sam?" a quiet voice said.

LARRY looked around and saw a solidly built man standing behind him, looking at the bartender. He had black curly hair, swarthy cheeks and white even teeth. His expression was one of amiable curiosity, but he had the kind of face that could become hard and savage in an instant. He was dressed carefully in a midnight blue suit, a figured white shirt and blue tie. Except for the too-wide shoulders and too-pinched effect at the waist, and the extra couple of inches of white handkerchief showing from his breast pocket, his clothes were in excellent taste.

The bartender said, "no trouble, Mr. Tonelli. The guy's just gabby and I'm busy."

Tonelli's face lost its amiable expression. "Sam," he said, "that's no way to talk to our customers." He sat down on a stool beside Larry and smiled. "What's the trouble, pally? Just feel like talking, eh? Well, I'm a good listener." He put a hand on Larry's shoulder and gave it a little pat. "What's on your mind?"

"I don't feel like talking," Larry said. "I just want to clear up something. I was in here last night. I talked to the bartender. Now he says he don't remember me."

"So, that's it," Tonelli said. He looked thoughtful while he undressed a thin cigar and wetted one end slowly. When it was drawing well he glanced through the smoke at Larry. "Now this isn't anything to worry about. Sam here serves dozens of people every hour. You can't expect him to remember everybody. But what of it? You didn't come back just to see if he remembered you."

"That's right," Larry said. "I came back here to find out about a girl."

"Ah!" Tonelli smiled genially. He removed the cigar from his mouth with manicured fingers and made a little O with his lips. His expression was amused. "So that's it. Now what about this girl? Did you meet her in here?"

"Yes. The bartender introduced us."

"Not on your life," Sam said.

Tonelli raised his eyebrows. "A little difference of opinion." He patted Larry's shoulder. "How about it?"

Larry looked at the bartender. "He introduced us. She was sitting one stool away and he bought us both a drink, told us we ought to get along well together."

"And did you?" Tonelli smiled.

"The guy is crazy," the bartender said.

"Now, now," Tonelli said soothingly. "Let's not argue about it. The customer is always right. Now about this girl. Supposing you did meet her here. Supposing Sam just doesn't happen to remember. What about it?"

Larry wet his lips. He didn't know what to say. But he knew the bartender, Sam, was lying. And that gave him a little assurance.

"Now," Tonelli said, "look at it this



way. You met a girl in here last night. Tonight you're back asking about her. That means a couple of things. She stood you up for a date tonight and you want to find her. Or she rolled you last night, or gave you a run around, and you're out to square it up. That's the reason guys look for dolls, take it from me Pally. They either love 'em, or hate 'em. Now which is it, with you?"

"I don't know," Larry said.

"Well, what did she look like?"

"A tall blonde. Good clothes, good shape. That's all I noticed."

"Only a perfectionist would look for more," Tonelli grinned. "But I don't remember any dames like that in here. What about you Sam?"

"Never," Sam grunted.

Tonelli spread his hands palms-up and shrugged. "I guess you're wrong, Pally. You must have been in some other joint. Better try somewhere else."

Larry felt he was fighting shadows. Shadows that could hit back when they were ready. Then he remembered something.

"Wait a minute," he said. "I can prove I was in here. I talked to one of the twenty six girls. She'll remember me."

Tonelli shrugged. "What will that prove? Maybe you were in here. I never said you weren't. But if it will make you feel any better that's fine."

Larry turned on the stool and looked at the girl's behind the green felt twenty six tables. There were three of them. They were all pretty. They were all blondes.

CORINNE had been a brunette.

"Well?" Tonelli said.

"She's not here now," Larry said. He turned back and looked helplessly at Tonelli. "Her name was Corinne."

Tonelli frowned for a moment and then drummed his finger tips on the bar.

"Corinne?" He shook his head and looked doubtfully at Larry. "That's a blank," he said. "Maybe some dame by the name of Corinne worked here. Maybe two or three years ago. But not since then." He shook his head and then smiled. "That should make you feel better. Now you know you're in the wrong joint. It happens all the time. Guys come in here looking for dames they met in Detroit or St. Louis. They get mixed up, have a few drinks, and they lose track of places and time. I've seen it a dozen times."

Larry felt a cold nausea in his stomach. The shadows were dancing around him, grinning and smirking. Waiting for their chance. And then he wondered if he was crazy.

"You never had a girl in here by that name?" he persisted.

Tonelli looked at the end of his cigar and shook his head.

"And you never saw a tall, well dressed blonde in here?"

"That's a pretty general description," Tonelli said. "I wouldn't give you a definite answer on that. But it seems pretty sure you didn't meet anybody in here like that last night."

He patted Larry on the shoulder. "Go home and get some sleep, Pally. And forget about this thing. I think you had a few extra drinks last night and got a little mixed-up."

Larry stood up. His hands were shaking.

"Thanks," he said. He walked out.

## CHAPTER VI

OUTSIDE a big man in gray clothes moved away from the wall and fell in step beside him. It was Meyers.

"Can't let well enough alone?" he asked.

"How did you know where to look for me," Larry asked dully. But it



didn't seem important.

"Your wife called me. Told me what you had in mind. So I thought I'd drop around and see that you didn't get liquored up again and cause us more trouble."

"I wasn't drunk," Larry said.

"Meet any dead blondes?" Meyers asked.

"Go to hell," Larry said.

"Talk that way and I'm liable to slap you one," Meyers said, without rancor.

"I'm supposed to be crazy," Larry said. "Nutty as a fruit cake. Why bother about me? Why tail me around?"

"Just trying to keep you out of trouble," Meyers said. He took Larry's arm. "My car is over here."

The car was parked at the corner of Canal and Madison under a NO PARKING sign. The traffic cop grinned at Meyers.

"How's the wife?" he asked.

"How's any wife," Meyers muttered.

He got in beside Larry and lit a cigarette. He made no move to start the car, just sat there, staring out the wind shield. The cigarette in his mouth accumulated ash. Is cascaded down his vest.

"Find out anything?" he asked finally.

Larry shook his head. "The bartender didn't remember me. The twenty six girl I talked to in there is gone. Some guy, Tonelli, his name was, spent twenty minutes trying to convince me I was drunk."

"Tonelli," Meyers said. "Go on."

"That's all. They claim I wasn't even at the *Kicking Horse* last night."

Meyers pinched his nose with stubby fingers.

"How did Tonelli seem?"

"Friendly enough," Larry answered. "But he didn't know of any blonde who hung around the bar there. He didn't know the twenty six girl. And the bar-

tender was pretty sure he'd never seen me before. But he was lying."

"How do you figure?"

"He went out of his way to talk to me last night. He fixed me up with this girl. He bought us a drink. A guy would remember something like that."

"I guess he would," Meyers said. He turned and looked at Larry. "If it happened, that is."

"Oh, shut up," Larry said wearily. "What percentage is there trying to prove I'm crazy? Or just a drunk who has funny dreams? If you don't believe me let me alone. I know what happened to me. I know where I was last night. I know that bartender was lying. And I intend to find out why."

Meyers shrugged. "Okay. But don't cry if you get hurt. Can I drop you somewhere?"

"No," Larry said. "I can get home."

Meyers frowned and then threw his cigarette away.

"If you come across anything give me a ring?"

"Now who's crazy?" Larry asked.

"I don't know. My food doesn't taste right though. Hell of a note." He sighed heavily. "Be seeing ya."

Larry got out of the car and watched him drive away.

## CHAPTER VII

HE WAS looking for a match when he found it. He was still standing at the corner of Canal and Madison, an unlighted cigarette in his lips when he found the match folder on which the dice girl had scribbled her phone number.

He stared at it for a moment, trying to assimilate all the things it meant. First, he wasn't crazy. Second, he had been in the *Kicking Horse*, had talked to the girl named Corinne.

And both Tonelli and the bartender



had lied about it. They were trying to convince him he had been drunk. And they had both known he wasn't. Why? That was a big why.

He turned into a drugstore. He knew a number, maintained by the telephone company for the use of its maintenance crews which would give the street address of any listed telephone number.

He dialed it, gave the operator the dice girl's telephone number and in a few seconds she gave him the address of the phone. It was on the North side, near Wilson avenue. He thanked her and hung up.

He went outside and looked for a cab. He felt a queer feeling of excitement. He felt he had finally succeeded in clutching one of the ravelled ends of this mystery.

Where it led he had no idea. But it was something. The shadows were taking form. Soon there might be something tangible in his hands.

A cab stopped and he climbed in and gave the driver the address on the North side. His hands were shaking as he lit a cigarette. . . .

\* \* \*

The house was a six-flat, brownstone front, with bay windows and an incongruously ornate canopy leading from the curb to the doorway. A flight of worn steps led to the double glass doors.

He paid the driver and went up the steps. It was ten thirty by his wrist watch.

The lobby had a vaguely dirty smell. There were a few overstuffed chairs, a phony marble fireplace and a worn wooden floor needed a good a good scrubbing.

The desk clerk was a tired old man with white hair, and over worked adam's apple and rheumy blue eyes.

"I want to see Corinne," Larry said.

The old man looked at him. "Corinne who?"

"How the hell do I know," Larry said. "She gave me her phone number and address. I don't need her last name. I'm not going to introduce her to anybody."

The old man grinned crookedly. "Corinne ain't as bad as some of them. But you guys are all the same. A dame is just something to kick around, treat like dirt. You wouldn't do it to your wives 'cause you're scared. That's why you chase these tramps around. But Corinne ain't no tramp. Her room is three ten. If she gave you her number it's because she likes you."

"Thanks," Larry said.

He crossed the lobby to the self-service elevator and went up to the third floor. Three ten was three doors from the elevator.

He knocked and waited. A moment later he heard light footsteps and then the door opened.

She didn't recognize him at first. When she did she tried to slam the door. But he got his foot in the way.

"I want to talk to you, Corinne," he said.

"I got nothing to say," she said. She was panting and her face looked pinched and scared. "You're poison. Get out of here and let me alone."

He pushed the door open, stepped in and swung it shut behind him. She backed away from him, her eyes wide with terror.

"Get out of here!" she whispered.

"Not until we talk a little," he said.

The room was shabbily furnished. There were a few chairs with worn upholstery, a day bed with a red quilt thrown over it, and a dusty gray rug. A lamp was on above the day bed and there was an open magazine on the floor.

He sat on one of the chairs and pulled out his cigarettes. He offered her the pack and she refused with a jerk of her



head. She was wearing a faded blue silk house coat and blue slippers. Her dark hair was drawn into a bun at the nape of her neck and her skin, without make-up, was white and drawn.

"I'm sorry I barged in," he said. "But I've got to talk to you. I want to know who that girl was I met in the *Kicking Horse* last night. And why you quit so suddenly. And why Tonelli lied to me about it."

"You saw Tonelli?" her voice was still a whisper.

"Just left him," Larry said. "He claims you never worked there."

"You fool! You simple fool! What are you sticking your neck out for? You're out of it now. Stay out of it. Get out of here and forget you ever saw me."

She spoke in a tense, frightened voice that was close to the breaking point of hysteria.

"I can't," Larry said. "That girl I met in the *Kicking Horse* was murdered last night. Somebody tried to pin it on me. But it didn't work."

The girl sat down on the day bed as if her legs had lost their strength. She stared dully at him. "Murdered? Velma dead?"

"Her name was Velma?"

"Yes." She answered like a person in a daze. "Velma Dare."

"Who was she?"

Corinne stood up suddenly. "Get out of here!" she screamed suddenly. "You're dragging me into this too. I didn't know what it was. You're poison."

He stood up then and gripped her shoulders.

"Corinne," he said urgently, "listen to me, for God's sake. I'm behind the biggest eight ball in the world unless I get some help. I'm not trying to get you in trouble. That's the last thing I want. But I've got to get some an-

swers."

FOR a moment she stared at him, trying to twist her shoulders away from his grip, and then she began to cry, soundlessly, and her shoulders went limp under his hands. He pulled her to him, until her face was buried against his coat.

"I didn't know it was murder," she whispered. "I knew it was bad, but nothing like that."

"Tell me about it."

"I don't know much. Tonelli gave me a thousand dollars last night and told me to leave town. He told me you were in some kind of trouble and we had to pretend you'd never been to the *Kicking Horse*. He didn't tell me any more. Just to get out. And to get lost. In a hurry."

"Who was Velma Dare?"

"I can't tell you. Oh, please get out now. Tonelli isn't an easy guy. If he ever learns I talked to you I wouldn't have a chance."

"Where did Velma live?"

"She lived with a friend of hers. In the Wilshire apartments. Occasionally, that is."

"What do you mean, 'occasionally'? What else did she do?"

"When did you leave kindergarten?" she said. She was starting to laugh and cry. She broke away from him and sank down on the day bed. "God, that's funny. A baby like you chasing around after these people. They'll slice you in thin strips and serve you in Martinis. Get out! Do you hear me? Get out!"

The Wilshire apartments . . .

Larry had what he came for. He patted her on the shoulder and left. Downstairs the room clerk looked at him in surprise.

"You was quick," he said.

"Yeah," Larry said.



## CHAPTER VIII

FROM Corrine's apartment to the Wilshire was a twenty minute cab ride. On the way Larry did some thinking, but it didn't help much.

He now had several facts to go on: one, he had been at the *Kicking Horse*. Two, Tonelli and the bartender had gone to a lot of trouble to convince him he hadn't. Three, Corinne had been paid off, told to get out of town, so he wouldn't have a chance to see her again.

Fine. Three nice facts. But they didn't tell him anything. He had been framed but the frame had unaccountably backfired. Now no one wanted any part of him. They wanted him to forget about it. Charge it off to a crazy dream or too many drinks.

But he still didn't know why.

The Wilshire apartments was in a better neighborhood than Corinne's. About a block from the Lake Shore, about fourteen hundred North, and about spitting distance from the Gold Coast.

The Wilshire was an impressive place, with shrubbery in brass pots, an expensive looking canopy and a doorman who looked like a White Russian.

The doorman opened the two glazed portals for Larry as if they led to the audience chamber of the Czar, and he walked into a discreetly hushed lobby that could have been used for a football game. The thick gray carpet hushed his steps as he walked to the desk.

A young man in a beautifully-cut flannel suit smiled at him, cleared his throat and said, "Yes?" His tone implied that if you wanted the East wing at Buckingham Palace he would be happy to get it for you.

"I want to see Velma Dare," Larry said.

"Ah!" the young man continued to smile. "Miss Dare isn't in. Do you

care to leave a message?"

"No. I'll see her friend then."

"Who shall I say is calling?"

"Don't say. I'll talk to her on the phone. I think she'll see me."

"Very well." He made a connection on the switchboard and then pointed to a phone on the desk. Larry picked up the phone and when a sleepy voice said, "yes," he said, "I'm a friend of Velma's. I've got something important to tell you. May I come up?"

There was a moment's pause. The voice said, "I'm in suite Four-A. Come up, please."

The voice didn't sound so sleepy. . . .

He knocked and the door was opened immediately. The woman who opened the door was thin, with graying hair and a tired looking face. Her eyes were pale blue, blood-shot at the corners. She looked nervous.

The black house coat and high-heeled pumps she wore accentuated her thin, flat-chested figure. She was wearing a lot of jewelry. A heavy silver necklace, thick silver bracelets, and two rings. A ruby and an emerald. It didn't help her much.

"Who are you?" she said. Her voice sounded like a nail being drawn across sandpaper.

"The name isn't important," Larry said. "Can I come in?"

She stepped aside and he entered a room that spelled money, from the black wood fireplace to the rugs, lamps, furniture, cocktail bar and Eastern view.

She poured herself a half-tumbler of brandy while he was sitting down, and drained it neat. He realized then her voice wasn't sleepy. She was just half tight. She sat down opposite him and regarded him steadily with her blood-shot eyes.

"What about Velma?" she asked.



He didn't know what to say. "Velma's in trouble," he said finally.

"That's nothing new. What am I supposed to do about it?"

"I thought you might be interested."

"And who the hell are you?"

"I told you. A friend of Velma's."

She hiccuped gently. "She didn't tell me about any trouble."

"When did you talk to her?"

She thought a minute. Her brow wrinkled and she gazed blankly at the floor. "I get so confused," she murmured. "Time is always getting mixed-up." She frowned, then said, "I talked to Velma this morning. She phoned me from the station."

LARRY'S stomach got cold. "You're crazy," he said. "Velma couldn't possibly phoned you this morning."

"Watch your manners young man," she said. She got her eyes under control and stared blearily at him. "I'm drunk, but not crazy. Velma phoned to tell me she was going south for a few weeks. She's always running off like that."

Larry tried to keep his face from showing what he was feeling. If Velma had been alive this morning, who was the murdered girl?

"Were you sure it was Velma?" he demanded.

"Course. Just like Velma to run off like that. No clothes, no luggage."

"Did you recognize her voice?"

The bleary eyes went to the floor again. She sat for a moment frowning, then she teetered over to the bar and poured herself another drink. When that was drained she came back and sat down again. "Velma had a cold. Her voice was husky. I told her to look after herself." She stared indignantly at Larry. "Of course it was Velma."

"If she spoke in a whisper you couldn't tell," Larry said. He knew

that was true. A whisper disguised any voice. You couldn't even tell if it was a man or a woman talking.

His mind was working swiftly. If someone had killed Velma and wanted to keep it quiet, this is just what they'd do. They'd call her roommate, using a whisper to disguise the voice, and tell just this kind of story. A story that would forestall her running to the police or Missing Persons Bureau to report Velma's disappearance. That much was logical but it still didn't help much.

"I think Velma is in trouble," he said. "I'm trying to help her."

"What kind of trouble?"

"Something pretty serious. Do you know any of her friends?"

She shook her head. "She didn't let me meet anybody." She sighed and a tear trickled down her cheek. "Good old Mabel. Everybody's friend. But not good enough to meet anybody."

"Who's Mabel?"

She blinked. "Me. I'm Mabel. The good old horse. Thash all."

She was getting too drunk to make sense. He knew he had to work fast if he was going to get anything from her.

"Did she have any enemies?"

The gray head shook slowly from side to side.

"Then who were her friends?"

"No friends." She hiccuped and put her hand guiltily over her mouth. "Touch of gas," she muttered.

Larry felt desperate, helpless. "You've got to tell me something," he said.

"Whatch you want?"

"Anything. Addresses. Telephone numbers. Names. Something I can go on."

She got up slowly, keeping her balance with difficulty and swayed across the room to a writing table. She fumbled through a stack of papers and



came back with a neat card. There was a telephone number typed on the card.

"Telephone number," she mumbled. "But you can't use it. Velma says never use it. Just for emergency." She giggled. "Like running out of brandy."

Larry took the card from her shaking fingers and put it in his watch pocket. She made noises in her throat and tried to get it back, but he grabbed her bony wrists and forced her back into the chair.

"It's all right," he said.

"Can't use the phone number," she cried. She started to sob. It made her jewelry shake and tinkle.

He left her there, crying, shoulders shaking, and the tears making little muddy rivulets through her make-up. And the sound of her silver jewelry was a discordant tinkle in the large, dimly-lighted room.

## CHAPTER IX

**D**OWNSTAIRS he walked West, trying to decide what was going to happen next.

That was decided for him.

Out of the shadows of the dark street two men emerged. His arms were caught and pinioned before he could make a move. The men were large, powerful and business-like. They seemed to know just what they were doing.

Larry struggled, but it was useless. He was half-carried, half-dragged toward an alley.

"Too bad," the man on his right said. "A guy gets a few drinks and his friends got to suffer with him."

"Yeah!" the voice came from his left. "Terrible thing this drinking."

In the darkness of the alley his coat was whipped off his shoulders and secured from behind, pinioning his arms. One of the men stood in front of him, a

bulky shadow, with just a pale blur of a face.

"Now listen, chum," he said, "this is good advice I'm goin' to give. Go home. Stop asking questions. Stop nosing around. Lay off."

Larry didn't see him raise his arm, but a fist like a mallet suddenly crashed into his jaw. His head rolled and a lot of lights started snapping on and off inside his head.

"Get it!" the voice said. "*Go home!*"

The fist landed again. More lights started flickering. There was a taste of rusty iron and salt in his mouth.

"*Stop asking questions!*"

The fist again. And more lights. He felt he could spit out teeth if he tried.

"*Stop nosing around!*"

This time the fist didn't turn on any more lights. It started to put them out. And that made it get darker.

"*Lay off!*"

The fist was an old friend by now. It put out all the lights and made everything soft and dark. He felt it land a few more times and he had a vague annoyance at all that wasted effort. Didn't the guy know the lights were out?

Everything was black . . .

A light rain was falling when he came to. He was lying in the alley. His head ached and it was minutes before he could sit up and make his thoughts focus. He took out a handkerchief and let the rain wet it. Then he swabbed his face. He lit a match and looked at his watch. Two o'clock. He had been lying here a couple of hours anyway.

He got to his feet slowly, and stood there several minutes, waiting for the hammers in his head to stop pounding. He felt sick and weak.

He felt in his watch pocket and that made him feel a little better. The card with the telephone number was still there.



He walked through the rain toward the Lake Shore Drive. That was his best chance of getting a cab. And all he could think of now was getting home.

It was a two block walk and it took him fifteen minutes. His legs were weak and he had to stop every few feet to rest. When he reached the Drive he had to wait fifteen minutes before a cab stopped.

He climbed into the back seat and gave the driver his address.

FRAN met him at the door. Her face was drawn with anxiety. When she saw him her lips began to tremble. She came to him, put her hand against his swollen lips.

"Oh, darling," she murmured. She began to cry.

He tried to grin, for her sake, but it wasn't very successful.

"I'm all right." His voice sounded thick and muffled.

She put her arm around him, helped him into the living room.

There were two cups of coffee on the low table before the fire place. Larry saw a pair of gray-clad legs, heavy black shoes extending from one of the chairs. He stopped and shook his head.

Meyers stood up slowly. The faint grin faded from his solid gray face when he saw Larry's condition. He tossed his cigarette into the fireplace and pursed his lips.

"Somebody did a good job," he commented.

"Yeah," Larry said. With Fran helping him he made his way to a chair and sat down.

"You're bleeding," Fran said. Her voice was hushed but she had stopped crying.

"Get me a cup of coffee, please," he said. He managed another grin. "I look a lot worse than I am."

She hurried out of the room and he

sank back in the chair and let his eyes close.

"Who did it?" Meyers asked.

"I don't know. Couple of guys. They seemed to know their job."

Meyers chuckled sympathetically. "That's for sure. Get a look at 'em?"

Larry opened one eye and squinted at him. "Ever try and look at a guy when he's beating you over the head with a fire plug?"

Meyers shook his head. "But I'm no tough guy," he said sarcastically. "I'm just a dumb cop. We leave these heroic jobs to guys like you."

"Okay. I'm a sucker." He opened his other eye and looked at Meyers steadily. "But I've found out more than the police force has on this case."

Meyers digested this without expression. He settled back in the chair and lit a cigarette. His gray face was blank.

"So? What have you found out?"

Fran came back then with his coffee. He took the cup and patted her hand gratefully. "Honey, better get some sleep. I've got to talk to Meyers."

He didn't want her around. He didn't want her to know anything. It wasn't safe to know anything. And he wanted her safe.

She looked doubtful, but she said, "All right, darling."

She left the room with light quick steps. Meyers looked after her. "Nice kid. We had quite a talk."

"What are you here for?" Larry asked.

"Let's pretend I'm still a cop," Meyers said dryly. "I'll ask the questions. What did you find out?"

Larry told him everything that had happened. But he didn't mention the telephone number Mabel had given him. He wanted to chase that down himself. He had reached the point where he didn't trust anyone.

Meyers frowned at the floor and lit



another cigarette with a gesture of irritation. "So they bought this gal Corinne off. That doesn't mean much. But it could. And then this Velma Dare. The gal you woke up in bed with. I can't figure that angle."

"Do you know anything about her. About Velma, I mean."

Meyers shrugged. "A little. I know the name. I've heard things here and there."

"What kind of things?"

"Nothing that helps any." He got up and picked up his hat and walked to the door. "You'd better lay off now," he said. "They know who you are. They know you're nosing around. Next time they'll do a permanent job on you."

"Who is 'they'?" Larry asked.

Meyers grinned sourly. "Who knows?"

Larry said slowly. "I think you do, Meyers."

Meyers laughed and walked out the door. . . .

HE HAD showered and put some adhesive tape on his cut lips when the phone rang. He came out of the bathroom and looked at the ringing phone. His mouth felt dry. There was something insistent and ominous in the sound.

Fran raised herself on one elbow and stared at him with wide frightened eyes.

"Who can that be?" she whispered.

Larry walked across the living room and picked up the phone.

"Yes?"

It was Meyers. His voice was flat and cold.

"I got a little news. A friend of yours got herself killed a while ago. A girl by the name of Corinne. Used to work at the *Kicking Horse*. Any ideas?"

Larry licked his lips. His hand on the phone was clammy.

"No. Who did it?"

Meyers laughed bitterly. "Good question. But they didn't leave any calling cards. They just blew a couple of holes in her and walked out."

Larry looked at the phone and worked his lips. But no sound came out. He was thinking of what Corinne had said: *if Tonelli finds out I talked I won't have a chance. She had liked him. He thought of the old desk clerk: She's no tramp. If she gave you her number it's because she liked you.*

Meyers said: "Nothing to say, eh? Well take a tip then. Keep in the clear from now on. Get it? Lay off!"

The phone clicked.

Fran came into the living room. She had put on a robe. Her hair was tousled and the fear in her face made her look young and helpless.

"Larry, who was it?"

"Meyers. It wasn't anything." He put an arm around her and patted her shoulder. "Nothing to worry about, hon."

She snuggled closer to him. "Darling, please stay out of this thing. I'm so afraid."

"I am too," he said. "I'm no hero. Everyone is telling me to lay off. God knows, I want to. But I can't."

"What are you going to do?"

"Make a telephone call," he said.

## CHAPTER X

HE DIDN'T sleep much that night.

About six in the morning he dropped into an uneasy doze; when he woke the sun was streaming in the window and Fran was standing beside the bed with a cup of coffee.

It was ten in the morning.

He didn't feel rested. He felt lousy. He drank the coffee and it didn't help much. He put on a robe and slippers and got the telephone number from his watch pocket. It was Summerville



8649. He didn't know where it was going to lead, but he intended to keep following every lead he got until he learned something.

He sat down beside the telephone stand and lit a cigarette. Then he dialed the department maintained by the telephone company. He gave the operator the number and she said, "One moment, please." A little later she said, "I'm sorry, sir, that is an unlisted number. We can't give you the address."

He hung up slowly. He smoked the cigarette down and put it out. Then he dialed Summerville 8649. The phone buzzed twice before a suave voice said, "Yes?"

Larry talked quickly. "This is the proof department of the City Directory. We're checking addresses for our next issue. Could you give me your address so we can check against our directory listing?"

There was a long pause. Then the suave voice said, "I'm sorry. This is an unlisted phone." Larry heard a click as the receiver was replaced.

He swore softly. There must be some way to get the address of an unlisted phone. He remembered then a friend of his, Charlie Barret, an employee of the telephone company, had told him once that it could be done.

He called Charlie Barret. When he told him what he wanted Barret was dubious. "I can do it for you, Larry, but it's against all our regulations. Are you sure this is important?"

"Of course," Larry said.

"All right. It might take a little while. But I'll get it. And keep this quiet, will you?"

\* \* \*

Larry spent the afternoon waiting for the phone call. When it came he grabbed the phone nervously. He said, "Yes?"

"This is Charlie. I got it. But I

waited until I got home to call you. I couldn't talk from an office phone."

"Okay, what is it?"

"Summerville 8649 is registered for Judge Avery Mills. The address is 1000 Lake Shore Drive, suite eleven-B."

"Judge Avery Mills," Larry repeated slowly. He was writing on the telephone pad.

"That's it. 1000 Lake Shore Drive. Suite eleven-B."

"I got it. Thanks a million, Charlie."

He hung up and looked at the name. Judge Avery Mills. It didn't mean much to him. He had heard it now and then. Mills was a Circuit Judge, a fairly young man, and well thought of, politically.

Well he would know more about it damn soon . . .

## CHAPTER XI

**I**T WAS eight o'clock when he got out of the cab at 1000 Lake Shore Drive. The building was new, glittering and impressive.

He went inside, crossed the lobby to the elevator. It was the self-service type. He pressed the button numbered eleven and the doors closed and he started upward.

He didn't think of where he was going or what he was getting into. He had no more caution left. He had to know what was behind the things that had happened to him. There had been two murders. There had been an attempt to frame him. And until he knew why he couldn't stop going.

He rang the door of eleven-B and waited. The corridor was wide, well lighted and carpeted in thick gray. Everything about the building looked secure, protected and prosperous.

The door opened and a butler looked at him with raised eyebrows. He was an elderly, with a lined face, blue-



veined hands and the impleccable air of the life-long retainer.

"I want to see Judge Mills," Larry said.

"I'm afraid that is impossible," the butler said. "His Honor sees no one without an appointment."

"Give him a message then," Larry said. "Maybe he'll make an exception this time. Tell him I want to see him about the murder of a girl named Velma Dare."

The eyebrows went a little higher but that was the only indication the butler gave that the news was anything more startling than a comment about the weather.

"Very well. Will you wait, please?"

The door closed.

Larry lit a cigarette and waited. In a few moments the butler was back.

"Will you come with me, please?" he said.

\* \* \*

Judge Avery Mills was standing before a marble fireplace, with a leather-bound book in his hands. He was a tall man with graying hair, alert, lean features, and brown eyes that looked humorous and friendly.

He wore a velvet smoking-jacket over a white silk shirt. He fitted the room perfectly. It was quiet, gracious, tasteful. And the Judge gave the same impression of cultivation and breeding.

The butler said, "This is the young man, sir."

The judge smiled. "All right, Henry. You may leave us now."

"I'll be right outside, sir," the butler said with a dubious look at Larry.

"Well, young man," Judge Mills said, when the butler had closed the door, "You almost scared Henry to death. Now what's this all about?"

He seated himself and waved Larry to another chair. He drew a pipe from his pocket and began to fill it carefully.

"There are cigars beside you," he said.

"No thanks," Larry said. "I'm here about a girl known as Velma Dare. She has been murdered. And I got your phone number from a friend of hers."

"I see," Judge Mills said. He puffed at the pipe thoughtfully. "And what conclusion do you draw from that?"

"You knew her," Larry said.

"Quite so. May I ask what your interest in this matter is?"

"Not until I find out what you know about Velma Dare."

"Oh, come now," the judge smiled. "Surely you must realize your position isn't that strong. You are here without authority, and you want to put me on the witness stand. I know Velma Dare. I've known her for quite some time. I don't know what to make of your story. I think you owe me something more in the way of explanation."

Larry said, "Someone tried to frame me for her murder. I woke up beside her yesterday morning. She had a knife stuck in her. I got out before the police arrived."

"Tell me this: how do you know the dead girl was Velma Dare?"

"I got that from a girl who worked at the *Kicking Horse*."

"My dear young man," Judge Mills said, "You have an amazing way of introducing testimony. Suppose you tell me the whole story."

LARRY knew he was in so deep already that it didn't matter. He told his story. When he finished the judge was frowning at his pipe.

"Against all my cautious instincts, I believe you," he said slowly. "Now I'll tell you a few things you don't know. Velma Dare was a relation of mine, a distant cousin. From time to time I've helped her out financially. She was a very independent sort of person, however, and she would never take more



than a few dollars. Just enough to pay a week's board, or something like that. She always made a point of paying me back as soon as her luck turned. I haven't seen her now for several months. I find it hard to believe she is dead."

"Take my word for that," Larry said. "She's as dead as you can get."

"I see," the judge said. He ran a hand slowly through his graying hair and leaned back against the chair. For a moment he said nothing. Then: "And what do you propose to do now?"

"I don't know," Larry told him. "But I'm not quitting."

"In that case perhaps I can help you," the judge said. "What did you say that man's name was? The proprietor at the *Kicking Horse*?"

"Tonelli."

"Then supposing we pay a call on Mr. Tonelli? Perhaps he'd be a little more cooperative with me. I don't know the man. But I seem to remember hearing a few things about him. Things that aren't too savory."

"I don't think it will help," Larry said. "He'll tell you I'm either crazy or drunk."

"Maybe we can make him a little more talkative than that," the judge said. "I think we can take an ace in our sleeve with us."

"What do you mean?"

"I certainly wouldn't walk in on Tonelli alone. If he's guilty or if he knows something, there's only one way to make him talk. And that is to convince him our suspicions are backed by the police."

"The police won't listen to me," Larry said.

"They've put no stock at all in your story?"

"They think I'm nuts," Larry said.

Judge Mills smiled. "They will probably think I am too, but they

can't afford to say so. I'm going to call the commissioner and ask him to send one of his men to meet us at the *Kicking Horse*. That might convince Tonelli we aren't just bluffing. The police are an admirable institution when they're on your side. Or maybe you know that?"

"I get what you mean," Larry said.

The judge walked to a cradle phone on a table beside the fireplace. He dialed a number and winked at Larry. "The commissioner will not be pleased. He would like to tell me to go to hell, but I'm sure he's too good a politician to do anything—" He broke off, spoke into the phone. "Let me talk to the Commissioner, please. This is Judge Mills. Yes, thank you." He tapped his foot impatiently for a moment. Then: "Hello, Jimmy. Did I disrupt the bridge game? Sorry. . . . As usual I want a favor. But just a little one this time. I want a little protection, a little authority, a little official backing, as it were, for a little extra-curricular activity I'm planning tonight." He chuckled. "I'm not going to get into trouble. I just need one of your men for a little while. You must have a few captains or lieutenants that aren't busy. . . . Very well, a sergeant will be fine. Have him meet us at the *Kicking Horse* in about fifteen minutes. . . . It is not a burlesque house. All right? Fine, Jimmy. Good night."

He hung up and nodded at Larry. "The power of the Bench," he said dryly. "Now. Do you want to leave a message here in case someone calls? Or did you tell anyone you were coming to see me?"

"No."

"Very well. I'll change and be with you in just a moment."

A MAN in a dark suit and a gray hat met the judge's car at the



*Kicking Horse.*

He opened the door and stuck a blank, wide face into the tonneau of the car.

"Judge Mills?" he asked. "The commissioner sent me down here to meet you."

"Yes. And you are?"

"Sergeant Erlangen, Homicide. What do you want me to do, Judge?"

The judge was out of the car, Larry behind him.

"I want you to look like a suspicious detective," the judge smiled. "I am going into this place to talk to the owner. I want you to stand near me and lend a little moral support. That's all."

Sergeant Erlangen said, "Very well, sir. No arrests, or anything."

"Possibly. I'll tell you if I find your role demands any other activity."

He took Larry by the arm. "Let's go inside. I think I'm going to enjoy this. She was one of my favorite people. We can do this much for her, anyway."

\* \* \*

They walked through the *Kicking Horse* to the rear of the barroom, where a narrow corridor led to Tonelli's office.

A slim, dark haired young man in a tuxedo was standing there, eyeing the room, puffing nervously on a cigarette. He put out a hand and tapped the judge on the arm.

"Sorry. Off limits."

Sergeant Erlangen said, "Shut up, punk. We want to see Tonelli."

"The law," eh? Well, Tonelli's not here."

"Where is he?"

"Down at the harbor. He said he was taking a cruise tonight."

"A cruise?" The Judge turned to Sergeant Erlangen. "What for?"

The sergeant shrugged. He said to Tuxedo, "What time was he leaving?"

"About eleven, I guess."

"We have time," Judge Mills said. "We'll take a little trip down to the harbor."

## CHAPTER XII

"TONELLI keeps his boat just North of Belmont harbor," Sergeant Erlangen said.

The judge gave the instructions to his chauffeur and settled back beside Larry.

"I don't know just what we're going to learn tonight," he said. He smiled and adjusted his gray Homburg slightly. "But it should be interesting."

There wasn't anything to say. So Larry kept quiet.

They drew up at the gravelled road that led to the harbor fifteen minutes later. The docks were dark. There were few boats putting out at this time of the year. They walked past a half-dozen sloops, still covered with their winter tarps, until they came to Tonelli's boat, a forty-foot cabined cruiser. There was a light showing from the cabin. The soft throb of its powerful engines was the only sound in the dark stillness. A gang plank led from the harbor to the deck. Larry saw the name of the ship, *Mermaid*, gleaming against the sleek mahogany hull.

And he saw a man standing at the foot of the gangplank. A big, slouching man in gray clothes and a gray hat that shaded his face.

The man pushed the hat back on his forehead and Larry recognized Meyers, the city detective. A cigarette hung from his lips making a pin-point of light in the half-darkness.

The judge drew up short. "We're here to see Tonelli."

Meyers chuckled. "I am too. I just thought I'd wait until the whole party



got here." His eyes moved over to Larry. "Couldn't take my advice, eh?"

"I don't understand," the judge said "Who are you?"

"No mystery. I'm Meyers, Bureau of Detectives. You're Judge Mills, aren't you?"

"Why do you want to see Tonelli?" the judge asked.

"Just got a few questions to ask him," Meyers said. He glanced from the judge to Sergeant Erlangen inquiringly. The judge said, "This is Sergeant Erlangen of Homicide. Meyers, we won't need you on this matter. I've already talked to the Commissioner and—"

"That's all right," Meyers said. He waved a hand negligently. "I'm not going to be in the way. The boss sent me down here though, so you see my position, judge. I've got to earn my salary."

The judge stood still for a moment, then made a tiny gesture of impatience. "Very well. Come along."

Larry followed the judge up the gangplank. Behind him were the two detectives. The judge paused briefly on the deck, then walked along a narrow companionway and pulled open the door of the cabin. An oblong of light fell across the corridor.

They went inside.

Tonelli was seated at a desk, his back to one wall of the cabin. There were bunks against the opposite wall. A passage way led to a small galley. The furniture was polished mahogany, the fittings were neat and luxurious.

Tonelli came half way to his feet. He looked from the judge to Larry and the two detectives. Then he sank back slowly in his chair. He wore a white shirt and blue jacket and his features gradually assumed an expression of amiable surprise.

He began to strip the cellophane from a thin cigar with slow, deliberate

motions.

"An honor," he murmured. "I wasn't expecting company, but—," he waved a hand carelessly, "Make yourself at home."

"Thanks you," the judge said. "I'm Judge Mills. Two of these men with me are police officers, the other—,"

Tonelli smiled at Larry and said, "I know the other guy, judge. He sees things. He lives in a private little world of his own, don't he?"

"We're here to ask the questions," the judge said.

Tonelli leaned back in his chair and busied himself lighting his cigar. His smooth cheeks and deliberate, unhurried attitude gave an impression of complete assurance. But his eyes were watchful.

"So? Ask your questions." He blew smoke at the ceiling and smiled carelessly. "I've got nothing to hide."

Meyers drifted over to a stool and sat down. He put his hands around one knee and leaned back. His square gray face was impassive. He let ash from his cigarette dribble down his vest and he kept his eyes on the floor. He looked bored.

Sergeant Erlangen stepped back into the shadows. The judge faced Tonelli over the desk. Larry stood at his right.

"We're here about a murder," the judge said. "The murder of a girl named Velma Dare. She was stabbed to death yesterday morning. She left your place with this gentleman here the night before. What do you know about it?"

TONELLI yawned. "Sorry I can't act impressed, judge. I heard all this crap before. This guy," he jerked a thumb at Larry, "was playing the same record to me yesterday. Not about the murder part, but he claims he met the girl in my joint. The bartender never



saw him, nobody saw him, but—,”

Meyers coughed apologetically. “Were you going to say nobody saw him, but a dice girl named Corinne?”

“I was like hell. Nobody by that name ever worked for me. That was another part of his story.”

“A girl called Corinne got herself killed last night,” Meyers said conversationally. “Did you know that?”

“No.” He looked sharply at Meyers. “That’s news to me.” There was a band of sweat starting on his forehead. “So she got killed,” he snapped. “Lots of girls get killed. Read the papers. It happens all the time.”

The judge said, “I didn’t know about this.” There was ice in the look he gave Tonelli. “You’re lying, Tonelli. We can prove, I think, that you knew Velma Dare.”

There was a change in Tonelli’s expression. He actually looked puzzled. “Yeah,” he said slowly. “I guess you can at that. But it won’t do you any good.”

Meyers said, “Can I say a word, judge?” Without waiting for an answer he went on, talking in a musing, thoughtful voice. “I got to earn that salary of mine, that’s all. Now I thought a lot about this case. A guy tells me he woke up with a dead girl in bed with him. We believe him. But there ain’t no body. We look everywhere and we can’t find a body. So we figure the guy is batty. And then the guy goes back to where he met the girl. The *Kicking Horse*. And nobody there knows him. They don’t remember seeing him, or the girl, or anything. They’re so blind, all of a sudden, they should get seeing eye dogs.”

He looked at Tonelli and then at the judge. The judge shrugged impatiently. “My line of inquiry was getting better results,” he said drily.

“I’ll be through in a minute. Now what does a set-up like that mean. Just one thing: a frame, usually. But not this time. The fall guy wasn’t somebody they wanted out of the way. He was just an ordinary guy. So then it begins to look like they want the girl out of the way and also provide the cops with a murderer. Now I wondered for a while why they should go to all that trouble. After all they could shoot the girl and dump her body in a vacant lot. That’s done all the time. Why go to the trouble of delivering the cops a murderer, right on a silver platter? Then when we couldn’t find the girl’s body I began to understand. The girl was dangerous. They had to get her out of the way. But she was a gal that was pretty well known. And if she was found murdered her death would point right to whoever did it. Do you get me? They had to provide a fall guy, so the cops would be satisfied. So they wouldn’t start looking for the real murderer.”

He lit another cigarette. Larry looked at the judge. He was listening attentively now. And Tonelli was staring at the top of his desk. His cigar had gone out. He didn’t bother relighting it. The other copper was just a shadow in the background.

Meyers went on. “When the body didn’t show up, I knew I was right. The frame fell through. The fall guy beat it before the coppers got here. So the murderer was in a spot. He had a dead body and no murderer. When the cops found that body it was going to point right at him. So he had to get rid of the body. He did that. And then he sat back hoping the fall guy wouldn’t start talking. But the fall guy was nosey. He was worried. And he kept walking around, asking a lot of questions, and seeing the wrong people, and things started getting hotter



and hotter." He smiled at the tip of his cigarette and then looked sharply at Tonelli. "Didn't they Tonelli?"

Tonelli said, "You're a wise bastard. Try and prove any of that and see what it gets you."

"Oh, I'll prove it," Meyers said. "I've got a search warrant in my pocket for this boat. I'll bet we find something pretty interesting down in the hold. I'm betting we find a dead blonde with her feet stuck in a tub of concrete."

Tonelli stood up suddenly. His eyes looked a little crazy.

"You're not going to get me for this," he said.

"Shut up," the judge snapped. "You've played out your luck, Tonelli. I know Velma was your mistress. You wanted to get rid of her but if she was found murdered too many people would be looking at you. So you figured out this very clever frame-up. You intended to get rid of Velma, tie it on this poor fool here, and be perfectly in the clear yourself. Didn't you?"

Tonelli cursed. "You're pretty smart," he snarled. "But not smart enough to pull this." He bent suddenly and jerked open the drawer of his desk.

**B**EFORE he could make another move two shots blasted the silence.

Tonelli jerked as the bullets hit him. He leaned against the desk, bracing himself with his hands. His eyes were on the judge. He opened his mouth twice, but no sound came out. His face twisted and he tried to hold himself erect, but his hands suddenly gave way and he sprawled across the desk.

There was no sound in the cabin. Meyers hadn't moved. His hands were still laced around his knee. There was the smell of cordite in the air.

The judge looked thoughtfully at the gun in his hand. He blew the smoke from the barrel and watched it curl up against the light.

"You'd better take the gun, Meyers," he said, matter-of-factly. "This wasn't very orthodox, but I didn't have a chance to think about the niceties of the situation. It was fortunate I had a weapon." He extended it, butt foremost, to Meyers. "For the record it might be better to explain that you did the actual shooting." He smiled sardonically. "My political opponents might make a fuss if they learned the complete story."

Meyers got to his feet with a grunt. He took the gun and held it idly in his big hand.

"They'll probably make a fuss anyway, judge," he said.

"What do you mean?"

The gun in Meyers' hand rose slowly until the barrel pointed at a spot just above the judge's breast pocket handkerchief. He was smiling contentedly.

"You're under arrest, judge. For killing Velma Dare. And Tonelli. Tonelli doesn't make much difference. He deserved it. But you're the little boy I've been looking for."

"You're insane!" Judge Mills said flatly. He turned to the other detective. "Sergeant Erlangen, I demand that you—"

"Oh, for Christ's sake, shut up," Meyers said wearily. "Erlangen isn't any more a cop than you are. He's just another of your paid punks."

"Meyers," the judge said, "you're making a mistake. I warn you to go slowly."

He walked toward Meyers until there was only six inches between his chest and the gun in Meyers' hand. He was directly under the light bulb.

Larry saw him swing for the bulb at the same instant that Erlangen dug his



hand into his pocket.

Darkness closed in on the cabin and two shots sounded. Larry dove across the cabin at Erlangen. He caught the man around the waist and went to the floor with him. Something hard and cold struck him twice across the forehead. Lights flashed inside his head, but he hung on.

He shifted his grip higher and caught the man about the throat. With one hand he dug for a windpipe and was rewarded by a sound of tortured gurgling. His free hand he used as a club.

He pounded that face with a fury that was like something hot and fiery inside his chest. There was the memory of his own horror and fear, the memory of a girl named Corinne, and a lot of other things behind his blows.

The figure beneath him stopped squirming eventually.

A match flared and Meyers' voice said, "Nice going. That guy don't look pretty."

"How about the judge?"

"I got him," Meyers said.

He raised the match and let its flickering light spread around the cabin.

Tonelli still lay sprawled across the desk. The judge was on the floor, staring sightlessly at the ceiling. His shirt front looked like someone had emptied a can of tomatoes on it.

"Well," Meyers said, "that's that. The old lady's food will start tasting good again."

### CHAPTER XIII

MEYERS sat across the table from Larry, noisily finishing the last of his turtle soup. Fran was in the kitchen, putting the last touches on the roast.

"Nice of you to have me up for dinner," Meyers said. He had a napkin tucked under his collar, and his impassive gray face wore an expression

of complete contentment. He finished the last of the soup with a noisy obbligate, and straightened up, smiling. "Your wife's some cook," he said.

"How about filling in a few details for me," Larry said.

"About the case? Let's wait 'till after dinner." He sniffed appreciatively. "Smells like a roast, don't it?"

"We've got time now," Larry said. "You can enjoy your food because you've got all the answers. But what about me? I can't eat until I know the whole story."

"Never thought of that," Meyers said. "Well, I'll make it fast. Let's take it from the judge's angle. That's the easiest way to figure it. He wanted to get rid of Velma. She'd been his mistress before he got elected to the Bench, and he wanted to shake her. He had big ideas. Politics, probably, and he didn't want a character like Velma to come popping up and make him look bad. But she wouldn't take the brush. She liked him, or she liked his dough. Doesn't matter which. She wouldn't brush. And she threatened to do a lot of talking about some of the judge's deals unless he stops talking about shaking her. So he's got to put her out of the way. Now. That took some doing. You don't know Velma is the judge's mistress. Your wife don't, either. Millions of nice respectable people don't know about it. But a lot of other people do. People like cops, newspapermen, bondsmen, lawyers, racketeers and hoodlums. They know about it. And if Velma gets knocked off mysteriously they'd know where to look. They look at the judge. And he's got a past that can't stand too much inspection."

Meyers paused and looked anxiously toward the kitchen.

"Maybe she burned the roast," he said.

"She didn't burn the roast. Get on



with the story."

"Okay. So he's got to get rid of her. And he's got to do it so the cops have a ready made victim. You. He tells Velma he's got a job for her. Wants her to pick up a guy and take him to a certain room. That's all. Then he has Tonelli look for a sucker. You come in, spill your guts to the bartender about having a fight with your wife, so they decide to use you. They got Velma there, ready. Maybe she's been waiting a week for this job. You get a Mickey, and Velma takes you home, dumps you in bed. Then Tonelli walks in, sticks a knife in her, undresses her, dumps her in beside you and walks out.

"It's perfect. You're it. You had a fight with your wife, you pick up this gal, take her home. You're drunk and you kill her. Try and beat that! You wouldn't in a million years. But it didn't work. They wanted the cops to find you, so it would look natural. And they figured the doped drink would keep you there for hours. But it didn't. You come to, get the hell out. And that leaves them in a sweet mess. Here's Velma, dead as vaudeville, and no fall guy. The judge is the fall guy now. When the cops find Velma they'll go after him. So he's got to get rid of the body. This is how they done it. They go down there in a hearse, pay off the landlady to keep her yap shut, and bring the body down to the harbor. Last night they was going to dump Velma overboard, tied to a nice anchor, and nobody but the fish would ever know what happened."

HE BUTTERED a piece of bread, took half of it in one mouthful and went on. "I knew something was phony. And I used you to smoke it out for me. You might have gotten killed, but I had to do it. You were the judge's Nemesis. I let you roam

around. You go to the *Kicking Horse*, to Corinne's, to Mabel's, and ask a lot of questions. That keeps 'em worried. They don't want to kill you. That would have started me going more than ever. They beat you up, hoping you'll play dead. But you don't. When you told me the name Velma Dare, I started looking into the judge's background. And I got just about everything I wanted. I had a tail on him, and one on you from then on. When I found out you went to see him I really got worried. I figured you were through. But he tried to play it too smart. He faked that call to the commissioner to fool you. He was talking to somebody at the *Kicking Horse*. Then he was going to dump you and Velma together. Not a bad idea. I mean, from his point of view."

"How about the phony call to Mabel? The one that Velma was supposed to have made, telling Mabel she was going down South?"

"That was the judge, or somebody on his payroll. They had to cover up for Velma's disappearance. That would do it. Then nobody would be asking questions. When they did it might be years from now and who the hell would care where Velma was."

He looked hopefully toward the kitchen again.

"The roast isn't burned," Larry said patiently. "Now what was the deal between Tonelli and the judge?"

"Tonelli was the judge's man. Right on the payroll. And the judge tried to double-cross him. The judge saw I knew what was going on, so he slanted my build-up to fit Tonelli, and then he shot him right in front of us. That took nerve and some pretty fast thinking. Tonelli was playing along with him because he knew the judge was in as deep as he was. But the judge figured if he could make a case against



Tonelli and then shoot him to keep his mouth shut—well he figured that would put him in the clear.”

“And Tonelli’s men killed Corinne for talking to me?”

“Yeah. That’s about all except—”

Fran appeared in the doorway, holding the roast on a huge platter. She paused, waiting for their approval. She had the triumphant expression of a bride who has followed the cook book faithfully and is a little amazed that it worked.

“Gosh, that’s pretty,” Meyers said. Larry was frowning. “You said that was all, ‘except’—except what?”

“Larry!”

Larry looked up and saw Fran standing in the doorway. One of her small feet was tapping the floor ominously. He remembered what had happened the last time he had failed to be properly enthusiastic over a special dinner. He shuddered.

“Darling, that’s magnificent,” he said fervently.

## PEARLS BEFORE SWINE

BY JOHN CRAIL

ON A sunny May day in 1913, a well-known London jeweler hummed and whistled to himself as he opened a long-awaited registered parcel from Paris. The parcel was to contain a pearl necklace valued at 110,000 pounds. To his dismay, he found nothing in the package but a few lumps of coal!

The case was referred to Scotland Yard, where detectives found that a plaster seal could be made and used on melted sealing wax within four minutes after the start of the operation. Therefore, at some point in the parcel’s journey, it would have been possible to break the seals, undo the wrappings, remove the pearls, and seal the parcel up again, without the loss of the postmark at the required time.

It was not long before the name of one called Grizzard was whispered as a suspect. He was linked with three others in connection with the robbery. Since these men were already known, there was no difficulty in finding them. But the difficult job was to find the men with the stolen pearls in their possession.

It turned out to be one of the most difficult cases of observation in years. The men had no reason to suspect that they were being followed, yet never for a moment did they relax their precautions. If they took a taxi to any rendezvous, they gave a false destination, paid off the driver, and took another taxi, sometimes repeating this process of mystification several times. They would meet in one street to have lunch together, start to enter a restaurant, change their minds on the doorstep and go off to another place. While all this hocus-pocus was going on, an aged ex-convict in their employ shadowed them to call their attention to any suspicious follower.

The day came, however, when the four suspects were found together. They were arrested and searched. But no necklace! (They had left it at home that day.) They were held by the

police so that a search could be made of all their hiding places.

SCOTLAND YARD soon came through with the details of the crime. They found an engraver who had innocently cut the false seal. Then they learned from the Post Office the round of the postman who had delivered the registered parcels. The four thieves had done the same and had planned their campaign in such a manner that they had picked up the parcel in an empty office where the postman stopped to rest for three or four minutes before continuing his round. The police then found the coal bin filled with the same kind of coal used in the theft. But the thieves had expected diamonds, not pearls. And what pearls these were! Each was extremely large and had a history in the jewelry trade. They knew they couldn’t dispose of them easily and, in desperation, wanted to throw the lot of them into the Thames River.

This plan was discarded, however, and the pearls were entrusted to the care of the wife of one of the thieves. She feared a visit from the police and, one day, she placed the pearls into a matchbox and dropped it into the gutter of the slum street where she lived.

A street sweeper soon found the matchbox, opened it, and seeing the pearls, which he thought were cheap beads, took them home to his children.

Thinking it over, however, the sweeper decided to check with the police—just in case.

The detective called up the owner who was so excited he could hardly speak. “I thought they were false,” said the detective. “They look so yellow.”

“Yellow?” stuttered the owner. “They’re r-r-r-ose color.”

The four thieves were tried at the Central Criminal Court and received long sentences at hard labor.



# Death's Bright Red Lips

by Bruno Fischer

## CHAPTER I

### The Pick-Up

**I**T STARTED off wrong. I mean that girl picking me up at the filling station.

All she wanted was a ride to Center City. The bus which went by every thirty minutes was the simplest and safest way for a lone and attractive girl to travel at night. Or if she had a bias against buses, she could have walked to the traffic light a hundred feet ahead and got a lift in a car containing other

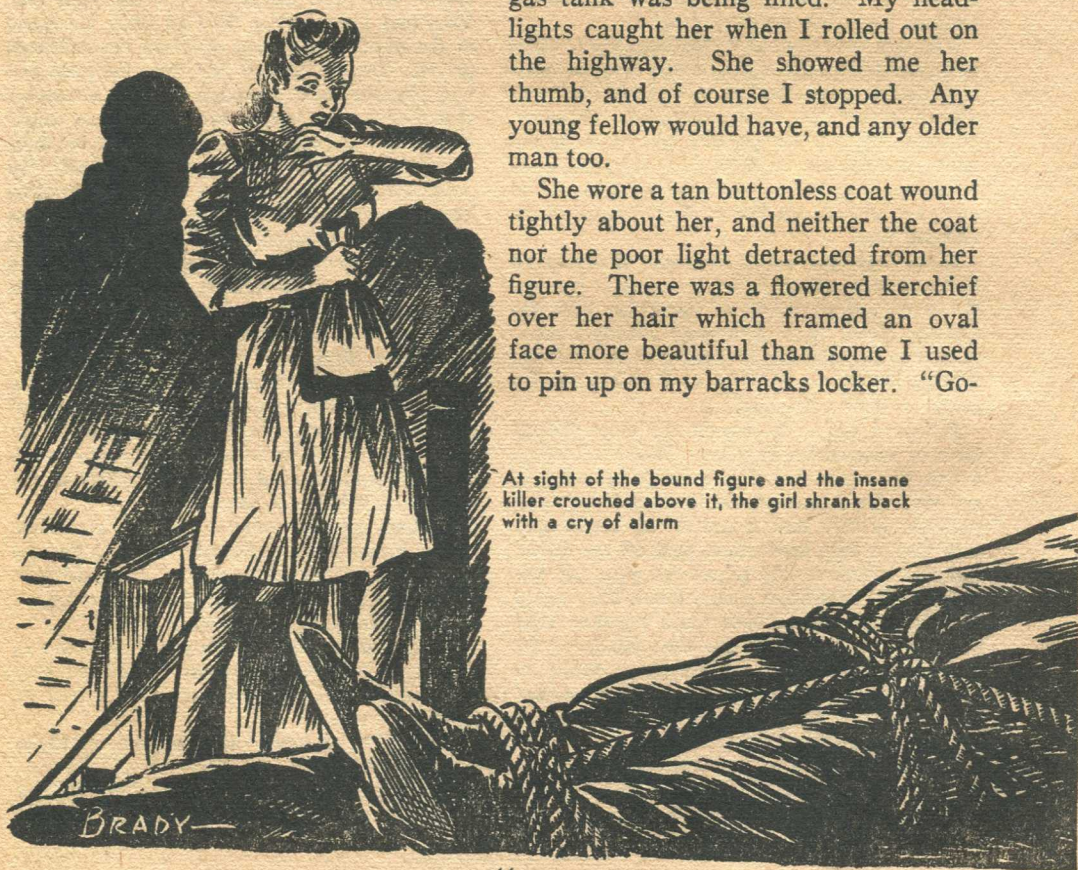
women. Or if she was blandly on the make for a man who would spend money, she could have chosen one in a better car than mine. She would have had to look far for a worse.

Why me and my broken-down jalopy which was held together with wire, chewing gum and a prayer?

She'd had plenty of time to make up her mind. She'd been standing in the shadow of a tree at the edge of the filling station and must have had a good look at my wreck and at me while the gas tank was being filled. My headlights caught her when I rolled out on the highway. She showed me her thumb, and of course I stopped. Any young fellow would have, and any older man too.

She wore a tan buttonless coat wound tightly about her, and neither the coat nor the poor light detracted from her figure. There was a flowered kerchief over her hair which framed an oval face more beautiful than some I used to pin up on my barracks locker. "Go-

At sight of the bound figure and the insane killer crouched above it, the girl shrank back with a cry of alarm





*When a woman tries to throw her  
arms around you, it's smart to make  
sure there isn't a knife in her hand!*





ing to Center City?" she said.

I wished suddenly that my jalopy were all glitter and shine to match her looks and that my beard hadn't grown so much since I'd shaved at dawn and that my best suit were on me instead of in the valise.

"If this junk wagon holds together that far," I said apologetically.

"May I go with you?"

I said sure and leaned sideways to open the door. She got in beside me and crossed her legs.

The dash light showed me that they were very nice legs. She was class, no doubt about that. Her voice was low and refined; she used only enough paint on her face to highlight what nature had already given her. None of your cheap pick-ups, that was sure. I couldn't figure her out.

"You don't seem to be one of the local boys," she said.

"No, ma'am. I come all the way from West Amber."

"You have relatives in Center City?"

"No, ma'am," I said. "I was discharged from the Army last month, and when I came home I found that my father had died the week before. He'd left a lot of debts for me to clear up. I sold the house and that just about did it. I heard there was a lot of building going on in Center City, so I'm on the way there to try to get a job."

"You are a construction man?"

**I**T WAS, I thought, more like a cross-examination than like conversation. Maybe she wanted to be sure of the man she was driving with, though this was a fine time to find out after she'd got in the car and we were on the way.

"I'm a carpenter, ma'am," I told her somewhat testily. I guess I was sore because I wasn't the kind of guy a classy dame would want to know better. "Just a plain, ordinary, unemployed

carpenter."

She handed me a bright red smile. "Please don't keep calling me ma'am. If anything, I'm Miss. Louise Boelger. I'd feel more comfortable if you'd call me Louise or Lou."

It was getting screwier by the minute. Maybe she had a passion for unemployed carpenters who needed a shave and a clean shirt and rattled along in jalopies.

"My name is Harold Mitchell," I said.

"Hal," she said, throwing another smile at me. It was one of those slow warm smiles that hit me all the way to my toes.

There wasn't any more talk for a while. No sound but the assortment of squeaks and rattles and groans by which my jalopy kept telling me that it yearned for the junk heap. She sat with her face turned away from me, looking at the side of the road. So there was nothing in it at all. She had wanted a lift and had made polite conversation and had lost interest in me.

Suddenly she said: "Turn left here."

We were still five miles out of Center City. There was nothing here. No houses. No sign of civilization. Only a narrow dirt road running through fields.

I stopped the car and looked at her. "I thought you wanted to go to Center City."

"I live right off this road. It's just a little way down." The intimate smile was turned on. "Do you mind?"

"Not at all."

It was beginning to clear up. A bus wouldn't take her up to the door. She had wanted special deluxe service and had known that she would get it from somebody like me. That was all it was.

A little way, she had said. There was a mile of narrow, rutted road through fields and another mile of it



through deep woods. Then the road really got bad, climbing and twisting and threatening to tear the heart out of my jalopy at any moment. We didn't pass anywhere near a house until at last we came to hers.

It was one of those low stucco structures with more windows than a modern factory. It perched on the edge of a cliff overlooking the lights of Center City a good eight miles away. Not a light showed anywhere—not in that house or as far as I could see in any direction.

"Isn't anybody home?" I asked.

"I live alone and like it."

Brave girl or screwy. Takes rides in wrecks with strange men and lives off by herself a million miles from nowhere. Well, that was her business.

I got out of the car and walked around the hood and opened the door on her side. When she got out, I said good-night.

Louise Boelger put a hand on my arm. "You've been very sweet, Hal. How would you like to come in for a drink?"

I SAID I would like it fine. The better part of a moon was rising below the cliff and showed us the way across the driveway to the front door. She fumbled with keys and after some trouble got the door unlocked. In darkness I groped after her down a hall and through a doorway. Then light came on and I found myself in a living room with a picture window overlooking the cliff.

"Make yourself at home," she told me over her shoulder as she continued through a door in the other end of the room.

She was rich. That room alone had cost more than I could earn in a year. I walked around, looking at the pickled-pine walls, with the expert eyes of a

carpenter. I stopped at the grand piano and picked up a nine-by-five photo which lay on top of it.

It was a group picture of three women and two men, all in bathing suits. Louise Boelger stood in the circle of the arm of a tall guy whose ribs showed through his bare chest. She had nothing on but a couple of white lastex strips, and I'd been right about her body. It was something to keep looking at.

But I didn't give it more than a glance. I wasn't interested either, in the nice looking brunette and the strapping Adonis on the other side of the group. The girl between the two couples held my attention. She wore a royal blue two-piece bathing suit which didn't cover much of the sweetest figure I had ever known. It wasn't so odd, I told myself, to find a photo of Amy Smith in a house in this neighborhood. After all, it was in Center City that I had met her two years ago.

Louise Boelger returned. She had shed her coat and the scarf or whatever it was called that she'd worn over her hair. Her dress was green and tight and low-cut and showed as much of her figure as the bathing suit did in the photo. Her hair was loose and brown. She was better looking than Amy Smith, but I would have preferred Amy with me.

"Are you a friend of Amy's?" I asked.

She glanced down at the photo, and all at once she was no longer beautiful. Rage did that to her face—a sort of spasm of savage fury.

"Do you know Amy Smith?" she demanded harshly.

"Well, it's been two years since I've seen her. I was stationed near Center City for a while and met her at a USO dance."

Her beauty came back. She



shrugged. "Just one of those fly-by-night Army romances," she said indifferently.

"I was sent overseas only a couple of weeks after I met her," I said evasively. "How well do you know her?"

"She's the sister of a close friend of mine." A scarlet-tipped finger pointed to the brunette standing next to the Adonis. "That's Maria Cabot, Amy Smith's older sister. The stunning looking man is Maria's husband, George Cabot." The finger moved to the skinny guy. "This is Hugh Terrace."

Hugh Terrace and Louise posed as if they belonged to each other. I asked her if he was her boy friend.

She laughed. "Oh, no, I'm footloose. So the only one in this picture who knows you is Amy Smith?"

"If she still remembers me," I said.

THAT seemed to please her. I was wondering why it should when I became aware of the pressure of her shoulder against mine. I turned to her and she turned at the same time and we stood facing each other, so close together that a sheet of paper couldn't have been slid between us.

"You're a sweet boy," she said huskily.

And then I was kissing her.

It was a nice kiss. I suppose I wouldn't have had any blood in me if I hadn't liked it. But all the same, during those first few seconds of it I kept thinking: *Why me?*

The point was that a lass with her money and looks didn't have to go out on the highway to pick up a guy in a jalopy. She could have plenty of handsomer and richer men. I wasn't much to look at. A face you couldn't pick out of a crowd. Amy had liked it and maybe a couple of other girls, but I wasn't a lad a classy dame on the

make would spot and say: I want that.

But there was the kiss and lots of ardor with it. Her passionate hands pushed aside my unbuttoned jacket and dug into my shirt. Suddenly she pulled violently away from me. I felt the shirt rip; I felt her sharp nails go through to my skin and tear into it. Then she was away from me, standing against the piano and breathing hard.

And smiling with that full bright red mouth of hers. That smile scared me more than what she had just done, though why I should be scared at all I didn't know. She didn't give me time to think. Almost at once she was back against me, her smoldering eyes and red smiling mouth tilted up to me.

I stood there wondering whether to kiss her again or beat it the hell out of there. She raised her right hand to my cheek. To pat it, I thought, but what she did was to make her fingers into claws and rip a shredded track from my right eye to the side of my jaw.

If she had been a man, I could have taken a sock at her and let it go at that. But you can't hit a woman, not even a screwball who likes to mingle the red paint on her fingernails with a man's blood. I was suddenly more disgusted than scared. Louise Boelger was the kind of vile dame who liked to bring strange men to her place and combine pain with passion. Which meant that this place was not for me.

So I merely shoved her away from me and turned. On the way to the door I felt my torn cheek. Blood came off on my fingers. Her nails had been sharpened to knives.

The thick rug absorbed the sound of her running feet. I didn't see her behind me, but I felt her close presence and started to turn. The blow seemed to come out of nowhere. It caught me at the base of my skull and drove me down to my face.



I didn't go all the way out. Level with my eyes I saw two slim legs planted solidly apart, as if waiting for somebody or something. I raised my head. She stood above me completely composed and relaxed. Her left hand was on her hip; the other hand held the rubber sap with which she had hit me. Her full mouth wore that bright red smile of hers. She seemed to be having a wonderful time.

Anger gave me strength. I pushed myself up to my hands and knees. And Louise Boelger, smiling broadly, picked up a light wooden chair and swung it at me.

Feebly I lifted an arm to ward off the blow. The chair wrapped itself about my head and shoulders. This time I went out cold.

## CHAPTER II

### The Dead Woman

MY FIRST sight of him was like somebody seen through a shimmering screen of water. A slender cigar and a pair of horn-rimmed glasses were suspended on a wavering shadow. I groaned and closed my eyes.

When I looked up at him again from the floor he had achieved definite outline. The cigar was fixed between slack lips in a pinched face. Behind the horn-rimmed glasses, two pale eyes watched me sorrowfully. He sat on the arm of the couch.

"How do you feel, son?" he asked. He didn't sound as if he particularly cared.

I grunted and pushed myself up on one elbow. I felt fine except that my skull was being stepped on by an elephant and fire ran up and down my cheek where her fingernails had made tracks and my stomach was going through a wringer. But nothing seemed

to be broken or permanently damaged outside of the chair with which she had hit me. One of the rungs had splintered.

Where's that lunatic?" I said.

The man straightened up beside the couch. He was small, insignificant; he looked used to being pushed around. "What lunatic?" he wanted to know.

"Louise Boelger."

He pointed his cigar over my head. "She's where you left her, son. Right behind you."

I started to turn my head and a sudden jab of pain almost tore it off my shoulders. I sat all the way up and carefully twisted my torso, and there she was behind me on the floor.

She had been choked to death. Her face showed it—that face which was not beautiful in violent death. Whoever had done that to her, hadn't ended there, or had started by doing other things to her. Her green dress was like a doll's paper dress shredded by the destructive fingers of a child. That full red mouth was not nice to look at now.

"I guess you've seen plenty of them dead, Mitchell," the man said dryly. "You get used to such sights in war."

I stood up. It hurt my head, but I didn't care about physical pain now.

"How do you know my name?" I demanded.

"I had a look in your pockets while waiting for you to come out of it," he replied evenly. "Your discharge papers—ex-Staff Sergeant Harold Mitchell. And a couple of hundred bucks in cash in your wallet. Did you steal the dough from Miss Boelger, or did you choke her merely for the fun of it?"

"You think I killed her?"

He returned the cigar to his slack mouth. It bobbed as he spoke. "How'd you get her lipstick on your face?"

I ran my tongue over my lips. They were sticky and slightly perfumed. It



was as if her mouth were again on mine. I shuddered.

"And those scratches on your face and your torn shirt," he went on. "A woman did that to you."

"And then I knocked myself out with the chair," I said with heavy sarcasm.

"She did that. She struggled when you attacked her. Maybe you weren't out to kill her then, but she managed to hit you with the chair and hurt you, and then you went at her throat. You had enough strength left to keep your fingers around her throat until she was dead. Then you passed out cold and rolled away from her."

I STARED at her on the floor and then at him leaning indolently against the piano. "Who're you?"

"A detective," he told me.

It was perfect. Everything fitted into the pattern, including a detective finding me here.

"I never touched her," I said. "She was the one who attacked me."

"I'll bet!" he sneered. "I've heard all sorts of stories about Louise Boelger, but never that she had to attack men in order to get them. Don't tell me she forced you to kiss her."

"No, but—" I stood swaying, trying to think. I knew that I had to think straighter than ever in my life. And I couldn't. My head hurt too much.

The man jerked himself erect. His head cocked birdlike. He was listening to something outside.

"Somebody is trying to sneak in," he whispered.

Then I also heard it. The front door was opening softly, stealthily.

The small man stepped past me and around the dead woman and stood at the side of the doorway. The sound of slowly moving, almost inaudible, footsteps, came up the hall.

Amy Smith entered the room. The figure I'd dreamed about in barracks and foxholes was covered by a tweed skirt and a fuzzy gray sweater. Her face had that wistful, childlike quality, though she'd matured a lot in the two years since I'd last seen her.

Her hand held a .22 caliber pearl-handled revolver.

"Hal Mitchell!" My name was an eager cry on her lips. She came forward three steps, which brought her past a table and showed her the dead woman on the floor. She stopped.

I couldn't think of anything to say.

Amy Smith didn't scream or faint or do any of the things a girl is supposed to do when she comes upon violet death. But her eyes, lifting to me, were suddenly tragic.

"Who did it, Hal?" she asked.

"I don't know."

The little man at the side of the doorway laughed. Amy spun with her gun out-thrust. She hadn't noticed him before this.

"Take it easy, sister," he said mildly.

"One corpse is enough for tonight."

"Who are you?" she demanded.

He dug a wallet out of his pocket and handed Amy a card. I went to her side to look at it. The card said:

**RAPHAEL GENT**

Investigations

"Only a private detective," I said. "Did you have business here?"

Gent plucked the card from Amy's fingers and returned it to his wallet. "You're the one who'll have to answer the questions. I've held off too long phoning the police."

"Wait," I said hoarsely "It's all wrong."

Raphael Gent smiled. "It looks right enough to me and will to the police. Her lipstick on your mouth and your scratched cheek and torn shirt."

Amy stared at me—at my mouth



and cheek and shirt. Her body sagged.

"Amy, I didn't do it," I protested. "You've got to believe me."

"I didn't know you knew Louise Boelger," she muttered.

"I met her for the first time an hour ago. She picked me up on the highway and brought me here."

I told them the rest of it, leaving out nothing.

WHEN I finished, there was silence.

Amy didn't look at me. Raphael Gent wore an expression of disgust on his pinched face.

"I know it sounds crazy," I said, "but Louise Boelger was crazy."

"Yeah," Gent grunted. "She was so crazy that when she wanted to commit suicide she went out on the road to pick up a strange man so that she could frame him for her own murder. Then after she knocked him out, she tore her dress and choked herself. I could think of a hundred better stories without trying."

"You're not funny," I said angrily. "I meant that somebody else strangled her."

"Oh, sure," Gent said. "And she cooperated nicely by setting the stage for her own murder. She didn't want the guy who was going to choke her to death to be suspected of the crime, so she arranged a fall-guy for him. Very thoughtful of her."

There it was complete and unshakable. The more I said the worse it looked for me. It had started off wrong with her picking me up, and every moment of it had remained wrong, with no more reason to it than a nightmare.

"How come," Raphael Gent was saying, "That you came sneaking in here with a gun in your hand?"

He was speaking to Amy Smith. She looked dully at him, dazed by shock

and horror, and then she looked down at her gun as if she hadn't noticed it before. "Louise wasn't crazy," she muttered. "She was bad, but she found no pleasure in hurting men. Not physically."

"I asked you a question," Gent persisted. "What's your part in this?"

Amy didn't seem to hear him, or else she pretended not to.

For that matter, Gent had avoided explaining his own presence. The war I had left behind me was safe and rational compared to what had happened here within an hour or less.

I said: "Maybe I'm the one who's crazy and I'm dreaming all this up."

"Well, dream up a better yarn than the one you've told me if you don't want to hang," Gent said.

At the other end of the room there was a French door leading out to the cliff side of the house. It opened and a man entered with the casualness of a visitor to a familiar house. This was becoming quite a party.

"Hello, Amy," he said. "Where's Lou—" And then he screamed and propelled himself across the room and dropped down on the floor beside Louise Boelger.

It wasn't nice. I turned my face away and my eyes fell on the photo on the piano. The man who had just entered was the tall, skinny guy of the photo standing with an arm about Louise Boelgers' waist. Hugh Terrace, she had said his name was, and that he wasn't exactly a boy friend. But there was no doubt that he had thought he had been a lot more than that to her.

The silence was thick enough to chop. Hugh Terrace lifted an ashen face. "Who did it?"

Gent nodded toward me.

Hugh Terrace stood up and opened and closed his hands. For a moment



I thought he would hurl himself at me. But he was too civilized or too much of a coward for anything like that. He swore at me in broken, sobbing tones. Telling him I hadn't killed her wouldn't do any good. Not even Amy believed me. She still didn't look at me, and that was what hurt most of all.

And then a car pulled into the driveway. The reflected glare of its headlights shone through a window. More visitors arriving. An old home week.

Gent looked out of the window. "State police," he said crisply and turned back to the rest of it. Through his glasses his pale eyes had sharpened. "Who called them?"

NOBODY answered him. What difference did it make? The police were here. They would take me away and hang me.

Panic hit me then. For two years I'd lived with death and I had thought that now I was through with it. Frantically my eyes swept the room. Amy's revolver dangled forgotten along her side. I took quick steps to her and snatched it out of her lax fingers.

Amy gasped. What I'd just done was as good as a confession of guilt.

"How far do you think you'll get, son?" Raphael Gent said quietly.

Feet crunched on the gravel driveway. Evidently the police were in a great hurry, which meant that they hadn't been told what they would find here.

I backed up toward the French door. "Listen," I said into their tense, staring faces, "I didn't kill her."

My words washed over them without effect. I reached back for the knob of the French door, pushed it open and went through.

There was a flagstone terrace on that side of the house. I crossed its thirty

feet to the guard rail at the edge of the cliff: Beyond the rail were a couple of hundred feet of sheer drop. It was a good spot for suicide, but impossible as an escape route for anything without wings.

The moon had risen higher, bathing the terrace in mellow radiance. I felt naked. I scurried back to the shadow of the house and along the terrace. At the corner of the house, close against a fir tree growing out of the flagstones, I came upon the second dead woman.

She might have been Louise Boelger lying there as I had seen her thirty seconds before. Her dress was shambles. Her arms were outflung. Here eyes stared sightless at the sky. Her tongue—

Her tongue and all the rest of her showed that she had been strangled. Like Louise Boelger.

This was madness in its most terrible form. And I must be the one who was mad, for life could not repeat itself as mindlessly as this.

She was not pretty now and not easily recognizable, but I had seen those features and that mass of black hair before. Not as living flesh, but on the photo in the house. She had been the nice looking brunette at the end. Mrs. Maria Cabot, Louise had told me. Amy Smith's older sister.

Voices drifted out to me from the house. The police were in there now. And when they came out looking for me and found me standing over a second strangled woman, I would be as good as a dead man.

I stepped over Mrs. Cabot and started to turn the corner of the house. Only my head went around it. The rest of my body checked itself and then my head pulled back.

A state trooper was coming down the side of the house. I spun to look at the French door. It hadn't opened.



The police hadn't plunged directly after me. They were smarter than that. They knew that with the cliff behind me I could escape only up either side of the house, and they were blocking me off, setting a trap. And because they knew that I was armed, they were being cautious about it.

The teeth of the trap had opened for me the moment I had picked up Louise Boelger in my jalopy, and now it was about to spring.

### CHAPTER III

#### The Brush Pile

BRUSH had grown up in the ten-foot area between the guard-rail and the edge of the cliff. During the summer it must have been cut down and piled to one side, probably to be burned when snow was on the ground and a fire would not endanger the house and grounds.

I was deep in among the dead leaves and twigs and briars when the two state police troopers and Raphael Gent shone lights on the pile and started to probe into it. If they glimpsed anything of me at the bottom, they thought I was part of the ground or a rock. After a minute they moved a short distance away, and I resumed breathing.

"I can't think of where else he'd be," one of the troopers said. "I'm going to take that pile apart."

I heard his steps, heard the scraping of a branch as it was pulled off the top of the pile. My palm was tight around the little automatic, though I didn't know what I'd do with it when they found me. I wasn't going to kill a policeman or anybody.

"Hey!" the other trooper's voice came from farther away.

The light swung from the brush.

Running feet slapped the flagstone terrace. Raphael Gent exclaimed: "My God, another one!"

They had found Maria Cabot's body, and that saved me for a little while. But only for a little while. I heard them return and renew the attack on the brush.

"Why don't you guys radio in a general alarm for Mitchell before he gets too far?" Gent said irritably. "Can't you see he went over the cliff?"

"You mean jumped?"

"No. There's a place you can climb down. I'll show you."

Their voices moved off to my left. Then one of the troopers said: "Yeah, a guy could scramble down this way in no time. See any sign of him?"

"You gave him enough time to be halfway to Center City," Gent said scornfully.

"Say, didn't you tell us there was no way over the cliff without getting killed?"

"I forgot about this place until now," Gent replied evenly.

"Yeah? I always said a shamus had no brains. Mort, you hop to the radio."

I put my face against the ground. It was damp under all that brush. If I had known about the way down the cliff, I would not now be caught like a bug in a beetle trap. And yet if I had made my escape, where would I have gone? I hadn't come back from war to hang or to be a fugitive for life from the law.

Damn Louise Boelger's soul, if she had had one and if it was not already in hell! Damn all attractive women who ask men for lifts on highways!

After a while I heard a girl weep. I raised my head an inch or two. Brighter lights than those made by electric lanterns trickled through the network of brush. Amy Smith was weeping for her dead sister.



I PUSHED a hand out in front of me. Briars tore my skin as Louise Boelger's nails had torn my cheek. But I managed to make a little window covered only by an outer layer of brush through which I could see as through a lattice. A string of light bulbs above the terrace made it brighter than day. There were a lot of police uniforms and other men in plainclothes.

Amy was seated on a metal glider beside a big man with the face of a movie hero. He was the fifth person in the photo on the piano—the Adonis, George Cabot, Maria Cabot's husband. His eyes were staring directly at me, but obviously he could not see me. Or anything at all, for grief had emptied his eyes.

A burly police captain was speaking to Hugh Terrace and Raphael Gent. Suddenly the captain moved to the glider, planted himself solidly in front of Amy, and raised his voice.

"Gent tells me that you seemed to know Harold Mitchell pretty well."

Amy's sobs had ceased. She ran a thumb along a pleat in her skirt. "Two years ago he was stationed at the Army Camp. I saw him a few times. We wrote to each other. Then I didn't hear from him for two months. The first I knew that he was home was when I saw him in the house a short time ago."

"Were you"—the captain chose his words carefully—"close friends?"

"He was a soldier I knew and wrote to," she replied without raising her eyes. "That's all."

"Have you any idea why he would want to kill your sister and Miss Boelger?"

"He told Mr. Gent and me that he didn't kill Louise, which means that he didn't kill Maria either."

The captain snorted. "What do you expect him to say? Did he know Miss

Boelger when he was stationed here two years ago?"

Momentarily Amy lifted startled eyes and dropped them again. "I can't say."

Hugh Terrace, standing beside the captain, said fiercely: "Why are you wasting all this time instead of finding the fiend?"

"There are a hundred men hunting him this minute," the captain assured him. "The way I see it, Mitchell knew Louise Boelger when he was stationed here. He came back after two years to take up with her again. She turned him down and he went berserk and attacked her and then strangled her when she hit him with the chair. Then he found out that he wasn't alone in the house, that Maria Cabot had seen it all. He chased her and caught her out here on the terrace and killed her too. That's as plain as day."

Plain enough to send me to the gal-lows. And there was not one voice anywhere to protest, except mine, and I couldn't raise it because it would mean giving away my hiding place.

For a while the group was silent. Then George Cabot left the glider as if to hurl himself at somebody. But the person against whom this hate was directed was not there—or I was there and he didn't know it. He checked himself, crouched with arms dangling out from his sides like a great ape's, and his harsh panting reached all the way to me.

"I'll kill him!" Cabot cried. "I'll choke him with these two hands like he choked Maria! You police won't save him from me!"

Hugh Terrace put a skinny arm about Cabot's broad shoulder. Raphael Gent said something to Cabot I couldn't hear, and Cabot dropped his head and shambled into the house between the two men. Amy looked after them until they were out of sight, then rose



from the glider and moved woodenly after them.

Two troopers arrived with a stretcher and put Maria Cabot on it and carried her away. I pressed my face back against the damp ground and closed my eyes. And after the police left—what? Where would I go and what would I do?

"Mitchell," a voice whispered.

**U**NDER the brush I stiffened. I looked through my little latticed window. A pair of legs in civilian pants stood on the other side of the guard-rail.

"This is Raphael Gent," the voice whispered. "I'll help you if you trust me."

I wanted to ask him why he would help me, but I did not dare utter a sound.

"The cops will be gone in an hour or less," he went on. "Walk east on the road in front of this house. After a while you'll reach a narrow dirt road running south from a bare rock. A few hundred feet in you'll find a small cabin with brown shingles. Go in."

The legs strolled away. The rest of the private detective's slight form appeared. He spoke briefly to the captain and then moved around the corner of the house.

**I** HAD plenty of time to think over what Raphael Gent had said to me. It made as little sense as anything else that had happened tonight, but I hadn't any choice except to trust him. He had steered the police away from my brush pile at the beginning of the hunt for me, and after that he could have given me away any time he had wanted to. I didn't know why he hadn't. He was playing his own game, and if it also happened to be my game it was the first break I'd got.

The police didn't stay long. They hadn't much to keep them. They had no evidence to gather, no clues to search for. The killer was known—they thought. Their only job was to catch him.

The terrace lights went out and so did the house lights. There were no more voices. I forced myself to wait for the space of another thousand heartbeats and then crawled out. My legs had trouble straightening up, and briars had added to the work of Louise Boelger's fingernails. I staggered across the terrace like a baby learning to walk.

Amy's little gun was still in my hand. I had forgotten about it. I thrust it into my pocket and moved up the side of the house.

Two windows which had been out of my line of vision showed light. Voices came out to me. I looked into a small sitting room.

Hugh Terrace's tall, thin body sprawled in a chair. George Cabot nervously prowled the room with a rifle under his arm.

"What kind of a man are you?" Cabot said harshly. "Is that all your love for Louise meant?"

"Can I bring Louise back to life?" Terrace muttered. "The police will take care of Mitchell."

"Will they? That's the point. The chances are a jury will declare him insane and send him to a nuthouse and let him out after a few years. Well, they're not going to." Cabot patted the rifle barrel. "There are only three cells in the county jail, and I can shoot into any of them from across the street."

"And be arrested."

Cabot ceased prowling. "What do I care what happens to me now? Maria meant everything in the world to me."

"I know, George."



Cabot laughed bitterly. "What do you know about real love? I'm asking you to help me look for Mitchell now—or help me kill him later if the police arrest him. I'd as soon do it alone, but he murdered your woman also, so it's only fair to let you in on it. Are you with me?"

"I don't know, George," Terrace said weakly. "Give me time to think."

I moved on. I was afraid of those two men, but not more than of any other men. Every man's hand was against me, except perhaps Raphael Gent's, and he was waiting for me nearby.

I walked along the silent road lighted only by the high moon. The kinks left my knees. But weariness, physical and mental, rode my head and shoulders.

I found the rock and the narrow road which was hardly more than a trail and came to the shingled cabin hidden in a cluster of pines. There was light in one window, but it was so dim that I saw it only when I was right up to the cabin.

I listened. There was no sound anywhere but the chatter of insects and the pounding of my heart. I put my right hand on the doorknob, but I did not turn it. I was afraid. Then I remembered the little gun and closed my hand over it, leaving it in my pocket. If necessary, I could shoot through the material.

I pushed the door open with my left hand.

## CHAPTER IV

### The Cabin

ON A wooden table stood a kerosene lamp turned down so low that the farther wall of the room was indistinguishable. A shadow moved out from that wall. I tightened my grip on the gun in my pocket. The shadow passed the dull periphery of light, and I saw

that it was Amy Smith.

"Hal!" she said in a glad, choked voice and flung her arms around me.

This would have been wonderful if it had happened before tonight. Now I stood rigid in her embrace and said bitterly: "I'm supposed to be a guy who strangles every woman who goes near him. Aren't you afraid of me?"

"Hal, I know you didn't do it."

A low chuckle came from the dimness. I thrust Amy to the side and pulled the gun all the way out of my pocket. Raphael Gent's pinched face came into the range of the lamp light. He sat down at the table and chuckled again.

"Put the gat up, son," he told me. "You're among friends, about the only ones you have. Miss Smith and I don't think you killed either of those women."

"Hal, only a madman could have murdered both of them and as brutally as that," Amy said. "You're not mad. You don't act it or sound it. Besides, if you'd murdered Louise first, how could you have gone after Maria if you'd been knocked out? And if you'd murdered Maria first and had had to put Louise out of the way because she'd witnessed it, why attack her so frightfully before killing her? I can't see you doing it, Hal."

I said: "The police can. Their point of view is the one that counts."

Gent waved a hand. "I'm afraid Miss Smith is persuaded more by feminine intuition and affection for you than by logic. It helps, of course, but it's the phone call to the cops which convinces me. An anonymous call came in to the state police zone headquarters. A thin voice without sex or character said that a woman had screamed in Louise Boelger's house. Then the speaker had hung up. The police couldn't trace the call because it had been made on a rural line. They



came out to the house and you know what they found. They get a lot of results on anonymous tips and don't question them too closely, but this one I like less than most. Why didn't he—or maybe she—go to the house to investigate when he heard the scream? He couldn't know it was murder. It could be merely a woman seeing a mouse, or very sick or hurt and needing immediate help. No, the way he acted was all wrong."

"Everything about this is wrong," I said.

Gent nodded. "Sometimes a lot of wrongs make a right. There's more. Why didn't you try to shoot your way out of the police trap? You had a gun. You'd just killed two people and were supposed to be berserk. Except that you didn't act berserk. And the clincher—to me, anyway—is that Maria Cabot was afraid of something or worried about something concerning Louise Boelger. That was why she hired me."

"So you were working for Mrs. Cabot?" I said. "I was wondering where you came in."

GENT scowled at the lamp. "I don't know yet myself where I came in. This morning Mrs. Cabot paid me a retainer to hang around Louise Boelger's house and report to her whatever happened there. She didn't tell me what she wanted; only that I should make a complete report of everything I saw. It's done sometime. Clients don't like to let on even to the investigator they're hiring what they're after. If I brought to her what she wanted to know, fine. If not, no harm done. I went out there this evening, looked through a window, and saw you out cold and Miss Boelger dead."

I turned to Amy. "Why did you come in with a drawn gun?"

She replied evenly: "Lately my sister

Maria had been terribly worried about something. I knew it concerned Louise, but Maria refused to tell me what it was. Probably I was foolish, but I thought I could frighten Louise with a gun into telling me what it was all about."

"What about Hugh Terrace?" I asked. "Remember that he came in through the side door, not more than twenty feet from where your sister was lying dead under the fir tree."

Amy wet her lips and looked thoughtful.

Gent said: "Terrace told the police that he came up to visit Louise Boelger. My own idea is that he came to spy on her. He was madly in love with her, and I guess she gave him plenty of reason to be jealous. Sure, he could have killed Louise, but why Mrs. Cabot? Or if he killed Mrs. Cabot because she'd seen him kill Louise, why give her the same brutal treatment he'd given the woman he was jealous of?"

"And George Cabot?" I asked. "What was he doing there?"

"He was home when the police phoned him that his wife was dead, and he rushed right over. Though that doesn't let him out. He had time to get home after the murders."

"Oh, no!" Amy protested. "George wouldn't have hurt Maria. They loved each other passionately."

I dropped the gun into my pocket. The fingers of my other hand touched the scratches on my cheek. "Why did she do this to me? These scratches have to tie up with the rest of it."

There wasn't any answer.

Raphael Gent stood up. "We've nothing to take to the police that will do any good. The idea is for you to hide out here while I dig up something concrete."

"Why do this for me?" I wanted to know.



Gent laughed softly. "Not for you, son. I'm a businessman. Miss Smith has hired me to clear you."

I glanced at Amy. She nodded. I turned back to Gent and said: "That's not an answer. You're making yourself an accessory by hiding me out. Can she pay you enough to be worth the risk?"

Behind the horn-rimmed glasses his eyes hardened. "I don't like to have my clients murdered. It's bad for business." That sad smile of his passed over the pinched face. "Besides, son, I think you deserve a break."

He left then, after telling me to go easy on the lights and not to stick my nose out of the cabin.

As soon as he was gone, Amy came into my arms. It was good to hold her against me, but I hadn't really found her again. Not yet. Not while all the police in the world were hunting me.

I said: "How well do you know Raphael Gent?"

"I never saw him or heard of him before tonight."

"Can I trust him?"

Her head tilted back so that she could look into my face. "What do you mean?"

"We have only his word that your sister hired him. He was in the house when I recovered consciousness. Two women were murdered when I was out cold. How can we be sure that they died before Gent arrived?"

Her arms tightened about me. "Hasn't he proved that he's on your side?"

"I hope so," I said.

After a while she led me up to a cramped attic under the pitched roof. There was a rather narrow cot against a tiny window. She told me that it would be a safer place to sleep than in the bedroom downstairs.

I flopped down on it without un-

dressings. She kissed me good-night. I thought of the two kisses earlier that night—the kisses of bright red lips that had died soon after. This kiss was infinitely better, what I had wanted all my life.

She stood up and pushed back her hair. "I'll return at noon to bring you food. Meanwhile, get all the sleep you can." She blew out the kerosene lantern she had lighted in the attic.

I lay flat on my back, listening to her climb down the ladder and then the soft opening and closing of the door. A thought crossed my mind. It concerned the scratches on my face. They were the crux of the whole thing, I knew suddenly, and I tried to think through why, but I was too exhausted. A heavy, drugged sleep overwhelmed me.

**I**N MY sleep I smiled. Amy had returned and was bending over me. I lifted my face for her kiss. Her hands moved up my arm. I tried to say her name, but something was wrong with my tongue. My mouth felt distended and chokingly dry.

I tore my eyes open and stared up into the cadaverous face of Hugh Terrance. His eyes were not right, not sane. Terrifying fires blazed in them.

The face moved away. I turned my head to follow it and saw his long thin body lean back in a wooden chair. He had taken the little pistol away from me; he held it lightly on one knee. His other hand held a clasp-knife with its four-inch blade open.

"There's no hurry," he said in a voice between a croak and a laugh. "I'm going to take my time. You'll beg me to use the gun, but I'll stick to the knife."

I threw myself at him—or tried to. My body twisted between wrists and ankles. I looked down along my torso and saw that my ankles were fastened



together by handcuffs and that the arm of the cuff was tied to the iron bar at the foot of the cot. And my arms were stretched over my head, linked by my ankles and secured to the upper bed bar.

"You didn't wake up when I handcuffed you," Terrace went on. "I suppose murder makes one very sleepy."

I tried to speak to him, to reason with him, but only mewling sounds passed my lips. My tongue was pressed against the roof of my mouth by a cloth gag.

"You didn't think anybody would find you here, did you?" he chortled. "But I'm smart. Amy admitted she'd been friendly with you, and after a while she started insisting that you were innocent. Well, I thought, if she loved you, she'd help you hide, and the easiest place would be this cabin so near Louise's house. It belongs to her brother who's in the Army of Occupation in Germany. She uses it. I came here and found you." His laughter was like icy water poured over me. "I'm smart. Smarter than you were when you murdered Louise and Maria."

I turned my head away from him. Through the little square window on the other side of the cot I saw that the sun was high over the pine trees. I could see the stretch of clearing in front of the cabin and the first fifty feet of the narrow road before it ran in among the trees. It looked pleasant and serene—a picture postcard scene. And up here I was without the power to move or speak or scream while a madman was making a terrible mistake.

"Damn you, look at me!" he shrieked. "Look at the man who loved Louise!"

I looked at him. I mewled through the gag, nodded and then shook my head to try to make him understand that I had to speak to him. He only

smiled vacantly, like an idiot child, and raised the knife.

"She scratched you when she was fighting for her life," he said. "But not deep enough. Not as deep as this knife will. You'll suffer the way she suffered before she died."

He bent over me. My eyes could not leave the point of the knife suspended above my face.

And then he was no longer staring down at me. His narrow shoulders hunched; his head extended like a turtle's from his skinny neck. Something outside had caught and held his attention.

I turned my head to the window and saw her also. Amy Smith was coming toward the cabin. There was a paper bag in her hand—the food she had promised to bring at noon.

Hugh Terrace sank back in the chair. I searched his face, looking for life in it now that a third person was coming. I found death.

He rose jerkily from the chair, like an automaton whose joints needed oiling. He threw another glance through the window and moved to the ladder.

I screamed after him, but the sound that trickled through the gag was no louder than a mouse would make.

I turned back to the window. I heaved my torso up, tore against the handcuffs until my flesh was raw. I was helpless.

She was still within my line of vision when I heard the cabin door open. It was Hugh Terrace stepping outside. Amy stopped dead and stared. She thought only that my hideout had been discovered. She could not know yet how much worse it was.

Then Hugh Terrace appeared within my sight. He still had the gun in one hand and the knife in the other, but it was the gun which was raised now.



"Hugh, listen!" Amy said hoarsely.

The gun-muzzle was level with her heart. "Your lover killed the woman I loved." He laughed. "It's only fair that I make him watch the woman he loves die."

I kept screaming, but the screams were forced back against my throat. And then the roar of a gun filled the world.

## CHAPTER V

### The Killer

THE shot was too loud for that little pistol. I thought of that even in the moment my eyes closed as if by themselves to shut out the sight of Amy dying. When I again looked through the window, it was Hugh Terrace who was on the ground and Amy who was standing over him.

The echo of the shot had rolled away, leaving the postcard tranquillity over the scene, if you could block out the writhing man on the ground. Amy was staring at the dark semicircle of pine trees. Then she stopped and plucked the automatic from Terrace's lax fingers and pointed the muzzle down at him. He appeared to be too badly wounded to cause trouble.

"Hal," she called, "are you all right?"

She looked up at the attic window. I could not answer her, and the silence brought terror into her face. She ran into the cabin.

Her head stopped when it appeared like a disembodied entity above the floor of the attic. She uttered a glad cry to see me alive, and then she saw the handcuffs on my wrists and ankles.

"Dear God, what happened?" she cried.

I mewed through the gag. She scampered up the remaining rungs of

the ladder and removed the gag from my mouth.

"Who shot Terrace?" I asked thickly.

"Didn't you? I thought—" She laughed a little crazily. "But of course you couldn't have. Who did this to you?"

"Terrace. He was going to kill me when he saw you through the window."

She tugged at the cuffs in a kind of stubborn fury before she conceded that it was hopeless. "He must have the key in his pocket," she said and left me.

"Wait!" I called. "Whoever shot him is still around. Don't go down."

She must have heard me as she descended the ladder, but that didn't stop her. I turned to the window to watch for her to appear below. And I saw Raphael Gent hurrying up the road. He had no weapon in his hands.

He broke into a run when he saw Hugh Terrace. He squatted beside him. Terrace moaned. His eyes were open now and one hand clawed feebly at his left side.

Gent's head jerked around to the cabin. He started to rise slowly, and he was all the way on his feet when Amy appeared. Her little gun was held against her hip, not exactly covering Gent, but pointing in his general direction.

They spoke to each other. I tried to hear their words, but their voices were low and Terrace's moans overlapped them. After a minute Gent nodded. He searched the wounded man's clothes, found the keys and handed them up to Amy. She thrust the little gun into the pocket of her skirt and turned to the cabin.

When her head appeared in the attic, I asked: "Did Gent shoot him?"

"He says he didn't," she replied, coming all the way up. "He says he never carries a gun."



"The shot came from the woods."

"I think so. I can't understand it."

Her hands trembled as she unlocked the handcuffs. I stretched my cramped arms and then put them around her and kissed her.

"Oh, darling," she said, "if I'd come a little later I would have lost you."

**I**T WAS swell hearing that from her.

It meant everything. Only we were lost to each other anyway as long as I was a killer in the eyes of the law.

I released her and slid off the cot. "Has Gent accomplished anything since he left?"

"He seems to think so. The medical examiner has found that Maria died at least an hour before Louise Boelger. Mr. Gent is excited about that, though I don't know why he didn't tell me."

I found myself smiling. I touched the scratches on my cheek. "It fits," I said. "I was sure it had to be like that."

"What fits?"

"Let's go down and hear what else Gent has to say."

Gent was still squatting beside Terrace when Amy and I came out of the cabin. He said: "He has a slug between his ribs, but he'll live."

"I know who murdered Maria Cabot," I said.

Gent's eyes darkened behind his horn-rimmed glasses. "Never mind about that now."

"What else did you learn? I asked. "Is there any evidence to show—"

"Listen!" Gent cut me off harshly. "We've got a badly wounded man here. We can save the talk till later. Our first job is to get him to a hospital."

That was when George Cabot stepped out from the pine trees. The rifle was under his arm. His big, athletic body moved with easy grace to the farther side of the man on the ground.

Amy said: "So it was you who saved our lives, George!"

"Hugh and I came here together," Cabot explained. "I'm glad now that I stayed out here to watch if anybody came while Hugh went into the cabin. I would have killed Mitchell at once, like a rat, because I was sure he was the murderer. I think now that I was wrong, that maybe the killer is Hugh. Why else would he have wanted to kill you, Amy?"

On the ground Hugh Terrace writhed in pain. "No, no!" he moaned. "I'd have given my life for Louise!"

"But you were going to kill Amy," Cabot told him.

Terrace closed his eyes. "I—I guess I did go mad for a while."

Cabot scowled down at him and then turned to me. The rifle moved with him. "Can you prove that Hugh Terrace murdered Louise and Maria?"

"I didn't say that," I said. "I know who killed your wife."

"Who?"

"Louise Boelger."

Gent said briskly: "Never mind that now. We'll save it for the police."

"I'd like to hear it now," Cabot said quietly. "Go on, Mitchell."

"There's only one reason why Louise Boelger acted the way she did," I told him. "And you ought to know the rest because—"

**I** WAS standing between Gent and Amy, and without warning Gent stepped behind me and reached to grab her.

I twisted around in time to see his hand dip to the gun in her pocket. I hit him with my fist. It was a glancing blow which raked his cheek, but there was enough power behind it to send him backward a few staggering steps.

Amy screamed. I felt a hard shoul-



der drive into my back. I clawed air, regained my balance, and turned. George Cabot was stepping back with Amy's little pistol in his big left fist. His left trigger finger was set on the rifle. He was armed for war.

"You idiot!" Raphael Gent said.

He spoke the words to me, but his gaze was fixed on Cabot. Amy stared at her brother-in-law too, more puzzled than afraid. She did not yet understand what I had done to her and to Gent and to myself.

In a moment it had cleared up for me. Gent never wore a gun and had tried to get Amy's so that we would have a chance against Cabot's rifle. "Idiot" was right. I'd moved impulsively to protect her, not sure until now that Gent was all the way on our side. Oh, I'd fixed it up nicely. I'd helped Cabot gain possession of all the weapons there were.

"Go on, Mitchell," Cabot said grimly. "You were telling us who killed Louise and Maria."

"I finished," I said. "Louise murdered Maria, but I don't know who murdered Louise."

Cabot laughed without mirth. "It's too late to hedge now. You told me enough a minute ago. Gent tried to shut you up and then get Amy's gun. That proves he also knows."

"Knows what?" Amy said. Nobody answered her. She stared at the rifle and pistol in her brother-in-law's hands. Her eyes widened. "*You're* the murderer!"

I looked at Gent. That sad smile was on his pinched face. "It's pretty plain, isn't it?" he said. "You tell her, Mitchell. Cabot wants to hear how much we know. Let him have the details."

Gent wanted me to talk. I didn't know why, but he was smarter than I and would know what he was doing.

Besides, nothing I would say would make it worse for us than it already was.

I said to Cabot: "Louise Boelger was in love with you. What she wanted she got. Your wife suspected what was going on and hired a private detective to get the proof."

Cabot's handsome face crumpled. "God, what a fool I was! I never really cared for any woman but Maria, but I let Louise drag me into an affair with her. It didn't last. I loved my wife too much. A couple of nights ago I told Louise I was through with her."

I nodded. "Louise wasn't a woman who would give up any man she wanted. You especially. 'Stunning looking' was what she called you. I guess we'll never know whether Louise killed Maria in rage when she came to Louise's house last night or whether Louise planned it in advance and lured her there. The fact is, Louise strangled her and made it look like an attack by a man. She was a cool article. She went out to the highway to pick up a fall-guy, and tagged me. She used Maria's lipstick and kissed me and tore my shirt and scratched my cheek and knocked me out. A perfect frame-up. A guy in a jalopy seeing an attractive woman and trying to make love to her and killing her in mad frenzy when she fought back. Why would anybody suspect Louise? It was a man's crime."

Amy started to whimper.

I DID not look at her or at anybody but Cabot. I went on: "What went wrong with her scheme was that you appeared on the scene. You'd come there often enough at night. You found your wife dead on the terrace. You looked through a window and saw enough of what Louise was doing to me to know that she had killed Maria. And so after I was knocked out, you



went in and did to Louise what she had done to your wife."

Hugh Terrace uttered a ragged cry. He raised himself on one elbow and turned his pain-controlled face up to Cabot.

"You murdered your wife's murderer," I said. "Maybe the law would have found that justifiable, but you played it safe. Louise had planned to have me take the rap for one murder. You decided that I would hang for two murders. You left me unconscious on the floor, called the police on the way home, and then waited for word that your wife was dead. But you weren't satisfied to let it go even at that. If I were caught and tried for murder, the dirt about you and Louise would come out during the trial. That might prove dangerous, so you selected a second fall guy—Hugh Terrace."

Again Terrace cried out. Cabot ignored him. His calculating gaze remained on me.

"Terrace loved Louise," I said. "I heard you talk him into killing me. He's the weak, pliable, high-strung type. You worked on him until he was crazy with hate, and then you brought him here to kill me while you waited in the woods. Then Amy came along, and Terrace, completely out of his head, came out to kill her. That wasn't according to your plan. You were fond of your sister-in-law. You could frame a stranger like me without a qualm, but Amy's death couldn't be part of it. So you did the one decent thing in the whole mess. You shot Terrace to save Amy."

Cabot lifted rifle and pistol. His eyes were sick with fear now, which made them killer's eyes. He had to kill all of us if he could—Amy too—for it was our lives or his. I glanced at Gent. He had moved closer to Cabot, but he

was unarmed and hardly more than half the other's size.

Yet Gent hurled himself at the armed man. I followed the flight of his slight body, and I saw that in that second I had looked away from Cabot things had happened. Hugh Terrace had wrapped his arms about Cabot's legs and was pulling him down, and Cabot was frantically swinging the barrel of the rifle down at the other's skull.

Then Gent was on Cabot. He hit him low with his fist—a foul blow, but fair enough under the circumstances. Gent grunted hollowly. The fighting was too close for the rifle. He brought around the pistol.

I hadn't far to move. I grabbed Cabot's left wrist and twisted. I'm no weakling and I know how to break a man's wrist. I broke it and raised my right to his face. Gent's fist and mine found it at the same time. Cabot went down.

I dropped on top of him, but it wasn't necessary. He was through. Gent gathered up the rifle and pistol and I clambered up to my feet.

Terrace had fainted or had been knocked out. Cabot sat shaking his head groggily and nursing his broken wrist.

"You talked very well, son," the little detective said.

"You mean you worked this out in advance?" I asked incredulously.

"In broad outline," Raphael Gent replied. "I figured that Hugh Terrace hadn't got over his murderous hate for whoever had murdered Louise Boelger and that he'd probably do something desperate when he learned the truth. And I wanted Cabot's attention off Terrace and me." His eyes twinkled behind the glasses. "You were telling the details of the murders he'd committed. Naturally he'd concentrate most intently on you."



Amy plucked my sleeve. Our arms went around each other. I don't know how long I held her, but it wasn't long enough. It would never be.

## THE MAN NOBODY FOOLS

BY SANDY MILLER

FROM the comic pages and the movies the public mind has crystallized an imaginative picture to describe a detective. One of this nation's foremost detectives, the man who has sent most of the big figures in Gangland to the penitentiary, looks far from the detective-type. Anyone seeing him on the street could easily place him as a Sunday school superintendent of the little church around the corner. Elmer Lincoln Irey, head of the Intelligence Unit of the Bureau of Internal Revenue in the Treasury, is an unassuming and soft-spoken individual. Notorious gangsters call him Uncle Elmer, and despite his harmless appearance are in awe of the amazing work he is capable of performing in order to track them down.

On the whole, his main interest has been the taxpayers who have frequent attacks of amnesia and forget to record the bulk of their fortunes when confronted by an income-tax blank. Through his work bootleggers of liquor and narcotics, kidnapers and racketeers, law-breaking sheriffs and governors, and bribers, have been discovered and prosecuted. Irey does not work alone. His staff includes 2600 investigators in the Alcohol Tax Unit, Customs and Customs Patrol, Narcotics, Secret Service, and Intelligence departments, and he is in charge of co-ordination. This outstanding group has collected more than \$400,000,000 in taxes and penalties in the twenty years of its existence. In terms of practical government mathematics, Irey's department has done more than pay its own way. For each two dollars spent, approximately \$100 has been collected!

Irey's talent for letting his job completely absorb all his time and thought has made him successful. He has a passion for minute detail, for joining together the seemingly remote ends of a case so that after a complete investigation and review of the facts involved, it all fits together smoothly and compactly.

Irey came to the department shortly following the first World War. It was in the Roaring Twenties when liquor flowed like water although the law prohibited its sale, and when everybody and everybody's butler played the stockmarket. Crime and its henchmen ran rampant in every community, large and small, and throughout the nation law-abiding citizens became alarmed.

Tax collectors began to come to the fore. Time and time again, men who thought they were above the law, men who paid their way by bribing the

local police, were caught because they thought they could get away with only paying a small fraction of the required taxes. They were wrong. Detective Irey showed them how wrong they were.

What Irey has done, of course, is to perfect and put into practice a new type of criminal investigation. It ranks clearly in the same group as the fictional exploits of Sherlock Holmes and his friend and helpmate, Watson. Infinite patience and painstaking care are required. The most complete description of the work Detective Irey and his men do can best be obtained through a review of the investigation of Irving Wexler, alias Waxey Gordon, a baron of the beer-and-machine-gun era.

WAXEY GORDON bossed around a large group of men who committed every crime on the books so that Gordon could glean the profits. Like Al Capone and the other big shots, he avoided all apparent connections with his organization and tried to break up its identity as much as possible so that if any of the men under him got into trouble his name wouldn't be involved. Early in his career, Gordon had learned his lesson; he had left his signature on the receipt of a shipment of narcotics. For this he had been convicted on a minor charge.

His employees now made and sold beer to hundreds of speak-easies in New York and the surrounding area. Business didn't progress smoothly for very long. In Wallington, New Jersey, a raid took place and a truckman was murdered. William Brady, the victim, had been a "protection man" for several bootleggers. Records were turned up and leads followed. The real investigation now began.

The first clues to the unearthing of a huge crime ring were discovered in checkbook stubs. Good sizeable bank accounts which were obviously registered in fictitious names were found with records in the early investigations. Five accounts registered under five names showed approximately two million dollars worth of deposits each during a single year.

Every account was carefully checked and rechecked by Irey's men; every entry was analyzed. In the search it was discovered that payments had been made for equipment and machinery closely related to the brewery business—beer barrels, auto trucks used by a beverage company,



blacksmith work and repair jobs on brewery machinery, and numerous other charges, all connected with the beer business. A large sum was traced and found to have been used by one of Gordon's men in a part payment on a new car, a Pierce-Arrow.

Following each of the threads that were exposed led Irey closer and closer to Waxey Gordon himself. More and more of Gordon's shady business deals were brought into the light. When his ties with the Paramount Hotel Corporation in New York were suspected, Irey demanded the books be opened. After an unaccounted-for delay the documents were produced; Detective Irey noticed that the ink had hardly dried. The accountants who had pulled together this new set of books in an effort to hide Gordon's 25% interest—were called on the carpet. Finally they confessed.

The last step which is so characteristic in Irey's handling of any tax case is the estimate of the suspect's day to day expenditures, a reconstruction of his scale of living to later be compared with his tax declaration of income.

**OUTWARDLY** there is nothing to indicate Irey's criminal-stalking livelihood. He might be any average business man—pleasant, agreeable, a good conversationalist, and a hearty handshake. But underneath you cannot help being aware of his analytical mind and his searching eyes. Behind the gold-rimmed glasses, the visitor is being appraised, and the result is stored away for safe-keeping in the mind of this brilliant man.

Irey's talents were turned on Gordon. In repeated expeditions to the areas where Gordon lived and relaxed, there was found a lease on an apartment with ten rooms and four baths at six thousand dollars a year. For his private use four cars were kept—two Pierce-Arrows and two Lincolns. In addition his wife had her own personal car—a Cadillac. Gordon spent his winters in Hot Springs, Arkansas, and his children went to expensive summer camps. Custom-made shirts for this "beer-king" ran to the sum of \$13.50 each, his underwear, \$10 a suit; his neckties, \$5 apiece. A loose estimate established his yearly expenses at more than \$25,000. On the government papers for several years Gordon had claimed an income of a mere \$6,000.

After the trial, Gordon discovered he owed the United States of America over one million dollars in delinquent taxes, twenty thousand dollars in fines and twenty thousand in court costs plus ten years of his life to be served in the penitentiary.

This was only one of the many famous cases Detective Irey brought to a successful conclusion. The Al Capone case was followed up in exactly the same manner. Capone knew his goose was cooked when he found out that it was Irey who had compiled the damaging evidence. As the government agents closed in, he began to squirm. Capone offered a record bribe to a close friend of Irey's in an effort to put the master detective off

the case. It was worth one and a half million to him if the case could be taken out of Irey's hands. The money was declined.

For the first and only time in his career, Irey sat in the courtroom while the trial was in progress. Capone by special permission was allowed to keep his private bodyguard, D'Andrea, at his side. The evidence against Capone began to mount. Day after day new material was brought into public view. Capone sunk lower and lower in his chair as the trial progressed; and yet there remained a certain hardness about his eyes.

Early one day, shortly after the court opened, Irey had his men surround D'Andrea. At a given signal he was searched; on him they found a shoulder holster in which was a loaded automatic. His vest pocket held a clip of bullets. Irey followed up a hunch that D'Andrea was armed. The trial was carried to a successful conclusion; Capone and several of his henchmen were placed behind bars where they belonged.

**I**MPORTANT cases involving bribes and other crooked deals often turn up on the course of routine checks of income-tax returns. All large-sized returns are carefully checked and rechecked. One national company mentioned on its return as expenses a payment of one hundred thousand dollars to a certain senator for "services rendered." That senator's tax return showed that he had "forgotten" to mention the receipt of such a sum. An agent was sent by Irey to pay the negligent senator a visit. By this time the man had been retired to private life by the voters of his state who didn't appreciate his efforts in their behalf.

"That little matter of the hundred-thousand dollar fee . . ." said the agent politely and with the utmost care and consideration. The senator was shocked and surprised.

"Fee! My dear sir, that was a gratuity, a gift, such as men in public life not infrequently receive; and gifts are not taxable as income." The senator might have gotten away with this ruse had not the company so thoughtfully labeled the sum "for services rendered" in bold letters. The ex-senator made a large settlement.

Most of the work that Irey has done has hit the newspaper headlines. His part in compiling evidence against Bruno Hauptmann in the Lindbergh kidnapping case will be remembered by many. It was necessary in this case to determine within a few dollars the sum of money that Hauptmann made and spent prior to the day he received the ransom money. Irey also directed the marking of the ransom bills and the hunt to trace and retrieve them.

Irey takes great pride in his work and he has reason to. When his investigation is completed, no loopholes remain for his man to slip through. He selects the agents that work with him with great care. In most cases they are either lawyers or accountants and their heart really lies in this work. They have a great respect for their boss and his untiring labor.





The beam of Johnny's torch  
cut through the swirling snow  
and outlined the motionless body



# **THE QUEEN CITY MURDER CASE**

**By ALEXANDER BLADE**

## **Death Takes the Bid**

**J**OHNNY wasn't interested in bidding on an Oriental rug, so while the small knot of people was grouped around the auctioneer at the rear of the long store, he wandered about near the front of the galleries. There were dozens of old nicknacks here that intrigued him. Of course there wasn't a single one of them that he could really use, but like scores of other people he came here to the weekly auctions, always buying something, always being utterly fascinated by the old antiques.

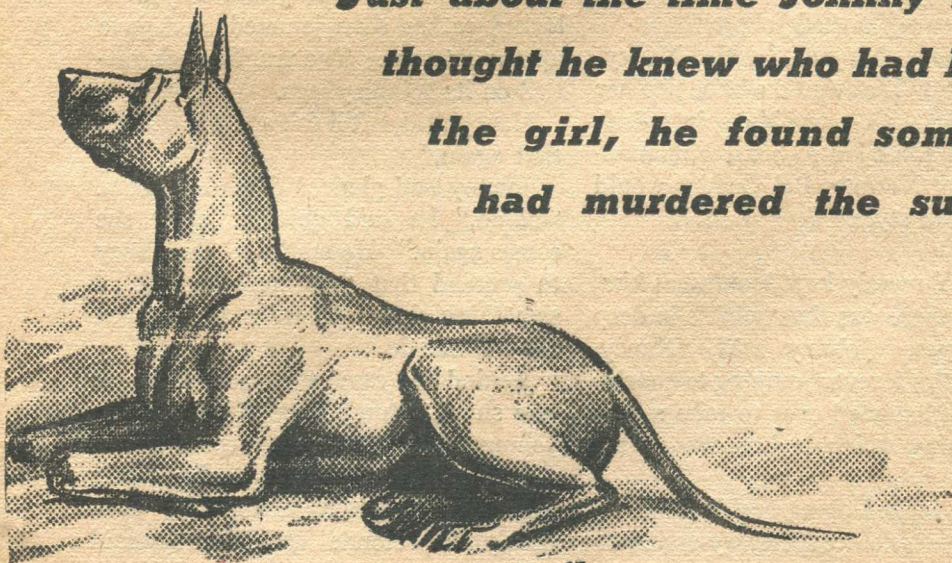
Johnny—Jonathan Jones, Investiga-

tions—was known as Cincinnati's leading private detective, but he would have passed up the best murder case in the world in order to attend the weekly auction sale.

His cool, quiet gray eyes lit on an old pewter lamp, then a vase, and next a gate-leg table. Then they lit on the blonde.

She was tall and slim-built, and she wore furs. She was pretty, yet at the same time she made him think of the Gayety Burlesque up on Vine Street. And the way she was poking around now amongst a pile of assorted junk back near the wall, you would have thought her life depended upon it!

***Just about the time Johnny Jones  
thought he knew who had killed  
the girl, he found someone  
had murdered the suspect***





Johnny kept watching her. Most people had a definite way of shopping through auction rooms. Usually they were casual and unhurried. But not this tall blonde.

Her features were tense. Johnny could see that as her face was reflected in a mirror just above her head. She had reached an old overstuffed sofa, was tugging it out of the way. Behind it, back against the wall, she had apparently located a rickety old desk. Other furniture surrounded the flimsy-looking article, and the blonde went to work getting the desk better exposed to view. She did it with determination.

Beside Johnny, his assistant—Nancy—remarked coolly, "I've seen moving men who couldn't do as well!"

"Quiet," Johnny said. "I'm watching her."

"And *thinking*, too!" said Nancy. "Did you come here to attend an auction or to—"

The blonde had straightened up, pushed a strand of hair out of her eyes, was quickly *tap-tap-tapping* down the length of the long room. She was heading toward the auctioneer, who was standing on a chair, winding up the bid on the last Oriental.

"Hum-m-m," mused Johnny.

"And somewhat cute," added Nancy.

He said, "What would a babe like her be wanting with a wobbly spinet desk that's on its last legs? Something modernistic by Norman Bel Geddes would be more her style."

NANCY merely kept looking at him, and there was that twinkle in deep brown eyes. Johnny said, "Nancy, baby, you're forever jumping to conclusions," and started over to take a look at the thing which had interested the blonde.

Nancy tagged along beside him.

Nancy—his office secretary-assistant-

partner—was also built along tall and slender lines. But about her there was something regal and cool. She came from one of the best old families of Cincinnati, and what she ever saw in the investigation agency business Johnny could never understand. On various occasions her life had been in grave danger because of the unorthodox, daring way in which he sometimes worked on a case. It never occurred to him that *he* might be part of the attraction of the business.

He was not what you would call a good-looking man, yet there was something about him. He was a little too thin for his height; his face was always a little too serious-looking. He had a sharp, determined chin. You got the impression that he was fairly young, until you noticed the touch of gray in his dark hair at the temples.

Johnny was studying the old writing desk. There was one long, very flat drawer built beneath the writing section. Two larger drawers were on either side of the desk. Above and behind the open writing section was a series of small cubbyholes fitted with pull-out drawers. Johnny tried several of the drawers, deciding that they were locked rather than jammed, and gave up the attempt. The fragile desk rattled on its spindley legs.

Nancy said, "It'll fall apart if you do that again."

Johnny had glanced down the room. "Oh-oh," he said quickly, "here she comes again." He motioned for Nancy to pretend that they were looking at something else. Covertly, he watched the tall blonde.

Behind her came the auctioneer. It was short, rotund Max Milton, whom Johnny had come to know quite well.

The gullible customers trailed along behind quick-moving little Max. Evidently the blonde had already said



something to the auctioneer, because he went directly to the old spinet desk, pulled it farther into view, and immediately went into his spiel.

"And now, ladies and gentlemen, we have here a rare and priceless—and authentic, mind you—desk that was once the proud possession of a . . ."

Johnny recognized Max's routine. Here was an object that Max desired to dispose of quickly. There was going to be only a slim profit, so why waste time.

Max was saying, "Who will bid fi—"

"Fifty dollars!" called out the blonde.

A murmur ran through the crowd. Everyone had been standing around listlessly, uninterested in the dilapidated antique.

And, Johnny knew, Max had been going to ask for *five* dollars. Even Max had to check his surprise. More than satisfied, he started to close the bid. "I have fifty dollars. Fifty dollars once . . . twice . . ."

Johnny called, "Seventy-five dollars!"

Nancy gasped. "Johnny!" she whispered. "It isn't worth five cents. Besides, what would you ever *do* with it?"

He was watching the blonde's face. "I don't know," he murmured. "What?"

The blonde had turned her head sharply, seeking out the person who had raised her bid. Johnny had the swift impression that her eyes held consternation.

"One *hundred* dollars!" she said.

"One hundred and twenty-five!" Johnny grinned at Nancy as he called the figure. He whispered, "How am I doing, kitten?"

"You!" Nancy snapped beneath her breath.

Again he caught the blonde's frantic look. There was something almost like

fear in her eyes now, it struck him.

"One fifty!" she called.

Max's eyes shot to Johnny, and the private investigator shook his head. The old desk was knocked down to the blonde and Max started toward another part of the auction room. "Over here," he said brightly, "we have a fine set of . . ."

The crowd followed.

A YOUNG man in rolled-up shirt sleeves, an inventory board in his hands, had stepped up to the tall blonde. He was saying, "You pay me, miss. I'll take your name and address."

Johnny did his best to hear the reply, but the blonde spoke in a low voice. A moment later she had paid for her purchase and was going out. Johnny's gaze trailed after her, and he had the definite impression that somewhere, some place, he had seen her before.

Nancy said, "Well at least you saved the office rent money. Now, let's get out of here before you—"

"Just a minute, pet," Johnny said, and stepped over to the young clerk. He knew the fellow fairly well, having made purchases here before. Just the same, he slipped the clerk a five-dollar bill. A moment later he was putting a copy of the blonde's address into his pocket.

Nancy's level brown eyes held a certain amount of gleam when Johnny started out of the auction rooms with her a moment later. She demanded, "What has *she* got that a dozen other blondes haven't?"

"The desk," said Johnny.

FROM THE windows of the office high in the Carew Tower building, you could see the rising Kentucky hills across the Ohio River. New leaden



clouds hung low in the sky, and there was an occasional gust of snow flurries. It was cold.

Inside the warm, very quiet office there was an air of richness and comfort. This was because Jonathan Jones liked nice things, and not because he wanted to impress a prospective client, as an average agency might.

But Johnny wasn't average. People came to *him*. And if he didn't like their propositions, the hell with them!

There were amber-colored drapes at the windows. The modern furniture was light tan, and leather-covered. The broad top of the massive desk was leather, too. Johnny had his long legs hooked on the edge of the expensive desk and was slumped down in his swivel chair. He had spread an afternoon newspaper across his knees and was studying the entertainment page thoughtfully.

The two column by sixteen-inch ad featured the star attractions of the popular Club Mayfair, across the river, and the most interesting thing about the copy was the partial view of a girl's nicely shaped ear and part of her wavy blonde hair. Beneath the cut was the caption: "This is Jeannette Evans' right ear. You can see the *rest* of her nightly at CLUB MAYFAIR."

"Jeannette Evans" was the name that the auction store clerk had written on the slip of paper for Johnny. He remembered, now, that he had seen her picture some place recently. This was her all right—even thought it was only a picture of *part* of her face.

He kept wondering about the old desk, and why the devil *anyone* would want to pay so much money for it. He lifted the receiver of the handset and said to Nancy, "Get me Max Milton at the auction rooms, pet."

"*That* again?" commented Nancy.

"Um-hum," said Johnny.

An instant later he was talking to the auctioneer. He learned that the desk had been delivered an hour ago to the blonde.

"Look, Max," said Johnny. "I'm just curious, is all. Why would she want the damn' thing? Certainly it wasn't worth more than—"

Max said, "I should ask! All it contained was a lot of junk—"

"You mean," interrupted Johnny, "there was something *in* the desk?"

"Sure! Nicknacks. You know . . . old bits of lace some old maid must have saved. Letters. A couple albums. Stuff like that. We kept the desk locked up, so I sent her along the key."

"Where did you get the desk, Max?" asked Johnny. "I mean from whom did you buy it?"

"Funny thing about that," explained the auctioneer. "That desk was stored with us quite a few years ago. A fellow came in one day and asks us, will we store the desk, and he pays us the storage. Then he never comes back. That blasted thing has been lying around for years, and we don't remember his name, so we decide to unload it."

"You never saw him again?"

"No."

Johnny thought that was that, until Max said abruptly, "Say!"

"What?" prodded Johnny.

"I just remembered. A couple days ago a guy was in here. He looks at the desk, and even has me show him what's inside. I thought sure thing he was going to buy the desk, but he doesn't."

Johnny was getting interested now. "Was it the same man who stored the desk?" he asked.

"No. I'm sure I would have remembered him."

Johnny was disappointed. Why, he did not know.



"Well, thanks, Max," he said, and hung up.

NANCY'S tall, straight figure was standing in the doorway leading to the outer office. Her nice dark hair shone in the light cast by a desk lamp behind her.

She said, "That blonde is on the wire and wants to speak to you."

Johnny's eyebrows raised slightly. "What does she want?"

"She's keeping it a secret," said Nancy. Her mouth twisted wryly as she started to close the door. "She insists that she'll *only* talk to you."

"How nice," said Johnny, grinning.

Nancy slammed the door behind her.

"Hello?" said Johnny into the phone.

"Is this Mr. Jonathan Jones in person?" asked the voice. He was disappointed in the voice. It sounded harsh over the phone. But it was the blonde—Jeannette Evans—all right; he was positive of this.

"Speaking," assured Johnny.

"Well," said the blonde, "it's about this afternoon. I mean . . . there at the auction rooms. I bought a desk, and you were there bidding on it too. . . ."

"Yes," said Johnny, "I know. You're Jeannette Evans." Then he added, "That clerk is a very obliging fellow. I suppose you phoned him and learned my name?"

"Yes!" agreed the blonde. "That's just what I did. I'll tell you . . . you see, I'm disappointed in this desk. I've decided I don't want it after all. Since you, too, were bidding on it, I thought perhaps—"

"That I might wish to buy it from you?"

"I'll make the price very reasonable."

Johnny didn't want the desk. He

said, "What time could I see you?"

"Would eight this evening be convenient?"

Johnny looked at his watch. It was six o'clock. Outside it was dark now, and he had an idea that it must be much colder.

"Eight will be just right," he told her.

She gave him the address out on Reading Road, which he already knew, and then she hung up.

Nancy came into the office as he was putting on his hat and coat. She stood there, watching him. He knew that she was curious to know about the blonde.

"Hungry, baby?" he asked. There was a mirror built into the coat room closet door, which he had opened. He studied the fit of the gray overcoat he was wearing. He had just bought it two days ago, and it looked good. It damn' well should; he'd paid one hundred and fifty dollars for it! He liked nice clothes.

NANCY was saying, "I think I'll stay awhile. It's almost the first of the month." Her nice face was serious. "Johnny, do you realize you have only five hundred dollars on deposit in the checking account—"

"Swell!" he started to say.

"—and so far the bills total better than seven hundred dollars!"

He winced. "Let's go out and eat," he suggested.

"Some one has to worry about those bills," Nancy said coolly. "You've had two calls today from people asking you to handle their cases. It might be a good idea—"

Johnny said emphatically, "I never touch divorce stuff, kitten. I'm not an ambulance-chaser. Something will turn up."

Nancy's eyes flickered. "What did



she want?"

That's what he admired about Nancy. She was a very clever girl. He said, "She wants to sell that desk."

Nancy groaned. "Oh, Lord! Don't tell me you're going to buy some other useless piece of junk—"

"I wonder why she is suddenly so anxious to sell it?" Johnny mused. "A couple of hours ago she almost broke her neck to *buy* it. Strange!"

"So you're going up to see her?"

He nodded. Then, "But there's time to eat first."

Nancy murmured, "Thanks. I've got work to do." She preceded him into the outer office and sat down at her desk. Account books lay open on the desk. She picked up a pencil and pretended to ignore him. He noticed spots of color in her smooth cheeks.

Before he closed the door behind him to the outside hallway, he turned back and said, "Don't worry about the blonde."

THE apartment building was out in Avondale. It was snowing when Johnny rode the cab out from downtown, and in the suburbs a soft white blanket of white lay over the streets. The long, two-story building before which the cab driver stopped had a Christmasy appearance, light shining from its many windows onto the white-sheeted lawns.

A moment later Johnny followed a curved walk to the main entrance. Various wings of the long building led back from the lobby. A number beside Jeannette Evans' bell in the outer lobby indicated that the blonde lived in the left wing, in a rear first-floor apartment. Some people were just coming out, and they held the inside door open for him, so he went in without ringing the bell. He followed a hallway that led down the long wing of the building.

It was the last apartment door on the left. Directly ahead of him was the end of the building wing, and there was a single window that revealed a dim street lamp on the shadowy side street. The window was raised slightly, and cold air swept into the hallway.

He pushed the buzzer of the blonde's apartment and started to take off his gloves. Then he noticed that the door was not closed tightly. Some light slivered through from the living room beyond. He opened the door wider, stepped into a small entrance foyer and said brightly, "Hello! It's me."

No answer.

He thought that perhaps he'd made a mistake. Maybe he'd barged into the wrong apartment. Stepping outside the door, he bent down and looked at the name plate beneath the bell buzzer. Her name was there: JEANNETTE EVANS.

He pushed the buzzer again and went inside, pausing just inside the door.

The apartment was unusually quiet. She had said eight o'clock, and it was just a little after that now. Therefore she couldn't be sleeping. Then it occurred to him that she might be visiting in a nearby apartment. That explained the unlatched door.

He moved into the living room and sat down, still wearing his coat and hat.

Two gold-shaded end table lamps cast soft-hued light across the furniture and the wine-colored rug. The living room was small. The furnishings were the kind that came with those department store three-rooms-all-for-two-hundred-dollars sales.

There was no indication that Jeannette Evans was an art collector, or the type who would follow auction sales. He hadn't thought she was.

At the other side of the living room was a doorway that was open. He



## CHAPTER II

## A Girl Named Irma

could vaguely make out a small kitchenette beyond. It was in darkness. To the left, back across the foyer, was her bedroom. There was a small lamp glowing on a vanity, and thus he knew.

Several moments had passed now. Annoyance flickered in Johnny's eyes. He lit a cigarette. There was a restless, quick energy about him that upset him when he must be kept waiting. And he was more impatient every minute.

Standing up, he moved across the room, poked his head into the darkened kitchenette, came back through the living room again and went across the foyer into the bedroom.

Some of her street clothes were flung on the bed. There were silky underthings, too, and near these a lounging robe. Carefully spread out on a chair was a black evening gown. He remembered the newspaper ad saying that the the first show at the Club Mayfair, across the river, went on at eleven o'clock. She had probably been getting ready to leave.

Then—where the hell was she?

Though the bathroom door, nearby, was closed, he knew that she couldn't be taking a shower. He would have easily heard her. Nevertheless, he opened the door without trepidation. He wasn't going to be kept waiting around here all night. . . .

The light was still turned on in the bathroom.

Johnny stood very still in the open doorway, looking at Jeannette Evans. She must have been ready to take a shower, because there was a pair of feathery mules kicked to one side and she was nude.

But the shower had never been turned on. She was lying in a twisted heap in the tub.

Because he could see the bruise marks distinctly on her throat, he knew that she had been strangled to death.

JOHNNY had seen the results of murder many times in his career as a private investigator and, before that, as a city detective. Murder was usually messy and gruesome.

This, however, was not.

Jeannette Evans had a serene look about her lying there in the tub. The telltale marks on her slim white throat were the only things that bespoke sudden, unexpected death.

He bent down over the corpse, touched it gingerly. The body had cooled somewhat, but rigidity had not yet started to set in. He recalled that Jeannette had phoned him around six o'clock. It was only a little after eight now. She must have been murdered very shortly after she'd made that phone call.

By whom? And why?

He thought of the old desk again. First, she had been almost frantic to buy it. Then, within a few hours, almost equally as anxious to sell it. That puzzled him. Would the desk have anything to do with her murder?

He went out of the bathroom, remembering to put on his gloves again. He was very careful in moving through the small apartment, because he did not want to bang into anything and draw any tenants here—yet.

He closed the hall door, which he had left open slightly. Wearing gloves, there would be none of his fingerprints left around the place. He wondered where the blazes the desk was. He had not seen it around.

In the kitchen, he turned on the lights, looked around, then came back through the living room. No signs of the desk!

He returned to her bedroom. There



was the vanity, a dresser, a small night-table-and-telephone-stand combination next to her bed. He swung open the closet door nearby. The old desk was in there.

The closet was a large, deep one, and assorted gowns and dresses hung from a rod overhead. The perfume scent about the dresses had a very seductive odor. The desk had been hauled inside the closet and was practically concealed by the hanging dresses. He pushed them aside, sliding the hangers back. Johnny pulled a cord on a light bulb that hung inside the closet.

Someone had already been here ahead of him. Contents of the desk were spilled on the closet floor. The searcher, from the looks of things, must have been in somewhat of a hurry.

Max must have been correct about the contents of the desk. Johnny picked up bits of fine old lace, that had fallen from a faded paper packet. Photographs were scattered about. He recognized views taken of the old Cincinnati water front, of boats on the river, and other old landmarks. He found a tiny pair of baby's boots, tied with pink ribbon. Oddly, a remark his mother used to make years ago flashed through his mind. Pink was for baby girls—blue was for boys!

But in all the assorted junk that was in that desk, or strewn around nearby, he found absolutely nothing that might identify the *owner* of the desk.

**J**OHNNY had been moving with the quick, efficient actions that were so characteristic of him. There was a deep frown between his eyes, as there frequently was when he was keyed up. A dead woman lay out there in the bathtub, and any moment someone might come here to visit Jeannette

Evans. Perhaps someone who even had a key. He was in somewhat of a ticklish situation.

He really should notify the police. Before doing this, however, he left the closet and the desk, and made a quick search of the bedroom. He pulled out dresser drawers, found nothing but wearing apparel and various feminine items. He wished he had more time, because he wanted to learn more about Jeannette Evans or her acquaintances.

Johnny had switched on the table lamp beside the bed, had looked through the clothing spread out there to make certain there were no letters that might tell him something. What he wanted most was her purse. Every woman carried all her intimate secrets in her pocketbook.

Strangely, it was missing. The murderer, for all his apparent carelessness in dumping things out of the desk, had also been a thorough person. Johnny suspected that he must have taken the purse.

Johnny was just ready to leave the room when his prodding gaze went back to the night table again. He was looking at the telephone located there and remembering how Jeannette Evans had called him.

Beside the telephone was a little square box containing squares of loose scratch paper. The table light struck the paper at such an angle that Johnny noted the impressions made on the topmost sheet of clean scratch paper—impressions made by someone writing on the sheet that had been *above* this one.

Tilting the box, getting the light just right upon it, he made out his own name, address and telephone number as pencil indentations in the clean sheet. Someone—Jeannette, naturally—had written his name there. Someone *else* had removed the topmost sheet of pa-



per on which Johnny's name and address had been written!

This did not give him a very reassuring feeling. If the murderer now held that paper, then the murderer knew that Jeannette Evans had phoned him. And the murderer would wonder just what the girl had *told* Johnny. Not a happy thought, to say the least. That person might get the mistaken idea that Johnny knew too much!

Removing several of the topmost sheets of paper, just to make certain that the impression of his name would not be there for the police to see, Johnny quickly turned off the lights and left the room.

**A** MOMENT later he was out of the apartment, standing in the hallway. He decided to leave the apartment door slightly on the latch, as he had found it. This would facilitate entry of the police. He planned to call them, but not from here.

Johnny was just ready to start down the hallway when he heard someone approaching along the other right angle that led into this one. It was the quick, light steps of a woman. And it occurred to him that a woman's natural curiosity would cause her to remember him—later—just in case the police started canvassing the tenants who lived here.

So Johnny hurried in the opposite direction, moving to the open window he had noted open on his arrival here. It was only a half dozen yards away. Raising the window wide, he swung his legs over the sill. The window ledge was only a few feet above the snow-covered ground, since this was a ground floor of the building.

Reaching behind him, Johnny pulled the window down again. Sitting there a moment in a twisted position, he peered back through the glass. Curtains inside the window shielded him.

He saw a woman enter an apartment up the hall from Jeannette's. She didn't glance in his direction, therefore she had not seen nor heard him. Satisfied he dropped down to the ground.

The rear of the long apartment building backed on lots near a side street. There were only a few private homes on the street. There was only a single car parked near the curb. No one was moving along the sidewalks.

Johnny headed for the street, reached it unnoticed, turned left and walked back toward Reading Road. Just a few blocks away was a shopping center. Five minutes later he entered a drug store and dialled police headquarters.

Briefly, he informed the desk sergeant that it might pay the police to immediately visit Jeannette Evans' apartment. He stated that it was quite urgent. Before the desk man could ask further questions, Johnny hung up. He started out of the store before headquarters could trace the call and investigate.

He went outside, crossed the street, and waited for a cab that would be headed back toward downtown Cincinnati. He turned up his coat collar. It was still snowing, and cold.

**S**EVERAL cabs rolled by, all filled. Impatiently Johnny stomped his feet and mentally cursed the cold and the snow and especially people who committed murder on a night such as this. Or rather—he reprimanded himself for getting involved in the thing. And all on account of an old desk. Worse yet, he knew less now than before the murder!

It was almost nine-thirty by the time he reached his downtown office building. Snow trucks were out now, moving like big tanks through the streets. A street-car sweeper came up Vine and



sent snow cascading toward the curb.

Two moments later, he found Nancy still at work in the office. She jumped up, took his coat, shook snow from it before putting it on a hanger. Gone was her coolness of an hour or so ago. She acted as though he were a long-lost friend returning to the old fire-side. She chattered brightly as she followed him into the inner office.

"Guess what?" Nancy said. "Beth called up while you were out. She's out at the Colony for a weekend of sports. You remember Beth, Johnny."

Johnny said sure he remembered Beth, and bent down to peer inside the mahogany liquor cabinet. He saw that he was down to his last two bottles of Kentucky bourbon, and wondered how he was going to get any more.

Nancy shook her head when he nodded toward one of the two jigger glasses he had placed on his desk. He had a quick one, filled the small glass again, placed it in front of him as he sat down at the desk.

He said, "So you heard from Beth?" Beth was her married sister. He remembered that she was married to wealthy Dave Sherman. Dave had access to a fortune that had been accumulated in a leading Cincinnati pump business over the years. He had met Beth one night at a party where she and a clique of her married friends had asked Nancy and himself.

"Yes," Nancy was saying eagerly. "And, Johnny, she has something very important for you!"

He frowned, looking up at his slim, attractive assistant. "Important?"

Nancy jerked her head. "She wants you out to the Colony. This weekend. And she says Dave says you can name your own price for the job!"

Johnny decided he'd better delay taking the second drink until he got this straightened out. "Job?" he asked,

puzzled.

A cloud swept over Nancy's face. "Beth's in trouble, Johnny! Both she and Dave want you to handle the case. It's blackmail! Someone is trying to blackmail Beth, and they don't know who it is, and if the person isn't located and exposed it might lead to—"

"Hold it," said Johnny. "One thing at a time. First, why should anyone want to blackmail Beth?" He vaguely recalled that Nancy's sister was a pretty swell sort of person, leading a decent life, married to a substantial citizen.

Nancy said quickly, "Somehow, *some* one has twisted around the facts concerning a vacation trip Beth took to Colorado several summers ago. Dave wasn't along at the time, and during part of her stay at a dude ranch out there, she met a friend she had once gone with while in college. This blackmailer has given it a sordid twist, and threatens to make the whole thing public unless Dave and Beth pay off—plenty!"

Johnny said with feeling, "Beth isn't that kind of girl—"

"Of course not," agreed Nancy. "But Dave doesn't want the notoriety. You know how people are. And apparently this blackmailer has contacts with some of those filthy scandal sheets that are sold here in Cincinnati. Now, do you see?"

"So I'm to nab the unknown blackmailer?" said Johnny.

"Yes. And believe me, Dave's payment will be handsome, Johnny. He can well afford it—and *we* can use the money." Nancy said this last with emphasis. "They both feel that it is someone who is visiting out there at the Colony now. Outside of Beth and Dave, none of them are people you have ever met, as far as I know. You'll simply pose as one of the guests, and keep your eyes open. You have, an



intuition for spotting phonies, Johnny. Dave feels that you'll be able to pick out this vile person."

Johnny said, "Thanks, kitten," and picked up his second drink. He smelled its rich bouquet. It was a shame the stores were running out of this stuff. He guessed it was going to be a pretty tough winter.

"Then—you will?" Nancy asked brightly, leaning her slim hands on the desk, her face expectant.

Johnny leaned back in his chair, rubbed the back of his neck. His gray eyes were suddenly bleak and frowning.

"Except for one thing," he said. "Let me think it over a bit, pet. I can run out there to the Colony tomorrow if I decide. Right now, though, there's something else.

As he talked, he saw that cool regard creep back into Nancy's eyes. She said sharply, "That blonde again!"

He nodded. "Yes," he agreed. "She's dead."

NANCY'S eyes held steadily on his face. Then she sat down. He told her briefly what he had found at Jeannette Evans' apartment. He finished with:

"The hell of it is, the person who strangled her now has my name and address." He explained about the telephone note pad. "Either that person might try to involve me—or might figure I know something and attempt to do me in." Johnny's lips thinned across his white teeth. "Pleasant thought, what?"

"Johnny!" Nancy gasped, unconsciously reaching out and grasping his arm.

Johnny's grin was reckless. "So you see, kitten? Either I've got to get busy, or else I might be caught right behind the eight ball."

"Or end up in a coffin!" Nancy said

tensely. "Johnny, haven't you any idea—"

"Who it is?" He shook his head grimly. "Not the slightest!"

He stood up, moved around the room, came back to the big desk and lit a cigarette. The two drinks had taken some of the cold out of his veins—cold not entirely caused by the weather. He was thinking of that girl, lying there in the tub, life driven out of her.

Nancy was watching him. "What are you going to do?" she wanted to know.

He sat down again and reached for the phone. "I've got an idea how we can start," he told Nancy.

A moment later he had the *Inquirer* on the line. He said, "Is Steve Eggers around?"

"Just a minute," someone told him.

Steve was a reporter for the newspaper. Nancy's eyebrows raised slightly when she heard Johnny state the name.

She said quickly, "Steve drinks a lot, Johnny. He's always running around with some woman. I don't see why you should—"

"That's just the point, pet. He also likes to roll the dice at some of those big night clubs across the river. He gets around and meets people—the kind of people who are just getting wound up for the night when folks like you and I are in bed." He grinned. "Pay no attention to that last. I got my phrases mixed up."

Nancy's cheeks colored slightly.

On the phone, Johnny was being told, "Steve isn't here right now, but you might find him at the Cricket."

Johnny murmured, "Thanks," hung up, then dialled the number of the popular cocktail bar. Whenever you wanted to locate anyone of note in the newspaper profession, you called



the famous Vine Street bar.

Steve was there, and was called to the phone.

Johnny identified himself, then asked, "Busy, kid?"

"The town's a morgue," Steve Eggers said sadly over the wire. "There's a raging blizzard outside and I'm snow-bound here. Pity me!"

Johnny laughed. "That's *one* excuse for not leaving a bar. But look, kid. How's about taking a run across the river? This is on me. Nancy's coming along, too. Know anyone at the Club Mayfair?"

"Know them all!" said Steve. Nancy's coming, huh? Say, that's swell. Sure thing!"

"Well pick you up in fifteen minutes, right there where you are," finished Johnny, and he hung up.

Nancy asked, "Why me? I'm not even dressed for—"

Johnny told her, "Honey, you'd look gorgeous in rags. Besides, I had to bribe the guy. He likes you, you know."

Nancy made a wry face. "He's probably been drinking. The things I have to do in this business!"

Johnny started to get his coat. "Remember," he reminded Nancy, "this is for *me*. I've got to get a lead to this thing."

Nancy's face was again worried. She came up close to him. "Johnny, I'm afraid. This really *is* serious. Do be careful!"

There was the nearness of her, and her voice. . . . It was in moments like these, which happened occasionally, when he wondered why he didn't chuck the private agency business and ask Nancy to marry him. He really loved her, in his fashion—but he loved excitement and danger more.

And more than once he had come close to stopping a slug in this game.

You couldn't ask a woman to marry you and settle down and have kids when you led a life like that.

Then the mood of the moment had passed and he was pushing her toward her office. "Come, baby," he urged. "Get your coat. Don't worry about me. Pappy leads a charmed life."

TRAFFIC crawled slowly over the great old Suspension Bridge to Kentucky. It was still snowing, and cold enough that the snow was packing down hard. Chains went *clank-clank-clank* against fenders.

Steve Eggers sat between the girl and Johnny in the back seat of the cab. He had Nancy's arm tucked through his own and was talking.

"Say!" he said cheerfully. "Long time no see you people. We should do this more often. The Club Mayfair, huh? We'll have fun!"

You couldn't help liking the guy, Johnny thought. Steve was in his forties, but he had the energy of a college student. Quite bald, he had round, boyish features and twinkling blue eyes. He looked pudgy, but he was solid and hard. He drank too much, as Nancy had commented.

Johnny had delayed telling the reporter the real purpose of their trip across the river. Now he started getting around to it.

"Kid," he said, "you said you're fairly well acquainted at the Mayfair?"

"Sure thing! I *ought* to be. I lost enough folding money there last winter to pay half their taxes!"

"Know many of the entertainers? I mean—the regulars they keep there throughout the season?"

A mischievous grin touched Steve's features. "You mean—girls? Sure! There's a cute little doll named Irma I've been out with from time to time. She sure is—"



"Know one named Jeannette?" Johnny asked.

"Yeah, she's a singer." Steve shook his head sadly. "She's not my type, though."

Nancy caught the glance that Johnny gave her above the reporter's head. "Why not?" she asked. "I thought you loved them all, Steve?"

The reporter patted her hand fondly. "Most of the time I do, Nancy. But not that one. She's too sharp, if you ask me. The kind who is always figuring angles. You know—money in the bank and scheming as to how she's gonna add more to it."

"I see," mused Johnny.

Steve looked at him sharply. "Okay," he remarked. "I should have known. Jonathan Jones doesn't go trekking around the countryside on a night like this just for his health. My nose for news tells me you're on the trail of something. What?"

"She was murdered tonight," said Johnny.

The reporter stared at him. "No!" he exclaimed.

But his surprise only lasted an instant. For then he was saying worriedly, "Hell, let's get back to Cincy. There's still time to make the morning editions—"

"You can call from the club," Johnny said. "They can put a rewrite man on the story. Besides, there isn't any story—yet."

Johnny told him everything that had happened, finished with, "That's why I figure our only lead will start at the Club Mayfair. We've got to talk to someone who really knew Jeannette—a girlfriend, perhaps—and then learn what men Jeannette ran around with. How about this one you call Irma?"

"Well," said Steve Eggers thoughtfully, "I guess Irma knew her as well as anyone. But as I said, that Jean-

nette was cute. She wasn't telling anybody *anything*. And she was out for what she could get. I don't know whether Irma can help us or not."

Nancy put in, "Johnny's in a spot, Steve." She told about the notation on the telephone scratch pad, and of how Johnny might either be implicated in the murder or else put on the killer's list."

Steve murmured, "Geel!"

"So you see," pointed out Johnny, "we've got a job to do. That's why I needed your help, kid."

Steve nodded thoughtfully. Then he asked, "Think news of the murder has been broadcast yet?"

"I doubt it," said Johnny. "There hasn't been time. Right about now the police are up there tearing the place apart."

"Then we'd better not say anything about it at the club," suggested the reporter. "Otherwise, every one in the damn' place will clam up and we won't learn a thing."

Johnny said, "I was going to suggest the same thing. We're just doing a little slumming, and perhaps you can get this Irma to join the party, and we'll see what we can find out."

The cab was moving through the narrow streets of Covington now. Here and there they were held up by a snow plow clearing the streets. So far, the roads were being kept open. But there was no sign of the storm letting up. Johnny was glad that the popular club was within the city limits, and not located out in the Kentucky hills, as some of them were over here.

MOMENTS later they pulled up in the driveway before the big white building. Neon signs glowed colorfully against the surrounding background of white. As the three of them ducked their heads against the storm and ran



up the wide front steps of the place, they could hear the beat of dance music coming from within. Entering the long, richly decorated lobby, there was the sound of bright laughter and voices. As usual, the place was crowded; and tonight the snowstorm had given the Mayfair almost a holiday spirit.

Steve Eggers ducked into one of the lobby phone booths and called his newspaper. He was back in a moment, and none would have ever guessed the impact of the murder story he had just relayed to his office. He was grinning now, greeting every other person. He took Nancy and Johnny each by an arm and steered them toward the cocktail lounge, to the right of the main foyer.

The place was jammed with people. Everyone was talking at once, and there were soft, indirect lights, reflected by the artistic arrangement of thin-stemmed glasses stacked against mirrors on the long backbar.

They squeezed into a small, circular leather booth in a corner of the room, and ordered a round of drinks. Steve told them, "Irma's got a dance routine to run through in the main dining room. Soon as she's through, I'll get her."

A sign at the rear of the lounge read: "GAME ROOMS." Well-dressed men and women moved in and out of the doorway to the gambling rooms.

The warmth of the room brought back the glow which Steve Eggers had achieved when Nancy and Johnny had picked him up across the river. The cold ride through the night had sobered the reporter somewhat, but now he was feeling splendid again. He held Nancy's slim hand and said, "You're lovely. You're such a lovely girl."

Nancy said, "Perhaps you shouldn't drink any more, Steve. Remember, be careful what you say here tonight."

Her eyes, worried, met Johnny's. "His life is in danger, you know."

Steve grinned. "With you along, baby, I'd welcome *any* kind of danger." He squeezed her hand. "Don't worry about me."

The waiter passed their table. "Three more of the same, Joe!" Steve called to the man.

Johnny said, "Never worry about Steve, honey. He sobers up on Martinis."

They were on the fourth round when the stocky-looking reporter brought the girl named Irma to their table.

Johnny couldn't help showing a certain amount of admiration as they were introduced. Irma was cute. She was cute and she was redheaded, with a small, shapely figure and the straight shoulders of a dancer. She had changed now from her dancing costume, but the sleek-fitting dress, Johnny thought, did intriguing things to her figure.

Steve ordered the girl a drink. At the same time, he felt that the occasion called for another round for themselves. His round face looked red and warm, and there was a fine, faint layer of perspiration on his forehead.

He put his arm around Irma's shoulders and said to Nancy, "Isn't she lovely?"

Nancy smiled. The routine seemed to be the same. She was worried that Steve Eggers was getting too drunk and was going to say something about the murder, and Johnny's connection with it.

Irma giggled, "He says the craziest things."

Johnny said, "Sure, you're lovely. You're lovely and you're cute."

They all had another drink.

A MAN—a good looking man, paused beside their table and



said, "Nancy!" And then, "How about a dance?"

Johnny vaguely remembered him as one of the leading musicians from the Cincinnati Symphony. Nancy's acquaintances were few, but of the right sort. He and Steve stood up, and were introduced. Then the fellow walked off with Johnny's tall, lovely assistant. Steve knocked over his drink as he sat down again.

This, the reporter figured, called for another round.

Irma giggled. "Steve, you'll get drunk."

Steve asked, "How's that friend of yours—what's her name—Jeannette?"

Johnny knew that the reporter's shrewd brain was sharper than ever. He admired the smooth way in which Steve had led up to the subject.

Irma said, "I thought you came to see *me* tonight?"

Steve looked shocked. "I did honey—I did! I was just asking about her, is all. I thought you and Jeannette were good friends?"

"She isn't here tonight," said the dancer.

Steve sipped at his drink and looked vague. "You mean, she was fired?"

"Oh, no! She stayed out." Suddenly, her hand was on the reporter's arm. "And, Steve—I'm worried!"

"About what?"

"Her!"

"Who?"

"Jeannette, of course. Weren't you just asking me—"

"Oh," said Steve, pretending to pick up the thought again. "The hell with her. I came to see you. You're cute."

"I really *am* worried about her, Steve," the girl continued. "Remember that man we saw waiting outside in the car the other night—the one I pointed out to you?"

The reporter pretended to have some

difficulty remembering. "Who?" he asked.

"Oh, you know! We were sitting out there a moment in a car, and then this man drove into the parking area and sent the attendant in to get Jeannette. He *always* does that. He was tall and dark, remember?"

"I'm not sure," said Steve.

"Well," the girl raced on, "him. Just last night Jeannette was telling me that if he asked for her tonight, I was to say that she wasn't here."

"Who?" prodded the reporter.

"That *man*! Jeannette never did say who he was. He always waited outside, like I say. And, believe me, those kind aren't to be trusted. Any man that doesn't want to be *seen* with a girl—"

"You said it, honey," Steve said with affection, patting her hand again. Then, "You don't know who he was?"

"I just told you that!" said Irma with some impatience. "And I'm worried about Jeannette—her not being here tonight and all, after what she told me last night about not wanting to see him if he asked for her tonight—"

Johnny interrupted, "How about another drink?" He thought Irma might begin to suspect something if they continued the questioning further.

Irma was talking to Johnny when the reporter called the waiter. He saw Steve scribble something on a piece of paper, hand it to the waiter before the man started back to the service bar. Irma was busy talking to Johnny. He thought perhaps he'd like to dance with her. She had a very lovely figure. He was feeling the drinks somewhat now.

The waiter returned with the drinks and said, "Mr. Eggers?"

The reporter looked up.

"Your newspaper just phoned sir. They said it was quite important. An uncle of yours has just been taken to



the hospital—”

Steve bounced out of his seat. “Uncle Ben!” He looked stricken and he spoke to Irma, “Gosh, baby, I’m sorry about this. I’ll have to leave at once.” And to Johnny, “You can drive me right back, can’t you, fellow?”

“Of course,” said Johnny. He paid the check and tipped the waiter.

The girl was saying almost tearfully, “And I thought you were going to stay until I finished my last show—”

Steve put his arm around her. “Gosh, I’m sorry as hell, kid. But maybe we can get back here before closing. We’ll try.”

Steve gave the private investigator a quick nod above the girl’s head and they started out. In the lobby they met Nancy just returning from the dance floor with her acquaintance.

Johnny made quick apologies, and they left. They found a cab driver dozing behind the wheel of his hack, his head buried down in his collar. The heater was turned on in the cab and the man had lowered the window beside him a little.

It was still snowing.

Nancy asked in surprise, “Why the sudden exodus?”

Johnny said, “And having the waiter pull that old gag about Uncle Ben! What’s up, Steve?”

As the cab bumped over snow ruts onto the main road, Steve explained, “I think I picked up a lead from Irma’s remark about that guy. Anyway, we’ll soon know!”

“Where are we going?” asked Nancy.

“To the morgue,” said Steve.

### CHAPTER III

#### The Man in the Photograph

THE “morgue” turned out to be the newspaper and photograph file

room of Steve’s newspaper. By the time the two men and the girl arrived there they were chilled from the ride back from Kentucky. Steve magically produced a full bottle of bourbon and set it beside them on a table littered with old newspapers. He went over to the water cooler and obtained three paper cups.

“This might take a little time,” he told them.

Nancy asked, “Just what is it you expect to find, Steve?”

The reporter pointed to a large bundle of old photographs he had brought from one of the files. He had already told Nancy about Irma’s description of the man they had both seen one night, waiting in a car at the Club Mayfair.

“I remember him, too,” he said. “It especially stuck in my mind because of one of these old photographs.” He pointed to the table. In doing this, he was reminded that he needed a drink. He started filling the paper cups.

“Include me out,” said Nancy. Then she asked, “What about the photographs?”

“About a week ago,” Steve went on, “we ran a feature article about one of the local department stores. It was an anniversary thing, and so we had to dig up some old photographs. Well, in going through them, I happened to come across an old family group photograph taken some years ago. In it was a guy who was the exact likeness of this man Irma saw that night outside the club. In the picture he was younger, of course, but just the same he looked like him. I had forgotten all about it until she brought it to my mind again tonight.”

Johnny sat with a paper cup in his hand. He had been thinking. Within a few hours the police would dig up something on Jeannette Evans. Sooner



or later they'd get around to questioning the janitor, and perhaps the janitor would remember the desk being delivered, and who had brought it. As soon as the police learned the name of the auction rooms, they would also hear that he—Jonathan Jones—had been mighty interested in locating one Jeanette Evans. Then—bingo!

Of course he could go to the police now and tell them everything he knew. And in the meantime there'd be a lot of questioning—they might even hold him on suspicion for several hours—and while this was going on the murderer would still be free.

Steve's remembrance of the stranger who had been seeing Jeannette recently was the first hot lead. Johnny wanted to track it down as fast as he could—to save his own skin.

THE reporter had been methodically searching through the old file photographs. From time to time he had another drink. He came across a photograph, leaned back, stared at it, and said, "Ah!"

Nancy jumped up. Johnny leaned across the desk tensely. "Find it?" he wanted to know.

Steve said, "Remember Schmidt's Place up Vine Street years ago?" He held up the photograph of the old beer hall. "Ah, there was the place. Many's the time—"

Nancy said sharply, "Steve! We'll be here all night!"

He put down the picture with a sigh and started through a new pile.

Nancy's remark reminded Johnny that it was getting late. He said, "Come on, sweetheart. I'll get you a cab. This might take all night. You're going home and get to bed."

They left Steve Eggers half buried in photographs and with a drink in his hand. Going down in the building ele-

vator, Nancy touched Johnny's arm and looked at him warmly.

"You haven't forgotten tomorrow? I'll be ready early—"

"Tomorrow?"

"We're going out to see Beth, remember? I *promised* her, Johnny!"

He had hoped she had forgotten about it. He should have known better. She'd drag him out there now come hell or high water. One idea came to him.

"Look, hon, it'll be wicked driving. Besides, I'm about out of gas coupons, and that's a twenty-mile trip each way—"

They had reached the sidewalk.

"See?" exclaimed Nancy. "The snow has stopped. And I've got *plenty* of gas, Johnny. I told Beth you'd *surely* help her. Please!"

Her arm was tucked through his. It was cold and clear now, and their shoes made hard crunching sounds in the packed-down snow of the sidewalks. It was nice being with her.

"All right," he said. "What time in the morning?"

"We ought to get started by ten o'clock."

They had walked to the corner of Sixth and Vine, where there was a cab stand. As he helped her into a waiting taxicab, Nancy said, "Remember, we'll be there for the weekend. Bring some things."

"All right," he said. He could tell her later, after they arrived at the Colony, that he had no intention of spending a weekend in the country in weather like this.

"And Johnny?" Nancy said, leaning toward him as he stood in the open doorway of the hack.

"Yeah?"

"One thing Beth suggested. No one there will know you're a private investigator. They'll be all married couples,



and they'll think we're the same as they, and never suspect a—"

He suddenly stared at her. "You mean, we're supposed to pretend we're married?"

Nancy smiled. "Yes—pretend."

For an instant, it came as a shock. Then, just as he closed the door of the cab, it struck him as very humorous. He stood on the curb and gave Nancy a broad grin as the cab rolled off into the night.

MORNING papers were on sale when he re-entered the lobby of the newspaper building. Splashed across the top of the first page was the black headline: "NIGHT CLUB BEAUTY FOUND SLAIN."

Johnny quickly scanned the article as he rode up in the elevator. Outside of the information which he had given Steve, and which the reporter had relayed to a rewrite man, there was little else. The police, apparently, were groping around. It occurred to him that as soon as they saw the morning newspaper, with the headlines, they'd want to know how Steve's paper had scooped the city. They'd investigate.

He hoped Steve, by now, had located the photograph.

The reporter was still seated at the table when Johnny came back into the room. He jumped up, holding something in his hand, as Johnny entered. Also, he almost fell flat on his face. He was very drunk indeed.

"Got it!" the reporter said thickly. He waved the old photograph before Johnny's face.

Johnny took the picture. It was a group photograph of several people—women and men—at what must have been a picnic or lawn party.

"That's him!" said Steve, jabbing a finger at the photo. He had a little

difficulty pointing his finger at the right person.

Finally he picked out a tall, well-built man with thick black hair and rather handsome features. It was a face that you would not readily forget. The man, at the time the photo was taken, was perhaps in his thirties. Johnny did not recall ever having seen him.

"Swell!" he said. "Know him, Steve?"

"Sure I know him," the reporter said in a too-loud voice. "I've seen that guy before!"

"Who is he?"

Steve stared at the picture, and shook his head slowly and sadly. "I can't remember," he said vaguely.

Johnny groaned. Then he tried running through the alphabet, in the hope that this would suggest a name. But Steve did not spark. He was in a complete fuddle. Also, he was getting too drunk to remember anything at all.

Johnny took the reporter home in a cab. On the way, Steve fell into a noisy slumber. Johnny took a note pad from his pocket, wrote a note and tucked it into Steve's vest pocket. The note read:

*Will call for you first thing this morning. Try to remember that guy's name!*

It was with some difficulty that he got the reporter home and to bed. Then Johnny rode the cab to his own apartment in Clifton. He half expected to see a police car out front. But the street was deserted of cars.

Later, just before retiring, he sat on the edge of the bed and stared at the photograph Steve had turned over to him. Dammit, why couldn't the reporter remember the tall, dark man's name? His only hope now was that Steve would recall it in the morning.



Sitting there, Johnny's gaze traveled across the room to the open bathroom doorway. The white, square side of the bathtub gleamed in the light angling in from his bedroom.

He looked at the tub and thought of Jeanette Evans, lying dead in her own bathroom. He thought it was a hell of a way to die. He snapped off the light and couldn't see the suggestive tub anymore. He climbed into bed and two moments later was asleep.

THE morning was clear and sharp.

During the night the State highway running north from the Queen City had been fairly well cleared of snow. Plows had formed a two-foot wall on either side of the highway, and in between, the roadway was hard-packed and smooth.

Nancy looked comfortable and warm, bundled in a fur coat. Her face was bright and pretty from the cold that seeped into the coupe.

Johnny drove. He smoked a cigarette, flicking the ashes through the partially rolled-down window on his side of the car.

He was saying, "And so that's all that happened, kitten. Steve got too drunk to be further helpful. I'd planned to talk to him again this morning."

"Poor Steve!" Nancy said.

"Yes, when I called, his landlady said that the police had been there and had dragged him down to headquarters for questioning. And him with a hang-over."

Nancy bit her lip. "Johnny, do you think he'll tell the police he got that newspaper scoop from *you*?"

"No—o," Johnny said slowly. "Steve'll be just sore enough with the cops not to tell them a thing. And if I know that guy, he'll be released in a few hours. They've nothing to hold

him on."

Nancy took his cigarette and from it lit one of her own. She tucked her slim legs up beneath her on the wide seat, and sat half facing him. "You said you left a note in his vest pocket last night?"

He nodded. "Naturally the police found it. It's a good thing I didn't sign my name to the thing. Even while I was talking to the landlady a cop cut in and wanted to know who was talking. So I hung up!"

"What about the landlady?"

"She didn't know who I was." He grinned. "So I still have a few more hours of freedom. Perhaps it wasn't a bad idea after all, coming out here."

They drove in silence for several minutes. A small country town dropped behind them. Tires of the heavy coupe made sharp cutting sounds in the snow of the roadway.

Then Nancy was pointing at a side road still some distance ahead. "There's the turnoff. The Colony is about a quarter of a mile in from the main road."

The side road curved off from the main highway, and was slightly up-grade. Johnny sent the big coupe into the climb at a fairly good clip. The rear end slewed around, the tires then took hold and the car shot ahead.

Nancy gave a little squeal.

"I'm a wonderful driver," he assured her matter-of-factly.

They climbed the slight grade. There were double ruts where other cars had preceded them. They reached the top of a flat ridge, traveled several hundred yards, and then the white picket fence came into view. Just ahead, on their left, was a group of small bungalows that overlooked a long, sloping valley beyond.

Beyond the smaller houses was the big stone main house. Still beyond



was a huge modern barn, poultry houses and a stable.

This was the Colony. Johnny had often heard Nancy mention it. Nancy had told him that her sister Beth Sherman, and a small coterie of intimate friends, spent their summers out here and many of the winter weekends.

AS THEY swung into the cleared drive, two huge great Danes came loping across the yard to meet them. The dogs put their forefeet up on the running board and peered in the windows as Johnny brought the coupe to a stop, parked near the white fence of the yard.

"My God!" he said, staring at the huge heads of the animals just outside the car.

Nancy laughed merrily.

"They're friendly dogs, really. Look!" She stepped out of the car and the dogs rubbed their big noses against her slim, straight figure.

Johnny followed his assistant out of the car and said uneasily, "I hope they don't know there's a meat shortage!"

The great Danes, like pleased children, followed them around the car as Johnny opened the trunk compartment and hauled out his and Nancy's bags. The animals stuck their big heads inside the compartment and made assorted loud sniffing sounds.

As Johnny started toward the house, following a narrow pathway that had been dug through the six-inch-deep snow, behind him, Nancy said warningly, "Remember, now, you're my husband. Try to act like one!"

"How about a kiss, baby?"

"Quiet!" Nancy hushed him.

Some distance ahead, at the end of the path, the door to the side porch had opened. A woman's figure was waiting there for them, and her greet-

ing came clearly across the frosty air.

"Hel-lo!"

Johnny tried to wave his hand, and succeeded in almost dropping one of the handbags.

Behind him, Nancy said, "Look, Johnny!"

He turned, then followed the direction of her pointing hand. Far off, on another hillside, several figures on skis were skimming down a slope. It was like a picture, with the background of endless white.

"That's some of the crowd," Nancy said.

On the porch, they stomped snow from their feet, then entered the warmth of a room that appeared to be a study. There was a bright log fire crackling in a huge fireplace.

The woman who held the door for them was dark and trim, and somewhat attractive.

Nancy said, "Johnny, you remember my sister Beth, don't you?"

He said, "Of course!" and shook hands.

After a quick greeting with her sister, Beth Sherman's dark eyes clouded. You could see now that something was bothering her greatly. To Johnny, she said, "Oh, I'm so glad you came. I *do* need your help. Like I told Nancy over the phone—"

Footsteps sounded from an adjoining room. A short, gray-haired man appeared in the doorway. He had sharp eyes behind fairly heavy glasses, and about him there was an air of energy and health. Yet Johnny guessed that he must be close to sixty.

Beth's face had quickly shifted back to its bright smile. "Oh, doctor," she called across the room. "Come here and meet my sister Nancy and her husband."

Johnny learned that he was a Doctor Sam Clark, retired from active practice.



Beth pointed through a window of the study, indicating one of the nearby cottages of the grove. "Sam owns that one," she told them.

They were talking, and Johnny was wondering if he were acting like a husband should act when he is with his wife. To cover some of his self-consciousness, he removed his coat and started to drop it on a long, comfortable divan that was near the fireplace.

"Oh, I forgot!" Beth Sherman exclaimed. "You two dear children must be tired after the ride. And cold! I'll show you to your room upstairs."

Johnny picked up his coat again, and the handbags, and he was aware of the slight color that had crept into Nancy's cheeks. Following her, he remarked casually, "We've looked forward to this, haven't we, dear?"

"You bet!" said Nancy, but her voice was a trifle high-pitched.

Doctor Sam Clark accompanied them to the white-railed staircase. He said to Johnny, "I'll fix something that will warm your bones. It'll be ready when you and your wife come down."

"Swell!" said Johnny, following the two women up the stairs. He liked the doctor. He seemed like a real sort of person. Johnny wondered if he were married.

THE bedroom faced on the hillside that overlooked the white-coated valley. Sunlight came through the chintz curtains and gave the room a cheerful, welcome brightness. The large room was done in blue and white.

There was only a single bed in the room. Johnny looked at the bed, and then at Nancy's color-filled face, and grinned broadly. He was getting a kick out of this, since it had been Nancy's idea to come here in the first place.

Her sister, dark-eyed Beth, had closed the hall doorway behind the three

of them. Instantly Nancy looked at Johnny and said with emphasis, "You're not going to *sleep* in here!"

Johnny shrugged. "Where else? The barn? I suppose the great Danes and I can cuddle up real cozy-like?"

Beth explained, "Johnny can use the big divan in the study, downstairs, after everyone else retires."

Nancy looked relieved.

Again Beth Sherman's eyes held that look of worry. Quietly, she told them swiftly, "The others will be back in a little bit." Her eyes shifted to Johnny's a moment. "Nancy has probably told you all I told *her* over the phone. There's little else. I might not get another chance to talk to you privately like this. All I can say is that I think it is *someone* of our group. It might even be one of the women—though I can't conceive *who*."

Johnny said quietly, "Nancy tells me it's blackmail."

Beth Sherman nodded. "And *ugly*. They want fifty thousand dollars. I received the threat through the mail."

"How are you supposed to pay the money?" asked Johnny.

"The note said that I would receive a telephone call sometime this weekend. Arrangements will be made then."

She moved toward the door, put her hand on the knob. Johnny noticed that her hand was trembling slightly. "Doctor Clark will think it's funny I'm staying up here. I'll try to talk to you again later. Remember, no one except Dave and I know that you are a private detective, Johnny. Please try to help me. Find out who it is!"

Johnny nodded soberly. "I'll do my best," he assured the woman. He liked her. There was a clean-cut look about her. He thought it was a damn shame someone was trying to blackmail such a person.

Beth Sherman went out and closed



the door behind her.

"Well, darling," Johnny said brightly, "I hope you didn't forget my pajamas."

NANCY scooped up a hairbrush off the dresser and scaled it across the room at him. He ducked just in time. The brush landed on the bed and slid to the floor.

Nancy said, "Be serious, Johnny! Beth's in trouble. You act like this was a holiday!"

He wondered if she knew how serious he really felt. He walked over to one of the windows, staring out, thinking of the case back in Cincinnati, and how was it going to end up. By now the police were probably combing the city looking for him. Leaving town like this wasn't going to help any, either.

He said, not turning around, "I feel like a guy with a brief stay of execution. Wait'll we get back to town!"

"Johnny!" gasped Nancy, coming over to him, touching his arm with feeling. "Maybe I shouldn't have brought you out here. Maybe you should have gone to the police and told them exactly what *did* happen!"

Coming toward the house were the people they had seen skiing on the hillside a little while ago. Now they carried the skis balanced across their shoulders, and they were laughing and talking. You could faintly hear their voices even through the storm sash that covered the windows. Johnny saw two women and three men plodding toward the house, their heavy shoes crunching through the snow.

He said to Nancy, "Well, we might as well go downstairs and drink to the condemned. Doctor Clark said he was going to concoct something—"

Johnny broke off, still looking out the window. The five skiers, walking in single file, were nearer to the house now.

Two of the men had removed their fur caps and were mopping at their brows after the stiff walk up the hill.

"What are you staring at?" demanded Nancy, curious.

"I always said that, drunk or sober, Steve Eggers was the shrewdest news-hawk in the business. That guy's got a memory!"

"I don't see what—" Nancy started to say. Then she stopped saying that and let her eyes freeze on the object of Johnny's stare.

It was one of the two men who had removed his cap. He was a big fellow, solid-built, and he had thick, dark hair. Years had done little to age him since that summer day when the group picture must have been taken.

Nancy said tensely, "Our man of the photograph! The one Steve pointed out last night!"

Johnny nodded. He pulled Nancy away from the window. Looking at her, he said, "The man who seems to have known Jeannette Evans *quite* intimately—and who, I feel, might be able to lead us to her murderer."

"Or," added Nancy, "the man who might be the murderer *himself*!"

## CHAPTER IV

### Crying Lady

GOING down the stairs a moment later, Nancy took Johnny's arm. She whispered just before they reached the bottom of the steps, "I suppose this is the way a wife should enter a room with her husband. Besides, Johnny, I'm jittery. Imagine, we've got to *meet* that man!"

He said softly, "For God's sake, don't show it!"

Later, he guessed they were pretty good, the way they carried it off. Besides putting on the man-and-wife busi-



ness, they had to meet the man of the photograph and still be casual as hell about it.

His name was Ralph Cronk.

He seemed jolly enough. He immediately took Nancy by the arm and led her around the room. Johnny trailed along. The two women he had not yet met were seated before a fireplace, warming their feet. Two men stood nearby, drinks in their hands, talking to alert little Doctor Clark.

One of the women was named Doris Wells. Johnny learned, after introductions were completed all around, that she was married to the big blond fellow who was now helping the doctor mix another round of drinks. Everyone called him Jock.

The name stuck in Johnny's mind. Jock Wells, he seemed to recall, ran a stock brokerage business and was reputed to be quite wealthy. He looked much younger than his wife Doris.

She was a middle-aged woman, still attractive. There was a manner about her that held Johnny's attention. In his business he met people who were worried or bothered about something. Despite her gay laughter, Doris Wells was troubled. He could read it in her gray eyes.

Johnny took a drink from the tray which Doctor Clark passed, handed it to her. The doctor pointed to two small Old Fashion glasses on the tray. "These two I fixed for you and your wife. Try them!"

Johnny picked up the glasses, handed one to Nancy. She had joined them. "To a pleasant weekend," he said.

Strangely, Doris Wells said, "I'm sick of being stuck out here in the snow. We've been here all week. I'd like to go into town tonight and have a fling!"

Johnny's eyes raised. "An idea," he said.

Nancy gave him a look. Her gaze

swerved past him and stopped on the tall, broad-shouldered man whose back was momentarily to them. It was Ralph Cronk, of the photograph.

Johnny continued talking to Doris Wells and Nancy, and at the same time there was a peculiar sensation that flowed through his veins. This man—Ralph Cronk—he *could* be Jeannette Evans' murderer, as Nancy had said. And he *also* could be the person who had removed Johnny's name and address from the telephone pad in the murdered girl's bedroom!

Johnny's quick imagination took it on from there. A weekend in this house with the guy. Not that he was worried about himself—but Nancy! If anything ever happened to her . . .

Because, for all his kidding around, Johnny guessed he was really crazy about her. And now, throughout this entire weekend, there was going to be played a subtle game of cat-and-mouse—until Johnny could be *certain* whether big Ralph Cronk was connected with Jeannette's death or not.

HIS thoughts were interrupted by the couple who came over to join their little group. The man was Nancy's brother-in-law, Dave Sherman. He was a slender, dark, quiet-looking man.

Johnny asked pleasantly, "How was the skiing?"

Dave Sherman took the pipe out of his mouth and gave a painful frown. "With an expert like Bea, here, I felt like an amateur!"

Bea Cronk was the tall, dark, athletic-looking girl at his side. She had a large mouth and features that were too pronounced for a woman's.

She talked too loud, Johnny thought. She said, "Dave's in horrible condition."

"So am I," said Johnny. "I'd probably break my neck on that hill you folks were managing so easily."



Bea Cronk looked at him. "I don't believe it. How about trying it with me this afternoon?" She glanced at Nancy. "Does your wife ski, too?"

Johnny had to think fast for the answer to that one. He didn't really know whether Nancy could ski or not. He said with a smile, "Well . . . off and on."

Everyone laughed.

And all the time he was talking to them, he was studying this girl—Bea Cronk—sister to the big, dark-haired man across the room. Bea Cronk apparently was not married. Johnny could almost imagine why. She had too much of the capable, athletic, well-able-to-take-care-of-myself-thank-you quality to give her any feminine appeal.

Johnny wandered around the big living room, talking to this one and that, and from time to time his gaze strayed covertly to big Ralph Cronk. He tried to detect anything about the man's actions that would reveal he was under an emotional strain. But Ralph Cronk laughed and talked, helped the doctor mix drinks, acted like a big jovial guy without a care in the world.

Yet Johnny noted one thing. For all his willingness to see that everyone's cocktail glass was kept filled, Cronk himself drank little. For the past half hour, Johnny estimated, the guy had been holding the same half-filled glass. Was he being careful about his drinking, for some reason?

Later, everyone sat down to dinner in a long, many windowed room that overlooked the sloping hillside. Afterwards, Bea Cronk energetically prodded everyone to go skiing again. Johnny thought with a grimness: these outdoor girls!

He managed to escape her and went upstairs to Nancy's bedroom. There was a comfortable-looking daybed in the room, and he lay down on that, put

his hands behind his head and stared at the ceiling.

A LITTLE later Nancy came in and said sharply, "Hasn't a woman *any* privacy?"

"What's the matter, darling?" he murmured drowsily.

"I'm going skiing. I want to change my clothes!"

"Dear," he said, "you talk as though we'd just been married. What's wrong with you?"

Nancy stamped her foot in anger.

Grinning, Johnny reached down and shook out a quilt that had been folded at the bottom of the daybed. He drew it completely over his head and started humming "Please Go 'Way And Let Me Sleep . . ."

A few moments later he heard Nancy go out of the room. He threw the covering aside and lay looking at the ceiling again. He wondered if there were some way in which he could find out whether Ralph Cronk had been in Jeannette Evans' apartment during the past twenty-four hours.

Johnny got up and walked over to the windows. The party of skiers was well down the hill now, some distance from the house. It was difficult to make out just how many were in the group.

The house was quiet.

Johnny went downstairs, located a hall that led to the kitchen. Beyond a swinging door, he found a maid polishing silver in the pantry.

He said, "Do you know if Mr. Cronk brought a package out here for me? He was supposed to."

The young girl shook her head.

"I really don't know, sir. Your name is—?"

"Mr. Jones," he told her.

"No, he didn't say anything when he arrived this morning."

Johnny's thoughts quickened. "I



thought he came out a couple days ago."

The girl said, "He did, sir. He brought his sister. But he had to return to the city. He just came back this morning." She nodded toward the small pantry window that gave a view of the parking area near the white picket fence of the broad yard. "Of course he might have forgotten and left the package in his car—" She looked back at Johnny suddenly. "Or maybe he took it up to his room. I saw him carrying some packages—"

"Thanks," said Johnny easily. "I'll look." And then, as he started from the pantry, and though as in afterthought, said, "Let's see, his room is the—"

"The last one on the right in the left wing upstairs," the maid said quickly.

"Ah, yes," said Johnny. "Thank you." He went out.

So Ralph Cronk had just come out here this morning! Perhaps a little snooping through his room might prove interesting, while everyone was out of the house.

JOHNNY climbed the carpeted stairs to the second floor. The bedrooms were constructed in two wings that led right and left from the center hallway upstairs. The maid had said the left wing. It was in the opposite direction from Nancy's bedroom.

Johnny was just ready to start down the hall when he heard voices talking softly. The sound came from the left wing. He drew back quickly into the shadows of the center hall. He had thought the upstairs rooms were temporarily deserted.

Suddenly one of the voices rose sharply. It was a woman's voice. Doris Wells'! And he distinctly heard her say, "Ralph, I'm telling you for the last time—"

The man's voice, a deep mumble, interrupted her and said something. Johnny could not catch the words, but he recognized the voice as Ralph Cronk's—to whose room he had just been headed!

Johnny was puzzled as to why the big, blond-headed stockbroker's wife should be up here talking to Ralph Cronk, and why she should be so upset. He remembered the expression that he had observed in her eyes when he had met her. His deduction that she was disturbed by something had been correct!

Then he heard a loud slapping sound, as though Doris Wells had slapped the man. Next, quick, urgent footsteps were *tap-tapping* down the hall.

Johnny took a chance and backed into an open doorway almost beside him. He hoped to hell it wasn't *her* room.

Doris Wells probably would not have seen him anyway. An instant later she swept down the stairway, and she was crying. Her quick, soft sobs reached his ears. He stood there, just inside the open doorway, and he heard her disappear somewhere in the house.

And he also heard the door to Ralph Cronk's room close with a loud bang. He listened for the fellow's footsteps in the hall, but there was stark silence. Ralph Cronk was in his room.

That meant that the search had to be temporarily delayed. Frowning, puzzled by the little incident that had just taken place, Johnny delayed a moment before proceeding downstairs. He went into the living room and mixed himself a drink.

In this business you meet the damndest people, he thought.

JOHNNY strolled from the large living room to the more intimate study, which faced on the side entrance porch of the big house. He wondered if Ralph Cronk would go out? He'd delay a



while and see.

He came through the doorway of the study and Doris Wells was in there, seated on the divan with elderly Doctor Clark. The doctor's arm was around her shoulder in a fatherly manner, and Johnny realized that she still had been crying.

Doctor Clark got swiftly to his feet. He said, "I say, Jones. I was just going to come looking for you. How about a nice walk? It's a beautiful afternoon. Say a mile down the road and back?"

Johnny knew the doctor's quickly thought-out statement was a cover-up for Doris' tears.

Going out of the study, Doctor Clark called over his shoulder, "See you later, Doris."

The woman murmured something.

To Johnny, outside the room, Sam Clark added, "She has a rotten headache, poor child."

And that ended Johnny's opportunity to get anywhere near Ralph Cronk's room. The walk lasted two hours, and by the time they returned to the house everyone else was also back. A light, early dinner was ready, and it seemed that everyone had suddenly decided to go into the city for the evening. It looked like the night was going to be clear.

Johnny recalled Doris' remark of the morning about having a "fling" in town. Was it this she really wanted—or did she want to get away from this house? Was she afraid of something?

Johnny managed to get a second alone with Nancy before everyone prepared to depart for town that evening. She told him, "You really don't know what a helpmate your wife is, darling!"

"Why?"

"I think I managed things quite nicely for tonight."

"What do you mean?"

"I sold them the idea that it would

be much more fun if we all went to the Club Mayfair, across the river!"

Johnny said, "Remind me to give you a raise in salary." Then, seriously, "Perfect! I'll be very interested to watch Cronk's reactions when we get there."

"I thought you would be," Nancy said. Then she touched his arm quickly, whispered, "Tell you more later. Here comes the outdoor girl, looking for you again!"

She referred to tall, angular Bea Cronk, moving across the room in their direction.

It was the last chance he had to talk to Nancy before they reached the night club later that evening. The party was split up among several cars, and Bea Cronk herself rode with him and Nancy, sitting between them.

All during the ride, while the girl related her athletic achievements, Johnny was thinking, wondering just what would happen when they reached the Club Mayfair. If this woman's brother *was* the murderer, he was not going to be able to enter the night club without showing some kind of strain.

But even Johnny himself was not prepared for the startling thing that was to happen.

## CHAPTER V

### Danger in the Dark

THE night spot was jammed, but as in all such places, the head waiter managed to squeeze in a couple more tables for them. The tables were placed together, covered with white linen, and the party immediately became a very cozy affair. Everyone got split up, and Johnny found himself sitting next to gray-eyed Doris Wells.

Doris' husband, the big, blond, handsome Jock Wells, was seated down at



the far end of the table with Beth, Nancy's sister. Johnny noted with some misgiving that Nancy had paired off with Ralph Cronk. So far, the guy was showing nothing. He seemed as jovial and as friendly as ever. He was a smooth one, the investigator thought.

Johnny wanted to talk to Doris Wells. He was remembering her actions of this afternoon, down near Ralph Cronk's bedroom. Why had she been crying? What was it they had been talking about?

He said, "How's the headache?"

She gave him a quick look. Did she know that he had overheard part of the scene in the upstairs hallway? Then she was smiling.

"Gone completely!" she said gayly. She indicated silver ice buckets being set up by the two waiters. "Look, Jock's ordered champagne. Let's have fun!"

What was she trying to escape from, Johnny asked himself. Her cheerfulness was forced.

As the champagne was served, he raised his glass and touched hers. "Sure," he said lightly, "let's!"

Jock Wells glanced down the table at his wife, waved his hand and smiled. He was younger than Doris, yet they seemed to be a happily married couple. Johnny was still puzzled about that hallway incident.

Casually, he said, "How long have you and Jock been married, Doris?"

"Didn't you know? Two years. He's wonderful!"

Then what the hell is she so upset about, Johnny wondered. It was in her gray eyes. He could see it. And now she was drinking too fast. She finished one cocktail and started immediately on another.

She said to him, "Come on, you're slow. Have another!"

"Why not?" said Johnny. He nodded

to the waiter. "Leave one of the bottles right here," he told the fellow. He thought, if he had to, he could outdrink anyone here. Especially, if he kept up with Doris Wells, he might get her talkative enough to find out things.

Doctor Sam Clark came down to their end of the table. He put his arm around Doris' shoulder. "How are you feeling, my dear?" he wanted to know. "Splendid, Sam," Doris said quickly. "I'm all right now." For a moment, Johnny noticed her face was quietly serious. He was just a little puzzled by the way she looked up at the doctor.

But when Sam Clark moved on, she touched Johnny's arm and said brightly, "Let's dance."

She was a nice dancer. She still had a fairly nice figure. The floor was jam-packed, and about all they did was get in a corner and move their feet a little.

Above her head, Johnny let his eyes search the room. He had been thinking about the girl named Irma, whom they had seen last night. So far, she had not been out to do her dance routine. Johnny wondered if she were around. Johnny made a mental notation that he must see her. He ought to do it before he had too much to drink.

WHEN he took Doris back to the table, the party had warmed up considerably. Everyone was talking at once. Everyone except Nancy and big, dark-haired Ralph Cronk. Neither was seated at the table.

Someone laughed, noticing Johnny's expression. "He stole your wife!"

It was Jock Wells. He motioned toward the dance floor and, turning, Johnny saw Nancy dancing with Cronk. Relief flowed through him.

His partner, Doris, had just started



to sit down. She, too, had seen Nancy out on the floor with Cronk. In a remark meant to be under her breath, she said icily, "That louse! He's always after a woman!"

But she said it loud enough for others to hear, and Johnny saw tall, angular-looking Bea Cronk catch her breath. Her face reddened. Grabbing the arm of Nancy's brother-in-law, Dave Sherman, she said quickly, "Dance with me, Dave."

As the two of them threaded their way toward the dance floor, Beth Sherman said, "Well, Doris is right. It's too bad Ralph Cronk owns a cottage at the Colony. Why doesn't he get a girl of his own? He's always after some married woman!"

Doctor Sam Clark said worriedly, "Now, now, girls. That isn't the way to talk. I thought this was going to be a jolly evening!"

Big Jock Wells joined in. "Sure! Drink up!" Johnny wondered whether the wealthy stock broker was really getting tight, or merely pretending, so that his wife, Doris, would think he was enjoying this.

At Johnny's ear, Doris herself cooed, "I'm a ba-ad girl," and pushed another drink into his hand.

It was getting to be a lovely party, Johnny decided. Nancy had not yet returned to the table. He saw her still dancing with Cronk. He wondered if really he should be worried about her. *Was the guy a murderer?*

He kept drinking drink for drink with Doris Wells. He was just a little bit tight. There was a lot of noise in the big dining room, and he was trying to hear what everyone at the table was saying.

Then he was aware that Doris' hand was on his arm and that she was saying, "Do you know something?"

He turned and grinned at her. "Sure.

What?"

He realized that she was suddenly, seriously tight.

"That guy!" she said, and there was venom in her tight voice.

"Who?" prodded Johnny.

"Ralph Cronk, who do you think?"

She raised the glass, took a sip, spilled half of the contents as she put the glass back on the table with determination. "I'll bet you can't guess what he's—"

Beside them, short Doctor Clark said brightly, "Do you realize, my dear, that you haven't even given this tottering old man a dance?"

"Oh!" Doris Wells jumped up, contrition suddenly in her voice. "I'm so sorry, Sam. Really I am!"

THEY disappeared in the crowd.

Johnny thought that Doctor Sam Clark's interruption had been timed for a reason. What was it she had been going to tell him about Cronk? *Everyone* seemed to have it in for that guy!

Everyone in their party was either dancing or talking to someone. Johnny's slightly bleary thoughts kept going back to Irma, Steve Eggers' friend here, and he thought maybe he could find her somewhere around. Thinking of Steve made him also think of the police department. He ought to try and locate Steve and see how the reporter had made out. First, though, he'd have a talk with the girl.

He met Nancy as he made his way through the room. She joined him and accompanied him to the foyer. They found a corner, deserted momentarily, beyond the phone booths.

"A fine detective you are!" scolded Nancy. "I think you're getting drunk!"

He grinned at her. "A fine wife



you are! Going off with another man."

"Well," Nancy continued with satisfaction, "at least I'm working."

"What did Cronk have to say?"

She made a wry face. "He's the kind who doesn't talk while dancing. He doesn't *have* to—if you know what I mean!"

"So you didn't learn anything?" Johnny had to concentrate in order to keep his mind on one subject. Here he had almost got himself squiffed so that he could get Doris Wells to talk, and then the opportunity had been taken away from him.

"Yes, I did," Nancy was saying.

"Did what?"

"Learn something. Cronk *knows* her!"

"Who?"

"Irma. Who else?"

She told him about it. "We were dancing. The far end of the dance floor is near a hallway that must lead in from a side entrance. The hall is the way back to the dressing rooms, I imagine. Well, Irma, must have just been coming to work. She passed through the hall, and Cronk saw her. The reason I knew, he made a misstep while dancing, and then I saw his eyes following her as she passed the doorway."

"Did he say anything, pet?"

"No. He didn't have to. He was worried, I could tell."

"Where is he now?" Johnny asked.

"Back at our table. At least, he was when I just left him."

"Johnny said, 'Don't let him out of your sight if you can help it. I'll be back in a moment. I want to call Steve Eggers.'"

But as soon as Nancy left him he headed toward the rear of the club. There was another hallway that led back to the men's smoking lounge,

and beyond this was a door marked: "Employees Only."

Johnny opened the door and found another passage beyond. It was a long corridor, closed off by doors at either end. There was only a single light glowing in the hall. It made the place shadowy and dim.

Halfway down the hall he saw an intersecting corridor, the one that Nancy had mentioned. A bus boy came along as Johnny stood there.

"Where's Army?" asked Johnny.

The boy started to say, "Patrons aren't permitted back here in the—"

Johnny put a bill in the young fellow's hand.

"That next door," the boy said, pointing. He pocketed the bill with alacrity and disappeared.

Johnny rapped on the door the fellow had indicated. From inside the room, the girl's voice said, "Yes? Who is it?"

"MAY I see you a moment," said Johnny. He drew himself together. Champagne sure stuck by you, he thought.

The door opened a trifle. He saw Irma's auburn hair and her childishly cute face. He saw the rest of her plainly revealed beneath the skimpy kimono which she held tightly around her slim waist with one hand. In the other hand, she held a hair brush.

"Oh!" she said with some surprise. Then her eyes seemed to brighten. "You! Oh, I want to see you!"

This last made him feel very splendid indeed. She had remembered him.

"I'm really not dressed," she was saying. "I was just changing—"

"Think nothing of it," said Johnny, continuing into her small room. He closed the door behind him. True, the hallway was dark, but just the same he



did not want anyone to see him back here. He imagined it was against the house rules.

Irma had been brushing her hair, and now it fell in a soft, curving wave across her straight shoulders. Without makeup, she looked very young.

She motioned to an arm chair. She sat down on the edge of the bench in front of the vanity table, facing Johnny, and suddenly she seemed very tense and wide-eyed. She said, "Did you see Steve?" Her voice trembled slightly.

"No," he said. "Why?"

"Why—about Jeannette!" she said.

Johnny said, "Then—you know?"

"That she was murdered last night?" Irma jerked her pretty head, "Yes! The police were here at the club this morning, questioning everyone!" She leaned forward, touched Johnny's arm. Her hand was shaking a little. "Wasn't it horrible?"

Johnny agreed that it was horrible, then asked, "What did they ask you?"

"I wasn't here. The police didn't see me at all. But Steve came up to my place this afternoon. He told me about it!"

At Johnny's puzzled, irritated frown, she explained. "I don't live here at the club. I have a room in Covington. Steve knows where it is. So he came there. He was looking for you."

"Then the police didn't hold him?"

She shook her head. "No, but they're looking for you! They want to question you." Her eyes were wide.

Johnny stared. "My God, you don't think *I* killed Jeannette?"

Impulsively, the girl jumped up and gripped his arms with both hands. "Heavens, no! You're a private detective. Why would you want to murder poor Jeannette?"

He felt much better indeed. "Yes, why?" he agreed. He patted her hand

and made her sit down again. He, himself, was afraid to stand up. He felt quite rocky, and it was an effort to keep his thoughts running smoothly.

He was quite amazed that she knew he was a detective.

"HOW did you know about me?" he prompted. "Did Steve—"

Irma shook her head. Her soft hair, spilling about her shoulders, gave her a very seductive appearance. Johnny tried not to think about this.

"No," she told him. "I knew. I've seen you before, and once somebody told me who you were."

He decided that Irma was a very clever child. Last night he had imagined her a giggling moron. You never could tell about a woman.

Johnny said very confidentially, "Irma, I have an idea you didn't tell us everything last night. Why not?"

Her answer was simple and direct. "Because I was afraid!"

"Afraid? What of?"

"That man—the one I told you used to meet Jeannette outside night after night!"

"Yes?" He waited.

"I'm convinced he killed her!" the girl said.

"Why, Irma?"

There was a thoughtfulness in her eyes now that made her seem years older. Staring past him, obviously recalling things that had been stored away in her mind, she went on, "Jeannette was a peculiar girl, but I guess I knew her better than anyone. So one night recently she was telling me about this man who used to meet her. She'd been out with him several times, and after he got to know her real well he made this deal with her."

Johnny, attentive now, listened. Already he had a partial idea of what was coming.



"There's an auction room over in Cincinnati. There was a desk or something there that he wanted. Why, I don't know. And neither did he want to be seen buying it. He gave Jeannette some crazy reason for not wanting to go to the store, and so she was to get the desk for him."

Johnny nodded. "So he gave her the money, told her to obtain the desk above everything else, and arranged to see her later."

"Yes, that's exactly it. She told me. But she also learned something else about him?"

"What?"

"She had an idea that he was trying to blackmail someone, and that there was something in the old desk that he wanted or needed. She said that two could play at that game, and that she was going to hold him up?"

"Hold him up?" Asking the question, Johnny remembered Steve's remark about Jeannette being too "sharp" for him. It was much clearer now.

"Yes. She was a strange girl. All she wanted was money. Once, she told me that she had been raised in poverty. She said she had a horrible fear of growing old and being penniless. So she made up her mind to get her hands on all the money she possibly could."

Johnny said, "And so she was going to shake this fellow down?"

"Yes, she told me about it. She said she had an idea he, himself, was worth plenty. He was going to give her fifty dollars for buying this desk for him. He was to meet her at her apartment last night, after the desk had been delivered there. In fact, she phoned me a little before six. She wanted to know if I thought a thousand dollars was too much to shake him down for—before she let him have the desk."

Johnny whistled. "She *was* a shrewd one!" he said. He remembered Jean-

nette's phone call, offering to sell *him* the desk. She had even planned to collect a little extra from *that* source.

He said to Irma, "And now we know why Jeannette was murdered. When she tried to shake this man down, he got worried—as well as mad. He figured that maybe, later, Jeannette would expose him. So he strangled her right there in her own apartment!"

The girl shuddered. "That's why I'm afraid. I don't even *know* that man, and yet he might have seen me with Jeannette some time and figure that I suspect something."

How right she was, Johnny thought. He remembered Nancy's comment about Ralph Cronk's actions when he had seen Irma, here, passing through the dressing room hallway a little while ago. The guy did know Irma, and was worried. He might try anything.

**N**O DOUBT about it now, Johnny decided—Cronk was the killer. Yet one thing was still needed in order to clear himself and definitely establish Ralph Cronk as Jeannette's slayer. The guy had to be placed within Jeannette's apartment sometime between six and eight p.m. last night, in order to positively connect him with the crime. That's why Johnny had wanted to search Cronk's room this afternoon. There must be something of great value the fellow had removed from the old desk . . .

Perhaps if he could get back there to the Colony tonight, ahead of the others, he would have time to do it. At the same time, he was worried about this girl. She really was in danger.

For that matter, Nancy was too! Nancy might inadvertently say something . . . Hell! Johnny's mind drew up suddenly with a start. The guy *did* know! He had that slip of paper that had been removed from the telephone



pad in Jeannette's apartment. And so he knew Johnny—and *also* knew that Nancy was not his wife!

He asked one question. "Irma, do you know a man named Ralph Cronk?"

She shook her head, looking at him curiously. He got up and put his hand on her shoulder. "Look, kid," he said with feeling, "any idea where we can find Steve Eggers? I've got to leave here for a while. I'll be back. In the meantime, I'd like Steve to stay with you. I don't want you to stay *alone* for a minute—"

"Steve should be here now," the girl said. "He wanted to find you. He said he had an idea you would be back here tonight."

"Good!" said Johnny. "Now, look. Don't leave this room. Keep the door locked until Steve shows up. The hell with your dance routine tonight——"

He paused, struck by an expression that had come over the girl's pretty face. Then, suddenly, he realized that she was staring past him, at something beyond, and there was stark terror in her eyes.

She screamed, "Look out! The light——"

And the lights went out, and there was gun sound in the room. Two shots, coming fast. The roar reverberated off the walls. He felt Irma brush against him. In that very moment she had mentioned the light, she had started to leap toward the wall switch.

Johnny had flung himself downward toward the floor in the darkness. At the same time, his arm reached out and tried to find the girl, in order to drag her down with him out of gun range.

Somewhere, a door slammed. He guessed it was the door to this room. The ringing sounds subsided in Johnny's ears. The room, suddenly, seemed very still and very silent.

All this had taken place in a matter

of split seconds. Johnny stood up in the darkness. He guessed he was not hurt; at least, he could not feel anything. He fumbled around the wall, seeking the light switch.

Grimly, he wondered what he was going to find.

## CHAPTER VI

### Revelation

AT LAST his finger found the light button and he pushed it. His eyes traveled downward, and he drew in his breath sharply.

Irma lay in a crumpled little heap on the floor, behind the arm chair and almost against the wall. There was blood on her cheek.

Johnny pushed the chair roughly aside and bent down over her. Relief flowed through him when he found that she was breathing normally—and that the blood was caused from a scratch she had obtained on her cheek while falling.

She had merely fainted from excitement.

Straightening quickly, realizing that she would be all right for a moment, Johnny moved fast toward the passageway outside the room. Outside the door, he looked right and left.

The hallway was deserted. There was no sound. He realized, then, that doors at either end of the hall had stopped the sounds of the shots from being heard anywhere in the club.

There was slim chance that the would-be murderer would return now.

Johnny closed the door behind him as he re-entered the room. Irma was already stirring. An instant later she opened her eyes. He helped her to her feet and sat her in the arm chair. Her eyes slowly focused on him. Then she gasped, "I thought——"

She was shaking.



"Hush, child," said Johnny feelingly. "You're all right."

She clutched at him. "Those shots! I saw a hand reaching for the lights. I thought *you* were kill—"

Johnny grinned tightly, lips thin across his teeth. It gave him almost a vicious appearance.

"Both of us were almost killed," he said grimly. "Here—" He stepped across the room to the small wash basin that was located in the corner. Moistening a cloth, he returned and wiped the smear of blood from Irma's cheek. There was just a slight scratch beneath, where she had struck the chair in falling.

"Feel all right now?" he asked.

The girl nodded. Then she got out of the chair and clung to him like a frightened child. "I . . . I'm afraid!" she half sobbed.

He put his arm around the girl in a protective gesture. At the same time, above her head, his eyes saw the two bullet holes in the wall. They were at shoulder-level. If he and the girl had not fallen so quickly to the floor, they would probably have been killed.

Looking down into her pretty face, he asked, "Did you see him?"

She shook her head. "Was it—the same man who killed Jeannette?"

"Who else?" said Johnny.

THE door from the hall opened and tall Bea Cronk stood there. She looked at Johnny and the girl. Johnny's arm was still around her shoulder.

"Is this a private tryst," asked Bea Cronk frankly, "or can *anyone* join in?"

She came into the room. She had that confident, mannish way about her that Johnny never liked in a woman.

Taking his arm away from Irma's shoulder, lighting a cigarette, he looked at lanky Bea Cronk and tried to appear casual. The close contact with sudden

death had sobered him greatly. In fact, he wished to hell he had a drink.

"Where are the others?" he wanted to know.

"Gone."

"Gone where, Bea?"

"Home!" She gave a brittle laugh.

"What a party! Beth Sherman got into an argument with her husband. Doris is drunk and mad at Jock."

Johnny was suddenly worried. "Where's Nancy?" He added quickly, "My wife?"

Bea shrugged her bony, wide shoulders. "She left with them, too. She thought you had gone."

It gave him a start. He asked quickly, "Where's your brother—Ralph?"

"With them, naturally. He was one of the first to leave. He went out to warm up one of the cars."

Warm up hell, Johnny thought. His mind was working fast now. He asked tightly, "Who is Nancy riding with?"

Bea Cronk shrugged. "I don't know." She must have noticed that he was upset, and added, "I don't see why *you're* worrying. You seem to be doing all right—"

Irma spoke for the first time. She said excitedly, "We were almost murdered just now!"

The tall, athletic-looking girl stared at her. Johnny saw a peculiar, sort of haunted expression leap into Bea's eyes. For the first time, the smirk left her large mouth, and she said, "You're not fooling—?"

"She's not fooling," assured Johnny.

Someone was hurrying down the hall. Then the stockily built reporter barged into the room. His almost bald head was beaded with fine perspiration as he walked right up to Johnny, ignoring the girls. "Boy, am I glad to find *you*!" he said. "I had a hell of a time with the police, Johnny, kid. I remembered who that guy of the photograph was,



and they guessed I knew something, and I wouldn't tell them a thing because I wanted to find you and make sure you were in the clear and—"

Johnny grabbed Steve's arm, gave him a look and steered him toward the hall. Over his shoulder, to the two women, he said, "Just a minute."

Outside, in the hallway, he told the reporter, "That's his sister. She doesn't know."

Steve stared. "You mean, you've found the guy? His name is Ralph—"

"Cronk," Johnny finished for him. "He was here at the club tonight." Briefly, because there was so little time, he sketched what had happened since he had last seen the reporter. Then he was saying, "I've got to work fast. I think Nancy's with him now. I've still got to get *proof* that Cronk was in Jeanette's apartment last night. So I'm hurrying back there to the Colony. That's where they've all gone. Nancy might be in danger."

"I'll say!" Steve Eggers agreed. "I've dug up plenty about that guy, kid. He's been mixed up with women before. There was a case several years ago, which he managed to hush up, where he tried to take over an old dowager—"

Johnny nodded. "I haven't time now," he said hurriedly. "Look, stay here with Irma, that poor kid." He told about the close escape from the gunshots. "I doubt if he'll be back. He's probably well on the way to the Colony by now. I'll phone you from there—later."

Steve shook his head. "You've got a trip, brother. It's snowing like hell again!"

Johnny stepped into the room doorway a moment, said to tall Bea, "Coming? I'm in a hurry."

He thought she gave him a curious look. But she started out of the room. Johnny took time to give Irma a warm

smile and say, "Steve'll look after you, baby."

Then he was hurrying back to the front of the club with Bea. At the checkroom, they obtained their coats. It was snowing hard outside. They turned up their collars and ran toward the parking area. Johnny slipped a tip into the half-frozen attendant's hand and held the door open against the wind while Bea Cronk slid past the wheel.

A tiny light glowed when she opened the door to the compartment. She fumbled around, finally located the package of cigarettes. She lit two and handed one to Johnny.

"Thanks," he murmured.

"You say someone tried to shoot you?" asked Bea Cronk, blowing out smoke thoughtfully, staring ahead into the night.

"Yes," said Johnny.

"Why?"

He countered with a question of his own. "Do you know who I am, Bea?"

He felt the woman's frank, direct eyes on his face. It was too dangerous driving for him to take his gaze from the road ahead.

"Yes," she said, and this surprised him. "You're a private detective. I checked up on you from the club awhile ago. I phoned a friend and asked about you."

"Oh," said Johnny quietly.

"You're trying to find out something, aren't you?" she went on in her direct manner. "It concerns someone at the Colony. Who?"

For a moment, he did not answer. One thing had bothered him ever since he had met and studied this woman. It was his belief that she was a very lonely person. She was not the type who held a feminine appeal for men. She was unmarried. He knew that a lonely woman—especially one in her



thirties—can also be a jealous woman. He had asked himself if the person trying to blackmail Beth Sherman, Nancy's sister, could be this woman seated beside him.

"Well?" Bea repeated.

It took several moments to get the engine warmed up. Impatience took hold of Johnny, and he swore. He was naturally an energetic person. Delay bothered him. But it was more than this that troubled him now. Nancy was in real danger!

As they finally rolled out of the driveway, windshield wipers going *swack-swack* against the wet glass, Bea looked at him narrowly and asked, "Why are you so upset?"

He kept his eyes on the road. He would have had to do that anyway, because of the storm. The snow came into the bright headlamp beams like something being sprayed from the nozzle of a huge hose.

"What?" he asked, thinking.

"I said, what's got you so keyed up?"

And Johnny wondered if he should prepare her for the truth that must shortly be revealed.

THEY joined a slow-moving line of traffic that moved across the Suspension Bridge. They were again delayed by the downtown traffic in Cincinnati. Then, finally, they were on Victory Parkway and rolling toward the outskirts of the sprawling city limits. It was still snowing hard. Cars had packed the snow down hard atop the previous fall of the night before, but Johnny knew that out in the country, driving would be more difficult. He wondered if they would get through to the Colony at all.

The woman beside him said, "Have you a cigarette?"

He motioned toward the glove compartment, in front of her in the dash-

board. "You'll find a pack in there. Light me one, too, will you?" He had put some things in there yesterday, before leaving Nancy's garage.

Johnny's eyes were suddenly blank. He decided to let her have it straight. Rolling down the side window a little, he let the wind whip his cigarette away into the night. Letting out his breath slowly, he said, "I have reason to believe your brother is a murderer."

HE HAD expected all sorts of reactions from her. Nothing happened. She sat there, saying nothing, so that curiosity made him take his gaze from the road an instant and glance at her.

There was a vacant stare to her eyes and she was looking straight ahead, biting her lip.

Then, and he barely caught the words, she asked, "What did he do?"

Johnny spoke frankly. "He's trying to blackmail someone. In order to do so, he had a girl from the Club Mayfair obtain something for him. It was an old desk, and it must have contained letters or a family history that he knew about. Anyway, he needed it. Then this girl who had worked for him, later held out on him. She was murdered last night."

Silence was heavy in the car. Outside, there was the wind, and the sound of the heavy treaded tires digging into the snow. From time to time the car slowed a little, but Johnny did not cut down his steady speed.

Finally, softly, Bea said, "He's been in trouble before. People think he has money, but he hasn't. Yet he insists on living well and spending. I've warned him."

"I'm sorry," Johnny said truthfully. He kept watching the road.

After another pause, the woman said, "Stop the car."

"We'll be there shortly," he said.



There was a strange, icy coldness in her eyes.

In the same glance, he noted that the glove compartment was again open, its tiny light shining into the interior. That was it! She had seen his automatic when she reached inside the compartment for his cigarettes. He seldom carried the gun on his person. He had put it there yesterday.

Johnny wondered if she had ever handled a weapon before. Dammit, a gun in the hand of a nervous woman could be downright dangerous. He decided to stop the car!

Snow made hushed whispering sounds against the windows as they sat there. Johnny looked at the woman. She still kept the gun pointed at him.

"What do you think this will get you?" he asked.

And she was abruptly saying, "He's my brother. You're going back to the Colony in order to get him. I'll never let you. He's my brother!" With her free hand she motioned to the door beside him. "Get out of the car!"

He wondered if she really would shoot him as he got out—or whether she was merely going to take the car and race to warn her brother. Either way, it wasn't going to be very pleasant finding out.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Well, if that's the way you want it—" He turned toward the door, reaching for the handle with his left hand. At the same time he had estimated the exact position of the gun. His right hand cut down fast and expertly, and he seized her wrist, twisting as he did so.

Bea Cronk gave a sharp cry of pain and dropped the weapon to the seat. Johnny scooped it up, careful to put it in the pocket of his coat on the far side from her. He realized, then, that he was still holding her wrist in a fierce grip, and that tears had come into her

eyes. He released her.

"You fool," he said, upset. "You might have hurt someone."

The tears kept coming. She went completely to pieces, and sobs racked her.

Johnny waited a moment, somewhat amazed by his own feeling toward her. For the first time, there was something appealing and helpless about her. She was no longer a confident, efficient female.

He said, "I'm sorry if I hurt you."

Head bowed, she murmured, "I shouldn't have done that. I'm sorry."

"Let's look at this thing clearly," he said. "If your brother is guilty, sooner or later the police will catch up with him. Eliminating me wouldn't help. Not in the long run."

"I know," Bea said.

He started up the car again. He did not want to delay another moment. "I'd like to ask you some questions. Maybe you won't care to answer them. But it would help a lot."

She was silent for a moment. Then she said, "All right. If Ralph is guilty, he deserves to pay the penalty. You've risked your own life in order to protect others. What is it you want to know?"

"Tell me," Johnny said, "what is it that Doris Wells is trying to hide?"

## CHAPTER VII

### Sudden Death

BEA CRONK pondered the question a moment while Johnny maneuvered a bit of roadway that was partially drifted over. Snow completely covered the windshield now except where the two wiper blades made black openings. Once the stuff started to freeze, the wipers would be useless, and he would not be able to see at all.



The woman said, "You're a very discerning person. I thought you were just getting tight with Doris. Yet, at the same time, you discovered something?"

"Yes."

"I'll tell you this," Bea went on. "I think I am the only one who knows. I've never told anyone, and I never will—outside of you, because I am trying to get to the bottom of this."

"Yes?" He waited.

"Years ago, Doris was married once before. She was only seventeen at the time. The man was absolutely no good. Shortly after the marriage, he was sent to prison. But before that, he had walked out on Doris and her mother, taking everything he could lay his hands on. She got a divorce, and no one has ever known."

"I'm beginning to see," said Johnny. "Two years ago, Doris married again. Jock Wells is wealthy, but outside of that she is crazy about him. If anything ever happened to that marriage—"

"She'd die," Bea finished for him. "That's what she fears."

"What happened to Doris' mother?"

"She's been dead a number of years."

"You say," asked Johnny thoughtfully, "Doris' first husband walked off with a lot of stuff?"

"Yes—"

"Would you recall anything about an old spinet desk?" He described the object that had been in the auction rooms. "Let's say her first husband stored that desk in the auction house. He knew it contained papers and stuff of value. He planned to call for it later, but in the meantime was sent to prison and—"

Bea's face brightened as she interrupted him. "Yes. I remember that desk. And I also heard recently that he had been paroled from prison." She stared at him intently. "Don't you see?

Maybe he's behind this. Maybe he's trying to threaten Doris!"

Johnny sighed. "For your sake, I'd like to think so. But I doubt it. Somehow, your brother found out about that desk and its contents, and is using it for blackmail purposes."

She was silent a moment. "Ralph's younger than I," she said, as though talking to herself. "I've always felt that he did not remember about Doris. He was just a kid at the time. But one day recently he mentioned that old desk, and I was puzzled about it. Now, I see." She added in almost a whisper, "All through his life that terrible, clever streak has been a part of him."

He knew that she was crying again. Johnny asked no more questions. Besides, he had little opportunity. The driving was worse now. The wind was blowing in almost a gale, and the driven snow made visibility nil.

Finally, he thought they had reached the stretch of straight roadway from which the side road led to the Colony. He slowed, and abruptly visible through the blowing snow numerous, blinking yellow and red lights were directly ahead.

Johnny brought the car to a stop. A huge transport truck was parked, almost blocking their way. To the woman, Johnny said, "Just a minute," and climbed out, closing the door again behind him.

THE wind blew hard particles of snow against his face as he hurried toward the truck. And the snow got into his shoe tops, wetting his ankles. Very soon now it would be deep enough that you wouldn't be able to follow the road at all. Yet he felt that Nancy and the others must have got through. He had passed none of their cars so far.

The truck driver had seen the lights of the car come up behind him. He



swung out of the high cab as Johnny approached. "You're out of luck, mister," he called.

Johnny blinked his eyes against the snow particles that whipped against his face.

"What's wrong up ahead?" he asked.

He could see red flares blinking, dimming and then brightening again as the wind shifted.

The driver told him, "A big trailer job slewed around up there. It has the road completely blocked. There's nothing anyone can do until they can get a wrecker out here. Lord knows when that'll be!"

Johnny explained, "I'm turning off at a side road just ahead. I think it's only fifty yards or so." He pointed, squinting against the storm.

"Wait," the truck driver said. He climbed up on the running board of the transport, reached inside the cab and flicked a switch. A big, movable spotlight outside the cab flashed into life. Gripping a handle attached to the light, the man directed its powerful beam ahead. The light picked out the side road and illuminated it clearly.

"Swell!" said Johnny. "Keep the light trained on that spot until I swing off. I think I can make it."

"Good luck!" the man called, as Johnny went back to the big coupe.

Bea Cronk was sitting there, her face strained and tense. He knew what she was thinking, and it made him feel like saying the hell with it and chucking the whole thing. And yet, he felt, she had prepared herself to see this thing through now.

Grinning tightly as he started up the car again, Johnny warned, "Hang on. This might be a little rough!"

Pulling out past the parked highway transport truck, he put the coupe in second gear and got a good start. The spotlight clearly illuminated the way.

He went into the slight uphill grade with the motor throbbing.

The car slewed roughly from side to side. Then it found old ruts that were already beneath the new layer of snow and the heavy tires dug in.

Johnny kept gunning it, and they moved up the grade. He breathed with relief when they reached the top of the low ridge and the car shot ahead again. Moments later the white fence of the Colony swept into view. The heavy car slid sideways through the gate entrance. Ahead, a large black opening showed in the end of the high barn. He saw that the big barn doors had been left propped open, and that the cars were parked inside. There was a wide runway that led right through the barn.

He drove in, pulled up behind one of the other cars, and cut the ignition. As they climbed out, he heard water dripping from the fenders of the other cars. They could not have been here long, he imagined.

OUTSIDE the barn, somewhere in the night, he heard the deep, throaty barking of the great Danes. He wondered why the dogs had not come running to meet them. Usually they were like inquisitive children, interested in everything that happened.

Taking the woman's arm, Johnny hurried with her toward the lighted main house. He noted that the smaller bungalows were all in darkness. He knew that Doctor Sam Clark owned one, Beth and Dave Sherman another. Ralph Cronk also had one. Everyone was using the big main house of the Wells' during the weekend.

As they reached the side entrance porch, Johnny heard the dogs still barking out there in the night. It was sort of creepy, with the storm and all.

Then they were inside the house, shaking snow from their clothes. Doc-



tor Sam Clark himself had flung open the door. Johnny's eyes brightened with relief when he saw Nancy appear behind him in the small, warm study. She held a cocktail glass in her hand.

"We saw your lights," said Doctor Clark. "What a night!"

Nancy gave Johnny a skeptical look. "I looked all over for you. What happened?"

"Plenty," said Johnny. He glanced at the glass in Nancy's hand. "Got any more of the same, darling?"

She nodded. "Doctor Clark just prepared nightcaps for everyone. There's some left."

"Where's everyone?" Bea asked as they moved toward the big living room. Cheerful log fires were crackling in both the study and the larger room.

"Around," said the doctor. "I think Doris has gone to bed. Beth is out in the kitchen making sandwiches."

Quiet-looking Dave Sherman, Nancy's brother-in-law, was in the big living room. He was still smoking his pipe. It occurred to Johnny that Dave never got worked up over anything. You would have thought he'd been sitting at home all evening, reading a book or something.

Behind his thick eyeglasses, his dark eyes looked at Johnny and he said, "Jock's out there helping Beth."

Johnny noted empty cocktail glasses on the coffee table. Doctor Clark picked up a cocktail shaker, shook it, smiled and filled two fresh glasses for Bea Cronk and the private investigator. "What a party tonight," he smiled. "Well, at least we're all home safe, and bygones are bygones. Drink hearty!"

Johnny took his drink. But Bea shook her head. "Thanks," she refused.

Her eyes met Johnny's, and then she asked the doctor, "Where's my brother?"

It was Dave Sherman who answered her. "Ralph decided to spend the night in his cottage," he said. "He left right after we had a nightcap."

No one else said anything for a moment. But Johnny knew what they were thinking. Numerous people in this house hated Ralph Cronk. No wonder he was staying by himself tonight.

Johnny then caught a glance that Nancy gave him. She wandered out toward the adjoining study, and he followed. Her brown eyes were no longer scolding as he came up to her. Instead, they were serious.

She said, "I've just searched Ralph Cronk's room upstairs. No one was around, and I took advantage of it."

Johnny smiled. "Fine girl! What did you find?"

"Nothing!"

"You're sure—"

She nodded. "I practically tore the place apart."

Johnny was frowning. "Then, if he does have anything from Jeannette's apartment, he's taken the stuff with him to the bungalow. I'm going over there."

Nancy instantly gripped his arm. "Be careful, Johnny!"

He grinned. "I'm glad my wife worries about me *once* in a while."

Against her protests, he got his coat and went out into the stormy night. He remembered to shift the automatic from his left to the right-side coat pocket.

Moving across the yard, he heard the great Danes still barking. They were still outside in the storm. Odd, that!

He also recalled that there had been no light in Ralph Cronk's cottage, and yet they had said Cronk left the main house just a little while ago.

Johnny's steps swerved toward the sound of the barking dogs. The sound came from out beyond the barn.



He stopped off at the barn, located the flashlight that was in the glove compartment of Nancy's car. He had seen it yesterday when he had placed his gun and cigarettes there. The light in his hand, he continued his way through the snowstorm. The dogs were still barking.

Finally, he saw them. They appeared to have found something out there, and this explained their constant barks. Johnny directed the flashlight beam toward them.

A human form, motionless, lay in the snow.

Carefully, Johnny moved toward the big animals. They did not growl, but merely continued barking. One nudged against Johnny, as though appealing for aid.

The figure lay on its side. Johnny rolled it over. His eyes narrowed. It was big, dark-haired Ralph Cronk. Johnny swiftly loosened the man's coat. Cronk's features were pasty and set. Johnny bent close. He thought he detected a peculiar odor.

He was dead.

He was dead—and there was not a mark of violence on his body!

**B**EHIND him, a woman's voice said, "Good heavens!"

Johnny came to his feet. It was Doris Wells, a fur coat covering her rather small figure, her gray eyes staring past Johnny at the still form in the snow.

He said grimly, "I'd heard you were in bed." He wondered what she was doing out here at this hour, and in the storm.

She shook her head. "I was out on the front porch, getting some air. I didn't feel well. I saw your flashlight and wondered what was happening." Her face was white. "Is he—"

Johnny nodded.

"You'd better get Doctor Clark," he

suggested.

And then, for the next half hour, there was confusion and a lot of activity. They took the dead man into the barn. They tried to reach the State police barracks, and learned that no one could get up for a couple of hours yet. The road leading to the barracks was blocked by the truck that Johnny had been told about on the way here a while ago.

"It doesn't matter," said the doctor. "I'm county coroner out here, you know. I'd be called in anyway." He had already stripped the clothes from the dead man and was just completing a quick examination. He looked at Johnny and Dave Sherman, who was also out there in the barn.

"I know what you're thinking," he said to the private investigator. "You think it's murder. But it isn't. There isn't a mark on the body. It must have been his heart."

Johnny frowned. "He looked like a husky guy to me. A lot of people would have liked to seen him dead."

A little later he was talking to Nancy, in the big house. She had been with Bea Cronk, who had gone to pieces completely, and for whom Sam Clark had ordered a mild sedative. Nancy had put the woman to bed.

Johnny said to Nancy, "Well, this ends one murder mystery and starts another. It's screwy as hell."

Nancy protested, "but Doctor Clark says it *couldn't* be murder!"

"The hell it isn't!" snapped Johnny. "Doris hated Ralph's guts. Your own sister, Beth, despised him. The same goes for Jock and Dave, your brother-in-law. And since you folks have returned here tonight, everyone has been roaming all over the damn' place. I learned that Doris wasn't in bed, as you all thought. And neither was her husband Jock out in the kitch-



en helping *anyone* make sandwiches. He, too, was prowling around some place."

"But how was he *killed*?" Nancy asked.

Johnny murmured, "I have an idea," and grabbed his coat and went outside again. Through the falling snow, he saw a light turned on in one of the bungalows. He met Dave Sherman coming from the direction of the barn.

"Whose light is that?" asked Johnny, pointing across the wide yard. Smoke curled from the chimney.

"Doc Clark's. He went to get something from his medical bag."

"Why would he be starting a fire at this hour, when he's spending the night here at the main house?"

"Huh?" Dave Sherman turned, staring toward the cottages. He took off his glasses. "That's funny," he remarked.

Johnny suggested, "You might phone again and find out if the State police are on the way."

LEAVING the man, Johnny cut through the deep snow and approached the doctor's cottage. A light was on in the living room. Snow muffled his steps as he climbed to the front porch. He saw that the door was slightly ajar.

Quietly, he pushed open the door. Immediately he was aware of voices talking quietly.

From the hallway, he could see into the living room and past it. There was a sort of office-study beyond, and he saw alert, stocky little Doctor Clark bent over the fireplace, stuffing in papers and burning them.

Then the woman's voice spoke again. "Sam, tell me the truth! How did you get *hold* of these things? Ralph Cronk must have had them, didn't he? That's why he was demanding so much money

to keep quiet!"

"Of course he had them, dear!" said the doctor. "Your old marriage license, these photographs—everything. I found them in his room tonight—" He was moving back to the fireplace again, holding something in his hand.

Johnny came quickly into the room. "Just a minute, doctor!" he said sharply.

The short, solid-built man swung. Doris Wells, standing nearby, gasped, her hand pressed to her mouth. Then the doctor moved swiftly, hurling the stiff piece of paper into the fire.

Johnny flung across the room, seized the paper from the flames and quickly knocked off the part of it that had started to burn. He saw that it was a marriage license. He turned and looked at Doris Wells.

"It was yours, wasn't it?"

She nodded her head slowly. She had been crying.

Doctor Clark looked levelly at Johnny and said, "I've raised this girl like my own daughter. As a girl, she knew nothing but sorrow. When her mother died, she was alone. I've loved her and cared for her. And now she's married again and happy. I'd *kill* anyone who tried to spoil that."

Johnny looked at the short man, and at Doris Wells. Then he walked back to the fireplace and tossed the certificate on the flames. "I think I understand," he said quietly. He saw some photographs just curling into nothingness in the flames. He realized that these were the things Ralph Cronk had found in Jeannette's apartment, in the old desk, and for which murder had been committed.

Looking at the doctor again, he went on, "Yes, you would have gladly killed Ralph Cronk. The man was absolutely no good. I guess *anyone* in your position would have felt the same urge."



Doctor Clark laughed. "Naturally."

"Let's say you *did* kill him," said Johnny. "Then, as coroner of this county, all you need do in your report is say that the fellow died of heart failure. Who would question that?"

"Yes," agreed the doctor. "Who would?" He was smiling.

"I would," said Johnny.

**D**ORIS WELLS gave a choked little cry. She grabbed the doctor's arm. "Sam! You didn't *really*—"

And Johnny said, "The odor of almonds told me that it was poison, doctor. And I noticed there were faint burns within his mouth. *You* served the nightcaps after returning from the city. A simple thing to add that deadly poison to *his* drink." Johnny had seen the open medical bag on the table. He started moving toward it. "I imagine the vial can be found right here—"

"Stand where you are!" snapped Doctor Clark.

Doris Wells gave a little cry.

Johnny turned.

The doctor held a gun now, and was pointing it at him.

The woman flung herself at the short, gray-haired man. "Sam! Don't! Please!" She blocked his way. Johnny could have moved now and reached for his own gun. He did nothing. He stood still, looking at Sam Clark.

And the doctor's gun hand lowered. His arm went around the woman's shoulders. She was sobbing, pressing against him. He patted her head and looked across the room at Johnny.

"No," he said with a sigh, "I couldn't kill you, Jones. I could only kill a man whom I hated—as I hated Ralph Cronk." He put the gun down on the desk beside him. "You needn't worry about me. I'll go with the State police when they get here."

Johnny knew that he spoke the truth.

He was that kind of man. Johnny said to him, "I doubt if they'll do anything to you. Ralph Cronk deserved to be eliminated. A lot of people will be thankful."

He turned and went out. The doctor was talking soothingly to Doris Wells as though he were talking to a child.

Johnny felt like hell. He was thinking of Bea Cronk, who must be the real person to suffer. There was always *someone* who must be hurt like this.

He met Nancy as he entered the main house. She stared at his taut face.

He told her, "What I need, pet, is a drink."

**A**ND later—it must have been close to dawn—the State police had been there, and it seemed everyone had been talking for hours. Johnny answered their questions and tried to keep awake at the same time. From time to time he took another drink. It was the only thing that kept him awake, and finally, when it was all over, and the police had gone, he found that he had consumed plenty.

Quiet had settled down in the house. Everyone, exhausted, had gone to their rooms for a little rest before another day must start. Doctor Sam Clark had left with the police. The corpse, too, had been taken with them.

Johnny had been slumped wearily in a deep chair, and now he stood up. He swayed, and Nancy clutched his arm.

"Johnny!" she gasped.

"I'm a wonderful detective," he muttered. "I do everything but make money!"

"Johnny," Nancy said, "you're worn out. What *you* need is some sleep." She put his arm over her shoulder and



half supported him toward the hall stairway.

"Bes' little wife in the world," Johnny mumbled thickly. "Always worried about me."

He leaned against her heavily as she helped him up the stairs. He stumbled, and she held onto him firmly. They finally reached the top step and he still leaned against her.

It was nice being in her arms like this. She was the loveliest girl in the world, he thought. He really wasn't drunk at all, but Nancy had thought so, and he had taken advantage of it. It was nice being attended to like this, and he thought it would be nicer still if he kissed her.

Straightening, he cupped her pretty chin in his hands and followed his im-

pulse.

Nancy broke away, staring at him. Her eyes flamed. "You!" she gasped. "And I thought you were drunk!"

He was grinning.

She pushed him. Johnny stumbled on the topmost step. The next thing he knew he was tumbling down the stairs. He put out his arms and ended in a sprawl at the bottom. He sat there staring at the stairs.

Nancy had momentarily disappeared. Then he heard her returning. She held a big, fluffy comforter in her hands. She bundled the blanket up and hurled it down the stairs at him.

"I hope," she called, "you sleep well—on the *divan*!"

And as she moved toward her room, he heard her soft laughter.

### ■ ■ ■ FROM LITTLE ACORNS ■ ■ ■

NEW YORK'S established works for law and order are familiar to all today, but prior to 1844 the New York police force was well-known for its lack of organization.

At that time, the city, with a population of over 300,000 had a police force consisting of two constables elected in each ward annually; a small body of men called marshals, who were appointed by the mayor; and the night watch, which took its name from the fact that it was composed of citizens who patrolled the streets at night after finishing their day's labor.

In 1844, the legislature, realizing the necessity of a more efficient and better organized body of law enforcement, abolished the night watch and provided for the organization of a day and night police force. This took place the next year.

The new law provided that there was to be established a day and night police force to take the place of the following sub-divisions of the police force: the watch department, marshals, street inspectors, health wardens, fire wardens, dock masters, lamp lighters, bell-ringers, inspectors of pawn brokers and junk shops and officers to attend the polls. The latter two titles were probably inspired by some Gilbert and Sullivan-like character.

The force was not to exceed eight hundred men, including captains, assistant captains and policemen. District headquarters were established in each ward. However, although the law had abolished all the fancy titles, the duties performed by these men still had to be done. Thus we find that

the members were expected to attend fires, preserve the peace, report to their captains any suspicious and disorderly houses, arrest and arraign in court offenders against the law, light lamps and ring alarm bells, and, in general, protect life and property. Thus, with the exception of those duties made obsolete by the passage of time, their duties were much the same as those of the present day police force.

The chief of police was appointed by the mayor with the consent of the common council and was the chief executive officer. The aldermen, assistant aldermen and assessors of each ward were authorized to appoint, with the mayor's consent, a captain, assistant captains, and the quota of policemen to which the district was entitled. The term of office was one year.

The first regular police force did not prove to be very efficient, due to excess political interference. Thus, in 1857 the state legislature, after investigating the conditions in the city, decided to copy what was known as the London plan of state control. A metropolitan district was created, embracing Brooklyn, New York, and some outlying districts, and a centrally appointed police commission was put in charge. This system was abolished in 1870 and the present one of local control was introduced.

From those modest beginnings in 1844, New York's police force has grown to be the efficient public servant it is today.

—R. Clayton.



# Her Master's Choice

by Ken Kessler

Some men don't mind being married  
to masterful women — particularly  
when a burglar's in the house



In Letitia's hands the broom became a bayonet . . . and the enemy stood before her



THE whole fantastic event had its inception, Mr. Hughey was later to recall, at the supper table. It was there that Letitia, in her usual adamant tones, stated that she would accompany him to the office and wait while he checked the cash and balanced the books, or whatever it was he did on Thursday nights.

"Afterwards we'll go to the movies. That Montgomery man, the one that looks like Gable, is playing at the Washington." A soft smile that spun the clock back twenty years and





worked a hem around her fading lips. It was the smile that had trapped Mr. Hughey's heart, though he hadn't seen much of it since.

If Mr. Hughey had been clairvoyant, which he was not, he might have summoned enough nerve to put his foot down right then. After all, it was his future that was jeopardized. And the eleven thousand dollars was Mr. Preston's!

As it was he merely felt sorry for Letitia. Her life had been a futile if somewhat vicarious search for a dominating male. A mythical male indeed, for no such man lived. If he did, and if Letitia had found him, her life would have been sorely unhappy.

For Letitia was a princess of sorts, born to the purple, destined to lead. Mr. Hughey made this discovery six months after they were married and adjusted his life accordingly. He had, in his way, made her happy by making her sad.

He saw the man as they alighted from the bus two blocks from Preston Investments, where Mr. Hughey, bright and shaven, alighted every morning and every Thursday evening of his life.

The man was standing on the curb as if he was waiting for a bus—which he wasn't. As the Hugheys crossed the street he suddenly stirred and walked ahead of them.

"Now there," Mrs. Hughey began, "Is a man. Notice his walk, his air, and the way he holds his head. That man is a success, a—a conqueror."

The man was younger than Mr. Hughey, no more than forty, and still had his hair. He walked head up, chest out, stomach in. That his face was too dark and inexplicably hard Mr. Hughey also noted. He did not say, as he was tempted, "Appears plain arrogant to me," but settled for "Ummm." Moreover, Mr. Hughey did not like the

quick, scrutinizing glances the man cast at him.

"And look at you," Letitia went on. "Stooped over, your chin on your chest. Roger, straighten up. At least you needn't look like a mere—book-keeper."

Involuntarily, Mr. Hughey squared his shoulders. But he was a little man, little and pink and bald-headed, and a military carriage only caused his clothes to bulge and wrinkle as if they'd been tailored for somebody else. "It's a common fallacy," Mr. Hughey said, chuckling to cushion his temerity, "that certain people looking a certain way are expected to have certain traits. You can't tell about a man really, by his appearance. Brave men don't wear badges."

**B**UT Mrs. Hughey didn't hear him. She was too absorbed with admiring the man, which she was still doing as Mr. Hughey, under the ornate black-marble portals of Preston Investments, fished out his key.

"Oh, he's meeting a girl! There." She almost pointed. "That girl in the doorway. And see her hat. That adorable hat!" Her voice trilled off. Mr. Hughey looked.

A tall willowy blond, who might have just stepped out of a Frank Moran calendar, so slight were her clothes, was talking to the man. Mr. Hughey shivered. He didn't know why. The arrogant stranger just did it to him.

"Come inside, please, Letitia," he said, opening the door.

"It must be clandestine. Imagine. How thrilling. "She followed Mr. Hughey reluctantly.

Mr. Hughey snapped the lock after them. He felt better then. The lock represented security. They turned to the left, through the glass door with its shiny brass knob, into the inner



office.

"Now hurry, Roger. I'll sit here and read." Mrs. Hughey took a chair that commanded a view to the street.

Mr. Hughey's desk was the third from the end in a precisioned row. Mr. Preston had assigned Mr. Hughey, the most loyal and trusted of all the Preston book-keepers, to balance the books and count the money following the Thursday night rush. This was occasioned when Mr. Preston contracted with a local industry to cash payroll checks up until six o'clock and, in agreement with banking tradition, a balance must be struck previous to the following day's business.

Mr. Hughey opened the small safe, which was apart from the big vault and used exclusively for the payroll account, got the cash and ledgers, and wrestled the whole to his desk. He enjoyed this job. It flattered his ego. And certainly never before had he worried about thugs. The front door with its master Yale lock would have to be broken, an act that would attract the police. Moreover he was not really afraid. He was not anything near the Milquetoast he let Letitia believe.

He was counting cash when he saw Letitia pantomiming toward the window. Mr. Hughey swung around. There stood the girl in the cocky hat, a desperate look on her face, beckoning to Letitia to let her in.

Mr. Hughey's heart stood still. "Letitia!" he cried, not too loudly, then, "Letitia!" very loudly. But Mrs. Hughey was already through the glass partition on her way to the front.

"Letitia, the safe is open! You can't let anyone in!"

His voice echoed forlornly. Letitia was turning the Yale-lock wheel, the door was swinging open. He heard the girl say, "I wouldn't 'uv had the nerve except I seen you—" and then her

voice dropped to a whisper. Mrs. Hughey smiled understandingly.

"Certainly. Of course you may." She glanced toward Mr. Hughey. "Don't mind my husband. He has neither a bark or bite."

It escaped Mr. Hughey's notice at the time that the girl stepped around Letitia, as if to close the door. Of course, that's when she fingered the lock so it wouldn't catch. . . .

Mr. Hughey relaxed. Sometimes he was unwarrantedly cautious. The girl was pretty, and she was almost blushing. He watched her swing through the hall to the interior door; but just before she reached it she sneezed. This necessitated digging out a handkerchief, which she held in her hand as she grasped the knob to let herself in. It was all very naturally done.

Mr. Hughey took the precaution of folding his elbows over the cash. When the girl returned, Mrs. Hughey was inside the inner office again. "What a darling hat!" she exclaimed. The prospect of Mr. Montgomery and the movies was overwhelming Letitia tonight. "Wherever did you find it?"

It was quite a hat, a ruffle of lace and shiny straw braid. "I'm Mrs. Roger Hughey," Letitia said. The girl skipped introducing herself but she talked excitedly. Then, to determine how the lace fastened to the brim, Mrs. Hughey touched the hat. It toppled precariously, almost falling off.

"Now look what—" the girl caught herself and smiled.

"I'm so sorry," Mrs. Hughey lamented. "Here—" She removed a mirror from her purse, shoved it into the girl's hand. The hat was soon adjusted.

ALL this was engaging Mrs. Hughey's attention and he did not see the man enter. When he looked the man



was already inside, his right hand gloved, his left holding a gun.

"Okay, grandpop, let's have it."

Mr. Hughey went numb. "Why—I—I"

"Give with the dough," the man sneered. "And if there's an alarm wire under your desk, forget it. We'll be gone before the cops get started."

Letitia returned to character. "Young man, put that gun away."

"Shud'dup, grandma," the girl said. "Go ahead, get the money. I'll take care of her." The girl produced a small gun and placed it against Letitia's stomach. Letitia gasped.

It was over in an instant. The thug scooped up the bills and thrust them under his coat. "Don't move till we get out. Not even a little. That goes for you too, grandma."

Letitia was pretty well cowed. Her eyes sought Mr. Hughey's, pleading.

The numbness gone, Mr. Hughey was more angry than frightened. "You won't get away with this. I'll get you if I have to do it myself." But the couple was on their way. Outside, the girl took his arm and they walked nonchalantly down the street.

"Well, of all the—Why, I never dreamed—" Mrs. Hughey began.

"I told you not to open the door." Mr. Hughey's voice rang. Letitia gazed at him, startled. "Now, call the police. Quick. And Mr. Preston at his home." When she hesitated, he snapped, "I said quick."

Mr. Hughey himself ran to the window, but it was hopeless. Not a policeman in sight and the passers-by were oblivious to the drama so near them.

In a couple minutes Preston Investments was swarming with uniforms. A red-faced sergeant named Healy was in charge. "A man and a woman, huh. From what you say they were professionals."

"I'm sure they had it carefully planned," Mr. Hughey said. "I recall now how she maneuvered to check the lock. Then the put-on sneeze. I see that now. The handkerchief kept her from leaving fingerprints. And she seemed to know right where to go. That young lady had been here before."

"Hind-sight is better than bein' entirely blind, eh, Mr. Hughey?" Sergeant Healy said, with the philosophy of the ages in his eyes. "Describe 'em."

The color had returned to Mrs. Hughey's cheeks. She tested herself experimentally. "I can do that better than Roger. He always gets mixed up." She proceeded. "The man, so successful looking, and the girl wore a hat—like this—"

"You're the one that's mixed up, lady," said the sergeant. "They can change clothes." He added, unnecessarily, Mr. Hughey thought, "So pipe down." He turned to Mr. Hughey. "Give. Maybe we can get someplace." Letitia glared but her heart was not in it.

Mr. Hughey gave. "That's better," said Sergeant Healy. "But it's still a big world. If only we had fingerprints. Professionals we could check in ten minutes."

But the worst was yet to come. Mr. Preston arrived.

Mr. Preston was a self-made man. He was honest and fair with his employees, but he was equally stern and commanding. He was scowling. "What happened, Hughey? I hope it wasn't negligence."

Mr. Hughey gulped. "Well, sir—" He suddenly quit stammering. He took a deep breath and in words sharp and clear related just what happened.

Mr. Preston's face was a mask to the others, but Mr. Hughey knew him pretty well after fifteen years. Mr. Preston said, "Then Mrs. Hughey—?"



Mr. Hughey moved closer. His voice dropped to a confidential whisper. Mr. Preston, his gaze on Mrs. Hughey, nodded. Mr. Hughey then said, "Letitia, come here." She rose as if somebody had stuck her.

"Explain to Mr. Preston how you let the thugs in."

MR. PRESTON'S face was stern indeed. "I trusted your husband, madam. Whatever he permitted you to do in this office is his responsibility. He informs me that approximately eleven thousand dollars remained from unpaid checks tonight. I hope you're prepared to make it good."

Mrs. Hughey wilted. Mr. Hughey saw her cry for the first time. "I don't know—I didn't think—"

"You are discharged, Mr. Hughey. I'm sorry, but without recommendation. An example must be made of you for the other employees."

Mr. Hughey let his shoulders sag. He mumbled something about "dishonor," and guided Letitia sadly from the building.

Trudging back to the bus line, Mrs. Hughey said, "I'm so—sorry." She thought a moment. "I suppose the show is out."

"The show is definitely out," said Mr. Hughey. "How can you even think of it, under the circumstances? Your masterful Montgomery man will have to wait."

She tucked her arm in his. "I don't mind, Roger. You were magnificent. So—so like a conqueror." Mr. Hughey peered at her curiously. He supposed man was a creature of habits. Some women could say things like that and it sounded fine. With Letitia it was plain gushy. Beside it made him uncomfortable. He wasn't used to it.

All the way home Mr. Hughey kept thinking over preceding events. Mrs.

Hughey broke into his cerebrations. "What are we going to do?" she asked, still timidly. "You have no job. We'll have no income."

"You leave that to me," said Mr. Hughey, still forcefully. "I've always made the living and I'll continue to do so."

They were alighting from the bus on their own dark street when the idea struck him. "By golly!" he ejaculated, staring at her purse.

"What—is it, Roger?"

"I just thought of something." But no amount of cajoling could get him to elaborate.

He did not, he decided at once, want to frighten Letitia, but he had suddenly remembered the mirror that the girl held in her bare hand while fixing her hat. On it would be the imprints of her fingers. This, coupled with the fact that the thugs, like himself, would also think of it and want that mirror, furnished the core of a plan.

His first inclination was to call Sergeant Healy, but he ruled that out. The police would stubbornly pick up the girl first, which would give the man time to cache the money. On the other hand, his plan was not really dangerous, not considering the surprise element in his favor.

"YOU go on to bed, Letitia. I'll come shortly." Mrs. Hughey was reluctant but she went. After she turned out the light he got her purse and put it in plain view on the living room divan. Then, in the cellar he dug out the .22 revolver he'd bought years ago to kill rats. Lastly, he took a position behind the dining room portieres. He had not locked the front door as they came in.

Mr. Hughey felt certain that the girl, in the excitement that even thugs must experience during a hold-up, had



overlooked the fact that she'd touched the mirror. The only thing was, would she remember?

Time dragged incessantly. There was nothing but the muted night sounds to keep him company. He amused himself by thinking about Letitia. They had both seen a side to each other that neither knew existed. Mr. Hughey chuckled. Well, in a way, they both now had what they thought they wanted.

When it came midnight and nothing happened, he was about to give up. He hadn't heard Letitia's snores but he supposed she was long since asleep. Then, just as he stirred, the front steps creaked.

His hand clasped the revolver, his every nerve alert. He was trembling; he wasn't as steady as he thought he'd be.

Padded foot-steps crossed the porch. Mr. Hughey edged out where he could see through the windows. A shadow passed before him. His hand tightened around the gun. A key grated in the lock then was withdrawn. Mr. Hughey caught his breath.

In a moment the knob turned, the door eased open. A man's figure entered stealthily. The girl perhaps had waited in a car, ready for a quick getaway.

The man carried a flashlight which he snapped on. Mr. Hughey was sweating. Then he stepped out. "I've got you covered," he said, his voice strained. "Put—put up your hands."

The thug grunted. "So it was a trap, eh?"

Mr. Hughey didn't understand this. He shouted, "Letitia! Quick, call the police." He reached up and snapped on the ceiling lights.

Instead of fear on the dark, scowling face there was a smile. And the thug had changed clothes. He had worn dark

blue during the hold-up, now he wore grey.

A calm feminine voice from the doorway said, "Okay, grandpop, drop the water pistol."

It was the girl, her small gun leveled right at him. Her eyes gleamed excitedly though, her hand was white and nervous. She too had changed. Gone was the hat and the fetching dress; in its place was a dark suit and coat.

"People don't leave their doors unlocked," said the man, "Unless they want somebody to enter. Remember that, grandpop, next time you're layin' a trap."

Mr. Hughey dropped his revolver and felt very ill. To make it worse, Letitia hadn't answered, which meant she wasn't awake.

"There it is," said the girl, pointing to the divan.

The thug advanced, picked up the purse, removed the mirror and gave it a sound wiping between his gloved hands. "No use breaking it. Grandma'd just have to buy a new one." He laughed as if Mr. Hughey might miss the joke.

Mr. Hughey made a last stand, summoning the residue of his nerve. "Now look here—"

"Take it easy," said the thug. He addressed the girl, "You go first."

The girl stepped backwards out of the door, and then it happened. The girl never knew what hit her. Neither did Mr. Hughey, for that matter, not at once.

Then he glimpsed Letitia's face, set hard, her eyes two fearful fires. Before the thug could assimilate what was transpiring, Letitia charged him, striding over the girl's inert body to do it. She held a broom lance-like, and she bore down on him.

Instantly Mr. Hughey scooped up the .22. Before the man could concentrate his attack, or rather, his defense,



Mr. Hughey fired. The bullet struck his arm, the gun skidding onto the floor.

"Call the police, Letitia," said Mr. Hughey, in a voice that was not meant to conquer. He picked up the thug's gun. "And Mr. Preston, too."

Mrs. Hughey dropped the broom. "Call them yourself. And give me one of those guns."

Mr. Hughey called the police first and decided to wait, just to be safe, until the police arrived to call Mr. Preston.

Sergeant Healy scanned the guns, the broom, and the Hughey duet, then mopped his brow. "Well, there jest ain't nothing new, they say. But this is close." He squinted at the thug, later the still unconscious girl. "Tony Lappella and Bea Rives. But I never woulda knowed it from your descriptions."

"Policemen are notoriously dumb," said Letitia. "So take them out of here." When the sergeant started to speak, she added, "And pipe down."

Mr. Hughey chuckled. He was happy again, particularly so when the police found the eleven thousand dollars intact in a car parked a few doors away.

He went immediately and called Mr. Preston. The financier sounded sleepy. "Oh, stop worrying me, Hughey. The money was insured. I joined in your little joke to make your wife think you were fired and she was responsible for it. Now go to sleep—"

"But Mr. Preston, we've caught them. Here, at my house. And I'm afraid Letitia has—" He paused. He heard her voice from the other room.

She was saying, "Mr. Hughey was frightened, of course. He's not what you'd call a brave man. I heard him, he deserves credit for trying. I slipped out the back door, got the broom, and came around the house just in time—"

"Excuse me, Mr. Preston," Mr. Hughey said. "Thank you for what you did. But I think I loved Letitia more just as she was—is—"

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## THE HORSEMEAT MURDERS

BY LEE KALEY

**H**ORSES were the unfortunate victims of a new type of crime wave in the England of 1847. Farmers were reporting that they were suffering severe losses by the death of valuable horses which were left safe and sound in their stalls at night and then found lifeless the next morning. Was it a new epidemic? Scotland Yard soon found the epidemic was one of vicious criminal activity, not of disease.

On the evening of January 4, 1847, a farmhand named Mason heard the sound of a horse moaning as if in pain. Following the sound, he discovered a stranger in the stall, bending over a horse. Mason grabbed a stick, struck the intruder over the head with it, and tried to hold him. But the man tore himself loose and ran away.

Mason found the horse dead but still warm. He called the police. And Scotland Yard—as usual—handled the case very cleverly.

Investigators discovered that a shady character named Bentley was known in the past to sell animal carcasses on the London market, probably

to be used as food for the poor. These carcasses, claimed Bentley, were acquired by him through legal purchase from the former owners.

This customary story, long heard by the London merchants, was soon broken. Detectives found that Bentley had *lately* had a number of transactions with purchasers of dead horses in London and, when they grew suspicious of him and subjected him to close examination, found the mark of Mason's stick on his head! His goose was cooked and he soon admitted all.

His method was to choke the horses' nostrils with haywire, while keeping their jaws tied up with ropes, which he removed as soon as they were dead.

Thus, Bentley had adopted the method of his merciless predecessors who murdered humans and sold their bodies to medical schools. And, like his predecessors, he was convicted. However, since only a "dumb animal"—the horse—was involved, his career of "murder" cost him a mere fifteen years!

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# ONE DARK NIGHT

By LARRY HOLDEN

These two youngsters were going to help Keogh out on this case—even if it meant his death!

She let out a yip and tried to run. I wanted to go along but the club got there first





THE telegram said breathlessly, in the way telegrams do, "D. Keogh, Private Investigations. Drop everything. Sit tight. Must see you immediately. Very urgent. Life and death. D. Mothersill, Jr." I was panting when I finished reading it.

But "sit tight." That really called for a grin. The dry, bleached bones of a grin, but a grin all the same. I couldn't have been sitting any tighter if I'd been welded. Business had been so slow, I was a year up on my letter writing, foot wagging and finger twiddling.

So I sat tight. I sat tight until noon, and by that time I figured life and death had caught up with D. Mothersill, Jr., so I went out for a sandwich and a glass of beer. I got back just in time to catch the Western

Union boy turning from the office door.

I signed for the telegram and said to the kid, "He got himself an oxygen tent. He's up and around again." The kid said "Yeah" in a bored voice and reacted to the dime I gave him the way most people react to good advice. What did he want—a government bond?

I didn't pant over this one. That loose use of urgent wasn't getting me twice. It said, "Unavoidably delayed. Come immediately for conference to 18 Funston Parkway. Of gravest importance. D. Mothersill, Jr., Ronald K. Dorman."

Now he had a friend; that made it a conference. If I waited around an hour, maybe he'd dig up another friend. Then we could have a convention.

And that's the way it began—with a wisecrack.





I locked up the office and hung a card on the outside doorknob—Inquire At Lobby Cigar Stand. Minnie, my office girl, was dunking herself for two weeks at the seashore, and the little blonde in the lobby was taking care of callers for me. She wasn't losing weight.

I drove out to Funston Parkway in the agency heap, trying to figure out why a customer who lived right in the city should spend time sending telegrams when the phone would have been quicker and cheaper. Not that it meant anything. In my business you meet the world's most accomplished nuts.

The house was at the top of a rise from which you could overlook the placid park and see clear back to the blue haze of the Orange Mountains beyond. It was a rambling brick house that seemed to go on forever, and it was surrounded by a few acres of lawn so smooth and laundered, you might almost have cut it up in squares and sold it for diapers.

There wasn't any pushbell, but the front door was hung with a brass knocker as big as my head and almost as hard. I used it gently. I didn't want to batter my way in.

THE door swung in an inch and a bright blue eye appraised me suspiciously. It didn't say anything. I slipped a card from my vest pocket and inserted it in the crack. I said, "I'm expected."

There was an "Oh" and the door opened wide. He was a kid of about eighteen or nineteen, six feet tall and slender for his height. His hair was blond and a half inch long. He stuck his head out the doorway, looked up and down, then closed the door quickly. I began to feel like an international spy ring.

I was a disappointment to him. I could see that in his squint. I'm fat and forty. My jaw doesn't stick out a foot, I don't glower or grind my teeth. Maybe he expected Humphrey Bogart.

He whispered, "We're in the library," and led me through a living room you might have called cozy if you were thirteen feet high, then through another door into the library. We didn't walk on tip-toe, but the effect was the same.

In a green leather chair by the fireplace was another kid of about the same age. His hair was dark and curled into little horns on either side of his swarthy forehead. He didn't raise his head when we came in, but frowned up at us from under his eyebrows and folded a book face down across his knee. His right arm was in a black sling.

I said, "Which of you is D. Mothersill, Jr.?"

The blond said, "I am," and seemed surprised that I hadn't known that. I was a detective, wasn't I? "This is Ronny." Ronny grumbled something, maybe hello. "He's her brother. She's out now. That's why we're having the conference here. We thought it would be better. You never know."

"Is that the reason I got telegrams instead of phone calls—because you never know?"

"Yes. The wires to the house," he agreed quickly. "Ronny says you never really know, except for the click." He shepherded me into a red leather chair facing Ronny, and danced nervously in front of the fireplace, pulling at his fingers, looking from me to Ronny.

Kids, I thought. Kids! Someone had probably stolen their football.

"Well," I said briskly, "What makes you think you need a detective?"

Mothersill, Jr., licked his lips and said, "It's a plot," in a voice he must have thought, rightly, too high, for he



brought it way down and rumbled, "It's a plot. A death plot!"

I pointed at Ronny's sling. "Is that where he got that?"

"Uh. Indirectly. It's not *his* plot. It's against Valery. She's his sister," he spoke jerkily and pulled harder at his fingers.

Ronny spoke audibly for the first time. "He's in love with her." He wasn't jeering. "If you have to hire a detective," he said earnestly to Junior, "you have to tell him everything. Isn't that right, Mr. Keogh?"

I said, "It sure is." Baby sitter, that was me.

"I was going to tell him that," Junior said defensively. "Ronny's antagonistic. He wanted to handle this himself."

Ronny shook his head. "I'm not antagonistic, but I read once that private detectives sometimes blackmail their victims for years afterward. That's the reason I investigated Mr. Keogh this morning. And anyway," he said with a surge of fierce emotion, "she's my sister!"

Junior's lips quivered. "You can't love her any more than I do!"

I held up my hands palm outward and grinned. "Whoa, whoa. We'll grant your devotion. Let's find what it's all about." I pointed my chin at Junior. "And the best place to start is at the very beginning."

**R**ONNY nodded solemnly, and Junior squeaked, "At the very beginning?"

"There can be only one beginning."

"I just wanted to know," he apologized meekly. "That would be the plane, wouldn't it, Ronny?"

"That's the first *we* knew of it, anyway." Ronny seemed the more dominant of the two. His eyes were steadier and more mature, and when he

frowned, as he was doing now, you could see the solid, stubborn streak in him.

"That's Valery's plane," Junior told me. "It's up in the country and she said . . . But that isn't so important. It's a Piper Cub. Red. Uh . . ." he worried a piece of skin from the side of his finger, twisting his head to pull it loose. It was painful to watch. "Well, it's not very far from here. Do you know where the Rockaway Valley is? That's not so important either. It's that he always does, you know, and he has to do it behind her back because she . . ."

Ronny said impatiently, "Oh, tell him, Junior?"

"No," I said, "*You* tell me. It seems to have happened to you."

Junior's face fired, but he did look relieved as he mopped at it with a big white handkerchief.

Ronny said concisely, "I'm not supposed to use her plane, but I usually take it up on Wednesdays while she's at bridge club. I had it up a month ago and the rudder went dead. I got it down all right, but I crumpled a wing. I investigated and found the control cable had been filed to a whisker and had broken on a stiff bank up there."

This took me out of the nursery in one quick step. "You're sure it was filed?" I demanded.

"Well," he said carefully, "No, I'm not sure. It could have been cut with a hacksaw." He wasn't being funny. I don't think he had a sense of humor, but he wanted to be right. He was that kind of kid.

Junior looked as grave as an amateur undertaker, and he stopped eating his fingers long enough to say huskily, "Valery couldn't have brought it down. She's too emotional." He shivered.

I said quickly, before he could get



going again, "Did you do anything about it, Ronny?"

"Yes. I told Val, and she laughed at first and pretended she didn't believe me. I can tell when people are pretending. I've made a study of it, because most people aren't honest, not really honest, and you have to be on guard against it all your life. I told her to stop pretending, because anybody who . . . who mutilates a plane is a dangerous person. Then she became angry, but she was still pretending, because she was really scared. I can tell that, too. She told me to mind my own business, and that anyway I was imagining things, but I said I had made a thorough investigation and there was no doubt in my mind, and I said I was going to make it my business to see that no harm came to her. Then she really blew up and said a great many untrue things about me, although she knows I am essentially more honest than most people. Do you think, Mr. Keogh, that anybody is one hundred per cent honest all the time?"

I said, "Not all the time, but it's how you look at it. Has your broken arm anything to do with this business?"

He looked down at his arm. "It's not broken. I was shot."

**T**HAT caught me between the teeth. Eighteen-year-olds get shot down in the Ironbound District, not up here. I said, "Tell me about it, son."

"It happened four nights ago at eleven thirty-five. I was reading in bed and I heard a noise outside the house. I have made an analysis of night sounds, and they're very interesting, but this was a noise I couldn't classify, so I went to the window and looked out. I always investigate new sounds, no matter what time of night, and it was fortunate I did, because someone was trying to force the French

doors to Valery's room. I was very stupid and acted on impulse. Instead of finding a weapon and capturing him, I shouted. He turned and there was a flash and an explosion and something hit me very hard on the arm and I fell back into the room. It didn't feel like a bullet; it felt like a club hitting me, but I read up on it and found all bullets feel like that at first. I had never been shot at before, so I didn't know. Have you been shot often?" he asked curiously.

"Not too often," I told him. "Did you get a look at this guy?"

"He didn't get a look at him at all," said Junior eagerly, "Did you, Ronny? It was too dark. Ronny has a theory you can train yourself to see in the dark, but he didn't start practicing until after he was shot. Then he ran right into Valery's room. He's not afraid of anything."

"Shut up, Junior. Let me tell it," Ronny was still young enough to blush. "I did run into her room, but I had a golf club." A golf club against a gun! "Valery was sitting up in bed just getting her arms into a house coat. She asked me angrily what I was shooting at, then she saw the blood and she screamed. I hadn't even known I was bleeding. I told her we had to notify the police, but she begged me not to. She admitted she was in trouble, but she wouldn't tell me what it was, although I used all the methods of cross examination I had read about."

"Sometimes," I said, "they don't work. What did you tell the doctor?"

"Oh, I had that figured out before he came. I drank a large glass of whiskey and pretended I was drunk and had been shooting in the cellar and had wounded myself trying to reload the gun. He believed me and said very sternly I was too young to get drunk and a damn fool to play with guns. He



scolded Valery too, because she's supposed to take care of me, now that Mother and Dad are dead. Then, after the doctor went away, I found I was really drunk and Valery had to put me to bed because I kept bumping into things."

"And you still didn't call the police? You should have known by that time how dangerous things were getting, son."

"I knew it was dangerous. I knew right from the beginning, and more especially when I found the note. You see, she wouldn't tell me what kind of trouble she was in, so I investigated, and I found this note lying on the floor under her desk. This is the note."

He handed me a piece of paper that had a few lines of bad typing sprawled in the center of it.

look sistr, if you dont come  
accros with more \$\$\$ we will  
take you fpr a ride and bump  
you off/ abd thats not the  
olf malarky

"That from gangsters," said Junior somberly. "You can tell."

I compressed my lips. I folded the paper and slowly put it in my breast pocket behind the handkerchief. "The guy who wrote that," I growled, "doesn't even know a gangster by ear. Did you get any line on your sister's trouble at all, Ronny?"

**H**E SHOOK his head. "But I do know she has paid out a lot of money. Dad left us each a quarter of a million dollars when he died, and her's must be nearly gone. I've been watching her mail. I steam it open, but I'm not very good at it. It gets wrinkled looking. There was a notice from her bank saying she was over-drawn, then a few days later a check came from a New York broker with a note saying he had sold her railroad bonds. Then

I called in Junior, because I knew he was in love with Valery and would do anything to help her."

"And that's a fact, Mr. Keogh." He coughed. "That's the reason I made him get you. Are you going right to work on it?" He wriggled with excitement.

But Ronny said more practically, "How much are you going to charge? I read that twenty-five dollars a day plus a reasonable allowance for expenses was a normal fee. Is that right?"

"That's about right," I said. A boy with a mind for practical details like that was going to go far—just as if a quarter of a million bucks wasn't far enough. "Have you any pictures of your sister?"

"Right here. I collected all I could find."

He went over to the flat-topped desk and came back carrying a six-inch stack of all kinds of photographs awkwardly in his left hand. I discarded the glamor studio portraits and selected three fairly clear snapshots.

Junior asked, "Are you going to tail her?" and in such a voice you'd think it was something you did on a dark night in the cellar with a meat cleaver.

"He has to tail her, of course," Ronny looked at me. "Tell me, what are the requirements for successful tailing?"

"Oh," I said, "you just follow them around and keep out of sight."

"There must be more to it than that," he shook his head slowly. "I've tried it and she always spots me. It's very embarrassing."

I stood and looked at both of them—at Junior's flushed and eager young face, at Ronny's square, tight jaw.

I said, "From here on in, it might be a good idea if you left all the detecting to me."

Ronny's head was lowered stubbornly and he said, "I won't promise that.



She's my sister and I. . . ."

I sighed. "All right. I can't stop you. But for God's sake, don't go shooting anybody. You haven't got a license."

He asked very seriously, "Where can I get one?"

SHE was half a block ahead of me and moving right along. She was a tall, lithe girl with a spring step as tireless as a turbine. There were three inches of perky hat and three yards of chartreuse veil over her dark hair. She had herself braced at the edge of thirty, and there was a taut, haggard look to her face, but there was still enough beauty in her carriage to twist the necks of the drugstore beauty appraisers.

We had been shopping all morning. We had gone through Hahnes, Kresges, Bambergers and Hearn's like a pair of fire inspectors with a political grouch. She was as busy as a feeble-minded pup in a fireplug factory.

Then we had lunch in Shrafft's, and after lunch we went to *Alix* to have our hair set, our face massaged and our nails done.

Until now, she had just been entertaining herself, but when she came out of the beauty salon she glanced at her wrist watch, looked surprised and lengthened her step. Her face had a dark, wild look with a flash of excitement and two lines of creased worry between her eyes. Too, she opened her purse and looked into it, as if to reassure herself that something she had been carrying was still there. She walked purposefully, and her lower lip between her teeth showed she was really thinking about it, and thinking hard.

She turned into Charley's on Market Street, which was a surprise, for Charley's is just a beer joint with a few pine booths at the side.

I was about fifteen feet behind her

and I got in just in time to see her slide into the seventh booth on the left wall and sit opposite a bulky, craggy man with a face that looked blurred and incomplete. Which it was. His left ear was gone except for a small knot of twisted flesh. The skin on his left cheek seemed to have been smoothed with a hot iron and polished with wax, and there was only one nostril left to his nose. His left eye drooped in a perpetual satyr-like leer. His hands were under the table, but I knew what they looked like. The left had only a thumb, and the right a thumb and forefinger.

I knew him. He was Louie App, ex-con, ex-boxman ex-practically everything since the night the Investors' Building & Loan strongbox went off in his face, carrying seven of his fingers with it.

Back in the old prohi days, he used to make a specialty of those little souvenirs bootleggers loved to leave attached to the ignitions of one another's cars. You step on the starter, and after the fireworks they pick up what's left of you on the ends of pins.

That was Louie App. He was supposed to be a little punchy, but I never quite believed his foolish grin or the fumbling of his mutilated hands.

I slid down to the end of the bar, ordered a beer without the usual half-witty remarks so Charley would know I was on a job and didn't have time to exchange the weather with him. I had both eyes on the pair in the booth.

She was scared. There was no doubt about that. Her face was so dead white, her lipstick was just a smear of soot between her nose and chin, and above that her eyes were dilated and brilliant. Her fingers coiled and meshed at the table edge. She was talking swiftly, shaking her head, arguing, but Louie App's loose grin never wavered or



tightened, and when she finished and leaned back, her mouth a crescent, he held up his three remaining fingers, then just the two. Five. When she shook her head, he shrugged and drew his forefinger amiably across his throat and widened his leer, leaning forward over the table.

SHE argued again, pleading, holding out her right hand, palm-upward, shaking her head gently from side to side. His face never lost its expression of moronic good-nature. He made five with his fingers again, then spread his hands apart in a gesture of finality.

She spoke on, but he had stopped listening. He put a cigarette in his mouth, held a match folder on the table with his left thumb and struck a match across it. His eyes flickered at her over the flame and for the instant before he held it to his cigarette he seemed to be laughing. He started to push himself sideways out of the booth, but her arm shot out and stopped him. She nodded briefly and a thin, bitter look pinched her face, and she opened her purse and dug into it with shaking fingers. They both put their hands under the table. I couldn't see what went on from where I was sitting, but it was money, for he leaned to the side and slid something into his pants pocket as her hands came up over the table again.

She said something to him through a mouth as thin as a violin string and jerked her head contemptuously toward the door. His grin disappeared as if he had swallowed it. He lurched heavily out of the booth and strode away from her with his hand still in his pocket. She watched him go.

She was still watching when I went out after him. I didn't run or put on cotton whiskers or hold my coat over the lower part of my face or do any of the conspicuous things you see in the

funny papers, but I would have been happier if she'd been staring into a glass of beer.

Outside, he just strolled along. He stopped at the corner of Market and Halsey Street and talked for a couple of minutes with the cop on the beat. When he moved away, the cop laughed and patted him on the shoulder. Good old Louie App, just a big, slap-happy bum—I don't think! He repeated this act with the Broad and Market cop, building himself up as a harmless clown. Then he continued down to Mulberry street and turned right.

At the other side of the railroad overpass, he shambled into a doorway beside a small shop with dusty windows that were stacked with indiscriminate junk—cast-iron Venuses with clocks in their bellies, high button shoes, Christmas ornaments, broken, and piles of forlorn, decaying books that had never been read. I have never seen anyone go into shops like that, and they are padlocked. When I was a kid I used to think them very sinister and fascinating. I still do.

I didn't stop for a glance at the inviting debris, but went right to Louie App's door and braced myself as I pushed it open. The stench rolled down the stairs and over me, so thick you could have tied it with rope and dragged it away.

A door closed noisily on the second floor. I parted a way through the miasma and trudged up the steps. They gave soggly under my weight. There were two doors facing one another across the dark hall. Neither had a doorknob. I pushed open the right one and looked into the room without going through the doorway. It was littered with bottles, newspapers, tin cans, and against the wall was an army cot from the 1914 war. A man was lying face down on the floor with his arm



crooked under his head. He was snoring. All he had on was a pair of long dirty drawers. I closed the door.

The door at the left was caught by a hook and hung open about a half inch. I flipped up the hook with a pencil and stepped into the room and said, "Hello, Louie."

HE WAS lying fully dressed on the bed, reading a magazine called King Kong Komiks. He let the book fall and raised himself on his elbow, a web of gray fear further blurring his face. He turned on his loose, flapping grin and said, "Oh. Yeah. Come to call on Louie? Yeah. How's things, pal?" His voice was thick and furry.

I said, "You know me, Louie?"

He looked at me, but his eyes kept sliding off as if my face were ice and too slippery. He mumbled, "Yeah. You're the fella . . . the fella . . ." His voice trailed off and his face clouded with bewilderment. He put the back of his hands to his lips and shook his head.

"I'm Keogh," I said with flat sarcasm, "Dinny Keogh, the private eye. A hard name to remember, eh? Especially considering that I had you knuckled for that Second National job back in '37."

His heavy face creased in all directions as he disgorged his grin again. "Oh, yeah, yeah. Hiya, Dinny pal. Long time between friends, eh?" He held out his two-fingered hand.

I pushed it aside and growled, "Put it away. I know what it feels like."

He used to do that for the laughs in Charley's—hold out his hand to an unsuspecting sucker, then roar with innocent merriment when the sucker found out what he was holding and dropped it like a rotten tomato.

He said anxiously, letting his hand dangle from the wrist in an attempt at

pathos, "What's the matter, Dinny pal. I done something?" He pushed himself upright and started to swing his legs over the side of the bed. "I'll buy you a drink, what do you say, Dinny pal?"

I put the heel of my hand against his breastbone and pushed him back against the headboard of the bed. I held up my hands with the five fingers spread. "What do five fingers mean, Louie?" I asked.

He looked puzzled. "It means . . . It means you got all of them?" he faltered. His lips shook.

"That's fine, Louie. Now what does it mean when you hold five fingers up to a dame? Something else, Louie?"

Fear was suddenly stark and white in his eyes and the way his arms were braced on the mattress, it looked as if he were trying to push himself back through the headboard, away from me. He shook his head and his hanging underlip flapped like a torn sleeve.

"You don't know, Louie?" I leaned forward and slapped him across the face. "Does it mean five C's or five G's?" I snarled.

He began to whimper and cross his arms in front of his face. I sat on the edge of the bed and pushed his arms down. His forearm was so thick with muscle, my fingers didn't go a third around it. That should have told me something, but it didn't. I was too busy being a louse and beating up a helpless cripple, if you know what I mean. He drew up his legs and crouched against the bed.

"Come on, punk," I slapped him again, harder, "What do you have on her that's worth five G's? You're going to tell me if I have to sit here all night and slap your jaw off the hinges."

Which is what I thought. I didn't have to sit there all night at all. I didn't even have to sit there another thirty seconds—for he unfolded his legs



on me and I went over the footboard of the bed like a pair of drawers over a windy clothesline. He was on me before I could get to my knees. He hooked his wrist under my armpit, jerked me up and hit me under the chin with the flat of his hand, and harder than I have ever been hit before. I was just plain lucky he couldn't make a fist, or my neck would have been ten inches longer. The floor tilted and caught me flat between the shoulder. I wasn't out, but I couldn't move a muscle. My eyes were open and I knew I could see, for I saw Louie give me one look of terror, then turn and lumber through the doorway and disappear into the hall as if fleeing from something nine feet wide and all teeth.

I lay there thinking bitterly, "Shame on you, Dinny Keogh—beating up a helpless cripple like that?"

I WAS just beginning to be able to wriggle a pinkey when the door opened and the kids—the pair of them—looked wildly into the room.

Junior sagged whitely against the wall and started to slide down as his knees gave out, but Ronny helped me up with his one good arm. Except for the pipe vice clamped on the back of my neck, I felt fine. My legs worked, and my arms worked. I might even have said my mind worked, but after the exhibition of talent I had just given, that would have been stretching it farther than the girdle would go.

Ronny said anxiously, "We've been following you. I wanted to see how an expert tailed people. We were downstairs when that man came running out. We thought something had happened."

Junior's lips looked like drained veal, but he was eager. "Did you get anything out of him, Mr. Keogh?"

"Yeah," I wagged my jaw with my fingers, gently, "but nothing to boast

about. Let's get out of here before we have to be fumigated."

Outside on the sidewalk I said to them, "You'd better not follow me around anymore. I hate to be head man in a gooney parade, and people might get suspicious of a walking convention. I'm going to try to pick up your sister again."

Ronny said promptly, "That will be very simple, sir. She's probably at home. She's going out tonight with . . . uh . . ." he looked sidelong at Junior, who was staring miserably at his shootips. "It always takes her hours to get ready," Ronny went on swiftly. "I timed her to see how long it took the average woman, and it was three hours and forty-seven minutes. But that," he added fairly, "included a bath."

I shooed them away, and they went reluctantly. They should have been Junior G-Men. They were gifted.

I went over to the G's Clam House to graze, and by a quarter to eight I was on duty outside the Dorman mansion of Funston Parkway.

At ten minutes to nine, a black LaSalle sedan, long enough to come in sections like a train, turned into the driveway, noiselessly mounted the terrace and stopped before the front door. The porch light went on, and the door was opened by someone completely hidden by the bigness and broadness of the visitor. The light went off.

It was a few minutes after ten before it went on again, and Valery Dorman in a tailored white satin evening gown, came out chatting with her head turned to the man at her side. The LaSalle floated down the curving driveway and turned left into Funston. I gave them a block before I put the heap into first gear and idled along after them.

They parked in a lot near Lincoln Park and strolled, arm in arm and still talking, over to the new club that had



opened a month ago, called *The Zoo*. That was just the temporary name. It had been *The Thousand Club* before that, and still earlier *Joseph's*. It was a gambling crib, but very, very exclusive, limited to customers with money in their pockets.

They had a reservation, and I didn't. She was wearing a white satin evening gown with an orchid, and I wasn't. They got a table, and I got the eyebrow. But the headwaiter didn't stop me as I slipped by him and wandered up to the bar, that somehow didn't quite look like the interior of a lion's cage.

VALERY DORMAN and her friend were tabled right next to the bear-pit, on which the couples heaved and panted to maintain foot room as the orchestra beat the devil out of *Night And Day*. The orchestra was called Swoop McGoo and his Ragged Andys, which gives you an idea.

Valery was looking around, smiling here and there. Her glance swept over me as if I were a picture on the wall, stopped for an instant at the two fluffy blonds down the bar, then continued its itinerary.

But it wasn't she who held my eyes. It was the man with her. He would hold anybody's. He was tall and broad, but that wasn't all there was to it. There was a spray of gray at each of his temples, but instead of making him look older, it just accented his distinguished bearing. You knew instantly he was someone important. And that was something—a real asset, especially for him, for he was one of the most successful confidence men in the business. Women, a specialty.

His name was, or had been, Rolf Dockery. I don't know what he called himself now, but it wouldn't be Dockery. The cops of seven states had their tongues hanging out for a piece of him,

but he'd never been knuckled, or even printed. His victims never squawked, so what could you do? Some of them, in fact, yapped only because he hadn't hung around to accept the rest of their bankroll. He was as suave as Napoleon brandy, and as slippery as a cafeteria tray.

Valery leaned forward, said something to him, smiled, rose and walked away from the table, holding a small jeweled bag at her waist.

The barman came down and passed a spotless cloth over the spotless bar and raised his eyebrows. This place was full of eyebrow-raisers.

I said, "I'll be back in a minute," and slipped off the tiger-striped barstool and crocheted my way through the maze of tables until I stood at Valery's empty chair. Dockery was lighting a cigarette and didn't look up until I slid into the chair opposite and murmured, "Pardon me, but aren't you George Nielson of Chicago?"

He looked patient and started, "Why no, I'm sorry, but I'm . . ." he stopped as his eyes really focussed on me and a smile molded his mouth and he held out his hand. "Bless my shabby soul if it isn't Honest Daniel Keogh! Have they elected you mayor yet, Dan?"

His voice was warm and vibrant, and his smile pressed you right to his heart. Hell, it even made me feel good.

We shook hands and I said, "What's the pitch this time, Dockery? Oil, lumber, or have you gone in for atoms?"

He laughed and picked up his high-ball glass with a hand that looked as if it had been manicured all week just for tonight, but which managed to keep a hard masculinity. He raised his left hand and crooked his forefinger without looking anxious, indignant or imperious, but within ten seconds there was a waiter bowing over him. I have to blow a police whistle before I can get



one to give me even toothpicks.

Dockery asked, "What are you drinking, Dan?"

I said Irish and soda, and the waiter said yes sir, and hurried away as if he had to get back as fast as he could, just to look at another of those famous Dockery smiles.

When the waiter was out of earshot, I said bluntly, "I've been hired to see that this dame of yours doesn't pick up any bad habits. I'd go so far as to call you a vice."

HE LAUGHED pleasantly and flicked a few feathers of ash from his cigarette into the tray. "Dan, Dan," he said with a soft touch of mockery, "there you go shooting off your gun before you load it. You can't touch me and you know it." He rested an elbow on the table and sat his chin on his folded fingers. His eyes suddenly looked as remote as an ocean horizon. "You may not believe it," he murmured, "but this is one deal you could put a plumb line on. It's plastics. Plastic cloth for women's dresses. The most wonderful thing you ever heard of," his voice picked up a singing eagerness. "Gay patterns and the durability of armorplates. Rub it with a damp cloth, and it's clean!"

When he spoke like that, you'd believe him if he said he'd turned Lake Hopatcong into a reservoir of Scotch and was selling it at twenty dollars a case. You'd even buy it from him.

The waiter turned up with my Irish and soda and bowed fourteen times to the square inch when Dockery murmured "Thank you." People really fell for him, and fell till it hurt.

He gave me an amused glance and said, "You don't believe it, do you, Dan? But I have a factory in South Jersey that's practically set for full scale operation."

I said, "Yeah, and I'll bet you have the nicest blueprints." I yawned and put my hand to my mouth. My wrist watch said I'd been sitting there almost a half hour. "Seems to me," I said, "our girl friend's really giving herself a paint job. Maybe she went out to get herself sprayed."

He glanced at his watch, then back over his shoulder and around the room. The waiter was at his elbow immediately.

"Was there something, Mr. Dockery?" he asked. So it was Dockery.

"No thank you. I . . ."

"A young lady left this table about a half hour ago," I cut in, "We think that's a little too long. She may be ill. Would you see? Her name is Valery Dorman."

The waiter said, "Miss Dorman is well known here." Dockery followed him with his eyes as he sped among the tables with accustomed agility.

When he turned back to me, his face wasn't quite so serene. "A half hour . . ." He caught his lip with his teeth. He shook his head slightly and reached for the almost empty highball glass. "Sometimes she's very unaccountable."

There didn't seem to be any answer to that one, so I just sat and waited and wagged my foot with the thump of the band. I was thinking—there are a lot of dames who take more than a half hour, especially if they meet a friend they haven't seen for three hours and there must be plenty to talk about. Only Valery Dorman didn't strike me as the kind of girl who'd spend time with women when there was an attractive man handy. Then there were the other angles, like Louie App, and the kid brother with a bullet in his arm, and her plane with the filed cable. You add them up and a half hour becomes a long time, a hell of a long time.



SO I WAS prepared for it when the waiter, excitedly flapping his napkin as he talked, came up with the manager, a guy named Joe Corliss who dressed like a nance and kept a handkerchief up his sleeve—and who was as tough as a rifle barrel when you crossed him. He had lips I suppose, but I never saw them—just the slit that barely moved when he talked.

He said to Dockery, "The girl isn't in the Lounge. The Matron said she was in and out a half hour ago. Maybe she stood you up for something taller and darker. It's been done."

Dockery flushed, and I said in a hard voice, "How about upstairs? Did you look there?"

"Upstairs?" Corliss put his fingertips on the table and leaned on their resilience. There was a warning in his eyes.

"Yeah. Upstairs among the roulette, chuck-a-luck, crap and stud."

Corliss turned his head to Dockery, who made a quick gesture of disclaimer, disowning me.

I knew what had happened. I knew right away. The upstairs trade was not for the tourists, and Corliss couldn't afford to let me spread it around like jam on muffins. I had put him in a corner with only one back door.

He leaned a little deeper over the table and said coldly, "You—out!" He stood back and pulled the handkerchief from his sleeve, and suddenly there were three waiters in back of me instead of just one.

If I tried to bull it through, I'd find myself grabbed from three sides and the small, woven leather callahan I knew Corliss carried in his inside pocket would thud just hard enough behind my ear and they'd carry me out, while he explained liplessly to the customers, "Just another drunk. Enjoy yourselves, folks. We don't allow trouble

in here."

I said harshly to Dockery, "I'll see you later, bloodworm," and walked out ahead of Corliss and two of the waiters. I turned toward the front entrance, but he dug his fingers into the muscles of my upper arm and swung me left. "We're using the other door, chump," his voice had a bite to it. He had his left hand inside his jacket.

The other door was a fire exit just beyond the two Lounges. A tall, thin gray-haired woman came through one of the quilted leather doors, swaying from side to side as she clutched at her girdle. Her eyes narrowed at our procession. She looked away, then back again in a perfect double take. Her mouth sagged and she walked hurriedly to the right, probably to tell her friends she had just seen a man having it put to him.

And she wasn't too far wrong. When I reached the door, Corliss would cold cock me with his sap, and out I'd go into the alley on my face. I've never become fond of being tagged like that.

WE REACHED the corner. The fire door was about twenty feet to the right. I jerked my chin at it and said, "There?", and looked back over my shoulder. We were strung out—one, two, three, four, with Corliss immediately behind me and his hand deep into his jacket pocket. He said icily, "Keep going, chump." And I said okay in a resigned voice and went quickly around the corner, keeping in close. I whirled and as he came around after me I grabbed his lapel over his left arm, pinning it, and chopped his neck with the side of my hand. It's not nice, but it's quick. The first waiter was on us by this time and he yelled "Hey!" and I heaved Corliss at his legs. As he stumbled, I stepped to the right and bounced my wrist on the back



of his neck. It was a thick neck and it felt like hitting an automobile tire. The second waiter ran at me, tugging at his hip pocket. I went down sideways, supporting myself on my right arm, and popped his kneecap with a flip of my foot. He went down as if the leg had been cut off. I lunged and gave him the last rabbit in the hutch.

The customers never got this far back, so there were no sightseers. I dragged the three of them over to the door and heaved them out. It wasn't anything permanent, but I needed time.

I knew the way upstairs as well as I knew the buttons on my shorts. There'd been no reason for Corliss to get that tough, unless he hadn't liked me in the first place. There are a lot of people who grin and hate you, and maybe he was one of them.

The stairs were to the far left of the kitchen entrance. They were narrow and softly lit by fluorescent tubes concealed at the upper edge of the risers. The walls again were quilted with coral leather, and the handrail was braided.

There was a blank door at the head of the stairs, and you had to kick a buzzer with your left foot before you could get in. Under the leather, the door was steel. There had been an epidemic of gambling house heists, and Corliss had put it in before the rod-men sniffed at his hearth. There was a trick periscope arrangement, through which the strong-arm inside could dog-eye the sucker.

I tapped the buzzer the right number of times, and after a brief pause, the door opened. A gorilla, in a dinner jacket that fit him like a dropped bed-sheet, scowled at me and grumbled, "Damn it, Dinny, you hadn't ought to dress like that in here. Even a flat from Nutley'd finger you for a fuzz, with your mug and that sack." He peered

down the stairs and closed the door. He shambled back to his chair and tilted himself against the wall, running down a racing form with his thumb, moving his lips, spelling out each entry.

The gambling room looked as big as the Rose Bowl, and there was enough equipment in it to keep the Vice Squad busy for ten days dumping it in Newark Bay. It had everything.

Everything but Valery Dorman. I couldn't have missed her white gown and orchid. There were three steps down, but I didn't take them. I took the stairway along the wall, running my fingers lightly along the wrought iron handrail as I sprang up. I went along the narrow balcony that overlooked the room, and took the last door in a row of three. That was Corliss's office. The other two were just relief stations.

**I**T WAS subdued, as gamblo-niterie offices go. There was the usual amount of chrome and glass, plus a blond veneered desk with wood grains that angled this way and that and a top of glistening black glass. On it was a white telephone, a white blotter, a white ash tray, a white cigarette box, and a white carafe—that was probably filled with white mule. Other than some chairs, it was a thoroughly empty room. There were two doors behind the desk. One led to a personal jakes, and the other opened to a shallow closet in which hung two suits of clothes, an unshaven tweed and a very striped worsted. The closet was too shallow, for the suits hung at an angle—and in a gambling house there's pretty nearly a reason for everything. The reason this time was a pivot down the center of the back wall. You pushed the right edge and the wall became a doorway to a flight of stairs running down. Very handy and practical.



I backed out of the closet, leaving the door open. It was a heavy door—more steel—and was keyed on the inside. Also handy.

I went over to the desk and yanked open the drawers in a desultory sort of way, the way you do when you're trying to think of something to look for. They were just full of stuff—a black automatic big enough for a front axel, photographs of girls—decent ones, for a change—and letters. The "Dear Sir, You Cur" kind. Just gill bleats. There were a lot of those. Maybe Corliss kept them for the laughs.

Then I found the pocket. Corliss was one of those onions whose secret tickle is that he's smarter than everybody, so he had to have a special drawer with a gadget. Those smart boys always run to gadgets. This one was very simple. You pulled the drawer out, and beside the run was a thin compartment—paper with I. O. U.'s.

But one of them was signed Louis K. App, and his I. O. came to a modest two G's. It was dated two weeks back.

Now two G's isn't a lot of money—except maybe for an alleged nutsy fagin like Louie. And why had Corliss let him run up a score like that? I folded the note carefully and stashed it away in my wallet. It was my turn to be a smart onion.

And I was so busy thinking about it and congratulating myself and shoving the drawer back into place, I didn't hear the door open. It was practically noiseless anyway. You can call that an excuse.

Corliss's cold voice rasped, "When you finish going over my income tax, you can inspect the plumbing." The plumbing was in his hand and it looked at me without a wink. He took two steps into the room. Behind him was the portcullis tiger, and his eyes leered

and went over me like fingers reading a dirty joke in Braille. He chuckled and closed the door with a backward swing of his arm.

I said, "I'm looking for Valery Dorman." I was just talking.

He sneered. "In the desk. Your friend left," his voice sharpened, "Grab air, chump!"

I dropped behind the desk, pulling at the gun in the armpit clip. I went out fast around the left side, not giving them time to go right and left on me. Corliss had his eye on the wrong end, and the tiger had his arm twisted around behind him, as if his gun had fallen into the seat of his pants. He saw me and yelled, his head bobbing as he jerked at his gun. It was caught in his waistband. I put a shot into the door over his head to make them cautious, then dived for the closet. I pulled the door shut, turned the key and sprinted down the steps.

THE Dorman house was lit up like an A Picture premiere. Ronny opened the door for me. He was holding his slung arm with his left hand as if it pained him. It probably did. Excitement makes gunshot wound throb like a runaway pulse. He cried anxiously, "Did you find her?"

I shook my head and walked into the hall. He looked at the living room door.

"Mr. Dockery is here," he muttered. "I don't like him. He keeps saying he loves her. Come inside. I don't want to talk to him."

Dockery was standing at the fireplace with his hands clasped behind him and his head lowered, staring at the gleaming brass andirons. He turned as I walked in and said, "Ah!"

"Yeah," I said, "Ah."

He looked surprised at the roughness of my voice. "Still that?" he said, as if it were something that had hap-



pened a long time ago. "What did you expect me to do, get thrown out with you? What good would that have done? Did you find Valery?" then at the sight of Ronny's heavy young scowl, "No. I suppose not. We're worried sick. We've called everybody."

"I've called the police and all the hospitals," Ronny told me primly, deliberately not looking at Dockery. "I'm satisfied she hasn't had an accident, whatever else there may have been."

Dockery winced at that "whatever else there may have been", and a slight flush highlighted his broad cheekbones. Behind the flush, his tanned face looked yellow. He slipped a hammered silver cigarette case from his vest pocket and offered it, open, to us.

Ronny said heavily, "No thanks. I don't smoke. I'm too young. I won't be eighteen until October."

It was a stiff rebuff, and Dockery's flush deepened. I walked down and took one of the cigarettes and said thanks as he held a match for me.

He muttered, "I can't get to that kid to save my life. I've been here an hour and it's been sixty minutes of stone wall."

I let the smoke drift from my mouth. "Maybe he has a sensitive nose. You're rotten at the edges, Dockery."

He compressed his lips and turned back to the fireplace and mumbled, "Christ knows!" He put a cigarette in his mouth and forgot to light it. His eyes were as somber as an autopsy.

When the phone rang, you could have put a spirit level on our backs, the way we straightened up.

Ronny said belligerently, "I'll answer it," and ran from the room.

Dockery snatched the cigarette from his mouth and leaned toward the door. He looked like a pointer on a covey of quail, even to the quiver. If it was an act, it was a good one. Maybe he did

love the girl.

The door opened again and slowly Ronny came through it. He tried twice to speak, but his mouth had turned to cotton. He put his hand over his face and a thin sob filtered through his fingers.

I motioned Dockery back. I went up and put my arm around the kid and said, "What was it, son?"

"H-he said . . ." he shook his head as if angry with the tears that spilled over his eyelids. He flicked his fingers across his cheek. He looked at me appealingly.

"I'm trying to remember his exact words, sir. H-he said—'It's ducats or death, Ronny pal. Right now she's resting nice and easy. We'll send you a map in the morning. That's all for now, Ronny pal.' That's all he said."

I said sharply to Dockery, "That makes it a snatch, doesn't it."

His hands fluttered and the cigarette fell to the floor. He looked suddenly as old as the spray of gray at his temples said he was. He sank down to the sofa and sat with his hands dangling limply between his thighs. "I swear to God, Keogh," his voice was shaken and bleak, "I swear before God I don't know anything about this. I love the girl. I love her, Keogh. I wouldn't tear my own heart to shreds, would I?"

But the words were just cold pebbles in his mouth. He didn't expect to be believed, and I didn't answer him. I shook Ronny's shoulder gently. "I'll see you later, son," I said, and walked out swiftly.

AT THIS hour, Mulberry street was a dark, furtive alley—as furtive as the voice that had whispered "Ronny pal" over the phone. A drunk stumbled and lurched under the railroad trestle; the city sounds seemed muffled.

I stopped across the street from Louie



App's den. I got out of the car, tapped the gun lightly under my left arm, and quickly crossed the street. The door-knob was slippery, and when I turned to the faded glimmer of the streetlamp I saw a smear of red across the base of my fingers. I looked down the street. The drunk was weaving in the center of the sidewalk, his arms held out at either side, reaching for support that wasn't there.

He took two long steps toward me, plunging as if he had been pushed, then pitched forward. Even at that distance I could hear his head hit the sidewalk. I ran toward him. His arms were folded under him and his back was tightly humped, a curve from his forehead on the sidewalk to his knees. His feet beat rapidly three or four times and he straightened out, stretching, then softened and seemed to sink a little into the concrete. He was very dead.

It was Louie App, and his hands were clasped over the wooden handle of a slender knife that protruded from between his ribs.

There was no one else on the street. I ran back to the doorway and sprinted up the stairs. From his room came a heavy thump-thump. I kicked his door open and went in low and fast. I rolled across the floor and came up beside the bed. There was another thump and the bed vibrated against my shoulder. And that's where she was. I turned on the light.

There was a strip of adhesive plaster across her mouth, another around her ankles, and her hands were taped behind her. Her skirt had ridden up high on her legs above the points of her stocking tops where the garters caught. Her eyes rolled wildly and she shook her head from side to side and rough animal noises tangled in her throat. She tried to hitch herself up the bed and away from me.

"It's okay now," I said as soothingly as I could. I sat on the edge of the bed and gently worked the tape loose from her mouth. She whimpered a little as I pulled it free. Whoever had taped her ankles and wrists hadn't done a good job on them, for if she'd really struggled, she had a chance of pulling herself loose. I guess three fingers weren't as good as ten at that.

I helped her up from the bed. She looked at me wonderingly, her head tilted far to one side. She still didn't look quite sane. Her tongue protruded a little from between her loose lips and she followed me obediently as I led her to the door. The darkness of the foul-smelling hall seemed to frighten her, for she pulled back stiffly and moaned, "No-no-no-no- . . ."

"You're all right now," I soothed her.

She pulled back harder and began to tremble. I stretched out my arm to hold her up, and at the first touch of my hand she sprang back and shrieked and huddled against the wall. The opposite door jerked open and a squat, hairy man charged out. He said fiercely, "A-a-ah!" and swung his arm. I ducked, but I was ducking what I thought was only a fist, and I didn't hear the club whisper through the air until it was too late. I went down hard. Her skirts brushed my face as she sprang past me, her heels clattered down the steps. I heard rather than felt the club as it hit me again.

A SQUARE of plump yellow sunshine sprawled across the rough bunk in which I was lying. Through the uncurtained window I could see an apple tree with the red fruit hanging from it, and beyond that, not too far off, a high green hill, patterned with even rows of gently nodding corn. A frantic fly, as big as my fingernail, butted against the glass and buzzed



furiously. Outside I could hear the cut-cut-cut of gossiping chickens. A rooster crowed. This wasn't Newark.

It was a rough room with tarpaper walls. A black iron coal stove stood against one wall, a table on the other that I could see. There was a plate and a knife and fork on it. A rickety chair stood back from the table.

The door opened and the hairy man came in carrying a pail of water. He set it on the floor, scowled, and muttered something at me and opened the oven door and took out a stack of dishes and put them in too, and set the whole thing on top of the stove.

I growled, "What kind of snatch is this supposed to be?" I tried to move but my arms were tied behind me at the wrists, and my legs were crossed at the ankles with a piece of clothes-line.

He turned to me and said menacingly, "You shut up!" He looked jumpy.

I said, "Do you know how far you've stuck your neck out, pal?"

He took a step toward the bunk and waved his hairy fist. He didn't come any closer. He said loudly, "You heard me. Shut up!"

I looked at him and sneered. "Sucker." But I didn't say any more. He glowered and rubbed the palms of his hands up and down his blue overalled thighs, then turned away mumbling. He went outside and slammed the door behind him, and in a little while I heard the sound of hammering, as if he were building a barn.

He came back in about an hour and without looking at me, walked over to the stove and put his finger in the bucket to see how hot the water was. It wasn't. He pulled the rickety chair over to the window and put on a pair of glasses and started to read *The Poultryman's Guide*. He kept looking at me over the top of it. His eyes were

soft and brown and a little frightened. The magazine shook a little in his hands.

I said conversationally, "Louie's dead. Who stuck the shiv into him?"

He jumped and held the magazine a little higher in front of his face. He didn't answer.

"It was a thin knife," I murmured, "like a knife you'd use to kill chickens. Sharp. Wooden handle. Nothing fancy. You got a knife like that around here?"

He flipped over a few pages, but he wasn't reading anything. I had him going now. He jumped up and threw down the magazine.

He pointed a finger at me. "You shut up!" he yelled. "Louie told me all about you. A brother like you should be ashamed. You shut up!"

He turned and splashed his hand in the bucket of dishes, then stamped out of the house. Drops of water from his fingers sizzled on the stove.

HE DIDN'T come back this time until the sun was so low in the hills it shot nearly horizontal shafts through the window. The water had long since boiled away in the bucket, and even the dishes had stopped popping as they cracked from the heat. He staggered a little as he blustered through the door. He was drunk.

He looked derisively at me. "So Louie's dead!" He laughed loudly but there wasn't any mirth in it. He lurched over to the stove, stared into the bucket, then knocked the whole thing flying with a sweep of his arm. "Goddam dishes," he muttered, "lousy old dishes!" He took a loaf of bread and a knife from a box on the floor beside the stove and carried them over to the table. He started to saw, but suddenly let out a howl and flung the knife from him and clapped his hand to his mouth. Blood dribbled on his chin. He ran



clumsily through the doorway. He couldn't have yelled any louder if he'd cut himself off at the elbow.

The knife was on the floor in front of the stove. I swung my legs over the side of the bed, went down to my knees on the floor, then toppled sideways, cushioning the shock on my upper arm and shoulder. I got the knife. It was ground to a razor edge, for it went through my ankle ropes like smoke through a sieve. The wrists were a little harder because I had to hold the knife between my feet, and I left more than skin on the floor before I could stand and wave my arms in front of me.

I flattened myself against the wall beside the door, and when he came through, winding a blue bandana around his hand, I hooked for his chin. He grunted and went backward on his heels, and I let him have another. That cooled him. I dragged him back into the shack and threw him on the bunk and tied his hands behind him with the bandana.

When he opened his eyes, I was sitting on the edge of the bed, looking sinister with the knife. I said darkly, "I don't usually knife trussed hogs, but I haven't been fed today. Maybe if you tell me what gives, I'll let you off with maybe an ear or just a slit nose." That was pretty crude B-picture dialog, but with a guy as dumb as this one, you had to spread it.

He rolled his eyes and stammered, "It was Louie, mister. Honest, it was Louie, and he said he'd come up and turn you loose when she was married and you couldn't do anything about it. Nobody was going to hurt you, mister. I was only. . . ."

"Shut up!" I roared. "Who the hell's getting married?"

"Your sister. She's getting married to that guy and you're trying to stop her and grab off her dough and get her

put away in the squirrel den and. . . ."

"Wait a minute," I couldn't help grinning. "Who wrote that script—Walt Disney?"

"Louie, he said. . . ." he faltered and said feebly, "Wasn't that your sister, mister?"

My grin melted and I could feel it running down and dripping into a cold pool in the pit of my stomach. It was as if someone had opened his hand and there on the palm was something I had been looking for for a long time.

I grabbed him by the shirtfront and snarled, "Listen, Cupid, when was Louie coming up for me?"

He babbled, "T'morra morning, he said it would be too late for. . . ."

I threw him back. "Where's your car?"

"In the barn, mister. Go ahead and use it. I just filled it with gas. Go right ahead. The keys are in my pocket here. Just leave it in front of Louie's. It ain't much of a car but. . . ." Brother, did he want to lend me his car. He probably would even have given it to me.

I left him prattling on the bed and ran out of the shack. The car was a Model A pick-up. I backed out to the gravel road that dipped down into a purple fold of hills, and gave it the gun. The light was fading, and I wanted to get out of that wilderness before it got too dark to tell a bush from young love. The road was rough and we bounced. The car had a shock absorber, but there was only one trouble with that—I was it. About three miles down I hit a concrete highway and swung right. I passed a directional sign doing a top fifty and jammed the brake to the floor. I could have stopped faster with my foot. I backed to the sign.

I was thirty miles from Suffern, and on the way to Bear Mountain. I swore. Who the hell wanted to go to Bear



Mountain. I swung to the opposite side of the road, backed in a sharp arc, and pointed south.

IT WAS after nine when I rolled to a stop at the Dorman front entrance. The Model A sighed and died. I leaped up the steps, but Junior was out the front door to meet me before a hit the deck of the porch.

"He just left," he bleated, waving a sheet of paper at me. "He found another note. He couldn't find you so he. . . ."

I rasped "Okay" and snatched the paper from his hand. It said:

Here's how it goes, sistr  
\$5000 in the boxm under th  
porch of tje old wite hpuse  
at 23 Stocker place nutly  
Toonight or you knoq what

I grabbed Junior's arm and said violently, "Stop chattering your goddam teeth long enough to tell me where your car is."

He pointed at a cream roadster at the side of the house. I said "Good" and sprinted for it. "Keys?"

He gasped, loping beside me, "In the car." I jumped in behind the wheel. After the Model A, this was like an antelope. We went down the driveway in ten-foot leaps before I got the hang of it.

Nutley is a decayed aristocrat, looking over its gout at the factories creeping up the banks of the Passaic River on it. Stocker Place was a one-block dead-end with no streetlight, and only one house at the head of it, atop a high, shadowed terrace two hundred yards long. The house stood high and white, like a policeman's glove. I leaped from the car and ran toward the house. I felt for my gun, but it was gone and I cursed like a man spitting up his innards after a belly wound.

I hadn't gone ten steps when there

was a flash and a roar and a sheet of flame shot thirty feet into the air, and when it was gone, burning twigs and leaves spiraled slowly to earth like last year's regrets. But against this curtain of fire I had a sharply etched glimpse of the silhouette of a boy with his sling held out in a tight triangle, his left hand spread-fingered before his face, stumbling in the underbrush. He was, thank God, unhurt.

But of the girl, there wasn't enough left to say goodbye to.

DOCKERY was packing his bags like a man counting the treasures he wanted to put in his coffin with him. I sat in the window of the hotel, smoking a fevered cigarette and looking out at the urgent traffic of Broad Street, a block to the east and ten floors down. There was an untouched bottle of Scotch on the dresser, doubling itself in the mirror.

Dockery snapped the lock on his suitcase and straightened up with a weary, sodden gesture.

The police had let him go after a half hour of the nastiest kind of talk one human being had ever had to take from another—and Dockery had taken it without a flash of mutiny, without even a twitch to liven his eyes. They could have beaten him with barbed wire and it wouldn't have made that much difference.

"I'll never understand it," he said in the ashes of a voice. "I'll never. . . ."

He stopped. There was nothing he could say. He broke the seal on the Scotch. "Would you like a drink?" he asked mechanically.

I shook my head and stared moodily through the window.

He put the bottle back on the dresser. He didn't even pour one for himself. He seemed to have forgotten it. He put



a cigarette into his mouth, then took it out and carefully laid it on the edge of the dresser. He sat on the chair beside the dresser and took out his wallet. He didn't open it or look into it. He let it lie in his open palms, cupped in his lap.

He said dully, "I don't know why you're here." There was no curiosity—just a statement of something he happened to think of.

I said bitterly, "I came up to give you the last needle, but the hell with it. I don't give a damn what you feel. I just keep thinking of a nice kid with his arm in a sling, bewildered, scared, heart-broken. But you. . . ." I turned my eyes from the window but found only a graying old man on a dingy hotel chair, sitting with his veined hands dangling between his knees like a pair of mildewed gloves.

"I don't understand it," he repeated tonelessly. "I don't understand it at all."

"You don't understand it!" my voice was suddenly savage, "YOU don't understand it! How do you think all those women you suckered felt? Did they understand it when you took their money and disappeared? What do you think you were dealing in—scrap iron? Man, oh man, you weren't just fleecing them of their money; you were stripping them of their souls. They loved you, just as Valery Dorman loved you. Do you know what that means?"

His head swayed over his clasped hands as if he were praying. Maybe he was. Maybe for him that was praying. "Keogh," he said in a stifled voice, "I swear to you, I swear by Heaven, by anything you wish, I was levelling with Valery. The plastics were on the level, and she. . . ." his voice seemed shattered. "I don't understand it. I was levelling with her."

"For the first time in your life—and isn't it a laugh! Can you still laugh, Dockery? This is the time for it—for a real belly laugh. The girl loved you, and she tried to kill her brother for you, just to get his quarter of a million dollars because *you* needed money for your goddam plastics factory. Tell me some more about plastics, Dockery. Tell how wonderful it will be—after you've mixed blood with it.

"Louie App's blood is in it too. He made the bomb that killed her. He blackmailed her, bled her white, gambled the dough away in Corliss's Zoo, came back for more. Louie had to die. He was taking money from her she wanted to go to you. And Louie knew too much, had served his dirty purpose, and she knifed him. But I don't grieve for Louie. It's that seventeen-year-old kid I keep thinking about.

"FIRST she tried to kill him in her plane. He used it regularly, and she couldn't help knowing. There was gas and service. Maybe the mechanic told her. So she filed the control cable—that's something even a woman could do—so the next time he went up he had a wild plane on his hands. By luck, he got it down.

"Then there was that grand balcony scene, with the alleged burglar trying to get into her room. It was close that time. The bullet caught him in the arm. If he'd been smarter—not just a kid, a loyal brother—he'd have seen through that one. He heard the noise in the room next to hers, and she knew how he always investigated noises. If the noise had been loud enough for him to hear, why didn't it wake her up? And she even pretended not to have known where the shot came from. If someone shot off a gun right outside your window, you'd damn well know it. She was the one who was on the bal-



cony, and *she* was the one who fired that shot. Too bad for you, Dockery, that she missed, or you might have had a nice, new, shiny factory.

"Then I came along. She spotted me going out of Charley's after Louie App, and she spotted me again in *The Zoo*. She wasn't dumb. She knew it was more of a coincidence than that the sky is just as blue in New York as it is in New Jersey. She had to keep me unsuspecting of the real scenario. So she pulled that big kidnapping scene. All she did was walk through the fire door beyond the relief stations, out to the street, and walk to Louie App's room, fifteen minutes away.

"After Louie made arrangements with his chicken farmer friend to snatch me when I turned up, and she expected me, Louie called up Ronny. After that he was just in the way, and while the farmer was hiding in the room across the way, she knifed Louie.

"Then she tied herself up with adhesive tape. It's the easiest way in the world to tie yourself up, and if you're limber enough you can even get your bound hands behind you.

"After the farmer carted me away to Passaic County, she had clear sailing. I had to be out of the way. She didn't give a damn about later, because there wouldn't be anything anybody could

prove, because everybody had thought all along *she* was the one who was being threatened. The notes had taken care of that. The notes she left lying around for Ronny to find. She did everything but nail them on the door for him to see.

"She knew he would go to 23 Stocker place, and she knew when he opened the lid of that box—the box Louie had made for her, filled with explosive—she knew she'd have the money for you, because there wouldn't be any more brother, just a few scraps of leather and cloth and blood and a memory.

"But what made her open that lid herself? Was she nervous? Was she scared? Or did she want, like a woman, to make sure it was really filled with dynamite and really would go off? Or did she get the horrors and commit suicide? Whatever it was, she never knew what hit her. And all for you, Dockery, all for you."

My mouth went dry and the ends of it twitched. "Maybe the bomb was more successful than we think," I muttered. "Who knows how much of that young kid is really alive, knowing what he does about his sister? Or how much of you is alive, Dockery? Or how much of you wants to live? That was some bomb, wasn't it? A real killer."

He didn't say anything. The traffic noises floated up thinly, like a gull crying on an empty beach.

## HE DIDN'T WANT TO DIE!

BY LESLIE ANDERSON

ONE of the most horrible accounts of a public execution is that describing the hanging of a man named Bousfield, who had murdered his wife and three children in the Soho district, London. During his trial, it was pleaded in his defense, that he had been attacked by a frenzy of jealousy, and later, after he was found guilty, sentenced to hang, and then led to the gallows, he maintained an insanely "sullen violence." The crowd about him and his guards was so great that an additional force of policemen were used to force their way through.

When Bousfield reached the scaffold, he was

so exhausted that he had to be lifted on a chair. His sitting position broke the fall, and, by an intense muscular effort, he raised himself to the level of the scaffold and tried to lift his pinioned arms to the rope. A terrible scene resulted. The prison officers tried to control him, but he succeeded in getting his feet on the scaffold three times. Finally he was held until it was all over.

During this struggle, shrieks, yells, and hisses from the spectators added to the horror of the event. And all this time the bells of the neighboring churches were announcing the armistice after the Crimean War.



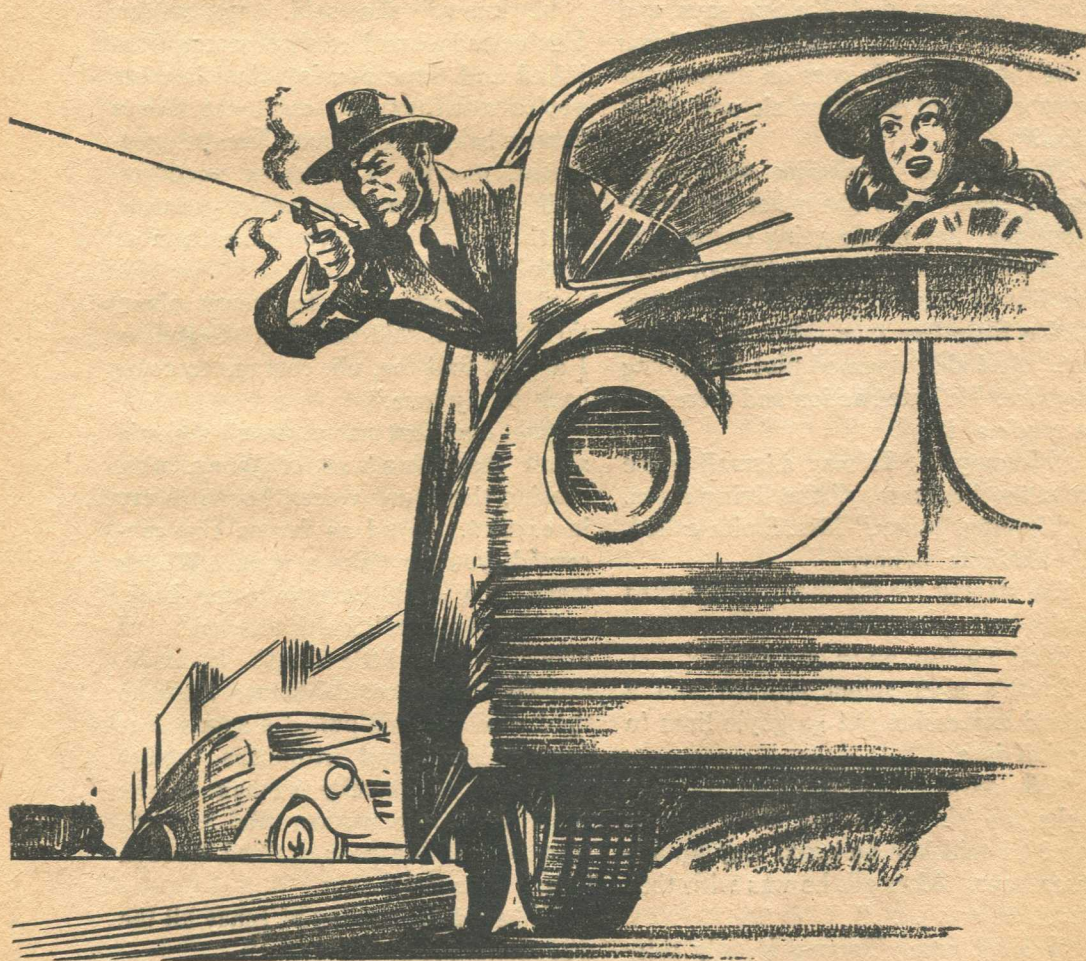
# JUST LIKE IN A BOOK

## By BERKELEY LIVINGSTON

GERALD SMITH put aside the Pocket Book edition of *Wall Of Eyes*, pulled the collar of his shirt from his throat and turned watery-blue eyes which always peered from behind thick-lensed glasses, toward his wife. He sighed gently, a barely discernable exhalation of breath, which his wife did not notice, of course.

"Gerry," she breathed in gusty remembrance, "I've never seen anything so thrilling. Ingrid Bergman was just—just, scrumptious! And that Peckman. . . . Oh, Gerry! You should have gone!"

Smith shifted uncomfortably in the sweat-stained sport shirt he had donned. It was so *damned* humid. He cleared





his throat. A comment was necessary, he realized.

"Ah. So you liked it, dear?"

"Liked it! Silly. I was simply thrilled. And I'm sure you would have been, too. Why it was all about psychologists. . . ."

"Psychiatrists, dear," Smith raised a soft interjection.

". . . She was a woman psychologist. And Peck was a . . ."

"I know, dear," he said. "I read the reviews."

She turned a bit nasty, then. Her brown eyes became a little like chocolate-colored exclamation points.

"Reviews! Of course. That's the only way you see life, through a review. The Trib. says, and The Sun says, and The Times gives it only a line. Did you ever think that life goes on under your very eyes and you just sit and let it pass?"

Under other conditions and times, Smith would have given her the argument that her movie-going career was in its way as vicarious a method of viewing life as was his perusal of reviews. And a little less true. But it was too hot. And that damned plot was going haywire. He hated action and there was so much of it!

"Mommy!" It was a small voice from the bedroom off the living room.

"Coming, Janey," Mrs. Smith called. "In a minute, honey."

She started for the room, and turned at the half-open door.

"Did Tommy go to bed early?"

Smith's eyes rolled upward and a pained expression put gargoyle lines in his full face.

"Oh, darn! Why do you want to make the kid go to bed early in this heat? I told him he could stay up another hour. After all, he was with that Harrison boy. . . ."

"I don't care. Tommy is only thir-

teen. He's got a long way to go before . . ."

"He's a man," Smith finished. He sighed again, a little louder than he realized. She heard it this time, and her face flushed.

"I suppose," she said bitingly. "You'd like to go for a walk?"

"You're damned right I would," he said. "If you'd have the sense that you were born with . . ."

"Don't shout at me!" she said, her voice rising in a crescendo of hate and shaking with emotion.

"It's one way of getting my point across," he said in a more modified tone. "There are times that only a shout can make you remember I am . . ."

"I know," she said. "A writer. You've had a hundred short stories published and three novels. And because you're a writer you can't act like a human being. You must have temperament, moods. Like those nocturnal walks. I wonder what floosies you meet on these walks that you take them so often?"

"You don't have to worry about them," Smith said bitterly. "Somehow I always find the, uh, courage to come back to my love."

"Oh, don't get nasty, now," she said above the rising wail of Janey, who, hearing the angry voices, began to cry in earnest. "And as far as I'm concerned, you can take a walk. What's more, you don't have to come back."

"Ah, shut up," Smith snarled. "I may not do that little thing." He arose, walked with sure, deliberate steps to the hall closet and pulled a sports coat from a hook, and without a further glance at the stocky woman in the beige dress, the woman who was his wife, opened the door, walked through it and slammed it shut.

He heard the wailing of Janey all the way down the stairs.



THERE was a newspaper stand below the concrete of the El. Usually he bought a paper of the boy there. But this night there was a man at the stand.

He stood hesitant for a few seconds, and the man waited for Smith to make his mind up.

"Got a—a . . ." Smith began and stopped, his eyes blank and looking beyond the other. "Oh, hell! Forget it!" he said suddenly. For he realized that *this* time he wouldn't return as he always did, after having a cup of coffee at the corner restaurant.

He wanted something stronger.

The wind had shifted and now blew from the north so he donned the coat he had brought. He walked north along Broadway, hesitating now and then before certain taverns he passed. But something made him go on. There was a place up where Sheridan turned on Foster . . .

He peered through the slats of the blinds and his stubby nose wrinkled in disappointment when he saw that the bar was quite crowded. He continued past the place, slowly, with lagging feet, then turned quickly and walked back.

There were two empty stools. He chose the one next to the blonde. He ordered a bourbon and water and downed his drink quickly, and ordered another. He saw the blonde give him a quick glance and turn her eyes as she caught his turning toward hers.

"No," she said, "you can't buy me a drink."

"Don't be so fast on the draw," he said. "Maybe I wasn't going to."

"That was just in case," she said.

Her glass was empty. The bartender came along, looked at her with raised eyebrows to which she nodded. He smiled, a quick upturning of the corners of his lips, and moved away. She opened her bag, pulled the change-

purse out, opened it and dropped it to the bar. It rustled as it hit. Smith knew it was empty. Her fingers moved slowly through the bag, then more swiftly and at last stopped. Her hand came away empty.

"Maybe I'll take that drink, after all," she said, turning her face full to his.

Smith motioned for the bartender to take the money from the spot he'd dropped it, beside the glass. There was a smirk on the man's face as he did. It told Smith quite plainly that the girl was no stranger in the place and that the little routine of the change-purse was well-known, at least to the bartender. But Smith didn't care. She was someone he could talk to, without having her snap at him like a frustrated hen.

He realized, of course, that there was more to it than just the fact she was a woman, and a pretty woman. She was a living reflection of the woman he was doing in his novel. In fact, he had done a pretty good job of describing her; the same metallic hair, upswept, to show small pointed ears; the same red-slash of a mouth, crimson-red; the wide high brow, and that slurred way of talking; she was Deena in the flesh!

Their drinks arrived and they raised their glasses to each other. Her eyes were mocking, derisive, coolly appraising of him: *Well, what do you think of me, sucker?*

*I think you're beautiful. And clever, too clever to work a cheap cadge like this. Unless there's something behind all this.*

But all their lips said, were, "Luck," (his) and "Sucker," (hers).

IT CAME to him quite suddenly, not in the way thoughts always came, in little steps, each a logical fore-runner of the last, that he had to know more



about this girl. Yet he was aware of the reason. She was the living Deena of his novel. He had to know more about her so that he could give full judgment to any and all of her acts. But he was also aware of another reason, although for the moment he would not give that one full cognizance.

Gerald Smith was most handsome when he smiled. Not that he had the kind of teeth which are to be seen on billboard displays, but his features relaxed from their stern, heavy stolidity, and an ingratiating twinkle came to life in his weak eyes. She returned the smile.

"My name's Gerry," he said.

"Be merry with Gerry," she said. "I suppose your wife's week-ending in the country and her little play-boy's out for a good time?" She laid peculiar emphasis on the time of week.

An odd mood seized Smith. It was a mood he well knew. As though a situation had come up which needed disentangling; as though he were meeting up with plot involvement. His voice, his entire bearing changed. His brain became searchingly alive, probing through the armor of her dis-interested smile, through the words and shell of her.

"No," he said. "My wife's not built that way. And let's talk of something else . . ."

"She's about thirty. Mouse-colored hair; dumpy, and at that stage of the game where's she beginning to worry when Gerry-boy takes a powder, because he might be taking more than a walk. Not that she wouldn't like to play, but there's probably a couple of kids, and she's got a life-long set of rules to observe."

"Look!" Smith said. "If you had an apple, three times a day, for twelve years, there wouldn't be a heck of a lot about the taste, smell or look of apples you didn't know. So let's skip the sub-

ject."

Her laugh grated on his ears. It didn't tinkle, nor was there any humor in it. It was hoarse and bitter.

"Okay, Gerry Galahad. What'll we talk about, the weather?"

"We don't have to talk about anything," he said. *But I'd rather we did. Because I like to look at you and listen to you and get down under that shell you've got on over you.*

"Now that'd be nice. You and me just sitting here, and you buying me drinks like mad and neither of us saying anything. It *could* be a pleasant evening at that. But little Joany's going to have to take a walk soon. Which reminds me. Any idea of the time?"

He looked at his wrist watch.

"Eighteen minutes past twelve."

"You *would* say that. Surprised it wasn't eighteen and a quarter past."

She got up from the stool and buttoned the chartreuse-colored short-coat she was wearing. Panic seized him. Words tumbled from his lips:

"Walk? But where? Why? Did I say something . . .?"

She made a half-turn and pivoted slowly back. Her eyes were narrowed and he could not probe their depths.

"It *might* be lonely walking. Like to keep me company?"

He scooped the money from the bar and took her elbow.

IT WAS a dark, empty street, and her heels made hollow, clacking sounds on the pavement. He walked by her side, silently. Nor had he said anything since the time they had left the tavern. They came to a driveway between two hotels, started to cross, when she pulled him back with a jerk. His arm was held prisoner against her side and he could feel her breast, high and firm, heaving in silent tremors. Her face was a blur of shadow. But he



could see her teeth, a faint line of white against her lower lip. She was looking toward the street, and he, too, looked.

A sedan had just pulled up before the entrance to the hotel toward which they had been walking. Two men got out and strolled casually to the entrance. There was nothing in their walk which would have told the casual that they had any other reason for coming to this hotel, other than they lived there. But Smith wasn't casual. He had a lifetime of observing the peculiarities of human behavior. And just the way they stopped before continuing past his line of vision, as though in their seeming dis-interest of the street, their's was of real interest. As if they were casing the street.

"Quick!" the girl breathed in Smith's ear. "The fire escape! The desk'll hold them for a few minutes."

She started at a trot up the dark away, and he followed.

It was one of those fire escapes which are anchored to the pavement. Each level of floors held a sort of balcony from which, in case of fire, the tenants could make their way to the street. Her destination was four flights up.

Smith was breathing heavily. She hadn't *walked* up. She had taken the steps, three at a time.

"Damn 'em," she whispered hoarsely. "They came early."

They were standing before the darkened rectangle of a window. Unhesitatingly, she pulled the bottom window up. And without looking back she climbed in. Smith followed.

He heard her moving about. He bumped against something and cursed softly under his breath. There was darkness, the kind which makes a mystery of even a closet. Suddenly there was light.

She was standing beside a wine-colored sofa. Two small tables flanked it.

Each held a small lamp. She had lit one of them.

Sprawled face downward in front of the sofa, lay a man. He lay in an immense pool of blood. He had been shot through the face, and the bullet, coursing upward, had taken most of the back of his head with it. He lay on his face. An automatic lay beside his right hand.

Smith choked back an exclamation of horror. He wrote about such things, but this was the first time he'd even seen a dead man. And he had no doubts that this one had been murdered. Then he looked away from the body and at the girl. She stood, stock-still, her eyes searching the room. They went wide as they centered on something close to the window, and from the direction of her glance, directly under Smith's feet.

He looked down and saw a red-leather billfold near his right foot. He bent, picked it up, and froze in that position. From behind the door, which was to the right of the sofa, there came the murmur of voices.

"Ah. T'hell with knockin'. Use the key," someone said.

There was the metallic sound of a key in the lock, the door swung open and two men stood on the threshold. Their eyes swung down toward the corpse, then came up to meet the frightened ones of Gerald Smith. The tableaux lasted for only an instant. Their hands clawed toward their shoulders, Smith let out a smothered cry of despair, and the girl acted, all at the same time.

When they opened the door, it had swung inward, to come to rest against the sofa arm, effectively concealing her. She thrust hard against the door, sending it against the two, and at the same time, she swept the lamp to the floor, shattering the bulb.

Smith whirled as the room was



plunged into darkness, started for the window behind him, and stopped, waiting for the girl. He heard the rustle of her clothes, felt her brush past him, smelled the heady perfume she used, and followed her through the window.

**P**ANIC lent wings to his feet. He was on her heels all the way down the escape. Breath gurgled in quick gasps past his half-open mouth as he reached the bottom. She was already on her way toward the street. The sound of feet leaping in pursuit started him at a gallop after her. They reached the sidewalk together.

"This way!" she called, as she started across the street.

He lowered his head and continued running. It was agony to breathe. He looked up in time to see her. Then he struck her before he could come to a halt. He knocked her into one of two men who barred their path to the other side of the street. He didn't see the guns in their hands. Something struck the side of his face with explosive force. He staggered back, bringing both his hands up to his head. And a voice said in menacing tones:

"Move, jerk!"

He heard the sounds of footsteps behind him, through a veil of pain which blinded his eyes and deafened his hearing. He felt hands take hold of him, felt their grip pulling him toward something, but there wasn't anything he could do about it. He felt numb and he staggered in their grip, like a drunk.

Hands shoved him into the car. He slid half off the seat and felt the girl's presence. Her hands were gripping the arm nearest her, and she pulled him erect. He shook his head and something wet slid away from his cheek. There were the sounds of others getting into the car, doors slammed, and suddenly they were moving.

**O**KAY. Start talking," the man with the scar alongside his jaw, said.

Smith opened his mouth but only a low moan of pain came out. He lifted a hand toward his cheek, made an expression of despair, and let his hand drop, palm upward his lap.

"I'll have 'em slice the other side open if you don't start singing," the man said.

"Leave him alone, Murdock," the girl said. "He's slug-happy, can't you see? Besides, it's me you want to talk to, isn't it?"

All their eyes swung toward the girl, who was seated in the armchair, one leg crossed over the other, her face resting against her right hand. She took her hand from her cheek, opened her bag, took out a tube of lipstick, switched it to her other hand, and looked at the fingers of her right hand. Then she slipped a piece of kleenex from her purse, wiped a smudge from her fingers and began to paint her lips.

Though Smith was in pain, his mind was functioning like it had never done. Everything had happened so swiftly. The ride on streets which had seemed to be chosen because they were so dark. The perfumed smell of the man who had squeezed beside him in the car, and the sour odor of his sweat which was even stronger than the perfume he used. The terse way they talked, monosyllables, spat out like bullets from a pistol. The girl on his other side, tense, her body pressed so close against his he could feel the muscles' strain. Then they had stopped before the darkened front of a store. He caught only a glimpse of a shabby street, the outlines of a factory's silhouette. Then he was hustled through the entrance next to that of the store.

There was a long stair up which they trudged, prodded by the gun in the hand of a stocky man in a dark-grey



suit. Then the one in the lead opened a door, switched on a light and the rest followed him in.

The entrance gave way to a kitchen, from which he saw another room. There was no other room. He and the girl were shoved into the other room. There was a Hollywood bed against one wall. Three chairs, forlorn-looking in their grease-stained upholstery, had been arranged haphazardly about the room. Two of the men sat in them, the girl in the third. Smith was shoved onto the bed. One of the men sat on the edge, a gun held pointed at Smith. The fourth stood before Smith.

**H**EWAS the best-dressed of the four.

The suit of sharkskin he wore was obviously customed to his measure. He wore a silk sport shirt with a convertible collar, and no tie. Narrow-pointed shoes filled out the ensemble.

He had a long, narrow face, high cheekbones, a long thin nose, the nostrils of which flared as he breathed, eyes that were like slits of smudged ebony and lips that did not fit the rest of him. For they were full and pouting, like a young girl's.

Smith noticed the scar, although it was not noticeable otherwise, because when the man spoke, he spoke from the side of his mouth, and Smith's eyes were drawn to the lifted side. He saw it then, a thin slit of welted flesh that ran from the corner of his mouth to a point just below the corner of the right eye.

Murdock turned a lazy look at the girl.

"If you want it that way, tutz?"

She put the lipstick away, gave him a bright smile and leaned back in the chair.

"So? Start talking."

"I came up there tonight. Ferris had called me earlier in the evening. Said

he'd wanted to see me about something, but that he couldn't tell me what it was over the phone. So I came over. We had a drink, talked a little, then I left."

"What did you come back for?" Murdock asked.

"I forgot something."

"Then . . ."

"Nothing. He was laying there, the way you saw him. Although why he should kill himself is beyond me."

"Who said he knocked himself off?"

"But the gun. It was laying by his hand."

"Sure. His right hand. Ferris was left-handed.

"Ooh."

"And bright eyes, here. Where does he come in the picture?"

She looked at Smith and suddenly her eyes went blank. She looked through him, at something only her mind saw. Her head shook, as if in silent agreement, and she said:

"I guess he came through the window. Because if he'd have come through the door, it would have banged against the sofa arm, as it did when you and Joe came in. I turned just as he started toward me. Then you walked in."

"Is that why you did what you did?"

"You mean slam it! Don't be silly! I couldn't see who had come in. Maybe bright-eyes had friends. So I let go."

"Your story stinks," Murdock said gently. His eyes glittered, pin-points of light.

"Ask Harry," she said. "He was chasing me. If he hadn't seen the boys . . ."

"That's right, boss," the one called, Harry said. "He almost knocks her over, before he spot us. So I let him have it."

"Sounds good, puss," Murdock said. "But your stories always sound good. Even when they stink. And I can smell



this one. But he didn't knock off Ferris. He was at the window when we came in. And we didn't hear any gun go off; that room isn't soundproof, you know. I don't like you, baby. I never did. But Ferris did, and he was the big gee. Well, that's over. But we got a problem."

She watched him intently. He thought: Yeah. We got a problem. You, you blonde bitch! Everything was running smooth till you came in the picture. Then, blooie! Ferris plays Romeo, talks, forgets things, and we got to split. But all the time you're listening to what he's saying. You know too much.

He said, "The cops are going to walk in that murder deal as soon the body's discovered. They'll spot the heater . . . God damn you!" his voice rose suddenly. And before Smith's startled eyes, Murdock strode over to the girl and slapped her viciously across both cheeks.

Her head rocked with the blows. He stepped away from her and Smith saw her face had puffed under the punishing slaps.

"So that was your angle, the gun. My gun. The one I gave to Ferris. He must have given it to you or you snatched it, one or the other. *You* knocked him off!"

"If I may bring my voice into this conversation . . .?" Smith said. Murdock whirled, his head bent aggressively in Smith's direction. "On looking at my watch, I see it is twelve thirty-five. I don't think the murder has been discovered. Certainly it would have been long ago, if the shot had been heard. There is no maid service at this hour. Therefore the gun is still there . . ."

Murdock got his meaning. But he went a step further. The body, too, was still there, the corpus delicti, the

mouthpieces called it. And without a corpus, there could be no crime. He issued orders instantly:

"Harry, Joe, take the broad and this character back to Ferris' and . . . let *them* lug the stiff down to the car. Be sure and case the joint. And if there's even a smell of a cop, scram. Got it?"

Harry said, "Got it."

HER face was rigid, livid, as if in a mad fear. Little knots of muscles made lumps in Smith's jaw. But the dead man on the floor looked very much at peace. He didn't care one way or another. Smith gulped down the dry saliva which had gathered in his throat, stepped to the corpse and knelt gingerly by its side.

"Well do something," the girl moaned in terrified tones. "Don't just stay there."

He looked at her, surprised at the fear in her voice. She had shown none of it before. Not even when Murdock had slapped her.

Pulling a kerchief from his pocket, Smith wrapped the gun in it and handed it to her. She took it as though it were something so fragile a touch would break it. Then, forgetting his repugnance, Smith heaved the corpse to his shoulders and made for the window. Blood dripped a crazy pattern over the rug in the wake of the heavy-set man with the thick-lensed glasses, who was carrying the grisly load.

Murdock's men were waiting for them at the bottom of the fire escape. One of them extended his left hand; the right held a gun, toward the girl who was still carrying the gun as though it were an egg. She hesitated a fraction of a second, and he jerked the gun from her hand. The other jerked his head for them to follow, as he turned and started for the street.

Harry was doing the driving. He



waited until the girl got into the car, and when Smith hesitated, he said:

"In the back. Let the stiff sit between you two."

In the meantime, Joe had been keeping a wary eye on the side of the street on which they'd parked. So it was that neither he nor the others saw the policeman approach from the opposite side. The first they knew of his presence was when he said:

"Anything wrong, folks?"

The lower half of Smith's body was in the car. He had just placed the corpse in the middle as Harry had directed, when he heard the cop's voice. He backed up until he was almost out of the car. He had to get to talk to the cop. Just for a few seconds. Long enough to . . .

But Harry and the other knew what was on his mind. While Harry slid over and stuck his head out of the window, Joe shoved at the man coming out of the rear seat.

"Hey! What's going on here?" the policeman's voice lost its polite tone.

The girl's shout of warning was lost in the blast of Harry's gun. The cop folded over and collapsed, his head hitting the running board and sliding away with a dull thud on the street.

Joe managed to shove Smith into the rear seat, and Harry got the car going. Smith turned his head to see whether the shot had killed the policeman and to his surprise saw the man lift himself on his elbow, pull the service revolver free from the holster, and while still supporting himself on the elbow, take aim and fire. Involuntarily, Smith ducked his head. There was a squealing sound and a grunt from the front seat. The bullet had coursed through the steel back and had caught Joe high in the shoulder.

Then Harry spun the car around the corner and they were out of range. In

the front seat, Joe cursed wildly, interspersing the curses with loud sobs of pain. To which Harry only answered, "Ah. Shut up about it. We'll be there in a little while. Murdock will get the Doc for you."

The wildly careening car sent the corpse sliding from the girl to Smith. She sat on the far edge of the seat, as close to the door as she could get. Smith saw that she was frightened to death at the touch of the horror beside her. But of more interest to him was the something hard in one of the back pockets of the dead man.

Slipping an arm around the stiffening shoulders, Smith reached his fingers into the pocket and pulled out a small-barreled pistol, and palmed it, then transferred it to his pocket when he saw that the two in the front seat were not even looking to see what the ones in the back were doing.

And for the first time since the night's adventure had begun, Smith felt a surge of elation, a loosing of the grip fear had laid. There was only one fly in the ointment. How to get in touch with the police. Somehow, he had to get free of the two in the driver's seat. But how? He also realized that there was more than breaking free. There was the matter of the girl. And the murder of Ferris. Why had she involved him? What was her idea of taking him along when she returned to the apartment? He had no doubt that she had murdered Ferris. There was a *why* for that too.

AND once again the frame building with the darkened store which looked like a black eye against the peeling white paint of the rest of the building. Only this time Joe staggered up the stairs to call Murdock and the other man down.

The other goon walked around to the



side where the girl was sitting and opening the door, yanked her out. Harry, in the meantime held his gun on Smith to make sure that he wouldn't make any move. Murdock gave Harry the signal to let Smith out.

Murdock stepped to the window, looked in at the corpse, smiled bleakly, and said:

"So now I know what a grave-digger feels like. Let the stiff stay there. He can't do anything." Then to the others, "Take the two of them upstairs."

There was another man in the room with Joe, someone they hadn't seen before. He was a lank individual, with stringy black hair which kept falling over his face. He was leaning over Joe, whose shirt was stripped away from his shoulder, displaying a bloody shoulder.

"So, Doc?" Murdock asked.

"So nothing," the one called Doc, answered in sepulchral tones. "He's got a .38 through the shoulder. Nasty, but clean. A week and he'll be all right."

Joe howled in pain as the lanky doctor swabbed swiftly and surely at the bloody hole.

Murdock sat down in a chair which he drew up close to the one the girl was sitting in.

"So now we knock off a cop," he said in that metalically soft voice. "Now ain't that something to make me dream nights. Got an angle on that?" he asked Smith.

"I don't think the policeman was dead, or more than just painfully wounded," Smith said. "I was watching through the rear window and saw him get to his feet."

That was a lie, but there wasn't anyone there who could prove it.

Murdock's slitted eyes went wide at the information. Then the lids came close, effectively hiding any tell-tale

signs of what went on in the man's mind.

"And if he got the number, it'll be a matter of an hour or so and they'll be here. Damn. He should have killed you!" he shouted savagely, venting his spleen on the hapless Joe. Then abruptly switched back to Smith. "Well, you're a man of ideas. What do you say now?"

Smith had put his hand casually into the pocket in which the short-barreled pistol lay. The gun's barrel flashed in the pale light as he brought it up with a flourish.

"This!" Smith said dramatically. "Now all of you get over to the other side of the room."

The girl got up with the others and started off, but he called to her, "Not you, Miss. You and I are getting out of this."

Smith had remembered that the motor was turned off but as he got out he had seen the keys in the switch. He intended using the car for their getaway.

She moved swiftly to his side. He motioned with his head for her to go first. Then as she disappeared into the kitchen, he backed up. She called to him to hurry. He whirled suddenly and sprinted through the door, banging it closed behind him. He knew it would give them an extra few seconds which could mean the difference between escape and doom.

He trod on her heels all the way down the rickety stairs. Just as they hit the last stair the door at the top opened. She turned swiftly at the sound, waited for Smith to reach her side, and as the heavy-set man leaped the last step, she reached out her hand and pulling the gun from his lax fingers whipped a shot past his shoulder at the first of those coming after them. A wild fusilade of firing was the answer to



the shot. Only hers was effective. The first man clutched his belly with both hands, rotated on the ball on one foot, and, with increasing speed, tumbled down the stairs. He ended up against the door which the two he had been pursuing closed against him. The chase had ended for him at the top of the steps, when the bullet struck.

But not for Murdock and the lanky one they called Doc. They had flattened themselves against the walls, when the girl fired the first. And had waited only till the man and girl were out before resuming the chase. They hit the outside just in time to send a couple of wild shots at the car as it zoomed by.

"C'mon. We'll use mine," Doc said, his legs churning, as he sprinted for the corner where he had parked his car.

His was a speedster, which, if the others had not too great a lead, could overtake them in a few minutes.

SMITH wheeled the car around the first corner on two wheels. He was driving as if the very devil were after him. And for all he knew, it was.

It was a carline. And the rutted street made for bad driving. The car itself, big, clumsy, was built more for the long pull, than speed. It swayed and careened from side to side as they hit bumps and rough spots in the brick. The girl sat, immobile, beside him, her eyes riveted on the mirror over the windshield. She gasped audibly when she caught the sight of the rakish-looking roadster which had suddenly appeared in her vision, a block behind them.

"It's Doc's car. A block behind us. Oh! Hurry! Faster! They'll catch us."

Smith lifted weak, tortured eyes to the mirror for a quick look. The strain

of the evening had begun to tell. The whole side of his face felt numb from the blow of the gun, when Harry had slugged him. The tension of the last hour had kept him strung up as tight as the G string on a violin. He had been forced by circumstances to travel paths which forces beyond his control had dictated. He was in the company of a girl who earlier, had thrown him to the murderers which he knew Murdock and the rest were, without compunction. Yet he was here in this car with her now, running away from those very men. There was no feeling he could lay his hand on and say, this is why I'm doing this. He was acting, just to be in action.

He had never driven much, because of his bad vision.

Now he drove as if inspired. It was a neighborhood of factory and cheap dwellings. The carline they were on twisted and turned in devious, unreasoning fashion. Sidestreets flashed by, their lengths shown to him in passing, like the dark mouths of tunnels. Once more he looked into the mirror.

A face stared back at him. He almost lost control of the wheel at the sight of those glazed eyes staring with intent deliberation into his. Then he realized whose eyes they were. The dead man, sitting erect in the back seat, had somehow managed to maintain a macabre balance. He swayed only slightly as the car jounced and swayed wildly. And his eyes stared with horrible intentness into those of Smith.

A frightened cry wrenched its way past Smith's lips as the windshield glass starred before his startled eyes. The pursuing car had come close enough for one of the two men to risk a shot. Again, Smith twisted the wheel and the car zoomed around a corner and down the length of a dark, deserted street before he twisted the car around another corner. They were in a colored neigh-



borhood, now. Here and there store fronts were lighted. Barbecue and fish joints for the most part. With here and there a tavern. He caught passing glimpses of dark faces turned to see the mad chase. The street led into a tree-lined boulevard.

Smith wheeled the car into the thin line of traffic. He knew where he was now. This boulevard led to the northern suburbs of the city. He kept his speed a little above the limit and continued to look into the mirror, now and then, for a glimpse of the roadster.

"I—I guess we lost them," he said after a few seconds.

He turned to her and saw she had relaxed against the seat. Her head was thrown back against the seat and her face was toward him. It had the waxen rigidity of a doll. Only her eyes showed life, their shadowed depths mysterious and darkly-inscrutable.

She didn't say anything, just continued to look at him. But she thought: No. We didn't lose them. Somewhere they'll find us. And me and my chump, Galahad Gerry'll feed fishes in that big lake to our left. Or they'll dump us somewhere in the country. So what? It's what I expected. I got what I wanted. Only I funk'd it when I left the billfold up there at Ferris'. I *had* to go back. And because I was a little scared, take this Joe with me. Poor guy! He looked like a lost sheep. Wonder what got him going. He had me figured. Yet he went along.

HE looked at her and thought: We're lost too. The both of us, Deena. So that's what happened to you. Life had too many turnings for you and you took the wrong one. But who knows which is the right one? And after you take the wrong one, who knows where to get off? I should have found you years ago. But I didn't. I found you

now.

He laughed and the little explosion of sound sent little wrinkles of wonder down the sides of her nose and put tiny lines in the corners of her eyes.

"What's so funny?" she asked.

"A something that occurred to me," he said. "Want to take a walk, the lady asks? But she meant a ride. A ride with a dead man. Y'know. It's an odd thing. But from the time we left that tavern until now, I've been operating in a sort of vacuum, a mental one. I might as well get it off my chest now, because I can't see the end to this night's deal, and better to talk than to think.

"You killed Ferris. Of that I'm sure. Why?"

"What makes you think I did?" she asked.

He turned his face away and stared intently, his brow furrowed deeply, then said:

"You weren't the least bit surprised to see him lying there. And you came back because you'd left something there. Oh, don't think that is clever deduction. It's not. But for every crime, there must be a reason. Not always a sensible one, but a reason, nevertheless.

"There was no struggle. Nothing was amiss in the apartment. So he had been expecting you. You must have come for something which you got. Then you killed him. But you left the very thing you came for. And while we were in the tavern, you discovered the loss. It was the billfold."

"Yes," she said bitterly. "And it's still there."

Suddenly her eyes went wide.

"No. No, it isn't. I looked for it when we went back. And I didn't see it. You picked it up, I remember."

"That's right," he said. "And it's still with me. I guess I dropped it in



my pocket. An unconscious act, I'm sure. Because I don't remember thinking about it, when Murdock and the other came in. Which brings in another point. You asked me what time it was, in the tavern. I think I know why, now. It was because you knew Murdock and the other man were coming. Either you or Ferris called them."

"Ferris," she said in a low voice. "He called Murdock the day before. They had a deal to go over."

"I might as well tell you. Ferris and Murdock were bank thieves. But Ferris played for other stakes. Blackmail, for instance. And Murdock didn't like that. So they broke. But Ferris had some money of Murdock's. That was why the call. To square off."

"But where do you come into the picture?" he asked.

She laughed for so long, and so oddly, he realized it was hysteria. He brought his fist down with vicious force against her knee, shocking her out of it.

"I'm sorry," she gasped. "But I had to laugh at something. It wasn't a picture. It was a frame. Like what I tried to plant on you. Only with you it was a spur of the moment thing. I should have known that it couldn't stick. But you walk in the joint. A blind man could have spotted what you were. The look on your face. Sheer anger. And that washer around your finger."

He looked down at the wedding band.

She went on: "Sure. You were a guy who'd just had a battle with his wife, wants a few drinks, and is in that frame of mind where he'll do anything so he can forget what happened. Like my husband, when he walked out on me. Just a family squabble. But he died because of it. He died in the chair. Tonight. At eight o'clock. He died because of me!" her voice rose in frenzy, then died away to a whisper.

Smith had to bend toward her to catch the next words.

"HE was a good, Ted. He liked a drink now and then. Who doesn't? But nobody likes it like I do. Like I *did*, I should say. I liked other things, too, things he couldn't buy me. Like furs and jewelry. After all, a teller in a bank can't buy those things. So we fight and he goes out and gets drunk. And talks to some guy at the bar. The same bar where I met you. Only this guy's name is Ferris. And he's a bank thief. Ted talked a lot, I guess. All about his work. And Ferris listened. Then Ted gave him the sob-story about his wife and how he loved her, and how he couldn't give her the things she wanted. Poor guy. Ferris showed him how it could be done. So Ted got started."

"He handled commercial accounts. I don't know too much about them, except that the detection of fraud is harder. I began to wonder where Ted got the dough all of a sudden. But I got the furs and jewelry I wanted. And an introduction to Ferris. He was a big-shot bookie; that was the song he sang."

"He went for me but big. The three of us'd go out. At first he was the gentleman. Then, and it took only a week or so, the veneer dropped off. He was strictly on the make and not for kisses, either. In the meantime the song and dance he was giving Ted, had a theme I didn't understand. You see, I thought Ted was getting his dough from the horses. That Ferris was giving Ted tips. And I even thought it was because the guy was gone on me. But I was only a side-line with him. All women were."

"Every now and then Ted'd work nights at the bank. So Ferris and I would go out alone. One night we went



into a Loop spot. He knew one of the girls there. She had the camera concession. We were in a back booth; it was kind of late, and there was no one around, and I was very high, but like a kite. And I was wearing the kind of dress that . . . He got a swell picture, I'll say that.

"I don't remember a thing. But a couple of nights later, he shows me the picture. And tells me why he took it. Can you guess?"

Smith shook his head. He could, but he didn't want to break the thread of her story.

"Don't bother. I'll tell you. Ted'd been getting leary of the deal. He knew a spot auditing would show the stealing he'd been doing. It wasn't too much, maybe a couple of grand. So he asked Ferris for a loan. Ferris had told him that he would lend him the money, more even than Ted wanted. But Ferris' idea was this. He wanted me to make a last demand on Ted. This time for a lump of dough. There was supposed to be a hot horse, and Ferris had given me the tip. The horse was to go in a couple of days. I should have told him to go peddle his papers, and the picture, too. But I was weak and scared. So I went for the deal. All the cards were from the bottom of the deck. Ted stole five grand. And we went through the frame. The horse ran out. And when Ted went to Ferris, Ferris told him that he was short too. that he'd plunge on the same horse and that he wouldn't be able to lend him the money for a week. But it was the end of the month. And in two days there would be the regular audit of the books and Ted would be a dead duck.

"So Ferris played his trump card. That's where Murdock came in.

"Ted worked nights, as I said. The deal was for Ted to let Murdock and some of the boys in. I guess it wasn't

too hard. Ted was a trusted employee. Only there was a hitch. A new guard. He caught Ted in the vault. Murdock and Harry, I think, were on the outside, waiting for Ted to let them in. And Ted lost his head and hit the guard. He killed him. And when the guy fell, he fell against a wire, tripping it and setting off an alarm.

"They got Ted. Murdock and Harry took it on high when the alarm went off. Sure, he and Ferris and the rest were brought in. They denied everything. But no matter which way Ted turned, there was no way out of the murder rap. So he paid. Tonight, at eight o'clock. And at five minutes after eight I shot Ferris . . . with his arms around me and his lips seeking mine. . . . Yeah. With the gun he'd given me to protect me, as he said.

"Take a look at the billfold."

SMITH pulled it from his pocket and held it close to the dash light. He felt a wave of heat at the sight of the lovely body, nude to a point below the waist. There were three negatives with the print. He placed them back in the billfold and handed it to her.

"So that's why you had to go back. If the police found this, they'd have you on the carpet."

"That's why," she said. "But it no longer matters. I can see now, that they would have come to me in the end. And I would have told them. I'm only sorry that I brought you into this deal."

"The deal isn't over," Smith said. He had been looking into the mirror while listening to her story. And had seen the chrome grillwork of the roadster, a block behind them. "I think Murdock and his pal have caught up with us."

She turned her face away, closed her eyes as if she wanted to go to sleep. Smith stepped hard on the gas. He



knew it was a futile gesture. They were on the Outer Drive. And here, there would be no turn-off for a long way. Too long. He hunched over the wheel and fed the car all the gas it could take. He looked into the mirror and was surprised to see that the roadster was no longer in his vision. Then he looked in the side mirror.

It was almost alongside. He could see the lean, drawn face of Doc, the driver. Doc was staring straight ahead. And Murdock was looking through the rear window. It was then that Smith heard the wail of the police siren.

The roadster speeded by. The two men were so lost in what was behind them they didn't even notice who was in the sedan they passed. And not ten yards behind them came the black squad car.

When the roadster's front tire blew, it woke the girl from her reverie. Smith slowed, as he passed the wreck.

The squad car had skidded to a halt and the three plainclothes men were gathered around the warped remains of the roadster which was wrapped around a light pole. Smith slowed to a crawl. He took a long look at the wrecked interior. Doc's body hung half-out of the car. A spoke from the steering wheel was imbedded in his belly. Murdock was half hidden by the twisted car. Only his feet showed. They were almost floating in an immense pool of blood. His head had struck the pole.

They drove in silence for a long time.

"And now?" Smith asked in a low voice.

She didn't answer.

"And now?" he asked again.

"Drive in there," she said, pointing to a section along the rocks where there were other cars, lovers parking for a few stolen kisses.

He edged the car in among the rocks. The soft wind blew in, warmly-damp,

yet somehow chilling. They stared out to the lake. At last she broke the silence:

"And now . . . Yeah. And now? A good question, Gerry. I wish I had the answer."

He felt a lump in his throat, and a wild surge of anger at himself. He was a writer, a creator. Yet here was something he couldn't solve. The riddle of what she should do with herself. She was a self-confessed murderess. This wasn't like a story where the author, knowing in advance, the end, could plant whatever he wanted, to make it come out even. What could he say to her, the flesh and blood of his dream-woman, Deena?

"There is only one end," she said, as if in answer to the questions he was asking himself. "And that answer takes in me, only. You were taking a walk, and you're going to keep taking a walk. Wait," she commanded as Smith started to interrupt. "Can't you see that no matter what you do there's nothing you can do that will help. It's too late for that. I'm glad that what I'm going to do will be final, the end. And you won't be in it."

"But what about you? What are you going to do? Can't we . . . ?"

She didn't say anything. She only leaned forward, plaved her lips against his, pressed gently once, and whispered, "Good-bye, Gerry Galahad, sucker! It was nice knowing you." Then, slowly with a strength he did not know she possessed, she pushed him from the car.

He stood, indecisive, looking through the window at her.

She smiled at him, and said:

"The water looks so . . . so peaceful."

He knew what she meant. Slowly, he turned and stumbled toward the drive. He didn't see her take a kerchief from her bag and wipe the steering wheel



free of prints. He walked a long time before he came to a place where he was able to hail a cab.

His wife murmured a sleepy, "Is that you, Gerry?"

He said, yes, and walked to the sun-parlor where he kept his typewriter.

He knew that she would be awake when he got to bed. And that there would be an argument. But before he could go back to the woman who was his wife, he had to tell of the woman he loved.

*Deena turned to Harris and said:*

*"No, thanks. You can't buy me a drink. . . ."*

## ORGANIZED TO DEFEAT CRIME

By

GARY LEE HORTON

**Q**UICKLY, quietly, two men step up behind the suspicious character loitering near the theater. They flash their badges, place the man under arrest and lead him off to headquarters. There he is questioned, searched, and fingerprinted. A hurried telegram is sent on its way to the central F.B.I. Headquarters in Washington. There a trained clerk searches through the most complete fingerprint file in the world, pulls out a certain card and quickly sends the reply to the requesting officer. Within a few hours the identification of the man, a wanted criminal, is established beyond a doubt, and he begins the inevitable road to justice.

Cases such as these occur every day. Throughout the country, every hour of the day, police officials are utilizing the virtually foolproof facilities of the F.B.I. to verify the identification of suspected criminals. The results are for the most part final and conclusive and have meant the apprehension of thousands of criminals.

It is good, however, that we remember that this was not always the case. It is not too many generations past that the best, and probably the only way that a peace officer could apprehend a criminal was to go after him himself. No reproductive photographic means were obtainable to spread the face of the offender throughout the nation. A simple handbill with a word description, distributed by mail carrier, had to suffice. And if the criminal was caught in some distant part of the country he could deny his identity and no one could disprove him for then there was no final means of identification. The story of those days and the history of the development of identification methods is filled with many humorous and exciting episodes.

In the days of the American Frontier the means of capturing a thief were simple, direct and rough. A posse was organized and the long, arduous trail was taken up with the prospect of months on horseback in pursuit a definite possibility. In Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, for example, there was organized a "Society for the Recovery of Stolen Horses and Bringing Thieves to Justice."

Each rider received six cents a mile for expenses and a sixty-dollar reward if he caught both the horse and the thief, twenty-five dollars if he caught only the horse. The Society rode far and long and, almost inevitably, caught up with the culprit. Science had absolutely nothing to do with it unless you would call the efficient manner in which they left the horse-thief hanging in the wind scientific.

In the wide-open western states it was often a case of man against man. In a small Texas town, for example, a cruel murderer, Hogart by name, committed a particularly brutal crime and hit the trail for the desert. The U. S. Marshal of that area, having at his disposal no telegraphic or photographic method for circulating the man's description and with no organized force in other parts of the West to aid him, saddled his horse to trail his man. For weeks across the trackless wastes and rugged foothills, the Marshal followed Hogart. The shrewd cunning with which the criminal covered his trail and doubled back trying desperately to shake off the persistent shadow were matched by the Marshal's own complete knowledge of the West and the tenaciousness with which he stuck to the trail.

**F**INALLY, the Marshal caught up with his man.

The battle was swift and savage. The two men, almost equally matched in strength and speed, fought viciously across the rocks and sands, first one on top and then the other. Hogart's fury was intensified by the knowledge that if he lost, this fight would be his last. His record was too black and justice in those parts too swift and sure for him to surmise anything else. The Marshal with a sudden burst of power overwhelmed Hogart, quickly handcuffed him, and started him on the journey back to an awaiting prison sentence.

Such stories, which were duplicated time and time again, demonstrate the dependence of law-enforcing officers in those days on themselves alone to capture a criminal. A particularly shrewd thief or murderer, one with a faster horse or deceptive hideout, could evade justice for years



simply because there was no means of linking the efforts of peace officers spread thinly through the country, no means of circulating accurate duplicate descriptions, and no means of final identification.

The same problems were facing the officials in Europe though in a slightly different way. There it was not so much a question of trailing the criminal into the desert as it was finding him in the thickly populated cities with millions of attics and cellars which could hide someone for years.

The answer of the police was an elaborate and extensive espionage system of informers. In Paris, for example, the city was so completely covered with police informers and spies that the movements of a criminal could be reported almost hourly. A necklace would be stolen by some enterprising thief and he would hurry off to some secret hideout, he thought, in an inconspicuous boarding house. Within the hour the police would arrive on the scene informed of the thief's activity by the landlady or the chimney-sweep. It was as complete a spy system as that!

IT WAS in Paris, incidentally, that the first completely scientific collection of standard pictures of known criminals was organized. Monsieur Alphonse Bertillion set up his Bureau of Identification there and in the first year revealed the true identity of two hundred ninety-one men. A few years later, in 1887, Inspector Byrnes of New York established the famous Rogue's Gallery. It was not until the end of the century that the use of these photographs as proof began to have weight in judicial proceedings.

It was recognized, however, that photographs in themselves were not a conclusive means of identification. Age and illness can have effects on faces that almost defy explanation. The use of photographs, therefore, was sometimes unreliable. A more convincing method had to be devised.

In the middle of the 19th century an Italian, Cesare Lombroso, began what we can call a "psycho-physiological" study of criminal types. His theory was that criminals differed from the rest of the people by such things as the shape of their head, the extent of their jaws, protruding eyes, unusually high cheekbones and etc. He tried to prove that there existed a direct connection between these things took in animals and in the criminal-type human being.

Lombroso's theories were definitely disproven by studies made by other investigators. They proved that the types he called "criminal" were found just as often among lawful, peaceful citizens as among the inhabitants of a prison.

M. Bertillion in Paris also began to measure the dimensions of convicts' bodies, particularly their heads. He intended to use these figures as a means of positive identification that would eliminate the possible error that occurred in the use of photographs. All this activity, while it proved to be of little value in itself was leading slowly but

surely to the final discovery that was to solve the problem.

THE discovery by Galton and Herschel that the oily impressions of the fingers differed from man to man revolutionized identification methods. Here was the final, conclusive, and unimpeachable way to establish the identity of individuals. Age, sickness, chemicals, nothing could erase the lines that made John Doe only John Doe and nobody else.

Immediately, throughout the world, police officials began the systematic collection that was to mean so much in the battle against crime. The shrewd criminal who had thought himself a master at the art of disguise found all his efforts to no avail. The slightest touch or brush of his fingertips would leave a record that was as final and direct as if he had stamped his name and mailed it to the police.

This was the first real step in the use of science and scientific methods in the battle against crime. But this was only the beginning. Once the idea was accepted by the courts that the use of fingerprints was completely foolproof, they began to agree that other scientific methods that were already accepted in industry or medicine could be used in aiding the police. In quick succession the use of ballistics to prove that a particular bullet was fired from a particular gun, microscopic examination of dust and fabrics, legal medicine, legal photography,—all were introduced and soon became the backbone of the new science of crime detection.

Countries throughout the world became aware of the importance of these new methods and began the development of national schools to train men in these modern techniques. Laboratories were set up for the specific purpose of providing the methods of science to the need of police agencies. One of the greatest of these laboratories is the Scientific Crime Detection Laboratory affiliated with Northwestern University. It was set up in 1930 and from comparatively humble beginnings has developed into one of the finest of its type in the world.

THE other great American institution which has carried the new ideas in crime detection to its greatest development is, of course, the Federal Bureau of Investigation under J. Edgar Hoover. All its agents are lawyers and accountants, men whose intelligence has been developed in their work by long and intensive training in scientific method. The organization which they have built up has the most complete filing system and set of laboratory equipment of any police bureau in the world.

The results which they have shown, the methodical running down of the "big boys" in the crime world has proven to the world that when the tools of modern science are applied to crime detection, the criminal's "goose" is truly cooked.



# You Take the High Road

by LEONARD FINLEY HILTS



*Even the fear of execution did not deter Mark Hewlitt from his plan for murder. But there are things worse than death...*

MARK HEWLETT transferred the gun from his overcoat pocket to that of his suit. He saw Graves staring at the hand in which the gun had been and laughed.

"Didn't you ever see a gun before, Graves?"

The butler stammered, "Why—why, yes sir. It wasn't that. It's just that..." The gray fringe that haloed Graves' shining bald spot seemed to stand straight up and his eyes were like half-dollars.

Hewlett slapped him on the back. "Forget it, Graves," he laughed. "The gun is registered in my name, so I don't like to leave it where anyone else might get hold of it. Any shooting done by this piece of lethal machinery would be

blamed on me. Now, is Mr. Wright in?"

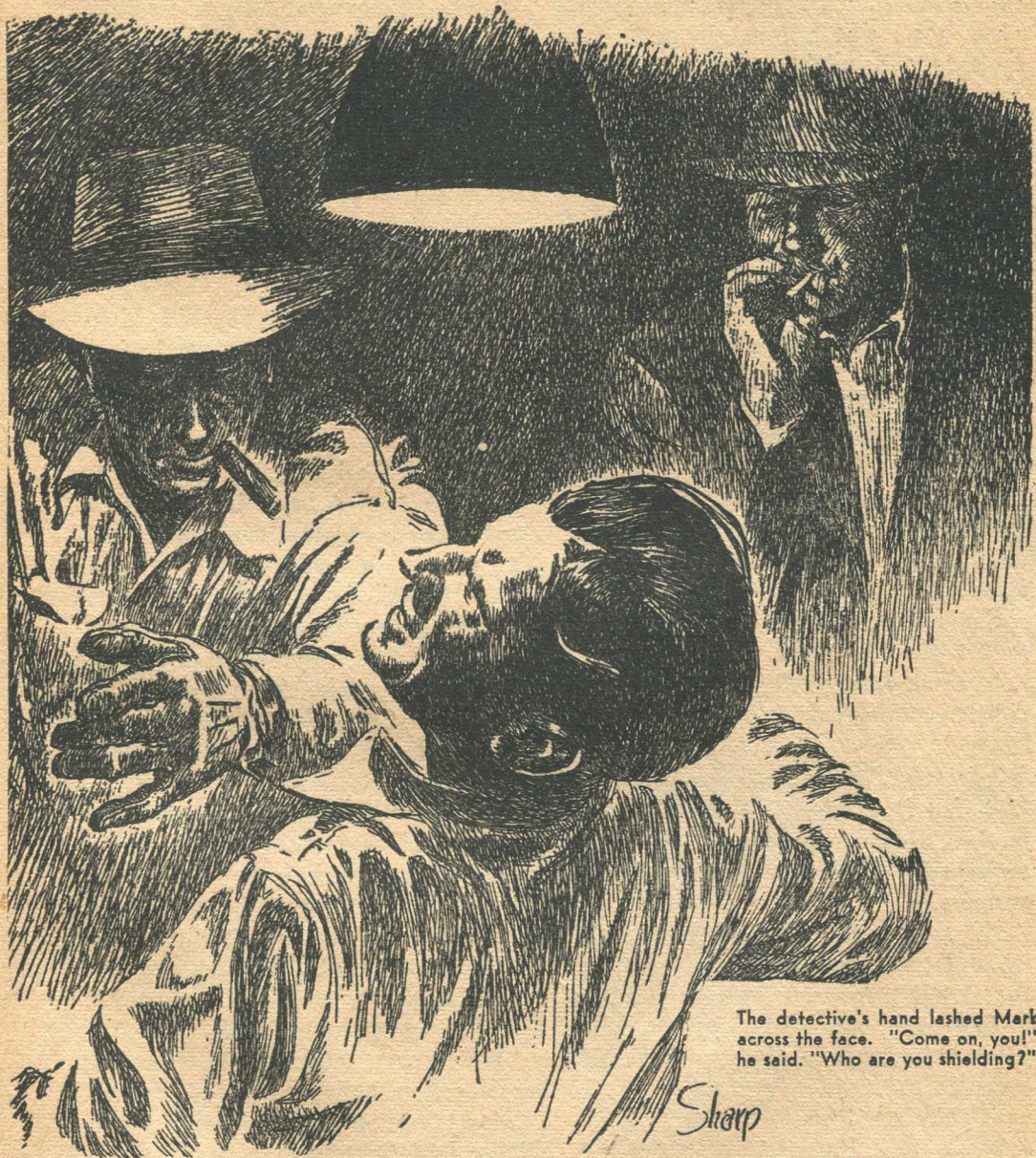
Graves took his hat and coat. "Yes sir. He's in his office."

"Fine. I'll go on down by myself."

Mark strolled away from the butler's disapproving eyes and went down the wide hall that led from the front door of the Wright house. He was of medium build, and carefully but not expensively dressed. His hair had once been coal black, but now was turning an iron gray. He seemed to contrast with the rich furnishings of the house.

Mark passed the first three doors in the hall and then knocked softly on the fourth. A muffled voice behind the panel ordered him to come in. Mark opened the door, entered Sam Wright's





The detective's hand lashed Mark across the face. "Come on, you!" he said. "Who are you shielding?"

office, and then closed it behind him.

Wright seemed only mildly surprised at seeing him. "Well, Hewlett," he said in a flat voice that conveyed no emotion of any kind, "what brings you here at this time of the day?"

Mark surveyed the room. It was a big plush room lined with books that had never been read. In most mansions

of this size it would have passed for a library. Sam Wright, being a thoroughly practical man, used it as an office to supplement his downtown business suite.

Wright, a big, bluff red-faced man with an obvious case of high blood pressure sat behind the ornate desk. On it in front of him was the sheaf of papers



he had been working on, and in his right hand was a fountain pen. He looked like he might go back to work at any minute. His eyes were a pale watery blue, now mildly inquisitive and slightly annoyed at the interruption.

Before answering Wright's question, Hewlett crossed the room and sat in a soft chair facing the desk. He lit a cigarette slowly and with a great show of deliberateness.

The annoyance behind Sam's eyes increased. "I'm pretty busy," he told Hewlett, "so I hope after this slow approach you have something important to say."

Hewlett smiled quietly, "Well, Sam, that all depends. It is important to me, and it *may* be important to you. I don't know."

Sam's fingers began to drum on the desk top.

"I came over to tell you that I've decided to commit suicide."

**W**RIGHT was startled. The pen fell from his hand and clattered on the glass top of the desk. "Suicide?" he asked. His face was vacant with surprise.

"That's right," Hewlett replied. "And I thought it would only be fair that I tell you about it first. There's no insurance, Sam, so I'm afraid you're going to lose all of the money I owe you."

"You're mad!"

Mark shook his head. "Uh uh. Not mad. Just a little weary of the whole rotten business. I'm fifty-five, Sam, and what have I got to show for fifty-five years of living? The biggest collection of debts any one man could own, no business, and no prospects. If I worked for a slave for the rest of my life, no matter what I did, I still wouldn't be able to pay what I owe. So why the hell should I stick around?

I'd only be hounded by my creditors until one of them was kind enough to donate a coffin."

Wright didn't understand his viewpoint, and his lack of comprehension was spread all over his face. He stared at Hewlett and groped for something to say, but nothing appropriate came to his mind. All he could manage was a question. "When?"

Hewlett shrugged. "That's hard to say. I made up my mind yesterday, and since then I've discovered a curious thing. I don't have to the guts to kill myself."

Wright let all the air out of his lungs and leaned back in his swivel chair. The annoyance came back into his eyes and his face lost its strange look. He smiled good humoredly.

"Well, then that settled it, doesn't it?" he said cheerfully. "You can't very well commit suicide if you can't kill yourself." It was plain that he thought Mark mad, and felt that the best way to handle him was to humor him.

Hewlett took a long drag on his cigarette and then exhaled. He shook his head behind the cloud of smoke. "You're wrong there, Sam. It can be done in spite of my lack of guts. But skip that for a while. I'd like to point something out to you."

Wright looked inquisitive.

"Did it ever occur to you that you are entirely responsible for my failure?"

Sam pursed his lips, thought for a minute, and then shook his head. "No, it hadn't. Should it have?"

The muscles in Mark's face tightened a little. "What do you think? I had a very nice little business started. It had all kinds of possibilities. So I borrowed from you to expand it. Then times got a little tough and you wanted your money back. You wouldn't give me an extension on the loan and I had to

*(Continued on page 162)*



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*(Continued from page 160)*

sell out. Only I didn't get nearly as much as I had put into it. After I distributed the proceeds I found that I still owed you and two or three other people a total of seventy-five grand. With a debt like that and a business failure on my hands my credit was no good. I had to go into retirement six months ago, and since that time I've had nothing but trouble. One summons after another."

WRIGHT stopped him with a raised hand. "Wait a minute. I called that loan because I decided that your business was no longer a good risk. Any good businessman looks out for his own welfare first."

The tightness hadn't left Hewlett's face, and now his eyes hardened. "Sure, I know. But it's a pretty personal affair to me. I can't look at it as objectively as you can."

Wright looked to him for a moment, then shrugged. "Well, it's done now, and it's too late to change. Now if you'll excuse me. . . ."

Hewlett straightened up in his chair. "No, I've got more to say."

Sam could no longer keep the annoyance suppressed. "Well, say it, man, and get it over with."

"I thought I'd explain how I'm going to commit suicide without killing myself." Mark grinned a humorless, taut grin that gave his face a pinched expression.

"Oh, very well!" Sam said crossly. "Let's hear it."

Hewlett settled back in his chair again. His face relaxed a little.

"You know, Sam, in this state they're very kind. They electrocute murderers. It's all over in a second, and I understand there's little or no pain."

Sam eyed him with a puzzled frown. "So what?"

Carefully Mark brought the gun out of his pocket. "Don't move, Sam," he warned. "I want to finish what I have to say. I've hated you ever since I can remember. I hated you when I came to you for the loan, but that was nothing to how I feel now. You've completely ruined my life."

Sam stared with hypnotic fascination at the muzzle of the gun that Hewlett had levelled at him.

"I have to take the easy way out now," Mark continued, "but don't think I'm going to let *you* get away so easily."

Wright raised his eyes from the gun to Hewlett's face and flinched at what he saw there. The eyes were bright and glittering, the lips compressed to a thin line. Two little pistons pumped at the temples. The man was serious!

"I don't have the guts to kill myself, but I have hate and guts enough to kill you," Mark said softly. "And if I kill you the state will be kind enough to take care of my suicide for me in their chair. See? I don't have to kill myself. All I have to do is to give you what you deserve and then . . ."

His laugh was unpleasant.

Sam Wright gripped the arms of his chair and brought his feet in closer, to a springing position. "Hewlett! Snap out of it! You're. . . ."

The gun exploded in Hewlett's hand.

Wright looked surprised at first, then his face twisted with pain. His hand clawed at his white shirt front. Then slowly his head lowered until it rested on the desk. After a long moan and one last gasp, he stopped breathing.

Hewlett watched him die with a twisted grin. Then he arose, dropped the gun into his pocket and went out into the hall. Excited noises at the back of the house told him that the shot had been heard. In a few minutes the maid and the butler and everyone else

*(Continued on page 164)*



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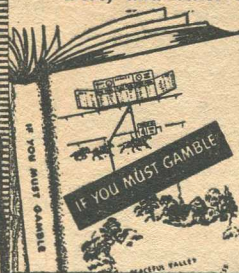
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(Continued from page 162)

would rush in and begin wringing their hands. It was a sight he didn't care to witness. The worst part of death was the necessity for weeping and mourning.

He hurried down the hall, scooped his hat and coat out of the closet, and pushed the front door open. The cold fresh air hit him and sobered him. By the time he had reached the sidewalk he was walking slowly again.

IN HIS smoking jacket, with a fragrant cigar in his mouth, Mark Hewlett sat in the living room of his apartment and read the evening papers. Occasionally he lifted his glance from the printed page and looked at the door. Time seemed to pass slowly. An eternity had come and gone since he had left Sam Wright's office.

He knew that the police must have been summoned to Wright's home within a few minutes after he had departed. And Graves would have told them of the gun and of his visit. They should be coming around to question him. In fact, they should have been here some time ago. He wondered at the delay.

The muted voice of the door chimes sounded out in the hall and interrupted his thoughts. Slowly he rested his cigar on the lips of the ash tray and put his paper down beside his chair. Then he went out and pushed the button that unlocked the downstairs hall door.

He waited a few minutes before opening the door. When the sound of footsteps told him that his visitors were almost at his floor, Mark opened the door casually and said, "Yes?"

A small homely man with the nervous eyes and manner of a hawk said, "I'm Lieutenant Gould from Homicide."

Mark invited him in. A second man, more obviously a detective because he looked like every detective Mark had



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ever hard of, followed Gould into the room.

Just inside of the door Gould said, "I'd like to ask you some questions, Mr. Hewlett, if you don't mind."

"Not at all. Come into the living room and sit down." He showed him to a chair and handed him a cigar. Gould accepted it quickly, as if afraid the offer might be withdrawn before he could get his hands on it.

Gould's companion refused a seat and a cigar. Instead he stood in the archway to the living room and lounged against the wall. He had the detached air of a Spanish duenna accompanying her mistress.

"You visited Samuel Wright early this afternoon?" Gould asked when the atmosphere of the room had settled down.

"That's right," Mark replied. "I was there for almost an hour. From two to three o'clock."

"What was he doing when you arrived?"

"Working on some papers."

"And when you left?"

"Dead."

The lieutenant's eyebrows arched themselves into horizontal parentheses. "Dead? Did he die while you were there?"

Hewlett was as calm as a man in church. "That's right. I shot him just before I left."

The man at the door started and uttered a little exclamation. Gould glanced disapprovingly at him and then looked back at Hewlett.

"You did, eh? Any good reason?"

"Certainly. I owed him more money than I could ever pay. He ran me out of business some time ago and that caused the debt. Is there a better reason than that?"

Two sets of quotation marks appeared between Gould's eyebrows and



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his eyes narrowed at the corners. "Suppose you tell me just what happened at his place this afternoon."

Mark spread his hands. "Not much. We sat and talked for a while and then I shot him. He died very quickly. I left when it was over. That's all there was to it."

"You don't seem very put out about it," Gould commented. "You act as if you had murdered someone every day of your life and it was getting to be a pretty boring business."

Hewlett pursed his lips and shrugged. "That's just how I feel about killing him. He squeezed me dry and then left me to rot. You can't expect me to feel sorry." He turned to look at Gould's companion who was staring from the archway with an open mouth. The man closed his mouth and straightened up when Mark's gaze collided with his.

"How about the gun?" Gould asked.

Hewlett ducked his head toward the back of the apartment. "In my coat."

Without being told, the big man in the doorway turned and went toward the back of the house. Hewlett picked up his cigar from the ash tray and relit it. While he concentrated on applying a burning match to the charred stump of tobacco, Gould studied him reflectively. He noticed that the fingers which held the match were steady.

The duenna came back into the room holding a gun in his handkerchief. He handed it gingerly to Gould.

"This it?"

"Yeah," Hewlett replied. "You'll find the fingerprints on the gun, and the ballistics will check."

Gould's eyes gave the gun the most cursory of examinations, then he wrapped the handkerchief around it again and dropped it into his pocket. His eyes went back to Hewlett.

"I don't get it," he said:



"What do you mean?"

"You act more like Christ walking on the waters than like a man confessing a murder."

The cigar stump had gone out again. Hewlett shrugged as he lit it once more. "What Wright did to me left me cold and bitter. He wrecked my life and drained any human feelings I ever had right out of me. Killing him was easy, and feeling any emotion over the death of a man like that would be impossible."

"Will you sign a confession?"

"Certainly."

Gould sighed lightly and transferred his gaze to the pattern of the rug. After a few minutes of contemplation he stood up.

"Okay. Don't leave town. I'll probably want to ask you some more questions."

Hewlett was surprised. "Aren't you going to arrest me?"

Gould started toward the door. He shook his head. "Uh uh. I've got to find some more answers first."

"But I already told you . . ." Hewlett's eyes were almost begging.

Gould looked thoughtfully at the appeal in his face for a minute, then said, "Skip it." He closed the door softly after himself.

**H**EWLETT stepped from the squad car that had picked him up at his apartment and walked ahead of the two plain clothesmen into the detective bureau.

"Take a right," one of them said from behind him. "Last door on the left."

He followed instructions and pushed the door open ahead of him. He was in a room that seemed bare. There were three or four chairs scattered around, a deep laundry-sink in one corner, and a small table near the door. Hanging from the ceiling on a heavy

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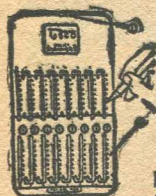
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duty cable was a large light. The light consisted of a green opaque glass shade and a bulb of large voltage. At a glance Hewlett knew that the light from the shade would be focused straight down, and leave the rest of the room in partial darkness.

The two plainclothesmen followed him into the room and told him to take off his hat and coat. One of them pulled heavy green shades down over the windows. When Hewlett was in his shirt sleeves they indicated a stool under the light. As soon as he sat down they turned the light on.

A few minutes later Lieutenant Gould came into the room. He was in his shirt sleeves with his hat pushed back on his head. Hewlett saw now that while he was short, there was a wiry stockiness about the little detective that could prove formidable against men of greater bulk than himself.

Gould walked directly to him. The other detectives sat on chairs around the wall of the room. Hewlett couldn't see them clearly. Most of the room seemed a gray black shadow because of the bright light. And now he began to feel the heat that was radiating from the bulb over his head. Little globules of sweat formed on the skin of his forehead.

"I want to know some things, Hewlett," Gould said, "and I'd advise you to answer fast and answer straight. Get me?" Gould's voice had a hard metallic ring to it.

Hewlett nodded but said nothing.

"All right. Why'd you show the gun to the butler?"

"I had carried it in my coat, and I remembered it when I was taking it off. I had to transfer it to my suit coat, and I did it in the hall."

"Did you kill him?"

"I told you before that I did."

"Why?"



"I told you that too."

"Answer me!" Gould took a threatening step into the ring of light around the stool.

"Because he ruined me."

"Where were you standing when you shot him?"

"I wasn't. I was sitting in the soft chair across from his desk."

"Did he resist?"

Hewlett shook his head quickly. "I didn't give him the chance."

Gould paused and stepped back into the shadows. After a few moments he stepped back into the light suddenly.

"Who're you shielding, Hewlett?" He fired the question at him.

Mark looked at him in surprise. "Shielding? I don't get it, lieutenant. I'm not shielding anybody. I told you before that I murdered Sam Wright."

Better think that one over Hewlett." Gould's voice had a razor edge on it now. Slowly he drew a pair of chamois skin gloves from his pants pocket and began drawing them on his small powerful hands. He did it deliberately and watched Hewlett's face for some signs of effect.

"I told you everything before, Hewlett insisted stubbornly.

The gloves were on now and Gould stood ramming the sides of his hands between the fingers to get the gloves on all the way. His voice had harsh mockery in it when he spoke.

"And you expect me to believe that? That you actually went to Wright's house, purposely showed the gun you were carrying to the butler, and then went in and shot Wright? Then, keeping the murder weapon in your pocket where it could easily be found you went home and waited for the police to come and get you. If you wanted to be caught so badly why didn't you wait at Wright's?"

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The mourning and crying get on my nerves."

**G**OULD howled. "Kill 'em and then scam because you can't stand to see people cry over them! Ain't *that* nice! Then when I get out to your place I find you all ready to confess. In fact you are in too big a hurry about it to suit me. You produce the gun and guarantee that it's the right one, fingerprints and all. You say you'll sign a confession. And then when I don't arrest you on the spot you almost bust out crying in my face."

He took a step closer to the stool. "How does that sound to you? Like you committed the murder? It does like hell!" The gloved fists were clenched at his sides. "*Who are you shielding?*"

"No one, I tell you!"

Gould put his left hand beside Hewlett's head and swung viciously with his right. The covered knuckles hit him high on the cheek bone and his head bounced against Gould's other hand. Hewlett blinked and shook his head.

Gould droned on in a course, throaty monotone. "The butler tells me he hadn't been in the office in a couple of hours. That no one had as far as he knew before you arrived. And he says that you insisted on going in by yourself, unannounced. In other words, he didn't see Wright at that time either. As far as he knows, Wright may have been dead then.

The doubled fists were waiting again.

"He can't tell us whether the gun you showed him in the hall was the murder gun or not. I think that someone murdered him before you got there. Someone you want to cover for. You went in on a carefully planned schedule to try and pin the murder on yourself."

The first came up. "*Who are you protecting?*"



Hewlett started to protest and the fist hit him a slashing blow in the mouth. His head snapped back and he came up blinking again. His lips were split and blood ran down his chin and covered the front of his white shirt.

"Nobody, damn it! *Nobody!*" Hewlett's voice was raising to a scream.

The fists hit him again, once in the side of the head, and once below the heart. The wind came out of his lungs in a rush, and he fell from the stool. There was a cut on the side of his head now, and the blood was still pouring from his split lips.

"Get up!" Gould ordered. He kicked him in the side. "Get back up on that stool!"

Slowly Hewlett got to his knees, and then sat down on the stool.

"I'll give you one more chance!" Gould said between his teeth. "You can't make a fool of me with stories like that. Who was it?"

Hewlett looked at him but did not speak. His lips were beginning to swell.

"Come on! Open up!"

Mark stared at him out of red angry eyes.

"Okay guy, you asked for it!" Gould brought his hands up fast and drove a left to the base of his nose, and followed it with a hard right to the side of his jaw. The left caught the side of his nose the second time around. There was a little sound and the nose moved off center on his face. The right came up on the chin again.

Hewlett sat quite still, then his eyes rolled back into his head and he fell from the stool. Gould stood over him, looking down at his prostrate form for a minute.

Then he said, "All right, boys. Put him in a cell. I'll work on him again later."

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**H**EWLETT came to with a huge throbbing head. He was lying in a damp cell on a hard bed. He stared around for a few seconds before he remembered how he happened to be there. Then slowly the scenes of the past two days came back to him.

He sat up suddenly. "They won't believe me," he breathed. Then he shouted, "they won't believe me!"

He lurched from the cot and staggered over to the door of the cell. He grasped the bars with both hands and shook them with all of his strength.

"I did it, I tell you! I did it! I did it! I did it! Christ, won't somebody come here and believe me? I murdered Sam Wright!"

His words echoed down the empty prison halls and bounced back to him. A drunk with a hangover at the other end of the corridor told him to shut up. But nobody else appeared to hear him. None came in to see what the trouble was, no one appeared even remotely interested in his confession.

Panting, Mark Hewlett fell back across his cell and threw himself on the cot. His breath came in great retching sobs. He had bargained for a quick, easy, painless death after he confessed deliberate murder. But they wouldn't believe him! He shuddered when he realized that Gould would probably call him back for more punishment. He was convinced that there was someone else. What in God's name could a man do to convince that blockhead that he had committed murder. Do another one right in front of his eyes?

This wasn't the way he had planned it. This was cold, brutal punishment and there was more to come. Any kind of self-destruction would have been better than this. He thought of the gloved hands hammering at his face and he cringed on the bed. The pain in his bruised face increased a hun-



dred times when he saw those fists coming.

"Hewlett!"

There was his voice again! Mark pushed his head further into the hard mattress to get away from it.

"Get up, Hewlett!"

Mark raised his head. Gould was standing beside him.

"No, no! Not again!" He screamed.

"No more of that!"

Gould pulled him into a sitting position on the bed. Then Mark saw the other two men in the room. Someone had brought folding chairs and they were sitting on them, watching him. This wasn't going to be another third degree. Mark felt the terror drain out of him. Gould backed up and leaned against the wall.

"Mr. Hewlett, Lieutenant Gould tells me that you want to confess to the murder of Samuel Wright. Is that right?"

The man's voice was gentle and persuasive. Something in it reached down into Hewlett's beaten body and soothed the fear and hysteria in it.

"That's what I've been trying to tell him for two days. *I killed Sam Wright.*"

"How do you feel about it now?"

"I planned it out and killed him deliberately. He deserved it and I have no feelings other than the fact that I'm not sorry."

Mark felt himself relaxing little by little.

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"No. That's not true. I killed him and I expect to be punished for it.

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Probably in the electric chair."

"How do you account for the obviousness of the clues?"

"That's just the way it happened. I didn't try to plant them, but I took no precautions either."

The second of the two men had nothing to say. He merely sat there and carefully noted with his eyes everything about Hewlett. He watched his eyes, his hands, his reactions to the questions.

The first man asked, "Did you feel that Wright ruined your life?"

"He did. Because of him I went into a debt I could never pay and I couldn't start a business again because he had ruined my credit. I have very little money of my own left."

"You felt no emotion when you killed him?"

Hewlett shook his head. "I had thought about it for so long that I was stone cold."

The two men stood up. "That's enough, lieutenant. And thank you, Mr. Hewlett. You look as though you could use a good rest."

Gould growled, "I'll send him down some sleeping tablets."

After he took the tablets, Hewlett went to sleep in a hurry. It was a deep, dreamless sleep.

THE sleep refreshed him. When he awoke, aside from the pain that still lingered in the cuts around his face, Hewlett felt like a new man. He wondered what progress had been made while he was asleep. The men who had been in to see him looked like they believed him. Perhaps they had convinced Gould that he was completely in the wrong.

He walked over to the cell door. Gould had still had a vicious look about him when he left. Mark hoped the men had tried to convince him, because



that look would only develop into another beating if they hadn't. And he couldn't stand that.

The jailor was escorting two men down the corridor. At first he thought they were coming to see him, but they showed no interest in his cell. They started to go past.

One of the men had a newspaper rolled up and stuck in the pocket of his suit. Suddenly Mark remembered that all of this would be in the newspapers. He found himself wondering what they had said.

He cleared his throat loudly. The men turned around.

"Pardon me," Mark said, "but that paper. . . ." He pointed to the bulging pocket.

The man followed his finger. "Huh? Oh, the newspaper. You want it?"

"If you're through with it."

"Sure. Here."

Hewlett took the paper back to his cot and unfolded it. He scanned the front page. He read the headlines that topped the story in different sized type.

## WRIGHT KILLER DECLARED INSANE

Will Use Insanity Plea  
Says Lawyer

Hewlett stared at the printed words for some time, stunned. He wasn't insane! But the full meaning of the sentence didn't strike him for fully five minutes. And then he remembered. Insane persons were committed to the state asylum for the rest of their lives.

But he had wanted to commit suicide. He threw the paper across the cell and jumped to his feet. He stared wildly around the room. He'd cheat them yet! A razor, a bit of glass, anything. He'd show them!

But the cell was as clean as a newly washed bottle.

THE END.

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## "LET'S HAVE IT, BUD!"

By PETE BOGGS

SOME detectives are better cross-examiners than others, and, in the essential job of following a case to its very end, this difference between good and poor questioning techniques often makes a difference in following a successful or unsuccessful detective career. But even for the most skillful examiners, there are many cases which are as tough as Gibraltar.

There is no doubt that with some susceptible people a little touch of the dramatic as to place, time, circumstance, and manner is very effective. But when an examiner meets a really clever and hardened criminal, who probably has been tried in court several times, knows the law, and is thoroughly acquainted with police methods, he meets a tough customer. When the detective starts out with a character of this sort with the broad assumption that the police know it all and only want the suspect to confirm it, this customer is forced to smile—often pityingly.

One such hardened criminal was given a "talking to" by one of New York's best police officers. The officer talked to him for over an hour. He praised, soothed, and reassured. He tried to instill into him a fear of God and the law. But instead of hearing a word or two which might have helped in the case, the officer noted that the prisoner sat and listened politely—without a trace of feeling—and, at the close of the session, gave him a low and courteous bow, and wished him, with an elegant accent, "Good awfternoon," as he adjusted his silk hat preparatory to returning to his cell.

For some people, however, especially the first-arrest man or woman, the effect of being imprisoned in the jail at police headquarters is powerful enough. Some people would confess to anything (almost) rather than remain in some of the cold and fearsome dens found in some of our cities.

With first offenders, especially weak-minded men and women stunned by the shock of being discovered for the first time and fearful of what they've heard about "third degree" and intensive grilling methods, the initial questioning process is at times very effective. Police examiners often depend upon the conversational talents of certain personalities. There seems to be a sex difference, too. A man can usually stay mute for two or three days, but a woman, unless she has been thoroughly "briefed" by other criminals, will want to have something to say and will not be willing to let the man in the situation (the examiner in this case) do all the talking.

In fact, in most of the books and articles presented by well-known detective agencies and police headquarters are many evidences that "the ladies, God bless them," have often furnished many a clue in unravelling a case.



## WHAT IS A DETECTIVE?

By JUNE LURIE

**Y**OU'VE probably met a "great detective." The gentleman introduced himself, of course. And strangely enough, although doctors lose out on the fight for their patient's life occasionally, and all lawyers sometimes lose a case, our friend, the "great one," never lost a case. How could men and women have been so foolish as to commit crime when our hero was on the job? In fact, it seems as though these foolish lawbreakers, poor and misguided, went astray for the sole purpose of adding to the reputation of these wonderful sleuths, who call themselves deep students of human nature, profound and mysterious thinkers.

Just ask them. They could read your mind by looking at a pair of your old shoes.

What, then, is a detective? Isn't he that clever? If this fellow who told me about his exploits isn't really the "hot stuff" he thinks he is, where can someone meet "the typical detective"?

The truth is, that the whole idea of a police detective, so far as the public is concerned, is largely erroneous. The number of really good detectives is very small. There are more men at the bottom of that profession than in any other, and, like good doctors and lawyers, the best men don't advertise themselves. When you hear a detective detailing his "clever" methods and publicizing himself in print, you will know that he is really out of the business, or else he ought never to have entered it.

To be a good detective requires, first of all, natural capacity, keen powers of observation, analysis, and deduction, at least a fair amount of education, and, in addition, a long experience with human nature in all its phases, a knowledge of the social and political conditions prevailing in the community, and a thorough acquaintance with all the undercurrents of life; a comprehensive knowledge of men and women lawbreakers, and, probably the most important of all, a capacity for progressing with changes in the times and in the conditions, circumstances and ideas of the day.

A detective possessing all of these qualities is also most likely to be a modest, hard-working man, inclined, of course, to reticence, but with no air of deep mystery, no taking you down into a dingy vault to tell you something of "profound importance" which really amounts to some trite commonplace of no practical value.

Your friend, "the great one," doesn't fill the bill, of course. But he won't bore you much longer. One glance through the list of requirements (and you can point this article out to him) will chase him away forever.

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