MAMMOTH MYSTERY

FEBRUARY 25¢

The MAN OUTSIDE

by ALEXANDER BLADE

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MAMMOTH MYSTERY

FEBRUARY 1947

All Features Complete

Front cover painting by Arnold Kohn, illustrating a scene from "The Man Outside."

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VOLUME 3 NUMBER 1

All Stories Complete

THE CALL BOX

REPORT BY THE EDITOR

ONE of the most popular types of mystery fiction is the story of suspense: the dangling-sword-over-an-innocent-head "gimmick" that is supposed to put the reader on the edge of his chair and keep him there though the roof fall in and his wife elopes with the milkman. We say "supposed" because too often such stories lack the quality of suspense they seek to impart and the result never succeeds in being anything but boring.

IN THE past MAMMOTH MYSTERY has presented quite a number of very fine stories along such lines. One of the best, it seems to us, was William P. McGivern's short novel, "Nemesis," which appeared in the December issue that featured the "Eye" cover which you readers were so quick to praise.

WHAT we're getting at is this: the lead story this month is "The Man Outside," by Alexander Blade and it is one of the finest examples of the suspense story we've come across. What would *you* do if you came home from the wars and found your wife was missing and nobody wanted to tell you what had happened to her? That was the situation T/Sgt. John Tomczik found facing him. What he did about it makes a story you'll read at a single sitting and praise to the skies.

A NEW writer to our pages is Sissy O'Daniel, who offers you a short-short story about a little old spinster who wanted to borrow carfare . . . not so much to get somewhere as to get away *from* something. What it was she wanted to leave is left for you to discover. Try "Ten Cent Alibi" for an unexpected answer to the question.

FRANCES M. DEEGAN, our favorite female author, is back again . . . this time with a novelette called "Serenade to a Ghost." We don't believe in ghosts either; but there were times while reading this story that we began to wonder . . . If there is any moral to this yarn, it might be summed up in the words: Never try to save a dead man from dying!

BACK again this issue is Dinny Keogh, the fast-talking, fast-thinking private eye created by Larry Holden of the New Jersey Holdens. Many readers have commented on Holden's authentic "feel" for the underworld and its characters, and here is another yarn that has plenty of such atmosphere. In "Too Many Crosses" you'll read what went on behind the scenes before and after a heavyweight boxing match; and, like most of Holden's stories, there are corpses scattered around before the action ends.

PHILLIP SHARP, the radio writer (at present he is one of the writers on the Dinah Shore program), presents "You Can't Run Forever," a combination of humor and chills that makes it one of the brighter spots in this month's list of stories. It opens in a tavern, with our hero staring at a drunk who is wearing a suit seventeen years behind the times. With that kind of opening, almost anything can happen . . . and it does!

STORIES about honest cops (and most cops are honest) are always popular; so newcomer Henry Gade tells about a homicide officer who went all out to solve a bank robbery. Naturally there were people who didn't want it solved and they put stones in the path. You can probably guess the ending, but the way the payoff takes places will give you a jolt.

SHORT stories by Robert Moore Williams, Leonard Finley Hilts and W. T. Brannon wind up an issue that ranks with the best we've ever put together. In the April number there will be a long novel by a new writer. —*H.B.*

The disappearance of his wife seemed to hinge on the fact that Margaret Tomczik had two dentists

AGAIN the stocky sergeant turned away from the jouncing bus's night-blackened window. His broad slavic face was blank, expressionless; his thick body slumped within his uniform. Unconsciously, his blunt fingers moved to caress the shiny stiffness of the discharge emblem, newly sewn above the right breast pocket of his blouse.

The ancient bus hit a bump, and the sergeant shifted, heavily, bracing himself with his cane in one more vain effort to ease the throbbing pain within his wounded leg. He fumbled, for the hundredth time—or was it the thousandth—at Margaret's tattered note.

Not that he needed to read it again. Every word was long part of him, every syllable carved into his consciousness

The Man Outside

by Alexander Blade

The dentist stared at him, alarmed. "You're out of your head," he said. "I don't know where your wife is"

with letters of flame, from the "T/Sgt John Tomczik" of the address to the bitter finality of that closing paragraph:

". . . I'm sorry, but it just won't work. You might as well forget the whole thing. It was a mistake to get married, and we both know it. Don't try to find me, either. It won't get you anywhere . . ."

Margaret. His wife. A memory, glowing and constant through all these too-long months and years. Someone to cling to, to fight for, to survive with, in the steaming stench of jungle foxholes.

And now, at the finish . . . this chill note, clipped and formal, reducing adoration to cold words' disillusion. Ashes of love, and a Railroad Street return address. . . .

John Tomczik's throat was suddenly too small, his stomach a tight, tormented knot within his body. His broad, bronzed face was still bleak, still stolid, still expressionless as a slavic mask, but the corners of his mouth were quivering, the paper a pale blur before his misting eyes.

A red blinker winked its warning out of the night.

Railroad tracks, dozens of them, stretching off through the blackness. The bus jerked to a lumbering halt, then lurched ponderously onward, a sag-springed jolt for every rail.

New needles of pain shot through the sergeant's shattered right leg with a ferocity that pinned him tight to the moment's reality. Sudden beads of sweat dotted his broad forehead. He jammed the note back into his pocket, the knuckles of his big hand taut and white with the jabbing pain.

The driver slammed on the brakes. He smirked over his shoulder at Tomczik.

"Here's your stop, soldier. Railroad Street. It runs right alongside the tracks."

"Thanks."

The word was as coldly impersonal as the sergeant's face. He pushed himself into the aisle with his cane; then, leaning on it, wiped the cold sweat from his forehead and straightened his blue-piped infantrymans' cap.

"Gonna celebrate, huh?" The leering driver touched the discharge emblem as he gave the soldier a hand down the steps. "Well, I guess you earned yourself a party." He nodded toward the two rows of ribbons and the Combat Infantryman's badge on the sergeant's left breast. "Yessir, have yourself a good time, soldier!"

He chuckled lecherously. Swung back aboard. The three human gorillas in the back seat were still roaring with ribald laughter as the bus rumbled away.

Railroad Street. . . .

Black snow in a smudged purple night. The red of the warning blinker, and a distant street light's pale glow. Coal smoke, to sting the nostrils; the river's stench, to turn the stomach. Warehouse piled upon warehouse—murky, geometic mountains blocking off the sky. Tumble-down frame dwellings —l e e r i n g, soot-blackened slatterns, crouching in their own filth. The faint coughing of switch engines, and the fading wail of a freight train's whistle.

Railroad Street. . . .

LIGHT seeped through and around the torn shades. The brassy clamor of machine-made jazz blared forth to torture the chill night air.

Sergeant John Tomczik leaned on his cane on the cinder path. His wounded leg, limbered by the exercise of walking, felt better now. Laboriously, he hobbled up the porch steps.

The sound of a woman's drunken

laughter, shrill cacophony, echoed from within.

Hesitantly, Tomczik knocked.

No answer.

Again Tomczik's knuckles beat a tattoo, louder this time.

Inside, a man's rumbling hilarity joined the woman's cackle. Other voices chorused alcoholic mirth.

The sergeant braced himself with the cane. His big hand knotted into a fist. He pounded at the door, his full strength behind the blows.

Within, a sudden hush. Then the quick, firm tread of a womans' footsteps.

The door opened a bare three inches, and a hovering figure inside peered out suspiciously, inspecting Tomczik.

The door swung wide.

The woman inside was tall, big-boned; her hair a tangled, half-frizzled orange mop. Her scarlet housecoat, floral-figured, was cut dangerously low between full breasts already beginning to sag. The crimson lips parted in a gold-toothed grimace that might have passed as a welcoming smile.

"Hello, soldier! Come on in! We'll have a real party tonight—"

Sergeant Tomczik shook his head.

"You're on the wrong track. I'm looking for a woman—"

"Then you came to the right place, because womens what we got, soldier!" the other cried, displaying the gold teeth again. She caught him by the arm; half-dragged him through the doorway. "What'll you have? Blonde—brunette—redhead?" One hand swept out in a gesture that took in the whole room. "It's all yours, soldier! We'll give you a real time." Her voice dropped. She came close, winking with an elaborately conspiratorial air. "You know what, sergeant? I got just the thing for you—a little Spic chick, not sixteen yet, but Gawd, is she sweet!

Tomczik jerked his arm free. A little ripple of disgust touched his usually emotionless face.

"Let go of me!" he rasped harshly. "I'm not after just any woman. I'm looking for my wife."

The woman stumbled backward.

"What?"

"I said I was looking for my wife."

He turned, surveyed the room.

IT WAS strictly Railroad Street, that room. From the red plush divan leaking springs and stuffing, to the tile fireplace with two tiles missing and mantel sagging, it was Railroad Street.

The girls were Railroad Street, too. There were six of them, all looking the same, from the sleazy, loose-hanging negligees they wore, to the inexpertly-applied makeup that brought out the hardness and bitter lines of their faces. They eyed the sergeant now, with no particular interest—just the idle curiosity of those who have nothing better to do at the moment to pass the time.

The one man in view was another story. Tall, gaunt, ungainly, with no chin and a Roman nose that overshadowed his entire face, he wriggled uneasily under Tomczik's glance and tried to cower from sight in a chair far too small ever to hide him. His shirt was immaculate save for a raw smudge of lipstick on the left collar tab, and his smoothly-draped suit never had come from Ten-Dollar Tom's Classy Clothes.

At the moment, long hands fluttering nervously, he was trying vainly to shove away the girl who had put the lipstick on his collar.

A perfect picture of blue blood thinned to the curdling point.

Beside Tomczik, the woman who had opened the door stared at the sergeant with wary, suspicion-narrowed eyes.

"What makes you think your wife is

here?" she demanded shrilly. "This ain't no rooming house. Or hadn't you guessed?" She swung one hip provocatively and sneered.

A faint line of color crept up Tomczik's face, but he stood his ground stubbornly.

"This place is the return address on my wife's letters," he said. "That's all I know. But I'm going to stay here till I find out more."

The woman swung about.

"Art!"

"Coming, Flo!"

The man who erupted into the room filled the doorway, and with muscle more than fat. Scowling, red-faced, coatless, collar open, vest unbuttoned, he hulked over the sergeant. His ham-like hands were on his hips, his balding head thrust forward like an angry, aggressive bull.

"What's the trouble, Flo? This guy givin' you grief?"

"He says he's looking for his wife, Art." The woman shifted her feet nervously. There was a tiny tremor in her voice. "Can you feature that, Art? Looking for his wife—here!"

"Shut up." The big man gave her a shove to one side that sent her reeling. Tomczik noted that he wore a gun in a hip holster on his right side, handcuffs on his left. "What's this all about, buddy? Let's have it."

Tomczik's broad face was wooden. His pale blue eyes met the other's glare head-on.

"It's just what she"—he jerked his head toward the woman—"said. I'm looking for my wife. Her name's Margaret Tomczik—or Margaret Clevis, maybe—, and her letters gave this as her return address."

He paused, but the man called Art said nothing. He was aware, suddenly, that the record player had gone off. That a strange, taut silence had settled over the place. Every eye was upon him.

He went on:

"She's a red-head. A little less than my height. Pretty. Nice figure." He fumbled in his wallet. Drew out that treasured, s w e a t - stained snapshot. Tried to keep his voice as bleakly even as before, as he shoved the picture into the big man's hand. "Here's her picture. Know her?"

There was a long moment of silence —heavy; dead.

"Well?"

THE man called Art shook his head slowly. He hadn't so much as glanced at the picture. But his red face seemed a shade whiter, and his voice was a hollow croak.

"No dice, soldier. Nobody here knows her. Nobody at all."

Tomczik's face was immobile. He leaned heavily on his cane. Looked slowly from one to another of the room's occupants, blue eyes probing. Searched one blank, painted face after another. . . . watched each one's eyes fall away. No one spoke.

The sergeant turned back to Art, his face almost placid in its guilelessness.

"You're sure?"

"Sure I'm sure. You heard me, didn't you? No one knows her—"

"Art! Wait!"

It was Flo. She shifted uneasily. Switched at her knee with the scarlet housecoat's belt. Looked unhappily from Art to Tomczik, and back again.

Then:

"I'm gonna give it to him straight, Art. It can't do no harm, and it ain't fair to turn him away like this." She turned to the sergeant. "Look, fella: You're right. Your wife *was* here. She was one of my girls." She tossed the orange mop of hair; gave a nervous little reflex laugh that sounded more

like a death-rattle. "Honest, soldier, I never knew she was married. Didn't know her name, even, till. . . . later."

The sergeant's blue eyes seemed to sink back into his skull. His face still was the same stolid, expressionless mask, but he seemed to be having difficulty with his breathing.

"Where'd she go?" he asked at last. His voice was slightly hoarse, but quiet.

Again the woman called Flo switched the housecoat's belt at her knee.

"I don't know how to tell you this, soldier—" she began nervously. "You see,—"

Big Art interrupted.

"What she means, mister, is—your wife is dead!"

CHAPTER II

IT WAS dark on Railroad Street. Especially dark here, where the nearest street light was a blurred yellow pinpoint in the distance, and the flickering, inky shadows clung to the warehouse walls, and the blackness crawled the cinder paths like a living thing.

They came at Tomczik out of an alley's murk, the two of them, before his spinning, tumult-filled brain had even time to comprehend their presence. Shadows among shadows, they were; in a world too dark for anything more to be apparent.

"You shouldn't be out so late, friend," the smaller, slenderer shadow chided. His voice had a peculiar, purring quality, as if a cat had been endowed with human speech. A smooth, soft voice, and one with insolent feline arrogance, also. His hands were moving, and a lonely, frightened sliver of light caught the sinister, silvery sheen of a razor-edged switchblade knife rasping over fingernail. "This is a bad neighborhood to be wandering through at night."

"Yeah," the bigger, burlier shadow echoed, hoarsely eager. "Yeah, it's bad."

"Maybe so," said Tomczik. "Thanks for telling me." He tried to force the tension from his muscles. Started to push on by.

The burly shadow moved to block him, and the smaller one, knife still in hand, laughed softly.

"I might even say this is a bad town to be prowling around in," the slender shadow went on, his voice still a gentle purr. "It's a very, very bad town if your nose is too long. Nosey people are liable to get their noses cut off around this town. Like this!"

His left hand shot out in an eruption of shadowy movement.

Instinctively, the sergeant ducked; jumped back. His full weight went onto the bad leg, and a spasm of agony exploded in it. Moaning, he stumbled against a warehouse wall, shaking and drenched with sweat.

"Did you see him jump, Jocko?" came the smaller shadow's purr. "I talked about nosey people, and he jumped. He must have a guilty conscience, Jocko."

"Yeah," the burlier shadow chuckled. "Yeah, that's it. A guilty conscience."

"As I was saying," the slender shadow murmured, "nosey people get their noses cut off."

Through his haze of pain, that purring voice drummed itself into Tomczik's brain. It would be a long time before he forgot that voice. . . .

"Like this!" spat the shadow.

Again his left hand shot out. Thumb and forefinger clamped onto Tomczik's nose. The knife in the shadow's right hand flashed upward. Nicked the skin from the end of the sergeant's nose. A drop of blood oozed out. Another. Another.

Tomczik stood like a statue, torn be-

tween rage, and fear, and the agony of that throbbing leg.

"Yes, sir, that's just how it happens," the shadow with the knife was saying. "Only it hurts a lot more than that." He released Tomczik's nose and stepped aside, half-turning toward his companion. "Show him how it hurts, Jocko!"

"Yeah." The other came forward in a wary boxer's crouch. "Yeah, I'll show 'im."

His left shot out in a feint; slapped sharply, stingingly, at the sergeant's cheek. Then the right, hard and heavy and with body-weight behind it. Full on the nose it caught Tomczik. Smashed him back against the warehouse wall.

"Another, Jocko. Another for good measure."

Again the boxer moved in, weaving and swaying. Again the right uncoiled. This time in an uppercut, though, to the point of Tomczik's jaw. An uppercut, with a boxer's skill and a man's full weight. The sergeant felt it lifting him. . . . on tip toe. . . . off his feet. . . . then falling. . . . falling. . . .

As in a dream he heard Jocko's eager words:

"Can I roll 'im, Nicky? Can I. . . . ?"

THE sign on the door's frosted glass panel said, HOMICIDE, with ENTER in smaller letters down in one corner.

Sergeant John Tomczik eyes the words for a moment, his broad face inscrutable, then hobbled forward.

There were two people in the room. The man was leaning back in a swivel chair, one glistening shoe propped on the time-scarred oaken desk. A grey man, save for the maroon in his tie and breast kerchief, and the white of his shirt. All grey, from the meticulously-brushed Homberg that rode his narrow head with casual precision, down to snug, pearl-buttoned spats about his ankles. His suit was a sleekly-tailored, double-breasted grey pinstripe. His mustache was grey, too—a thin, carefully-trimmed Adolphe Menjou adornment.

Just now he was polishing a sterling cigarette lighter with a soft, snowy handkerchief. Tomczik noted that his hands were as carefully kept as the rest of him.

Not an impressive figure; too small for that. But not insignificant, either.

The man looked up slowly. His eyes were grey, too; the sergeant had somehow known they would be. The eyes took Tomczik in: broad face; swollen nose and jaw; stocky body; uniform, ribbons, discharge emblem, cane.

"Yes?"

It was a pleasant voice, maybe—quiet, nicely modulated, but with a thin edge of authority creeping through. It went well with the man.

Tomczik leaned heavily on his cane.

"I think my wife's been murdered," he said. "It seemed like a good idea to tell you about it."

The grey man gave the cigarette lighter a final, admiring flourish. Turned to gaze thoughtfully through the window at the lurking cold grey day.

His eyes moved on again, to the room's other occupant.

"Beat it," he directed.

THE girl rose. She was small, pert. The casual sports jacket and red beanie she wore added to the effect. A pair of startlingly violet eyes surveyed first Tomczik, then the detective, and her somewhat-too-short nose wrinkled in what might have been either real or mock irritation.

"If papers depended on you for news, they'd close down tomorrow, Lieuten-

ant Haven," she commented half-caustically. "How am I supposed to get anything, anyhow, if you won't even let me hang around? Is that the way for a servant of the people to act?"

The grey man almost smiled before he thought better of it.

"You'll get your news," he retorted. "You'll get it just as soon as it's public record. I try my cases in court, not in the papers."

The girl shrugged thin shoulders inside the tweedish jacket.

"I wish I had a nickel for every time I've heard that song-and-dance." She clicked out the door and down the hall, a castaneting of French heels and the faint fragrance of gardenias lingering behind her.

The grey lieutenant leaned back again.

"Sit down, sergeant. Or"—he indicated the discharge emblem—"should I make it 'mister'?"

"It don't matter." Unsmilingly, Tomczik limped forward, let himself down in the vacant chair.

Lieutenant Haven proffered cigarettes. Brought out the silver lighter.

"Let's have the details, sergeant. Start from the beginning. Give me the background."

For a moment Tomczik was silent, blue eyes slightly narrowed, faint lines of concentration wrinkling his broad forehead.

"I met her here in '43, when I was on my way to the POE," he said finally. "Her name was Margaret Clevis."

A suddent tension seemed to catch the detective at the sound of the name. He leaned forward. Tapped non-existent ash from his cigarette.

"How'd you get acquainted with her?"

"Picked her up in a bar." A faint flush crept over the sergeant's broad, bronzed face. "I know, it sounds screwy, but we hit it off, right from the start. We got married the next day, May 23. I moved on to the port on the twenty-sixth. I never saw her again."

"But you heard from her?"

The sergeant nodded.

"Yes. Pretty regular. Everything was going swell right up to the last letter. Then, all of a sudden, she ditched me." He fumbled in his pocket, held out the tattered farewell letter.

Haven scanned it. Noted the return address with a frown.

"Railroad Street?"

The flush on the sergeant's face deepened.

"Yeah. But I still don't believe it. She wasn't that kind of a girl. I know."

The detective passed it over with a gesture of one well-manicured hand.

"Skip it, sergeant. That doesn't matter." A pause. "What was her background? Where did she come from?"

The other hesitated.

"I guess I don't know," he said at last. "She spoke of Iowa being home—some town between Waterloo and Dubuque, but I haven't got any idea of the name of it. Said she was in some kind of government work—never mentioned just what. Her folks were dead, I think, though she had a sister." He hesitated again. "You probably think I'm crazy, but those things just didn't seem to matter then. We were in love, all of a sudden, and we had so damn' little time. We were trying to jam a lifetime into three days . . ."

"But she wasn't in any trouble? Nothing seemed wrong?" The grey eyes were boring into Tomczik's.

"I don't know. She was worried about something, I think, but she wouldn't tell me what."

"And . . . now?"

I got into town last night. I didn't write in advance, or anything, because of that last letter. I went to the place

on the return address." The soldier's flush grew even darker. His voice thickened. "The madame said Margaret had . . . worked . . . there. Then a big, red-faced guy she called Art—her fancy man, I guess—told me my wife was dead. Said she'd been killed in a car wreck."

"Yes?"

The sergeant gripped his cane.

"I looked it up in the papers this morning. It happened September 6, just a couple of days after she wrote that last letter to me. The car came down a hill on Alturas Boulevard, and went through a fence and over a rock ledge. It burned. The stories said Margaret was behind the wheel."

"Yes?" the detective prompted again.

SERGEANT TOMCZIK dug into his pocket, pulled out another letter. He thrust it forward, his voice suddenly harsh and taut.

"She couldn't drive!"

Frowning, Haven read the letter.

" 'I'm looking forward to your getting back so we can get a car and you can teach me to drive,' " he quoted slowly aloud.

There was a long moment of silence. Then:

"What did you say her name was?"

"Margaret Clevis."

"Clevis . . . Clevis . . ." The detective's air was almost too rapt. "Yes. I remember. It was a stolen car, and she was loaded to the gills with hooch. Art Koehler and I looked it over, but we didn't find anything too wrong. With that kind of a woman—sorry, sergeant; I was thinking out loud."

He rose.

"Art's on the vice squad. He had more to do with the case than I did," he explained. "Maybe he can give us a hand. Just wait here."

He disappeared down the hall. Returned, moments later, another man clumping at his heels.

"This is Art Koehler, from the vice squad," he introduced. "Art, this is Sergeant Tomczik. He's looking for the dope on that Clevis case."

Sergeant John Tomczik half-rose, then slumped down again, his face suddenly once more a stolid Slavic mask.

The beefy, red-faced giant towering over him was—the man from Flo's!

CHAPTER III

HANDS thrust deep into his black overcoat's pockets, battered black felt hat jammed on the back of his head, red face even more livid than before, Detective Art Koehler glowered down at the sergeant, then turned away in what might have been either disgust or embarrassment.

"Ah, you don't need to look so damn' sour about it," he rumbled. "It's not my fault you married a slut."

Tomczik's face was like graven stone. His thick chest swelled, and he caught the edge of the ancient oaken desk to pull himself to his feet. But Lieutenant Haven's smoothly-manicured fingers, suddenly steel-muscled, gripped his shoulders.

"Hold it, Tomczik." And then, to Koehler. "That's not a pretty thing to say to a man, Art."

The other spun about, bull's head aggressively out-thrust. He flung down the battered hat, ran thick fingers into the thinning black hair through which his red pate gleamed angrily.

"I don't give a damn. It's still the truth!" he roared. He paced the floor with great, lumbering steps. "Look, George: I'm out at Flo's last night when this guy barges in. He tells us that he's looking for his wife—and that her name's Margaret Clevis. That chippie!" He hunched his powerful

shoulders in a shrug. "What the hell were we supposed to do? I was all for letting him go on his way with a brush-off, but Flo had to spill the beans, so I just told him the Clevis dame was killed in a car wreck, and let it go at that. So now he turns up here!"

He turned on Tomczik.

"All right, so I gave you the run-around. D'you think I like having to tell you that you married a tart? And don't give me any guff about telling the chief or the mayor that I hang out at Flo's either. They know I'm there, and they're damn' glad of it. Houses run open in this town, and they pay off, and if they didn't, the chief and the mayor would have to go back to living on their salaries."

He spat savagely on the floor.

Sergeant Tomczik's eyes were chill blue diamonds, his voice a harsh rasp.

"So that made it worth your while to feed me a line, then send a couple of thugs over to scare me out of town?" He touched his nicked, swollen nose. "Well, they did a good job. They mussed me up right. Only I don't scare that easy."

Koehler stopped short in his pacing.

"Who mussed you up? What the hell are you talking about?

"I'm talking about the two hoodlums who mashed my nose, and knocked me stiff, and rolled me for thirty bucks," the sergeant came back bitterly. "And don't try to play innocent, either. Who else knew I was getting 'nosey'? Who else but a lousy crooked cop like you gives a damn whether I stay here and look around or not?"

THE big detective shot a puzzled glance at Lieutenant Haven, his beefy face contorted in a frown.

The homicide man ignored it.

"Now, boys, this isn't getting us any place," he soothed. And, to Tomczik: "After all, sergeant, there were maybe a dozen people at Flo's who heard what you had to say. Before you start throwing charges around, just remember that any of them might have a motive for running you out of town." He hesitated, smoothed his neat grey mustache. "Besides, that's a tough neighborhood down there on Railroad Street. Somebody may just have decided to roll you, and have a little fun at the same time by scaring hell out of you."

Then, to Koehler.

"Don't blame the sergeant too much, Art. Anybody would be a bit on the suspicious side after being worked over in an alley." Another pause. "So what's the score on the Clevis death, Art? That's what I brought you here to find out. After all, you did most of the work on it."

Koehler scowled, as if not quite able to decide whether to accept the change of subject.

Finally:

"She blew in from out-state—Saint Louis—late in '42, George. Worked at Flo's from the start. I think it was her first stretch in a professional house—she'd been free-lancing before, but she knew she couldn't work here without protection.

"Cecil Vance gave her quite a play for a while." He jerked his head toward Tomczik. "You may have noticed him at Flo's last night. A skinny guy with a big nose. He's filthy with dough, but he's got a taste for slumming.

"Anyhow, things went on that way for quite a while, till she began to hit the bottle heavier and heavier. It scared Vance, because she'd come to his office sometimes when she was drunk. Finally, one night—September 6, I think it was—she got a real load on, and lit out. Someplace along the line she picked up Vance's big Chrysler. She

gunned it down the Alturas grade like a bat out of hell, only she must not have been able to pull over enough to make the turn. Hit the fence head-on. Went right over the edge.

"The jalopy caught fire when it landed. Roasted her like a hot potato. She was probably dead by then, though. The steering post went through her chest."

Tomczik stared at him, face expressionless.

"How do you know she's the one that stole the car?"

The big vice squad man shrugged.

"Circumstantial. She'd ridden in the car with Vance plenty of times. Then she turns up in it dead, fried to a crisp. We had to get her dentist to identify her, even, from his charts on her teeth." He chuckled suddenly. "Funny little dope, he was. Fat little guy, name of Roger Dwyer. He got sick when he saw the body. But it was lucky we had him; nobody even knew her name till he showed up. The girls at the house just called her Red, from her hair—"

TOMCZIK'S stare was still bleak.

"Did anyone see the wreck?" he interrupted. "Eye-witnesses, I mean?"

"Uh-uh. But we could tell just what happened from the skid marks on the grade." He turned, stalked over to the second of a bank of filing cabinets along the rear wall. Fumbled through the second drawer. Finally emerged with a fat manila folder. "Here. Take a look at this if you want to. That oughta convince you."

It was there; all there—medical reports, police notes, diagrams of the skid, ghastly photographs of a horrible, charred something spitted on a splintered steering post. John Tomczik stared at it, eyes glazing, stomach a tight knot of pain.

At last, with a shudder, he pushed the folder away.

"Anything else?" Haven queried, his hand on the sergeant's shoulder.

"No . . . no . . ." Tomczik gripped his broad forehead between his hands. Tried to shake off the horror that clung to him like a shroud. Then, remembering: "How about her stuff? Didn't she have anything?" He fought back a tightness in his throat. "Not even . . . a ring?"

The homicide man shook his head.

"I don't remember a ring, but I'll check the property room and get you all her things." He hesitated. "Of course, the girls at Flo's may have gotten it. We didn't even bother with her clothes, as it was, since there weren't any known heirs. All we kept was the junk in her handbag; that was thrown clear of the wreck."

He stepped to the door.

"I'll get that stuff from the property room right now."

He went out.

Art Koehler shuffled his feet.

"It was open and shut, kid," he said at last. "I wish I could tell you different, but it was open and shut. That dame was a wrong number, from the start, and finally she just naturally got so potted that she'd have flown that Chrysler to the moon if it'd had wings . . ."

Lieutenant Haven re-entered the room, a huge, dusty manila envelope in one hand. He laid it down on the desk beside Tomczik; extended a slip of paper and a pencil.

"There's her property, all of it," he explained. "Just sign the receipt and you can have the whole thing; the case is marked 'closed,' anyhow." He brushed the dust from his fingers with an air of distaste. Flicked imaginary lint from his sleeve as he took a seat on the desk's battered top.

Tomczik took up the big envelope, tore it open. His thick fingers were all thumbs. The contents of the package cascaded out in a jumble.

IT WAS a pitiful assortment. An address book, full of meaningless notes and places and appointments. A German silver crucifix. A receipted bill from Alexander Roth, D.D.S. Lipstick in a tarnished brass case. Eye shadow. Seventy-nine cents in small change. A compact, mirror cracked and beginning to flake. A pink plastic cigarette case, also cracked, with three cigarettes. A half-empty packet of paper matches, advertising Steele's Mammoth Bar & Grill. Seven bronze hairpins. An ugly little packet of obscene photos. A wadded, dirty handkerchief. A purse, imitation leather, with the fabric beginning to show through at the corners . . .

"Any more questions, sergeant?"

Slowly, Tomczik shook his head. He scraped the jumble back into the property envelope.

"No. No questions. That letter, though . . . where she said she couldn't drive . . ."

"Ah!" Koehler spat in disgust. "What's wrong with you? After the deal you got from that dame, you still worry about that damn' letter—"

"Shut up, Art!" Haven rapped. He turned back to Tomczik.

"It's rough, sergeant," he said gently. "It's rough, and I know that nothing I can say or do is going to help any. But we've given it to you straight. Now, at least, you can chalk it off as a mistake and start forgetting it."

Slowly, Sergeant John Tomczik raised his head. His broad tanned face was expressionless as a wooden Indian's.

"Thanks, gentlemen. Thanks." His voice was toneless, flat, a replica in sound of the stolid mask that was his face. "Only, if you don't mind, I think I'll hold off a little on that forgetting business."

Lieutenant Haven started to interrupt, but the sergeant paid him no heed.

"Maybe you're right about Margaret. Maybe she was just a . . . trollop. You got plenty to back it up, and all I got is knowing her less than a week. That, and a letter that says she can't drive, and a punch in the nose.

"But I think I'll look around some just the same, gentlemen. That can't hurt anybody. Look around, and see what I can see."

He fixed them with his eyes; pale blue eyes, suddenly as cold as twin chips of ice.

"If it was just the letter, I guess I'd forget about it," he said tonelessly. "I thought I knew her, of course, but I could be wrong there too. But the punch in the nose—that makes it something I got to look into. Put it with the rest, and it leaves me feeling like I've missed something . . . something that someone don't want me to find out."

He laughed harshly, but there was no humor in the sound.

"Even if it's got no connection with Margaret, that punch means I still owe somebody a wallop. So you won't mind if I stick around, will you?"

Koehler scowled.

"I don't know about that—"

Haven, the homicide man, brushed him aside with weary gesture.

"If it'll make you feel better, sergeant, go ahead and do your looking around. I think I can promise you it'll be a waste of time, but that's your business."

The note of authority, the official edge, crept back into his voice.

"One thing, though: Just forget this 'owing somebody a wallop' business. If you want to file a complaint, okay. But lay off police business yourself. Go

throwing your weight around, and we'll throw you. That's a promise." A pause. Then: "Have you got a gun?"

The sergeant nodded.

"A Jap Nambu," he explained. "I brought it back from the Islands."

"Where is it?"

"Up at my room at the Hotel."

Ignoring him, the detective turned to Koehler.

"Drop over there, Art, and pick up the rod." Then, to Tomczik: "It's a felony in this state to possess an unregistered firearm capable of concealment on the person. We'll hold your gun for you till you're ready to leave. It may help keep you out of trouble . . ."

A PAIR of startling violet eyes intruded themselves into Sergeant Tomczik's consciousness, and a voice said, "How about a cup of coffee, chum?"

It was the girl in the red beanie. She was smiling quizzically, half-merry, half-mocking. One arched eyebrow was lifted, the pert, too-short nose uptilted.

Tomczik did not return the smile.

"Who're you?" he demanded.

"So! Formal introductions it gives!" The girl's smile broadened. She stepped back in a derisive curtsy. "The name is Norah Moon, friend. I'm a war-born miracle—a girl police reporter, for the *Telegram*. Free, white, and twenty-one. Height, five feet two. Weight, —"

The sergeant's face did not relax at the raillery.

"What is it you want?"

The girl's thin, sports-jacketed shoulders lifted in a shrug.

"It seemed like a good idea." A pause. "You spoke of murder, chum. I thought maybe I could give you more satisfaction than you got back there." She tossed her small head in the homicide office's general direction with a ripple of honey-colored hair.

Sergeant Tomczik inspected her narrowly, blue eyes probing. At last he made up his mind.

"Could be," he agreed. "Where do we go?"

Norah Moon tucked her small hand into the crook of his left elbow.

"Right this way." French heels clicking smartly, she led him down the Police Department's steps, and on to a gloomy one-arm lunchroom half a block away. The table she chose was in the lunchroom's darkest corner. They ordered coffee.

"Now!" She leaned back, surveyed her escort with keen interest. "Make with the chatter, chum. Give me the dope."

"I came here to find my wife," said John Tomczik. Broad face stolid, he drew her the picture. Traced the pattern in cold, blunt words, while Norah Moon studied him through half-closed eyes.

"I hate to admit it," she said at the end, "but maybe this time the boys with the badges are right, chum. Did you ever think of that possibility?"

Wordlessly, the sergeant nodded.

The violet eyes were veiled in contemplation, staring off into nothing.

"And even if they're not," she went on, almost as if thinking aloud, without regard for his presence, "even if they're not, there isn't much you can do. Right?"

"Except look around."

"You keep saying that. Just what do you expect to see?"

"I don't know. Nothing, maybe." The sergeant's pale blue eyes were cold again. "Or then, maybe something. But I'm going to look, anyhow." He leaned forward, the broad shoulders suddenly somehow carrying an air of tension. "Where do I look, that's what

I want to know? That's why I'm talking to you. You know this town. You know the angles. Peoples, places, dirt. . . . something to get my teeth into."

NORAH MOON stared off into space.

"It's a tough assignment, chum. I hardly know how to steer you." She smoothed the honey-colored hair. "There are angles, yes. That's just the trouble. There are too many angles. Angles, and angles within angles.

"Look." One small, ink-smudged finger traced a little circle on the table. "You've got a dead girl, who may have been killed by accident, just like it shows on the records."

The finger traced another circle.

"Or she may have had trouble with Flo or the girls." Another circle. "Or with our gorgeously corrupt police department." Another. "Or she could have had a run-in with Paul Perni. He's the local Vice Incorporated, and Murder Incorporated, and Trouble Incorporated, all incorporated into one greasy, unpleasant, bad-breathed little man." She tilted her head thoughtfully. "Those lads who worked on your nose. . . . they sound like Paul Perni's way of doing business."

Tomczik nodded without speaking.

"Now, that's just the organized angles. But if we want to make with the personal motives—" The girl threw up her slim hands in a little gesture of despair. "It could be anyone, chum, I'm telling you. Anyone. How many clients did the lady have? A hundred? A thousand? Take your choice."

"You make it sound tough," said Tomczik.

"Sound tough?" The girl laughed. "Chum, it *is* tough. How many henpecked husbands on the loose might kill a floozy to keep out of scandal?

"Take Cecil Vance, for instance. Good stock, but gone to seed. Cecil might run into some pretty strange patterns.

"Or maybe Cecil got too attached to the little lady, and his old man decided to take a hand." A tiny shudder rippled through Norah Moon. "There's menace for you! Aristocracy. . . . just like Count Dracula. Pillar of church and society, with Beau Brummels' tastes and a fortune that comes straight from rental property on Railroad Street. Do you think he could have stayed where he is if he wasn't willing to cut corners? One shady lady, more or less, would bother him about as much as a cockroach in the coffee would worry this grease-joint."

Sergeant John Tomczik smiled—a bleak, unpleasant smile, without amusement.

"I like this kind of talk," he said softly. "This is what I wanted. Talk—with names, and places. I want some addresses, too, Norah. I got plenty of time, and plenty of patience." The smile grew into a death's-head grin. "Plenty of time, Norah, and plenty of patience. And now I got some angles to play with, too!"

CHAPTER IV

THE talking chimpanzee behind the counter of Paul Perni's cigar store glared at Tomczik.

"What for y'wanta see Paul?" he demanded.

The sergeant shook his head slowly; leaned heavily upon his cane.

"I got something he'll want to know," he explained carefully. "Only it's a secret, see? So I can't tell you. So if Paul don't see me he'll never find out."

The chimpanzee hesitated doubtfully.

"Well. . . . I'll see."

He disappeared into the cigar store's

shadowy rear, knee-length arms swinging grotesquely.

Seconds passed. Lengthened into minutes before the chimp at last reappeared. He motioned to the sergeant with a prehensile hand.

"Okay, Tommick. He'll see yuh. On'y it better be good. Paul ain't feelin' any too sweet today." He gestured. "Stick out your arms."

"What for?"

"Frisk. Paul don't take no chances, see?" The chimp delved briskly into Tomczik's armpits, his crotch, around his waist. "That's why he's lasted so long in the rackets."

Satisfied, he turned away, led the sergeant toward the rear.

The room was at the end of a long corridor that stank of beer kegs and stale cigar smoke, the door a peep-holed Prohibition job that gave off a dully metallic clang as it closed. Inside, an unshaded light bulb on a ceiling cord cast a grimy yellow glare over the chamber's bleakness.

The man fitted the room.

Toad-like, he squatted behind a huge, rock-solid pine table. His barrel chest was hunched forward, his hairy, shirt-sleeved arms extended, pudgy fingers toying with a big, glass cube inkwell.

"That's the guy, Paul. Says his name's Tommick."

"Huckay. Beat it."

The voice was a shock-high, piercing, it shrilled instead of rumbling.

Tiny eyes, obsidian-black, surveyed Tomczik out of a fat face that exuded grease from every pore. A fat hand moved to brush back a thick thatch of coarse black hair.

"W'a'chu wan,' huh?" Again that surprising voice, almost a falsetto. "You got somet'ing to tell Paul, huh?"

"Uh-huh." The sergeant nodded. "There was a girl. Her name was Clevis. Margaret Clevis—"

"W'atta hell!" Paul Perni screamed shrilly. His pudgy fist crashed down on the table so hard the glass cube inkwell jumped. "You no wanta tell nuttin'. You come fishin'!" Evil, cobra-like, the obsidian eyes darted over the soldier. "You nosey people, t'at's w'at you are."

The sergeant's expression did not change.

"I still want to know," he said.

PERNI leaned back, thrust thick thumbs into his lower vest pockets. His fat face twisted in a greasy sneer.

"W'y for I tell you anyt'ing, huh?" he demanded arrogantly. "You're scared. Yella. Anybody push you aroun' t'at wanno. T'hell wit' you."

His voice rose shrilly.

"Neecky! Jocko!"

Across the room a door jerked open.

Two men stepped inside.

Two men, and one was big and burly, with a cauliflowered left ear.

There was a switchblade knife in the others' right hand. It rasped gently now over his left thumbnail. He was young, this one, and sleekly handsome in a Latin way. An air of hair pomade hung about him.

"Yes, Paul?" he murmured. His voice was a silken purr.

Sergeant John Tomczik's broad, bronzed face was wooden, his pale blue eyes expressionless and chill.

"Neecky, I t'ought you tell t'is guy it's not good to be nosey in t'is town, huh?"

"I told him, Paul. I explained it to him very carefully. Didn't I, Jocko?"

"Yeah," the burly man agreed. "Yeah, you explained it very careful, Nicky."

"You see, Paul?" The man called Nicky spread his hands in a little gesture of resignation. "I gave him full

warning."

"But he's-a here."

"I guess he just didn't believe me, Paul. I guess he's one of those people who have to learn by their own experience."

"Hold it!"

Tomczik's voice was harsh, abrupt. In a sudden, surprising arrogance of his own, he limped forward. Sat down with heavy insolence on the table-corner closet to Paul Perni. "I came here looking for information, not trouble. But if it's trouble you want—"

Perni burst into a scream of contemptuous laughter.

"'Trouble'! He's-a talk about trouble!" he mocked. And then, suddenly savage:

"Neecky! Jocko! T'row t'is bum out! T'row him hard, so he don' come back!"

"Right, Paul. It's a pleasure."

The sleek young Latin with the feline voice erupted in a symphony of movement. Forward he came, as a skilled knife-fighter comes, left hand ahead at guard, right drawn back to stab into the first opening. His lips were drawn back from his teeth, his eyes narrowed, gleaming jet pinpoints.

And then John Tomczik struck.

As a tiger lunges, his arm shot out. His cane, crook forward, gripped by the shaft, hooked around the Latin's neck. Jerked the knifer off balance, off his feet. Smashed him, headlong, against the table's corner, in a spasm of spattering blood and bone.

Roaring, Jocko charged in, great fists drawn back.

TOMCZIK'S left hand snatched at the glass cube inkwell. Hurled it, with all his might, into the onrushing boxer's face.

It struck with a meaty *thunk*.

Jocko's mouth dropped open. The impetus of his rush still carried him forward, but he was falling as he came. He landed at Tomczik's feet, retching and moaning.

The sergeant swiveled to face Paul Perni. His breath was a harsh rasp, his stolid face as hard as carven stone.

"You want to push me around now?" he whispered hoarsely, his voice thick. "You said anybody could push me around that wanted to. You want to do it?" His shoulders were hunched, his big fingers working, as if lusting to sink themselves into the fat of Perni's throat.

Perni's face contorted into a greasy, gleeful grimace. An explosion of wild merriment bubbled through the thick lips.

"You dog!" he shrilled. "You lousy dog! I should kiss you!" He rocked with a spasm of laughter. "T'ese boys of mine! T'ey t'ink t'ey're so tough! An' t'en—like t'at!"—he brought two fat fingers together in a loud snap—"like t'at!—you take 'em! Oh, Tommick, you're good boy! You ever want job, you see Paul Perni!"

John Tomcziks face did not relax.

"Laugh!" he grated. "Go ahead, get it out of your system. But when you're through, you're going to tell me what I want to know: What about Margaret Clevis?"

Abruptly, Perni sobered. He hunched over the table. Brought one fat fist down with a bang.

"Tommick, if I know, I tell you. But *per Dio*, I don' know." He frowned. "Look: I hear you're stickin' your nose into t'ese Clevis bus'nus, an' t'at ain' good for me. Questions ain' never good for me. So I sen' my boys aroun'. T'at's all."

"Not quite, it isn't all!" rapped Tomczik. 'Someone had to tell you I was asking questions. Who was it?"

The racketeer shook his head in a

manner that might have implied anything.

"Don' know, keed. Jus' don' know anyt'ing. One of Flo's girls, I guess. But not for sure. . . ."

The sergeant leaned forward. His fingers were itching for Paul Perni's throat again.

"You mean you always send a wrecking crew out when you get a call from some floozy, Perni? Even if you don't know who she is?"

Perni shrugged, and smirked maddeningly.

"Or maybe you're just lying to me."

Again the shrug. "Could be, keed."

"Maybe not." Tomczik swung his cane gently to and fro by the shaft, as if it were a golf club. He let it come close to the gangsters neck. "Maybe it's the truth or your hide, Perni."

The fat hoodlum let go a shrill cackle of laughter. It was weird merriment, but it *was* merriment. There was no hysteria in it. The evil little black eyes sparkled with enjoyment.

"You're all-a right, keed! You're good boy. If I'm not crazy, I'd be scared stiff. You like to kill me now, huh? I t'ink you do it, too, if I don' set you right." He spread his fat hands, palms down, on the table before him. Seemed lost, for a moment, in intense concentration of his hairy forearms. Then: "Me, I'm crazy, Tommick. I don' give damn, you kill me or not." His eyes sparkled wickedly. "T'at's w'y it ain' do you no good, see, keed? You make me talk, you never know w'ether it's true or not. Huh?"

IT WAS true. It stood out all over him that it was true. Paul Perni had been in the rackets too long. He didn't give a damn. Right now or ever, he didn't give a damn. John Tomczik could see it in his eyes.

"But you got ideas," the sergeant said softly. He swung his cane again; tested its balance. "You must have ideas." A pause. "Who killed Margaret Clevis, Perni?"

The other's thick brows contracted into a greasy grillwork of wrinkles. He ran one fat hand through the thick black hair.

"Hones', keed, t'at I don' know. Anyt'ing I say is jus' guess. Don' even know t'at wreck ain' on t'e up-an'-up."

"But you got ideas," the sergeant repeated.

Perni licked his thick lips. The fat face was suddenly shrewd.

"You're good keed, Tommick. Mebbe. . . mebbe you see Cecil Vance, huh? An' his ol' man, Ed Vance, too. You see t'em." He nodded slowly. "Mebbe no good, Tommick. Mebbe get you no place.

"But mebbe you fin' somet'ing, too. Fin' w'y t'hat Cecil Vance report his car stole *after* t'is girl is dead. An' w'y he says t'at car was parked on Market Street, corner Fift', w'en he's-a got space in storage garage on t'at same corner. You ask him t'at, keed." He brought his fat hands down on the table with a sharp smack. "T'at's bes' I can do for you."

Tomczik's blue eyes were almost guileless as he pulled himself to his feet.

"Thanks, Perni. It's a lead."

He started for the door.

Behind him, Nicky stirred feebly. Groped for his knife.

"Where's is he?" the knifer sobbed. "I'll cut his God-damn' nose off! I'll kill him!'

Paul Perni stood over the man, hands on bulging hips.

"You!" he sneered. He spat full in his fallen aide's face. "You couldn't even kill flies. T'is boy—a cripple—yet—an' he takes you bot'!"

His foot lashed out in savage fury. Caught the man called Nicky on the

bridge of the nose. Even across the room Tomczik could hear the crack of the bone.

"Cut off nose, huh? I fix *your* nose . . . !"

THE Vance Realty Company's offices occupied a hall closet on the third—top—floor of a Front Street cockroach hatchery. The office girl, an ancient, wedge-faced witch straight out of *MacBeth,* greeted Sergeant Tomczik with all the cordiality of a bankrupt welcoming the sheriff.

"Which Mr. Vance d'you want?" she demanded waspishly, smoothing wisps of grey hair into further disarray. "After all, there's two, you know."

The soldier leaned on his cane. Meditated.

"Make it Mr. Edward Vance," he decided finally.

"He's not in," the witch proclaimed triumphantly. "He's here only from ten to eleven A.M., Monday through Friday." She started to turn back to her dust-swathed rolltop desk.

"Then I'll see Cecil."

"Well, make up your mind." The witch disappeared into a sub-closet, black skirt swishing, an aura of lilac talc and dried sweat in her wake.

Tomczik stared out the narrow window. A choice neighborhood, this befitting a realtor specializing in Railroad Street rentals. Across the way he could see a pawnshop, a cut-rate clothing emporium, a cheap burlesque house, two bars . . .

He moved closer to the window, looked down. A huge tooth labeled PAINLESS DENTIST marked a second-floor office. Crumpled orange wrappers, scudding before the wind, reminded him of the fruit store that occupied the ground floor.

The sub-closet's door opened.

"Mr. Vance'll see you now," the witch snapped. "Hurry up. Don't keep him waiting."

The sergeant hobbled forward.

CECIL VANCE had replaced the lipstick-smudged shirt he'd worn at Flo's. Otherwise, as he now sat beside the rickety knee-hole desk jammed next to the rusty radiator, he was the same big-beaked, chinless nonentity. He shifted his feet nervously. Finally stood up.

"Yes?" His voice was as uneasy as his feet.

Tomczik said nothing.

Vance wiped his long hands on a kerchief. His underslung mouth worked.

"Uh . . . won't you sit down?" He gestured toward a chair, and Tomczik noted that his hand was trembling.

The sergeant limped forward, lowered himself into the chair. Cecil Vance pulled out the handkerchief again, patted his forehead. He cleared his throat. Tried ineffectually to smile at his visitor.

"What can I do for you, Mister . . . er . . ."

"Tomczik. John Tomczik. You saw me at Flo's last night." The pale blue eyes fixed the suddenly red-faced Vance. "I just want to ask you a few questions, Mr. Vance."

"Questions? What questions?" The long fingers dithered aimlessly at the papers on the desk. His eyes refused to meet Tomczik's.

"Questions," the sergeant repeated. "Questions about . . . Margaret Clevis."

The realtor's sharp intake of breath was plainly audible.

Then:

"Uh . . . I'm afraid I don't know what you're talking about, Mr. . . . er . . . Tomczik."

The sergeant leaned forward on his cane, his broad face threatening in its very woodenness.

"I'm talking about Margaret Clevis, Mr. Vance. My wife, Margaret Clevis. The woman who went over the ledge on Alturas in your Chrysler. Or don't you remember your Chrysler, either?".

Cecil Vance's mouth was working again, his fingers toying shakily with his desk phone's dial.

"Well?"

"Uh . . . the car was stolen. I reported it. I can't help it if someone steals my car . . ."

"You knew her, didn't you? You'd been with her at Flo's?"

The realtors breath was coming jerkily. There was a note of panic, of desperation, in his voice.

"Really, Mr. Tomczik, I'm very busy. I haven't time for this cross-examination. You must excuse me—"

He started to rise.

Sudden fury gripped Tomczik. His arm shot out, shoved the other back into his seat.

"Sit down!" he grated. It was like an animal's snarl. "My wife's dead—and you talk about how busy you are!"

"I want an answer: You knew her, didn't you?"

Vance's shoulders were shaking.

He choked. "Yes."

"She'd been with you in that car?"

"Yes."

"And she'd driven it?"

The other hesitated. "Well . . ."

"Had she, or hadn't she?"

"Uh . . . no. I'm afraid not. I don't remember her ever driving."

"Do you remember her ever driving *any* car?"

"Uh . . . no."

THE sergeant leaned back. His knuckles were taut and white where they gripped the cane. He drew a deep breath.

"One more question, Mister Vance: Where was your car parked when it was stolen?"

A faint flicker of relief seemed to cross the other's big-nosed face. His mouth stopped working.

"Why . . . on Market, close to the intersection of Fifth."

"But you got monthly space rented in the Avon Storage Garage, on that same corner, haven't you?"

Vance suddenly was trembling again. His tongue flicked at lips gone dry.

"Yes, of course, but—"

"Then why was your car parked on the street, when all you had to do was turn it over to the attendant to have it put in the garage?"

"Uh . . . I . . . I wasn't parking. I just wanted to run into the drugstore—"

"What drugstore? I looked that corner over a few minutes ago, and I didn't see any drugstore."

"Uh . . . uh . . ." Vance's mouth opened and closed, but no coherent sound came. The nostrils of his big nose quivered like those of a frightened horse. His eyes were wide with fear.

"What drugstore, I said?" Tomczik's voice was a savage rasp. His left hand snatched at the other. Caught his coat front. Dragged him forward bodily to the edge of his chair. "And if you were in a drugstore, why didn't you report the theft till after Margaret was dead? Why, damn you? Answer me! Why?" He shook the realtor as a terrier shakes a rat.

Vance's breath was coming in great gasps, his face pal and contorted.

"Uh . . ." he whispered, "uh . . ."

He sagged limply, backbone suddenly rubber. Slid to the floor.

Tomczik stopped short, his own face suddenly pale. He fumbled for the other's shirt front. Felt for the heartbeat.

It was there, strong and regular.

Tomczik relaxed again.

"He's fainted!" he muttered half-aloud. "The lily-livered jerk's fainted!"

With the ghost of a smile, he pulled himself to his feet. Limped through the doorway and into the outer office.

The witch favored him with a glare down her nose.

"You certainly took your time," she commented caustically.

Sergeant Tomczik laughed in her face.

"It was worth it, though," he assured her. "Why, my ideas took Mr. Vance's breath away."

He was still chuckling as he hobbled down the stairs.

CHAPTER V

LIEUTENANT HAVEN brought out the silver lighter, snapped flame to a cigarette.

"For a guy who's just looking around," he remarked, leaning back once more against the headboard of Sergeant Tomczik's bed, "you manage to find a good bit of trouble."

The sergeant closed the narrow bedroom's door. His face was blank, his voice expressionless.

"I don't know what you're talking about," he said.

The detective laughed softly. Smoothed his grey mustache.

"Of course not," he agreed. "But Paul Perni knows."

"What about Paul Perni?"

Haven flicked lint from his coat-sleeve, admired his fingernails.

"Paul thinks you're quite the biggest hunk of man who's hit this town in a long time," he commented. "He's so impressed he's gotten himself two new bodyguards."

The sergeant's thick shoulders moved in a shrug. He lowered himself into a chair.

"I'm just looking around," he reiterated.

"Nick Lucci and Jocko Morgan were impressed, too." The lieutenant's grey eyes were quizzical. "They'd like to meet you again, sergeant. In a dark alley, preferably." He hesitated. "It might be an idea to bear those two gentlemen in mind, you know. They feel they have a grievance, and they'll be inclined to play rough."

Again the shrug.

"Then there's Cecil Vance." The detective tapped ash from his cigarette; studied the glowing point. "You frightened Cecil badly with your insinuations, sergeant." He shook his head chidingly. "You shouldn't have done that, you know."

Tomczik half frowned.

"Did he file a complaint?"

Again Lieutenant Haven shook his head.

"No. Not formally. But he called Art Koehler to ask for protection against you. He was sweating blood."

"I just asked him some questions," Tomczik answered woodenly. "I just asked him about why he parked his car where he did."

"But Cecil was frightened." A sober note crept into his mocking voice. "I don't think Art liked it, sergeant. He doesn't care too much for your style as it is, and he might be inclined to take steps."

"That's too bad. But I still got a job to do. Margaret was my wife—"

The detective passed it aside with a gesture.

"Norah Moon is one of your admirers, though," he went on, again mocking. "She gave you quite a play."

"Norah Moon? What about Norah Moon?" This time there was a genuine note of query in the thick-set sergeant's voice.

"What? You didn't know?" The

lieutenant chuckled as he caught it. The grey eyes glinted with amusement. He brought an evening paper from his coat pocket. Spread it to display the front page's lower left corner. "Here." He tossed it to Tomczik. "See how famous you are!"

IT WAS a feature story, double column. The headline read:

HEART-BROKEN VETERAN
PROBES WIFE'S DEATH

"Damn!" Tomczik muttered.

"Don't you like it?" Lieutenant Haven's air was one of elaborate amazement. "Why, I thought it was a lovely story!"

The sergeant said nothing.

"And now that you've gotten in everyone else's hair, I suppose you'll be going around to see Edward Vance, Cecil's old man," the detective went on. "Well, go ahead. Only don't say I didn't warn you. When you contact that old pirate, you'll have a tiger by the tail!"

Tomczik eyed him thoughtfully.

"It sounds like you wanted me to look up this Edward Vance," he said. "Is that the idea?"

"What! Me suggest you annoy a leading citizen!" The homicide man clucked disapprovingly. "On the contrary, Tomczik, on the contrary."

He rose, brushed the bedspread's lint from his razor-creased trousers. Adjusted the Homberg to a calculatedly jaunty angle.

"Guess that takes care of the day's news and views. Glad to find you still in one piece, anyhow."

Tomczik was abrupt.

"Just why *did* you come around?" he demanded. "How'd you know I was going to be here? How'd you get into my room?"

The other crushed out his cigarette. There was a glint in the grey eyes. The clipped, official note was back in his voice.

"Going to ask for my search warrant, too, sergeant?" His lips thinned. "I'm being broad-minded about you. But you certainly didn't think I wasn't going to keep tabs on you at least a little, did you?"

Tomczik opened his mouth to speak, but the homicide man brushed him aside.

"You're doing very nicely, sergeant. Stirring up sleeping dogs. Breeding yourself a juicy mess of trouble.

"Well, I won't interfere with you, so long as you stay half-way inside the law. You may get carved up or slugged or murdered, but that's your business, and I won't interefere."

Abruptly, without another word, he turned on his heel and strode off down the corridor . . .

THE Vance residence was as large as the Vance office was small. It stood far back from the road, in grounds big enough for a hunting preserve. A pillared colonial masterpiece, lost in a landscaped forest.

The cab brought Tomczik up to the echoing, dusk-shadowed porch that stretched across the front of the mansion. Two flunkeys and a half-mile of moss-rose carpeting further on he came to the library—and Edward Vance.

Vance rose as Tomczik entered—a tall man, ramrod straight, crowned with a silvery pompadour set off by the dark bookshelves behind him.

"Your business, sir?"

There was the ring of rapiers, of steel on steel, in that voice, and steel's bright bleam in the deep-set eyes, too. The lean, hard face, the thin hawk-nose, the smooth morocco skin—they were out of the Middle Ages, all of them, as if this

man were somehow misplaced, a twentieth century condottiere.

Sergeant Tomczik limped closer.

"There was a girl," he said. "Her name was Margaret Clevis."

No flicker of recognition passed over the other's lean face.

"Perhaps. I don't know her."

The sergeant leaned on his cane.

"She was my wife. She worked at Flo's, down on Railroad Street."

"Really?" Silvery eyebrows raised in studied insolence. The ringing voice was a whiplash of insult. "I can't say I admire your taste."

A darkly crimson tide began to rise in Tomczik's face. The cords in the back of his big hands stood out like thin cable beneath the skin, his knuckles white against the cane. His voice was thick:

"You own that house!"

"Do I, indeed?" The other eyed him languidly, a study in ennui. "If you wish to discuss business matters, I'm at my office from ten to eleven, Monday through Friday, providing nothing more interesting arises."

Tomczik was breathing hard.

"Margaret Clevis died when the car she was in crashed over the ledge on Alturas," he said harshly. "It was your son's car."

"My son's?" The hawk face was as cold as chiseled marble. "My son is over twenty-one, sir. If you're seeking information as to his doings, please see him, not me."

"To hell with that!" Rage bubbled through the sergeant's mask of imperturbability. "I'm asking you a civil question, and I'll get a civil answer—"

"Charles!"

VANCE seemed hardly to raise his voice, but instantly a door opened. One of the flunkeys who had brought Tomczik advanced.

"You called, sir?"

"Yes, Charles." Edward Vance turned back to the sergeant.

"Your presence in this house is unwelcome, sir. Please leave!"

Tomczik's head seemed to sink into his thick shoulders.

"And if I don't?"

Vance laughed shortly.

"You will, or Charles will notify the police to come and remove you. There'll be no unofficial brawling here." He laughed again. "Oh, yes, I've heard of your little episode with that fool, Paul Perni. But I assure you, sir, that such tactics will get you nowhere with me."

"Shall I call, sir?" Charles asked unctuously.

Vance eyed Sergeant Tomczik.

"Are you going?"

Defeat's bitter mantle hung heavy on the soldier's shoulders. He stood there, through a long moment of tense silence, the realization of utter failure gnawing at his vitals. Attempted, at last, one final, hopeless gambit.

He forced his stiff lips into what he hoped was a thin, grim smile. Pinned Vance's eyes with a cold stare of his own.

"Maybe Perni *isn't* a fool," he rasped. "Maybe he's right. Maybe you'll have to go." He laughed harshly, deep in his throat. "It's too bad, when a man plays tough so long he gets to believing it, and the rats he runs with throw him to the wolves."

He turned, then, and limped slowly toward his waiting cab. All the way back to the city he pondered whether there really had been a glint of puzzlement hiding in Edward Vance's final sneer. . . .

AN AMUSED voice said, "Why the dark-brown study, chum? And how's about a cup of coffee to match it?"

Irritation sparked in Sergeant Tomczik's pale blue eyes. He glanced up from his seat in the hotel lobby.

It was Norah Moon, the girl in the red beanie. Only this time the beanie was kelly green, instead, as was the jacket she had substituted for the tweed sports coat.

She closed one violet eye in a profound wink.

"Hiya, chum! Whats' new with the crew?"

Tomczik stared at her stonily.

"Why'd you do it?" he demanded.

"Why did I do what?" Norah was the original picture of injured, cherubic innocence. "What have I done now?"

"That story. Why'd you write it?"

The girl dropped to the leather divan beside him.

"I'm sorry, Tommy, if you don't like it. But I work for a living. For a newspaper." The violet eyes played hide-and-seek with him through lowered lashes. "That means I'm supposed to get news, Tommy, even if someone doesn't want me to."

"I see."

Norah studied his bleak, uncompromising face.

"Look, Tommy: The only thing you could have against my story would be that it gave away your game—let people know you weren't satisfied with the report on your wife's death. But actually, nothing was given away. Because you've told everyone who counted all about it yourself—Flo, and Koehler, and Haven, and Paul Perni, and the Vances—"

"All right. Forget it."

The girl moved closer. Her small hands gripped his arm.

"You mean it, grumpy? Or are you just giving me a rush brush?"

In spite of himself, Tomczik grinned.

"I mean it. I don't know why, but I do. Even though I ought to ring your neck instead."

"So now that's settled." Norah leaned back, wriggled contentedly. "What *is* new, Tommy? Between us. Have you picked up anything?"

Dourly, the sergeant told her of his day's doings.

"There may be an answer in it somewhere," he commented bitterly, "but if there is, I can't find it." His big hands twisted at the shaft of his cane. Sure, I've stirred up some smoke. Maybe even scared a few people. But where's it got me? No evidence. Nothing you can put your finger on.

"This stuff about Cecil and his Chrysler, for instance. What does it add up to? Just that he may have put Margaret in that car himself, instead of its being stolen. But even if he did, how can I prove it without a confession?" He shook his head, his broad face bleak. "I'm afraid it's the end of the line, Norah."

THE girl sat silent for a moment, her pert, too-small nose wrinkled in meditation. At last she spoke:

"You've talked to Cecil, Tommy. You know the kind of a fellow he is." A pause. "Do you see him doing cold-blooded murder, Tommy?"

The trace of a frown touched Tomczik's face.

"I doubt it," he said finally. "You can't ever tell, of course. There was a guy in my outfit overseas. . . ."

"I can see him covering up, though." Norah's eyes were thin violet slits. "Especially I can see him covering if the guilty party, who used his car, is someone he's scared of."

Tomczik nodded slowly.

"Could be. Only it still doesn't explain why his car was parked next door to his garage."

Excitement gripped Norah Moon. She gripped his arm, small face glowing,

eyes alight. Her voice trembled.

"Maybe his car *wasn't* parked there!" she gasped. "Maybe that was just the first place he thought of when he got mixed up with the police."

The sergeant's face was suddenly tense beneath its stolidity. His big hands were working, and his voice had an eager edge when he spoke.

"Maybe," he said, "maybe it was in that garage all the time!"

CHAPTER VI

THE Avon Storage Garage's night manager was a slender young colored man with a well-formed head and warm, intelligent eyes. He was very polite. But he also was firm as the Russian line at Stalingrad.

"I can't help it if you want to take your lady for a ride in the country, sir," he said pleasantly. His eyes, brown velvet, appraised Tomczik in a glance that was half curiosity, half irritation. "I can't help it if there aren't any rental cars available, either. The only thing for which I am responsible, sir, is this storage garage from the hours of eleven at night to seven in the morning. And regardless of your previous experience, sir, with other establishments or with other personnel of this establishment"—he smiled a little, wisely,—"I shall not allow you to take a car from this garage without express written permission of the owner." He smiled again, as if to soften the blow. "I'm sorry, sir, but that is the way it stands."

Sergeant Tomczik shot him a villianous glare, purely for effect.

"I got one here five months ago," he grumbled.

"Perhaps so." The night manager was still polite, and still firm. "We had a car-washer who was doing a very nice business at that time, sir, renting out our clients' cars. That is probably why he has not been able to find work since we dismissed him."

"Out of a job, is he?" Tomczik made his voice sound disgruntled. "Where does he hang out, anyhow?"

The Avon's night manager eyed him, head tilted thoughtfully.

"For a man who only wants to take his young lady joy-riding, sir, you want a remarkable amount of information."

Tomczik's big right hand disappeared into his trousers pocket. Came out again, a five-dollar bill twined between the thick fingers.

"What did you say that name was?" he prodded. "The name, and where he hangs out?"

The colored man's fingers closed over the bill; transferred it to a wallet in the hip pocket of his neatly-pressed uniform pants.

"The information isn't worth five dollars," he told the soldier, "but the man's name is Eddie Lawrence, and you should be able to find him at the Montgomery Club, on South Decatur Street, off Railroad. That is as close to a permanent address as he has at present."

"Thanks." Tomczik pivoted on his cane. "Come on, Norah. We got places to go."

A lone cab, cruising, picked them up. Swung about, in a wide U-turn, to head for their destination.

"Damn!" muttered Sergeant Tomczik.

Norah Moon swept back her honey-colored hair.

"What is it, Tommy? What's the matter?"

The sergeant glowered.

"I guess Haven wasn't kidding about keeping tabs on me," he grumbled. "That man turning at the Avon just now was Art Koehler!"

THE Montgomery Club proved an organization in name only. Actually

a bar on the edge of the citys' slum belt, it gave forth a blare of barrel-house jazz and a reek of sweating, close-packed bodies.

Sergeant Tomczik motioned an exiting youth to their cab.

"You know Eddie Lawrence, Joe?" he demanded.

"Eddie? Shu'."

"Is he in the Montgomery tonight?"

"Reckon so."

The sergeant displayed a dollar bill.

"Can you bring him out for this?"

"Reckon."

The youth turned, re-entered the Montgomery Club.

A minute later he was back, a sullen, shuffling figure in his wake.

"Dis heah's Eddie."

Tomczik withheld the dollar. Surveyed the slouching, unkempt man before him.

"Where'd you work last, Eddie?"

The other appraised him sullenly out of yellow-tinged, red-veined eyes.

"Wh'u make dat yuh biz'nis?"

Tomczik jingled the silver in his pocket.

"Money, Eddie. For you."

"How much money?"

"That depends." Again the sergeant jingled his silver. "If you're the man I want, and if you got the dope I want, it might be quite a bit. It all depends on you."

The man shifted uneasily from foot to foot, the red-veined eyes suspicious.

"Wu'ked 't th' Ay-v'n G'rage," he said finally.

The sergeant handed the waiting youth whom he had first hailed the dollar bill. "Thanks."

Then, to Eddie Lawrence: "Where can we talk?"

"Heah?"

Tomczik cast a sidewise glance at the cab driver.

"Uh-uh."

"Gotta ol' cah . . . dat be aw'-righ'?"

"Where you got it?"

"Jes' up th' street coupla doohs."

"Fine." The sergeant eased himself out of the cab. Turned to Norah Moon. "Stay here. If I'm not back in ten minutes, call a cop."

"No dice, chum." Suddenly, stubbornly, determined, she emerged from the cab herself with a clicking of high heels, a swish of short skirt. "I'm going with you."

"But—"

"No 'buts'. I'm going."

Tomczik threw up his hands.

"All right. Come along. Get slugged." And to the cabby: "You heard what I said about calling a cop?"

"Yeah."

"Then do it, if we don't get back. Tell 'em John Tomczik finally got into that trouble Lieutenant Haven, on Homicide, warned him about. I'll double your fare."

HE AND Norah followed the slump-shouldered, shuffling Eddie Lawrence into the shadows. Clamered into the back seat of a dilapidated relic that once—before the doors were torn off—had been a four-door touring car. It groaned protestingly under their weight, the cushion springs stabbing angrily at the new burden.

Eddie Lawrence, in the front seat, turned on them. A knife glinted in his hand.

"Wh' yuh want?" The thick lips hardly moved, but his nostrils were flaring, like an animal that scents danger.

"The Avon people fired you for renting out cars in storage, didn't they?"

"So wh'u?"

The sergeant leaned forward on his cane. His broad face was stolid, but the gleam in the pale blue eyes betrayed

his tension.

"I want some dope on a car you let out last September. The night of the sixth. It was a Chrysler—Cecil Vance's Chrysler—"

"Don't know wh'u yuh tawkin' 'bout," interrupted Eddie Lawrence. He was speaking too fast. There was a tremor in his hoarse voice.

"The hell you don't. I'm talking about Cecil Vance's Chrysler." Tomczik's eyes bored into the man's like icy blue needles. "I'm talking about the car that Vance said was parked down on Market, near Fifth, when it was in the garage all the time. The car you let out, Lawrence—the one Margaret Clevis was in when it went over the ledge on Alturas."

One of the sergeant's big hands shot out. Gripped the other's forearm. His voice rose in spite of his efforts to hold it steady.

"Who took it out, that's what I want to know? Who?" He shook the man, heedless of the knife. "Answer me, damn it! Who took it?"

"Don' know. Don' know nuthin'—" Eddie Lawrence was shaking, as with palsy. Fear and panic and guilt crawled in his bloodshot eyes—

Bang!

Almost in their ears the shot crashed. From the corners of their eyes they could see the orange flame belch from the gun's shadow-shrouded muzzle.

Bang! Bang! Bang! The first shot was swallowed in an echoing fusillade.

Eddie Lawrence sat bolt upright, yellowed eyes protruding, mouth agape.

Tomczik moved by instinct rather than design—the instinct bred of long months of island warfare, and jungle ambushes, and sudden death.

He was dropping before the first slug hit, sweeping Norah Moon with him. Surging through the far door, away from the gunman. Falling to the pavement. Rolling back under the car, close against the sheltering curb, with spasms of retching pain from his protesting right leg tearing at his stomach.

Doors were opening. Men shouting. Women screaming hysterically. The slap of running feet echoed on sidewalk and pavement.

"Norah! Quick! This way!"

Still in the gutter, swallowing his agony while pain's cold sweat streamed over his quivering body, Tomczik wormed forward, pulling himself with his elbows and one good leg. On, away from the car in which Eddie Lawrence sprawled still and dead, eyes yet glaring in shock and panic. On, into the welcoming shadows and momentary safety, a sobbing, shaken Norah Moon at his heels.

They stumbled into an alley's blackness. Pressed tight against a wall as footsteps scuffed on sidewalk. Held their breath, while three dim figures paused by the alley.

A match scratched. Flame flared, as one of the figures—a squat, toadlike figure—lighted a cigar, then moved on. The flame illumined the man's face, also. A fat face—greasy, evil.

The face of Paul Perni.

"I'VE got to leave you, Norah," Tomczik said tonelessly. "They'll be after me, now. Maybe with a 'shoot to kill' order. I can't have you mixed up in that."

"Maybe not." She leaned forward, the small, tear-smudged face suddenly eager. "Maybe they haven't found out, Tommy—"

Tommy laughed harshly.

"Are you kidding? With Koehler on our tail, at the Avon? With our cab driver primed to sing to the cops?" He laughed again, bitterly. "Remember what I told him? 'Tell 'em John Tom-

czik finally got into that trouble Lieutenant Haven, on Homicide, warned him about'." A pause. "Can't you see Haven's face after that, Norah? He'll think I'm needling him. He'll come after me with everything he's got, and ask questions afterward."

"But *I* can go to him. Explain to him—"

The sergeant shook his head.

"It's no good, Norah. At the best, they'd hold me on suspicion; I couldn't even blame 'em for doing it. And I can't have that just now." A hard note crept into the usually-toneless voice. "I'm getting too close, Norah. I'm getting so close somebody's scared—"

"Perni—"

"Don't be too sure about Perni, either." Tomczik's big fingers knotted into fists, so hard that the nails dug into his own flesh. His face was like graven stone. "That's the first thing I thought too, of course. But now I'm not so sure." He shook his head slowly. "Perni'd kill. No doubt about that. But would he kill himself, when he's got hired hands to do it? Would he walk away afterward, big as life and twice as ugly?" Again he shook his head. "I don't know, Norah. It may be, but I'm not sure enough." The blue eyes burned. "I'll find out, though. I'll find out, and when I do . . ."

A wave of emotion shook the girl. Her voice rose, half-hysterically.

"But why go on, Tommy? Why keep pushing them till they kill you? Your wife's dead. Dying yourself won't bring her back."

Her small hands closed over his big fist. Her voice cajoled, pleaded:

"Let it go, Tommy. For my sake, let it go. I don't want you to die. Can't you understand?"

THE sergeant stared down at their locked hands. His head seemed to have sunk between the thick shoulders. He was breathing heavily, deeply.

"It's you that doesn't understand," he said, and his voice again had taken on its protective veil of bleak emotionlessness. "I can't stop now. I've *got* to know—"

"But revenge—" Norah cried.

"It isn't revenge. Revenge is the least part of it." His big fists were quivering. "Oh, if Margaret was killed, I'll kill the dog that did it. That you can count on.

"But it's more than that. It's Margaret, and it's me. I knew Margaret—not for long, but long enough. She wasn't any . . . slut."

The girl beside him bit her lip. Tried to keep her peace, but could not.

"How can you say it?" she choked. "She was at Flo's, wasn't she? There's plenty of proof—"

" 'Proof'!" He exploded the word like an epithet. "There's proof of anything in this rotten mess. There was 'proof' that Margaret stole a car and drove off a cliff in it, too, before I poked my nose in."

He stopped short. Got a grip on himself again. When he continued his voice was grimly, coldly calm.

"I knew Margaret," he reiterated. "She wasn't any tramp. And if she was, then I'm no good either, because I looked at her and talked to her and married her and slept with her and kissed her goodbye, all the time thinking she was the kind of a girl any man would want to marry." His eyes gripped Norah's. "Don't you understand? If Margaret was no good, then my judgment's no good either. I couldn't ever trust it again. Every time I came to make a decision, I'd stop cold, remembering that on the most important decision in my life, I'd been wrong." His face was white beneath its tan, his lips trembling. "That's why I've got to

go on. Something's wrong . . . phoney. There's an angle I haven't figured yet, something that'll show me Margaret's just as I thought she was. I can't quit till I find it. . . ."

With a gesture of resignation, Norah Moon rose. Her small face was perty pretty no longer; only weary and hollow-eyed and bedragged, with a smudged, too-small nose.

"Have it your way, Tommy," she said, in a voice that almost broke. "I'll see Haven, and do what I can, but I'm afraid it won't be much.

"From here on out, you're on your own."

CHAPTER VII

THE room at the Hotel Viceroy (Men Only—Rooms 50c A Day—Special Weekly & Monthly Rates) was ventilated only by a slotted aperture opening into an air shaft; it had no window. Originally the wallpaper had been a bilious yellow; now stains and age and occupancy had created nauseous patterns—vile rainbows, against a sodden sky.

But it was safe. For fifty dollars, the weasel-faced clerk had assured Tomczik it would be safe. Outside, sirens might scream, and detectives prowl, and patrolmen watch with wary eyes, but here—here was safety, security, without even a line on the register to indicate a fugitive's presence. Security, so long as your money held out, at twenty-five dollars a day for your room, and five dollars a meal. Security, Tomczik suspected also, so long as no one put up a reward large enough to make a change in the weasel-faced clerk's allegiance worth while. . . .

Sergeant Tomczik's blouse lay in the middle of the floor. His necktie was loose, and his shirt collar open, and his hair awry. His head was throbbing, too, as if a great metronome were inside, each hammer-blow of its arm threatening to split his screaming skull. Great circles hung beneath the pale blue eyes. The eyes themselves were bloodshot, and the broad, bronzed face sagged with weariness. But still he stared at the property envelope's contents, spread on the rickety table before him.

The address book. He thumbed through it. Tried to force meaning from the cryptic scribblings: 'Bob—1718 LaMotte Ave.'; 'See Harry Tuesday—Apt. 401'; 'Aaronson Fur Shop, Shelby at Van Buren.'

He hurled the book down with an oath. It was hopeless . . . hopeless. . . .

The thick fingers poked at the rest of the pitiful display: the compact; the cracked cigarette case of pink plastic; the German silver crucifix; the bill from Alexander Roth, D.D.S.; the little packet of obscene pictures. . . .

He picked up the dentist's bill again.

Alexander Roth, D.D.S., 1112 Congress Bldg. To M. Clevis, 819 Railroad Street. For services rendered, $23.00. Please remit.

Tomczik tried to remember the name of the dentist who had identified Margaret Clevis' remains.

Dwyer. Roger Dwyer. A fat, frightened little guy, who got sick when he examined the body.

Tomczik flipped the bill aside, gripped his throbbing head. It was hopeless. . . .

Why the hell would a woman want to have two dentists, anyway?

He sat bolt upright.

Why would a woman want two dentists?

Sergeant John Tomczik reached for his cane. . . .

THERE was a dentist's office at Room 1112 of the Congress Build-

ing, but the name on the door was Bernard Graham.

Tomczik stared at the door. Hesitated.

Outwardly he was still calm, stolid. Not a tremor touched his hands. His eyes were cold and steady.

But within, a thousand screaming demons were making his nervous system a playground.

A dozen times on his way here—yes, a hundred—his freedom had hung by a hair. And now—

"Bernard Graham."

Tomczik gripped the doorknob.

Doctor Graham was a benevolently serious young man in glasses.

No, Doctor Roth was no longer at this address. As a matter of fact, Doctor Roth was dead. He, Doctor Graham, had taken over the practise. . . .

The sergeant leaned heavily on his cane.

"When did he die?"

Young Doctor Graham calculated.

"Quite a while back. Six months ago, about. He passed away September 1."

Tomczik tried to hold his voice steady. Tried to fight down the sudden hope that welled within him.

"Did he have a patient named Margaret Clevis?"

"Just a moment." The doctor consulted a card file. "Yes. Apparently he did." He straightened, held up a stiff, salmon-colored sheets. "Here's her record. 'Clevis, M., 819 Railroad Street.' However, it seems to be an inactive account. She was last here in August, and her account's been paid up in full."

WITH something of a shock, Tomczik realized that Doctor Roger Dwyer's dental offices were in the same Front Street firetrap as was the Vance Realty Company. Were, in fact, on the second floor, marked by the huge PAINLESS DENTIST tooth display he had noticed while visiting Cecil Vance.

The sergeant drew back into a doorway and considered, blue eyes narrowed, broad face bleak. He was suddenly conscious of a gnawing hunger, and his head was splitting, but he did not care. Only one thing mattered now —and the odds against that one thing were a million to one.

"I crack it now," he muttered, half-aloud. "I crack it now, or I don't crack it at all. It's the last chance before they nail me."

A passerby eyed him curiously, and Tomczik's blood ran cold. A slim Italian boy, not yet out of his teens, glanced across from the fruit store, and the soldier shivered. One chance recognition . . . one man who'd read the morning papers . . .

The corner of his eye caught another stocky veteran drifting aimlessly down the street. A tech sergeant, just as was Tomczik.

Sudden inspiration gripped him. He whistled shrilly, got the other's attention.

The man ambled over. Inspected him.

"What's up, Joe?" he demanded.

Tomczik forced a grin, or what he hoped would pass for one.

"Want to make an easy five?"

"Could be." The other's eyes were shrewd now. "Whose throat do I cut?"

Tomczik's grin came closer to normal.

"You don't," he reassured, drawing a ten-dollar bill from his pocket. "You just take this ten-spot into Uncle Moe's, there"—he indicated the nearest pawnshop—"and buy a cane that looks halfway like mine. Then, for half an hour, you do what I tell you. There won't be any trouble; that's a promise."

The shrewdness in the other's eyes deepened into a frown.

"This sounds like some kind of a snow job to me," he grunted suspiciously. And then, with a shrug of shoulders almost as broad as Tomczik's: "Oh, well, what the hell. Gimme the ten."

Five minutes later they were climbing the steps to the second floor together, with Tomczik explaining the other's duties.

"You stand here in the corridor, out of sight," he explained. "Then, when I give you a highball, you limp—get that, you *limp,* with the cane—over to the stairs and down, into the street."

The other sergeant nodded.

"Roger. Then what?"

Tomczik considered.

"You cross the street," he decided finally. "Keep on limping, all the way. Then stand in that doorway where I was, and look up at the windows of the dentist's office. Only stand far enough back in the shadows so the dentist won't be able to see your face well enough to know you're not me." Again he considered; came to the conclusion that he had covered everything. "All clear?"

The other grinned.

"How long do I stand there? 'Until properly relieved'?"

Sergeant Tomczik pondered.

"Half an hour should do it," he said. "Maybe less. Let's say that if I don't tell you to quit sooner, you stay half an hour. Okay?"

"Roger." The man wandered off into the corridor's shadows.

Sergeant Tomczik, in turn, limped into Roger Dwyer's office.

IT WAS a reception room in which he found himself—small and dark and empty, and redolent of cloves and eucalyptus oil. The wall calendar, rakishly askew, still proclaimed it to be 1945, while the tattered magazines on the table were of genuine pre-war vintage.

Another doorway—with the door—across the room revealed an ancient dentists' chair, standing before an unwashed window in a room decorated in a paris green theme about 1900. The usual instrument case flanked the chair, a wall telephone beside it.

Tomczik closed the corridor door behind him. Limped forward, almost tripping where the threadbare carpeting had split.

The room with the dentists' chair revealed yet another door, a door from behind which came vague sounds of poorly-coordinated movement.

Before the sergeant could knock, the door opened.

The man who stood in the doorway did not quite come to Tomcizk's shoulder, and he was as close to a ball of fat as the sergeant had ever seen. There was a startling sphericity about him—from the glistening top of a bald and dome-like head, to a protruding paunch the lower slope of which his trousers clung to only by complete defiance of the law of gravity, to the rounded, run-over heels of his cracking shoes. The global illusion was furthered, at the moment, by a tendency to sway, as if the man were likely at any time to go rolling off into a corner like a slightly distorted ball.

Bracing himself precariously against the door frame, the man peered up at Tomczik through the lower portion of thick bifocal lenses.

"Doctor Dwyer?"

"Be ri' with you. Ri' with you."

The man's voice was thick and furry. The sergeant noticed that an enveloping aura of cheap whiskey hung about him like a cloud. As he spoke, he disappeared back into his room. Reappeared, a moment later, wearing a soiled white coat.

"Whatsa trouble, soljer?" Doctor

Dwyer attempted to steer Tomczik toward the dentists' chair. "Siddown. Lemme take a look—"

Tomczik evaded the pudgy, not-too-clean hands.

"No. That's not what I came for."

"Huh? Wsassat?" Doctor Dwyer shoved the bifocals higher on his nose. Peered querulously up at the sergeant. "Doncha wancher teeth fixed?"

"No." Tomczik measured every word with grim care. "I came for my wife. We're leaving town, and she wants her dental chart to take with her."

"Chart? What chart?" The white-coated ball of fat brushed the idea aside with an impatient wave of one fat hand. "I don't keep no charts."

Tomczik's blue eyes were bleak.

"You're sure?" he persisted. "I thought sure you had one for her."

"Well, think again!" the doctor snapped pettishly. He closed his eyes. Polished his glistening bald head tenderly with a chubby palm, as if the whiskey of which he reeked had proved too much for him. "I said I didn't have no chart, an' that's what I meant."

SERGEANT TOMCZIK stood like a stone statue, the cold blue eyes fixed on the doctor. He said nothing.

Doctor Dwyer opened his own eyes. Glared balefully at the sergeant.

"Well, whatcha waitin' for—" And then, stopping suddenly: "Say, whatcher wife's name, soljer?"

It was the moment for which Tomczik had come. Never had his broad, bronzed face been colder, more stolid. He seemed to grow before the other's very eyes—to loom larger and larger, an ogre, out of a nightmare, dwarfing the fat doctor.

Very softly, he said:

"Her name was Clevis, doctor. Margaret Clevis."

"Clevis . . . Clevis . . ." Dwyer mumbled the name, half to himself. "I don't remember—"

Suddenly, then, the name slashed through his alcoholic fog. Struck, him, like a mighty fist's fierce blow.

"Margaret Clevis!"

He gasped the name, the fuzz all at once gone from his voice. Tottered backward, shaking hands raised before him, as if to guard against a blow he knew would come. Globules of icy sweat sparkled like tiny diamonds on his gleaming pate. The color was draining from his face, leaving it the hideous, pasty grey of a mouldering corpse. Behind the bifocal lenses panic vied with stark terror in his eyes.

John Tomczik did not move. His voice was still soft—a murderous caress to back the death that gleamed in his cold blue eyes.

"But I *know* you've got a chart, doctor. You *must* have—remember, you identified her body from your chart? It must have been a good chart, too—you knew her from it even when the sight of the corpse made you sick, Art Koehler told me!"

Dwyer was backed against a wall. He tried to speak, but no sounds came. The beads of sweat on his bald head had joined to form larger droplets now. They merged; trickled down his face in tiny rivulets; came together, on his unshaven chin, to drip soddenly on the grimy shirt that covered his quivering paunch.

Tomczik limped forward, till he was standing bare inches away from the dentist's shaking body.

"Who did it?" he asked gently. "Who did it, doctor?" And then, savage fury breaking into his voice, his thick fingers buried in the fat of the other's throat: "Who did it, you bastard? Before I strangle the life out of you—who did it?"

Fear had taken Dwyer's voice away;

now, doubled and redoubled, multiplied a hundred times, fear brought it back again.

"I . . . I don't know, soldier. Before God, I don't know—"

Tomczik's fingers were like steel claws in the dentists's throat.

"Don't give me that!" he rasped. "He wanted her dead, whoever it was, and he wanted her identified. So I wouldn't come prowling around, maybe. Only Roth was dead too; he couldn't pick her out. So the killer came to you, you slimy rat, and you went down and identified her with your phoney charts." He shook the dentist till Dwyer's began to blue. "Who was it, damn you?" Tell me!"

But again fear was convulsing Dwyer's fat body.

"I can't!" he choked. "I don't dare. He'd kill me . . ."

"And I'll kill you if you don't!"

The dentist's voice was a broken moan.

"No . . . I can't . . . I can't . . ."

With an oath, Tomczik flung him aside.

"God help you, Dwyer!" he raged. His broad face was contorted with passion. "You'll wish you were dead before I'm through with you! Long dead, long buried!" He pivoted on his cane. Limped toward the door, still raging. "I'm going, Dwyer, but I'll be back! And when I come, God help you!"

He slammed the door so hard the glass panel shattered in a thousand pieces.

OUTSIDE the office, in the corridor, Tomczik's anger seemed suddenly to leave him. His face was once again a stolid mask, his thick shoulders no longer shaking with barely-repressed fury. One hand swept up in a gesture that sent the veteran he had hired limping off toward the stairway. Tomczik, meantime, stepped back into a doorway, out of sight of Dwyers' office.

It was good judgment that he did. In a matter of seconds, the blubber-loaded dentist's door opened. Dwyer peered cautiously forth. Watched Tomcziks substitute down the stairs, before disappearing into the office again.

Sergeant Tomczik heard a key turn in the lock.

In an instant he was back by Dwyer's door, congratulating himself on the forethought that had made him smash the glass panel as he came out. He reached through the sharp-rimmed opening. Opened the door from the inside in taut, suspense-strung silence. Slipped cautiously into the reception room.

He could hear Dwyer on the phone in the inner office. The fat dentist's voice was quavering with fear, sharp with excitement.

". . . and he was here!" Dwyer was panting. "Here, in my office! He threatened to kill me . . . said he'd come back . . . he's down stairs now, across the street, waiting—"

There was the faint blur of someone at the other end of the line calming, soothing, expostulating.

Silently, Tomczik edged forward. Glimpsed Dwyer in the inner office, at the phone. He was peering out the window, down at the uniformed figure in the doorway across the street, his back toward Tomczik.

"I don't care!" he half-screamed. "It's all right for you to talk. You're safe. But what am I to do? I won't stay here and be killed! I won't!"

Ever so gently, Tomczik moved up behind the little dentist. His lips formed a silent prayer against creaking floorboards or the possibility of his wounded right leg's sudden failure.

". . . But how can I get out?" Dwyer shrilled. "He's down there. If

I leave, I'll have to stop watching him. He might go around to the back before I get there. He'd kill me . . . those hands . . . he had me by the throat once. Next time he won't let go—"

Tomczik struck.

His left hand shot over the dentist's shoulder; covered the phones mouthpiece. His weight was on his left leg, precariously balanced. His right hand whipped up the cane. Rammed its tip into Dwyers' back.

A grimace of shock and fear exploded on Dwyer's face. His fat body jerked in a paroxysm of panic. The phone's receiver dropped from his shaking fingers, still echoeing with a voice that broke faint, maddeningly-elusive recollections in Tomczik's brain.

". . . and get a grip on yourself, damn you!" the voice snarled. "If he'd been going to kill you, he'd have done it before. You won't be hurt if you use your head . . ."

On it went, and on—commanding, pleading, threatening . . .

"Get him over here!" said Tomczik. His lips were close to the little dentist's ear. "Get him over here, or I'll blow your backbone through your fat belly!"

"But . . . but—"

The sergeant's voice crept with sudden death.

"Take your choice. It's you or him. And this time I mean it."

DWYER clutched at the receiver. He clung to the phone-box, as a drowning man to a straw. The grey sheen of stark terror was back on his face.

Tomczik took his hand away from the mouthpiece. Transferred it to the dentist's throat. Let his big fingers ripple, talon-like, over the fat-shrouded windpipe.

Dwyer spoke.

"You come here," he begged. It was the voice of a soul in torment. Of a lost child, crying in the night.

The man at the other end of the line exploded into lurid profanity. Desperately, vainly, Tomczik tried to place that harsh voice.

"You've got to come!" sobbed Dwyer. Terror lent his imagination wings. "If you don't, and he comes back, I'll . . . I'll tell him who you are. I won't have any choice. I don't want to die—"

"Shut up!" came the others roar. It carried, somehow, a note of alarm. "Tell him, damn you, an' I'll make you wish you were dead! Lock your doors and stay there. I'll come!"

"Hurry . . . hurry!"

"Don't be such a God-damn' baby, you fat fool! I'll be there in ten minutes."

There was a click, and the line went dead.

With a shove, Sergeant Tomczik freed himself of the dentist.

Panting, Dwyer sprawled in a chair, ashen face clasped between shaking, fat-laden hands.

The sergeant hobbled to the window. Waved dismissal to the veteran posted in the doorway across the street. A flush of anticipation crept over his broad face. He stood there, wrapped in thought, big hands working at the crook of his cane.

". . . He'll kill me!" Dwyer was sobbing hysterically. "He'll kill me. Or you will. I'll die, and I never did anything wrong . . ." He babbled on and on, meaningless mouthings of a broken man.

Tomczik shot him a glance, half-pitying, half-contemptuous. Pondered a moment.

"So it wasn't either of the Vances," he muttered. "You'd have gone up to their office, not telephoned."

". . . he'll be here in ten minutes,"

Dwyer was whimpering "In ten minutes I'll die . . ."

"Ten minutes," said Sergeant Tomczik. He rolled the phrase over in his mouth. Savored of it, in grim anticipation. "Ten minutes!"

A thin voice said:

"Not quite ten minutes, sir!"

It was like an electric shock, that voice. It had the ring of steel on steel, and death to the one who fell . . .

Tomczik pivoted on his cane, thick shoulders hunched as if to receive a blow.

There, silver-haired and smiling, rapier-straight in the reception room's doorway, stood Edward Vance.

CHAPTER VIII

THERE was a snub-nosed automatic in Vance's hand. His thin lips were smiling, but a deadly gleam lighted his deep-set eyes. He bent forward in a mocking bow, the gaunt hawk-face somehow reminiscent of long-dead buccaneers.

"Your mistake, young man, lay in underestimating your opponent," he declared. "He smelled trickery the instant Dwyer's call came in. So, knowing how conveniently my office is located in relation to Dwyer's, he asked me to investigate immediately."

The Slavik mask was over Tomczik's face, his voice toneless.

"Then you're *not* the one who killed Margaret?"

"I? Kill a Railroad Street tart?" Vance rocked with ironic laughter. "Again you underestimate, sir—and I can't say I'm flattered by it." He eyed the sergeant with sinister amusement. "Surely you don't really think I'd risk my freedom—my life—for a woman of that sort?"

Angry blood darkened Tomczik's face. But he turned away. Brushed it off with a shrug of the shoulders.

"If you didn't kill her, who did?" he demanded.

Edward Vance smoothed his silvery hair, shook his head non-committally.

"I see no reason to discuss that question. You'll have your answer soon enough, and in the flesh."

Wearily, Tomczik turned. Limped over to the chipped white enamel table in the corner. Lowered his right buttock gingerly upon it, so that his wounded, aching leg hung at rest.

"There is one thing, though." Vance's brows were knitted. "Your remarks last evening about Perni . . . about throwing me to the wolves, as you put it. Would you care to explain?"

"Mebbe you let me tell you, huh? You like t'at?"

It came from the reception room, that merry, shrill falsetto. Came like a bolt of lightning out of the blue, with the squat, toadlike figure of Paul Perni close behind it.

"T'a gun!" he shrilled. "You be careful wit' t'at gun, Vance. You lay him down nice, huh?" He darted forward with amazing grace, and Tomczik saw that his fat hand gripped a short-barreled Bankers Special .38. His fat face was wreathed in a horribly gleeful smile. The evil little eyes were gleaming, intent on Vance's every move as the realtor bent to lay down the automatic on the floor. "T'at's right, Vance. You be careful like t'at, you mebbe live to be ol' man yet!"

The skin was tight over Vance's cheek-bones, the veins standing out along his temples.

"What nonsense is this, Perni?" His ringing voice dripped venom. "You addle-pated fool—"

The merriment was suddenly gone from Paul Perni's face.

"You t'ink so, huh?" His thick lips curled in a sneer. "Well, we see. Me,

mebbe I kill somebody sometimes. But I don' ask anyone to cover for me wit'out tellin' 'em it's murder. Your fren', he's-a want t'is boy beat up"—his head jerked toward Tomczik—"an' he don' say nut'in about murder." The evil black eyes narrowed to jet slits. "Mebbe you like to take t' rap too, huh?"

"You're mad!" said Vance. "Stark, staring mad!"

"Mebbe." Perni winked at Tomczik. "You're good boy, Tomczik. I'm glad my boys downstairs see you come up here." Then, turning back to Vance: "Mebbe we better do somet'ing about you." He darted around behind the realtor, into the reception room doorway. Raised the Bankers Special for a blow that never fell.

INSTEAD, a hand slashed out of the doorway. A hand, looped through the thong of a braided leather blackjack. It caught Perni on the back of the neck, a terrific blow.

Paul Perni seemed to rise on tiptoe. Then smashed forward, stiff-legged, to the floor.

Red-faced, beefy, bull-necked, a man lumbered into the room. Head thrust forward, ham fist still clenched around the blackjack, he towered over them.

It was Art Koehler.

He glared at Sergeant Tomczik.

"Satisfied, wise guy?" he snarled. "You had your chance to get out of this with your hide in one piece, but you wouldn't take it. Now you'll get out of it my way—on a slab at the morgue."

He turned on Edward Vance.

"And you! A fat lot of good you are, standing so that any two-bit hood like Perni can come up and stick a gun in your back! You're just damn' lucky I happened to be right behind him when he came in."

"That's hardly an accurate picture of the situation, sir," Vance retorted coldly. "I made no bargain for a gang war. I'd advise you to watch your tongue now, or I may yet withdraw."

"Withdraw!" Koehler bellowed. He thrust his red face to within inches of Vance's. "That's a laugh. Go ahead. Withdraw. Perni will love it."

"Perni!"

"Sure. Perni. Take your choice. Stay with this thing, or I turn Perni loose instead of knocking him off." A pause. "Well, which way d'you want it?"

Vance shrugged, stooped to pick up his automatic.

"It seems I have no choice. Proceed."

The bull-necked vice squad man swung back to Tomczik.

"First things first," he said. "You're at the head of the list."

There was a thickness in Tomczik's voice.

"*You* killed her, then?" he choked. "You killed Margaret?" His knuckles were white around the cane, his face pale beneath its tan. He seemed to be having trouble with his breathing.

Bull head lowered, Koehler swept the room with a glance.

"Sure, I killed her. Who the hell did you think did it?" He stalked to the window, pulled down the tattered green shades. Then, about-facing, tested his grip on the blackjack.

"I killed her," he rasped again. He slapped the blackjack down with a fleshy *thwack* against the palm of his other hand. "I killed her, and now, sonny boy, I'm gonna kill you!"

Teeth bared, red face flushed dark, eyes glittering, he came forward.

STOLIDLY, head sunken between the thick, hunched shoulders, Tomczik waited, cane gripped with both hands like a staff, blue eyes chill and glazed.

"What, sir? No explanations?" Edward Vance taunted. His deep-set eyes were gleaming. "Doesn't the killer always tell why?"

Koehler spat savagely on the floor.

"What the hell d'you think it is, a detective story?" he snarled. His eyes raked the realtor contemptuously.

In that split-second, Tomczik struck.

He was moving before Koehler realized it. Lunging forward, on his good left leg. The cane was drawing back, then stabbing forward in a bayonet-thrust at Koehler's navel. Stabbing forward, with all his weight behind it; driving in, with all the power of the thick shoulders. Straight into the soft flesh of the vice squadman's belly.

Frantically, Koehler tried to dodge. Tried to swing the blackjack. To elbow the stab aside.

Too late. The wind went out of him, with a half-shriek that doubled him over in a staggering paroxysm of helpless agony.

The cane came back, with Tomczik fighting for balance. He lurched against Koehler. Slashed upward with all his might, driving the cane's tip into the loose flesh under and just behind the detective's chin. Felt it break through, savage ecstacy surging in his veins. Did not even hear the shot from Edward Vance's automatic that hurled him to the floor. . . .

THERE was thunder in the room, then, the thunder of a Colt .45, and Vance, also, was lurching floorward, while a grim, grey Lieutenant Haven—smoking revolver in hand—pushed into the room. Norah Moon was behind him.

They talked about it, after a fashion, while the police surgeon was patching up Tomczik's bullet-spitted side.

"Koehler killed her," the sergeant said. His face was a stolid mask, his voice toneless. "He confessed it, even if he didn't tell why. It's easy to figure out how he handled it, though—some cheap liquor to get her drunk; then Eddie Lawrence, the car-washer, to let let him have Cecil Vance's Chrysler. He must have put her behind the wheel and started it down the Alturas grade—"

"And after that, Doctor Dwyer, here, identified the body," Norah Moon broke in. "Lieutenant Haven says Dwyer was peddling cocaine on the side, so it was easy enough for Koehler to force him to go along. Koehler had something on Cecil Vance, too—enough so Vance was willing to say his car was stolen off the street." She paused, her small face eager, happy. "This clears up Eddie Lawrence's murder, Tommy. Koehler was following us, you know, and he was afraid Lawrence might talk, so he tried to kill the three of us. The ballistics men say their tests of his gun will give us positive proof."

Another pause.

"But that's all over now, Tommy." Her small hands crept over one of his big fists.

Abruptly, heedless of the hurt in her eyes, the sergeant jerked his hand away.

"Those are all details," Lieutenant Haven interrupted. "We'll clear them up before the week's out. People will talk, now that the shooting's over and Koehler's dead."

"Koehler . . . dead?" whispered Norah.

"Very dead indeed," the homicide man nodded. He smoothed the grey mustache. Bowed sardonically to Tomczik. "A nice job, sergeant, and a vicious one. You drove the end of your cane up under Koehler's chin so hard it went on through his mouth and into his brain." In spite of his mocking air, he shuddered involuntarily.

"It was a nice job all around, I might say, sergeant," he went on then. He drew out a cigarette, snapped flame to its tip with the silver lighter. "You handled it very well, even though you did solve the wrong murder."

"The wrong murder!" Tomczik stared up at the homicide man, a study in blank bewilderment.

"Right," reiterated Lieutenant Haven. He studied his smouldering cigarette. At last said gently: "Margaret Clevis was strangled and dropped in the river in late May of 1943."

"Late May!" choked Tomczik. "It can't be. We were married the twenty-third. I didn't leave her till May 26—"

The detective gripped his shoulder.

"I'm sorry, Tomczik, but it's the truth. You told me you thought your wife was in government work. Well, you were right. Her prints were on file with the FBI. I handled the whole case myself; I was the only one who knew."

"Then . . . this other woman—?"

"Was her sister, Mary Clevis. The one your wife was worried about, but wouldn't discuss. As far as I can find, that's why your wife came here—to try to persuade her sister to leave Flo's."

TOMCZIK gripped his head between his big hands. His broad face was twisted, emotion-straught.

"But who killed her? Why? The letters I got—?"

Haven held up a restraining hand.

"One thing at a time, sergeant. I'll give it to you as accurately as I can, though I'm frank to admit there'll be plenty of guesswork until we can sift through the facts that will begin coming out now." He paused, marshalled his thoughts. "Figure it this way, sergeant: Your sister-in-law, Mary Clevis was a wrong number. Definitely.

"Your wife, Margaret, came here to try to persuade Mary to leave. As part of her campaign, she threatened Koehler, and Koehler killed her.

"That put Mary Clevis in a unique spot. Just why she decided to write to you, pretending to be your wife, after Margaret was murdered, we'll never know for sure. Maybe it was your allotment checks she wanted. Or maybe she had some scheme for blackmailing Koehler.

"Anyhow, the army finally decided to send you home. You wrote her about it.

"That scared her. She tried to break off with you, but she wasn't sure it would take, so she told Koehler about it.

"Koehler was so mad and so scared that he killed her, then stuck her sister's name on her in the hope that when you found she was a tart you'd call the whole thing quits."

Bewilderment still gripped the sergeant.

"But why did Koehler kill Margaret?" he mumbled. "What could she do that would scare him that much? It don't make sense."

"Oh, but it does!" Lieutenant Haven laughed harshly. "Haven't you guessed the answer? Our city is hardly a sterling example of honest, loyal and faithful public service, sergeant. You probably figured that out when you saw Koehler, our vice squad man, making his headquarters at Flo's. But Koehler was in with the right people, so there was nothing an honest cop could do about it.

"But if Koehler was safe from city law, there was one thing he *was* afraid of—the United States Government."

Haven ground out his cigarette. Leaned forward, grey eyes aglow.

"Did you notice how much he knew about Mary Clevis' background, sergeant—how she came from Saint Louis,

and so on?

"Well, there's your answer. He brought her in himself, and your wife, Margaret Clevis, knew it. She threatened to tip off the FBI that he was transporting women in interstate commerce for immoral purposes, and to demand prosecution under the Mann Act.

"That was one rap Art Koehler knew he couldn't square. So he killed her."

SLOWLY, Sergeant Tomczik nodded.

"Sure I get it now." And then, raising his head: "That means you knew who Margaret was, and that she was dead, when I first came to you, Lieutenant?"

It was the detective's turn to nod.

"Yes. When you said you were her husband, I nearly jumped out of my skin. I hadn't known she was married."

"Then why didn't you tell me?" choked Tomczik. His face contorted in an anguished grimace. "You knew, but you let me go on, thinking Margaret was a Railroad Street bum—"

"I'm sorry sergeant." The homicide man's face was not happy. He flicked imaginary dust from his sleeve. Studied his fingernails intently. "It was rough on you, but it was the only way."

He looked straight into Tomczik's eyes.

"When a town's partly crooked, sergeant, a straight cop has a rough row to hoe. Every new case he gets, he has to ask himself questions: 'Can I play this as it falls, or will I have to watch out for someone's toes?'

"That was the spot I was in when you came along. I had two murders on my hands—both allegedly of Margaret Clevis, and both so hot I couldn't touch 'em with asbestos gloves. Because they weren't just murders; they were politics, too, and the rackets, and the 'respectable' citizens—like Edward Vance—who graft on rackets.

"As things stood, I didn't have the chance of a snowball in hell of solving either of those killings. So since you were looking for trouble anyhow, I decided to throw you into the hopper—feed you to the wolves, and see what would happen."

Understanding downed in Tomczik's pale blue eyes.

"Sure. I get it. I was the bait, the guinea pig."

He hesitated. Frowned.

"But how did it break right? How'd you happen to show up when you did?"

Haven laughed thinly.

"Give me a little credit, sergeant. Just a little. I had a few plans of my own." The detective studied his fingernails. "There are certain illegal devices, sergeant, which enable a not-too-particular cop to listen in on a suspect's telephone conversations. Especially a good, strong suspect like Edward Vance, who doesn't object at all when a killer asks him to hold a gun on someone until the killer can get there to commit another murder."

"And Perni . . . ?"

The homicide man chuckled.

"Paul Perni is a very tough little man," he declared. "He's gone already. He only came in the first place because he was afraid someone was trying to frame him on the Clevis killing, which he hadn't anything to do with, even though he'd loaned his boys to Koehler to beat you up."

"But . . . then Margaret . . . I was right about her!" Tomczik's voice broke. His big hands reached out, engulfed Norah Moon's. "She wasn't just a tramp on the loose—"

"Right." Lieutenant Haven tilted the grey Homberg to an even jauntier angle. Started to turn toward the door, then stopped.

"As I said, sergeant, that was a nice

job you did." He raised a quizzical eyebrow. "What with veterans' preference and all, we might be able to finagle a desk job for you in the Department, in spite of that game leg of yours. I think there's going to be a bit of a shakeup, and this town needs honest cops."

But Sergeant John Tomczik scarcely heard him. The stolid mask had suddenly broken, and the pale blue eyes were chill no longer. He was holding Norah Moon's hands in his, and the ghost of a smile played around his lips as he spoke to her.

"How about a cup of coffee, chum?" said Sergeant Tomczik.

THE END

ESCAPE THROUGH FIRE

By JUNE LURIE

ON THE night of July 30th, 1925, an explosion rocked Berkeley, California, waking hundreds of sleeping townspeople. Curious faces peering through the night could see red flames shooting high up into the sky. These denoted the source of the catastrophe. The laboratory of Charles Schwartz had been destroyed!

The accident had occurred only five minutes after the chemist had phoned telling his wife that he was preparing to leave for home. The laboratory and the manufacturing plant were completely wrecked, and by the time the fire engines from Berkeley arrived on the scene, the entire building was wrapped in flames. Spraying the flames with chemicals, the firemen soon began to make headway. One by one the flames died out, and eventually the building was reduced to a glowing, smouldering pile of wreckage. When the ruin of twisted metal and framework cooled enough to allow a minute investigation of the scene, the charred remains of a human being was found.

It was a shame, the people of Berkeley agreed. Schwartz was a known and respected citizen of the community. He was thought to be fairly wealthy for he was a flourishing manufacturing chemist. His inventive mind was responsible for the development of a new method for the manufacture of artificial silk, a method which he guarded jealously and shared with no one.

It was plain that the chemist had suffered a fearful death in the laboratory. The authorities came to the conclusion, from the position of the body, that he had died while trying to get clear of the raging flames and choking chemical fumes.

But there was one man who shook his head, who boldly remarked that this was a case of either suicide or murder. That man was the chief of the Berkeley Fire Department. To substantiate his claim he pointed to the burnt stump of the bench at which, apparently, Schwartz had been working when the explosion occurred. He picked out from the wreckage the remains of six peculiar torches that had been contrived with coarse cloth wrapped around the ends of sticks and soaked in a highly inflammable liquid. The fire chief pointed out to the police some cases of a powerful explosive placed against one of the walls in such a manner that, had they exploded, it was certain the entire building would have been lifted from the ground. That the cases had not exploded was regarded as a miracle. Heavy brickwork and machinery had kept the flames from them, and the chemical spray had been applied by the fire department in the nick of time.

The police now agreed that the explosion was not an accident. The possibility of suicide was ruled out because of the position of the body. Only one solution remained—murder!

THE charred body was kept under police guard. Mrs. Schwartz and Gonzales, the night watchman, identified the remains as those of the scientist. The next step in the police investigation was the sending of the corpse to San Francisco where it was x-rayed, medically overhauled, photographed, and then preserved in cold storage against the possibility of future reference.

The results of this rather thorough examination were then circulated among a select group of specialists—one of whom happened to be the famous Dr. Heinrich. Confirmation was given to the obvious theory that the remains were those of the chemist. But after pondering on the more unique aspects of the case, Dr. Heinrich began to doubt his first conclusion. His interest in the mystery of the burned laboratory was more than routine. Professor Heinrich was not one of those fabled, imaginary detectives of popular fiction. He was not a detective at all. Studious and retiring, he was an instructor at the University of California and never ventured from his college laboratory. Heinrich was a chemist at heart. This case involved a man whose training and professional interests were similar to his own.

Shortly after Heinrich began to work on the case a very important witness turned up. A youngster who lived near the site of the laboratory had seen a car speed away from the explosion, a car which he recognized as Schwartz's car. Another important piece of evidence was brought to Dr. Heinrich's attention. Two hats had been found near the laboratory on the day after the explosion. On the band of one was some cellulose, and the hat was stained and muddy. Later it was recognized by reliable witnesses as a hat

Schwartz had worn. The second hat remained a mystery. It was an old hat, shapeless and faded, and stained with some caustic material.

It was from Mrs. Esther Hatfield, the chemist's secretary, that the police first heard of the cupboard under the stairs of the laboratory. She stated that on the day of the explosion he seemed very disturbed. She observed him glancing frequently in the direction of the closet. He had always been secretive about its contents, and he alone carried the key to unlock it. Gonzales remembered his employer's anger upon seeing the watchman's dog scratching outside the closet. Even Mrs. Schwartz was kept in the dark about its contents. There was good reason to believe that the closet had something to do with mystery.

A new development in the case occurred three days after the explosion. Mrs. Schwartz reported that a burglar had entered her home through a bedroom window. The most surprising thing regarding this event was the fact that the burglar had contented himself with stealing only photographs of Schwartz himself. The family albums had been ransacked, picture frames emptied, and the widow was left without a single portrait of her husband.

WHEN this strange burglary came to the attention of Dr. Heinrich, he advised the police to hunt for a photograph of the chemist, and finally one was secured from a family friend. As the case developed, Heinrich began to have doubts about the identity of the charred body. Taking the photograph with him, he went to San Francisco to study the body once more. Feature by feature, the corpse and photograph were compared. He found that the remains of the right ear lobe were of an entirely different shape and contour than that shown in the photograph! From the chemist's dentist, Heinrich learned that Schwartz's teeth had been remarkably good, and that he rarely had trouble with them. Two teeth were supposed to be missing from his upper jaw.

Now this information seemed to be very puzzling. The dead man's mouth showed that he certainly had had two teeth missing from the upper jaw, but his teeth could not be termed "good" in any sense; they were discolored, broken and decayed. Heinrich examined the mouth minutely, detail by detail. The gums were probed and the teeth tested, and it was found that those two missing teeth had been deliberately extracted —recently! The slightly swollen condition of the gums, the raw nature of the holes from which the roots had been drawn, and the as yet unrelieved pressure of the remaining teeth all substantiated the claim that the charred remains were not those of Schwartz. Further examination of the rest of the head brought to light a startling new fact. This unknown man had been murdered by a blow on the back of the head with some heavy blunt instrument, such as a hammer.

There was something very peculiar about the type of burns found on the body. Heinrich discovered that they were not all the same type of burns. Some were the result of the flames' scorching action, but others had been contrived deliberately. The hands were covered with horrible burns. Heinrich became convinced that the dead man's hands had been burned with acid to prevent the police securing a set of fingerprints.

A careful examination of the empty eye sockets and the torn flesh surrounding them proved that the dead man's eyes had been purposely gouged out; and the only reason for this could have been that the eyes of the corpse were of a different color than the eyes of the chemist.

The whole aspect of the case was now changed. The police were now set on the track of a ruthless killer, a killer who had attempted to commit a "perfect crime." Immediately after Heinrich's brilliant examination had established the truth, the authorities were faced with two urgent questions. Who was the victim of this brutal murder, and where was the missing Schwartz? The two formerly unrelated facts concerning the phone call and the speeding car now held together. What better way could Schwartz have had of leading everyone to presume that he was the corpse than by establishing the fact that he had been in the building.

AT HEINRICH'S suggestion the investigation into the private and business life of Schwartz was resumed. From bankers and others it was now learned that Schwartz had very little money of his own, that most of the money he had been spending had come from his wife. When questioned upon this phase of her husband's life, Mrs. Schwartz told the police that she had sunk all her money into her husband's secret formula. A re-examination of the ruined laboratory by Heinrich's trained eye revealed the interesting fact that the whole setup had been faked in order to get the money of unwary investors. Heinrich discovered that the place which was supposed to serve as a laboratory had never been built to receive water or gas. In addition there were no provisions for heating or lighting the workshop. Artificial silk could not be produced under these conditions.

Soon the real identity of the corpse was ascertained. It was discovered that two or three weeks before the explosion, Schwartz had advertised for an assistant chemist, stipulating that the man should have small hands and small feet. This requirement had an unusual significance, for Schwartz himself had rather small feet and hands. Gonzales remembered a man calling to see Schwartz late one night about the job of assistant research chemist. In the laboratory Heinrich unearthed the burned remnants of some religious literature. On the scorched flyleaf of one of the pamphlets was some almost illegible straggling handwriting which later deciphered as "G. W. Barbe" and a list of towns in Texas with a date

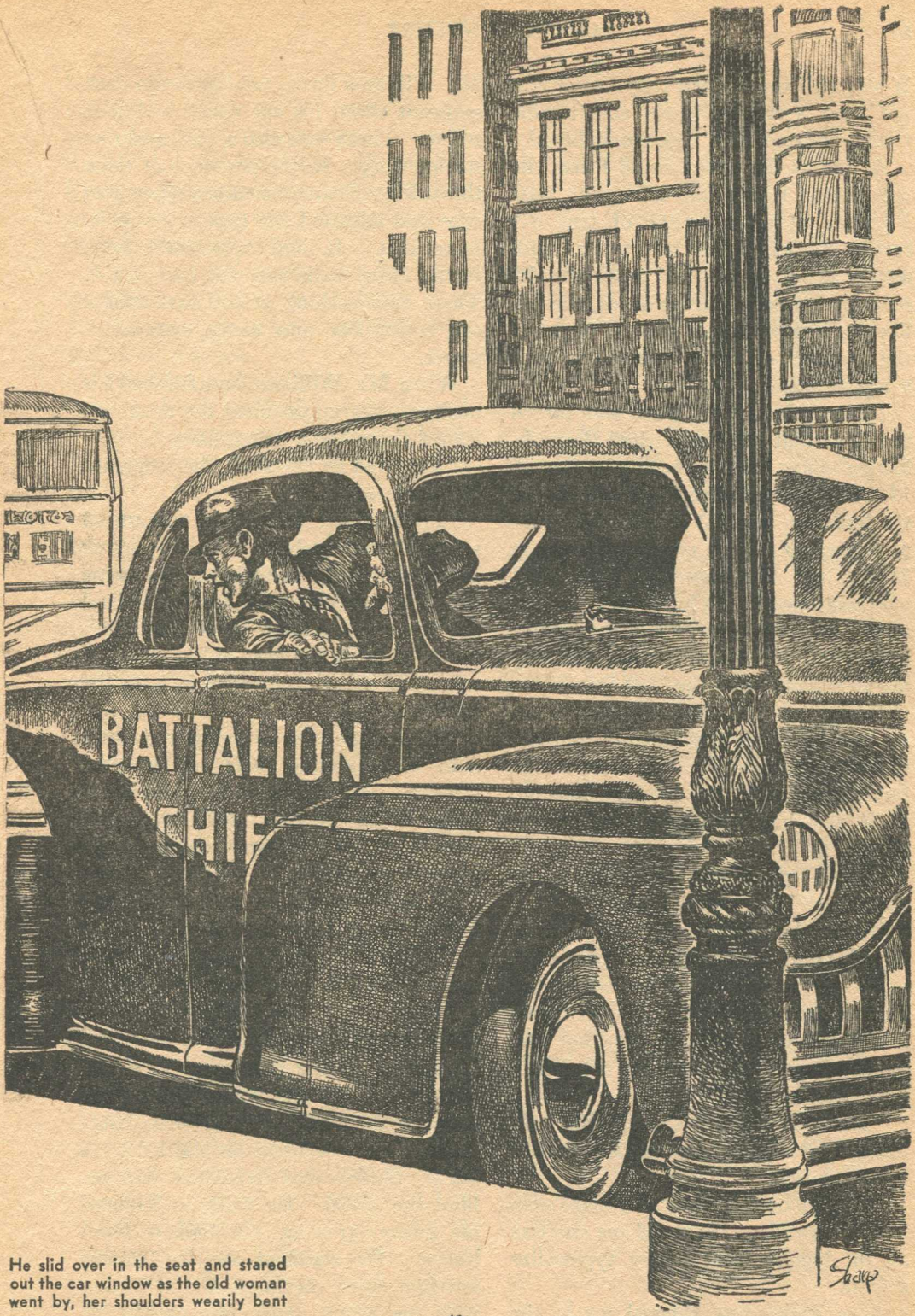
(Concluded on page 177)

TEN CENT ALIBI

by SISSY O'DANIEL

Just an unkempt little old lady with aching feet and a heavy typewriter. How did she fit into a murder scene?

HAROLD BARNES was undoubtedly dead. He had been stabbed in the chest some time during the evening of August 14. He was seated at his desk, slumped forward in his chair, and his pockets had been emptied. According to his secretary, and the other members of the staff at the Y-B Publishing Company, nothing else appeared to be missing. Not even the knife which had stabbed him. It was a murderous looking assassin's knife, which he claimed was genuine. He kept it on his desk as a letter opener.



He slid over in the seat and stared out the car window as the old woman went by, her shoulders wearily bent

It was still there when they found him the next morning, blade and handle thickly coated with discolored blood.

As far as the police could learn, the last person to see him alive was Miss Florence Dean, a writer of true detective stories. Miss Dean was a timid, mousy little woman, and when she denied having seen Barnes at all, the police put it down to her natural fright at the prospect of being involved in such a bloody crime.

Nevertheless, Miss Dean was forced to admit that she had visited the publishing offices on the evening of August 14. She had appeared in the lobby of the building, wearing a neat white suit, and carrying a black typewriter case, at 7:24 p. m. She approached the night man stationed in the lobby to check arrivals and departures after business hours, and asked him if there was any one in the offices of the Y-B Publishing Company on the twenty-second floor. He consulted his register and told her that no one had signed in after hours, but there might still be some one up there who had remained after closing time.

"Could I go up and see if there is any one there?" she asked timidly.

"Sure," he said, "but you'll have to sign the register—right here, please."

She signed her name nervously and he noted the time, 7:24. She returned to the lobby at 7:36, looking hot and flustered, and still carrying the heavy typewriter case.

"There is nobody there," she said limply and set down the black case with a solid thump.

"I'll sign out for you," the night man told her kindly. He could see she was all in, lugging that heavy typewriter around.

Miss Dean next showed up at the Chicago Avenue police station, looking even more limp and hot. There was a Mr. Williams there, talking to the desk sergeant about his car which had been stolen. There was also a policeman on station duty. In the presence of these three, Miss Dean opened her typewriter case and adjusted the typewriter in its fastenings. It had apparently been jarred loose while she was carrying it. There was nothing in the case except the typewriter and some manuscript paper.

When Mr. Williams had finished his business, she approached the desk and leaned there like a wilted daisy.

"Yes—ma'am?" said the sergeant disinterestedly.

"I'm Florence Dean," she announced a little breathlessly. "I lost my purse downtown, and I'm trying to get home with this heavy typewriter. I've walked this far from the Loop, but I don't think I can make it the rest of the way. I wondered if I could borrow fare for the subway."

The sergeant was a plump, red-faced man with thinning hair and wearing bifocals. He wrote slowly and carefully, filling in the information that went with Mr. Williams' name on the night's record.

"I don't know," he said. "I'm sure I don't know where I'd get it."

"Well, I—" she gasped. "I don't know what I'm going to do."

SHE turned away from the desk and picked up the typewriter case and walked out. There was a bright, red coupe at the curb with the words "Battalion Chief" lettered on the side. A burly, blue-shirted Irishman sat behind the wheel. He wore no hat and his bushy, graying hair looked windblown. He watched the frail figure struggle down the steps of the station with the heavy case. She caught his gaze and walked toward him.

"Are you going north?" she asked

rather helplessly.

"North? Oh, no. I wouldn't be goin' that way." If she was too dumb to see that he was busy driving the Chief around, there was no use trying to explain it to her. She looked a little cracked anyway.

"I—I lost my purse, you see," she explained. "And I don't know how I'm going to get home with this." She indicated the case.

"How far you goin'?"

"Thirty-six hundred," she said and pulled up her sagging shoulders. "Well, it'll be a good work-out anyway, won't it?"

She marched off a little unevenly toward Clark Street. A good many people saw her that evening, trudging up Clark Street, with the square black case dragging her down, first from the right hand and then toward the left, and then back again. For a while, she tried carrying it on her hip, but it was awkward, and kept slipping, and she went back to carrying it by the handle, switching it from one hand to the other every few feet. At twenty-hundred North Clark, she stopped at a small plaza fronting the Academy of Sciences, and sat down on a bench. That was at approximately 8:30. She spoke to two old ladies sitting near her.

"The case is heavy," she said.

The ladies looked at her sympathetically. "Have you far to go?" asked one.

"Not much further," she answered, and in a little while she took up her ragged march once more.

She arrived at her apartment building at ten minutes past nine, and rang for the janitor to let her in. She explained her predicament, and related her exhausting experiences. When questioned, the janitor affirmed that she was indeed "in the last stages" and he advised her to take a hot bath and get right into bed.

Miss Dean was hardly able to get out of bed when the police called on her the next morning. She was pale and weak from her ordeal, suffering from painful muscular strain and badly blistered feet. She had already heard the news about Harold Barnes on the radio. She was reluctant to talk until they showed her the page from the night man's register with her signature on it.

"Yes, I did go there," she admitted readily enough. "But that wasn't what you asked me. You asked me if I had seen Harold Barnes last night, and I didn't. There was no one there. The night man can tell you—"

"HE DID tell us," said Lieutenant Bissig frankly. He was a big, comfortable looking man who had achieved remarkable success on the Homicide Squad. He was rarely stumped by baffling details, but this time he had an unpleasant feeling that something was decidedly cock-eyed. "He told us that you spent twelve minutes upstairs. Enough time to search the entire office, and yet you say you saw nothing of Harold Barnes—dead or alive?"

"All the lights were out," said Miss Dean, "except the small desk lamp at the reception desk. The Y-B Publishing Company occupies the entire twenty-second floor, and the foyer and reception desk are right in front of the elevators. I went a little ways toward the offices and saw that they were all dark, and then I stopped in the ladies' room to freshen up a little. I was very hot and tired from carrying the typewriter."

"But the offices were open? You—or any one, would have had free access to the entire suite, simply by using the elevator?"

"Yes, I—I suppose so. I didn't in-

vestigate. I was a little frightened, up there all alone."

"Why did you go up at that hour?"

"I wanted to borrow carfare home," she said wearily. "I lost my purse, and had to walk all the way, carrying my typewriter. I'd had it in the repair shop. You can ask the desk sergeant at the Chicago Avenue police station."

Bissig looked surprised. "Ask him what?"

"Well, I—I walked that far, and I didn't think I could go the rest of the way on foot. So I stopped at the station and asked if I could borrow fare for the subway, but the sergeant said he didn't have it."

Bissig's wide mouth twisted in a suppressed grin, as he brought his mind back to the business at hand. "The night man at the office building said you were wearing a white suit last night. May I see it?"

"Why, yes. Of course. It's a little mussed, but—"

She went to a closet and brought out a rumpled white suit on a hanger. Bissig carried it to a window and examined it carefully. There was no sign of any bloodstains.

"How about the typewriter case you were carrying?" he asked gruffly.

She showed him that, too. The typewriter was still in the case. There was nothing else, except some blank sheets of paper.

Lieutenant Bissig went away with a puzzled frown. As he told Detective Haskell, on the way downtown, it had to be her; but it couldn't be.

"If it wasn't her," he said angrily, "then it was somebody who came up the fire stairs to the twenty-second floor, and we'll have a fat chance finding such a person! It's got to be her. She's the only one who went up there all evening."

"That's if nobody used the stairs," said Haskell morosely. "But how did she do it? She don't weigh more than 90 pounds, and Barnes was a big fellow. He wouldn't sit still in his chair and let her run a knife through him. And even if he did, she's not hefty enough to push six inches of knife blade into a man and pull it out again. And all this without getting a speck of blood on her."

"It could be done," said Bissig shortly.

"I'd like to know how."

"I'll show you when we get up to his office. I've got this much on her. She had the opportunity, I've figured out the method, and I think that business of lugging a typewriter all the way up to thirty-six hundred north was done on purpose. All I need now is a motive."

IT TOOK Lieutenant Bissig four hours to check through the current files and correspondence of the late Harold Barnes. The red-headed secretary was co-operative and helpful. And all the while they were searching fruitlessly for clues, the thing Bissig wanted was right there in front of them. It was a name, written on the secretary's calendar pad. The name of Felicia Dorman, and a notation to look up back issues of True Detective Mysteries, the magazine which Barnes had edited.

Bissig leaned back wearily to light a cigarette, reached for the ashtray, and saw the notation on the calendar pad. He studied it for a moment, breathing smoke streams with thoughtful regularity.

"What does that memo mean?" he asked at last.

"That's one of the old murder cases that was written up in True Detective Mysteries," the secretary explained. "It —it's the last thing Mr. Barnes told me.

I was in a hurry to leave last night, so I scribbled the memo, intending to do it this morning. If I had known he —he would be here—"

"What did he tell you?" Bissig's eyes had sharpened to pin points.

"Oh, it wasn't anything very important. He sometimes reviewed old cases for different reasons. You know, most of the cases written up in True Detective Mysteries are unsolved crimes. Every once in a while Mr. Barnes would get hold of a manuscript covering some new case in which the details were similar to one of the old cases. He liked to compare them, on the theory that if certain things happened in one case, they might have happened in a similar case. He was always hoping to solve one of the crimes through his magazine."

"Get me a copy of the issue in which the Dorman case was written up," said Bissig briskly.

Miss Dean was still in bed when Bissig and Haskell returned late that afternoon. She looked wan and spent, and seemed to be suffering considerable discomfort from her aches and pains.

"I'd like to get a few more details from you," Bissig told her. "First of all, did you ever submit a manuscript to Harold Barnes?"

"Why, yes. Yes I did," she murmured. "That's how I got acquainted with him."

"What happened to the manuscript?"

"He— it was rejected."

"Where is it now?"

"Why, I destroyed it. He said it was no good—not convincing."

"What was it about?"

"It—I don't see why I should answer all these questions. What has this got to do with—with what happened to Mr. Barnes?"

"Quite a lot. The case you wrote up was the five-year-old murder of Felix Dorman. He was stabbed in the chest one night while sitting alone in his home. The murderer was never caught. His niece, Felicia Dorman, inherited his property. She converted everything into cash and left the city where the murder occurred, presumably to avoid the unpleasant publicity which keeps on long after the victim has been buried."

"Really," Miss Dean muttered pettishly, "I don't feel at all well, and I can't see what all this has to do with—"

"With Barnes? Just this: Both men were killed in exactly the same way. Felix Dorman was killed for profit. Harold Barnes was killed because he knew who had killed Dorman, and how it was done. He got his information straight from the killer. From you."

"You—" she choked, and her voice came out shrilly, "Why, you're insane!"

"OH, NO. The men were bayoneted. We have the window pole from Barnes' office on which the knife was fastened. It was cleaned, but not thoroughly. There are traces of blood. We have the description of Felicia Dorman, and it fits you. I don't think we'll have much trouble proving your identity. As a murderer, you were quite successful, but you should never have tried to write up your own crimes. Barnes was smart enough to catch certain details in your story which only the murderer could have known. Of course, he wanted to know how you knew those things, and you very obligingly gave him a demonstration. You emptied his pockets looking for any notations that might give you away. You could have used money from his wallet to pay your cab fare home. But your thought it would be smarter to put on your act so that you would be seen by people in the last place in the

world a murderer would be expected to go. The busy Chicago Avenue police station! As you crossed the river, you could have disposed of the contents of Barnes' pockets. You had a convenient case to carry them out in. But the manuscript—which was not rejected, but questioned by Barnes—that was still in the case when you opened it at the Chicago station. It was later replaced with blank sheets. Felicia Dorman, alias Florence Dean," said Bissig flatly, "I arrest you for the murder of Harold Barnes."

"No," she whispered weakly. "You can't. You're just—just making it all up. You have no proof—you have no fingerprints!"

"How do you know we haven't?"

"You can't have!" she wailed shrilly. "You can't—oh!"

"Yes. You know we can't have any fingerprints because you wore gloves—after you got out of the elevator on the twenty-second floor. Unfortunately, those gloves stopped up the plumbing in the ladies' room, and we have recovered them. I'm sure the gloves will fit you, and we can trace their purchase to you. But we had a case against you without the gloves."

"Framed!" she muttered despairingly, huddling in her chair. "I've heard of policemen like you. You frame some innocent person—"

"You've been reading too many detective story magazines," said Bissig. "If anybody framed you, it was yourself—with that phony story about trying to bum a ten-cent subway fare. It serves you right that you had to walk home. Your ten-cent alibi wasn't worth a plugged nickel!"

THE END

IT'S NEVER TOO LATE

By PETE BOGGS

THE case of a woman's death in Tacoma, Washington, illustrates the fact that, with some clever detectives, it's never too late to change the verdict in a case and finally solve it. A dead woman was found lying behind a stove with a pistol close to her hand. The sheriff and his deputies made these two observations, then removed her body to the morgue. Shortly thereafter, a jury was formed and came to the conclusion that the woman had committed suicide.

Soon after the sheriff and his men left the house, neighbors went into the home and cleaned it. Therefore, when a scientific investigator arrived later, it seemed from a quick glance that he had missed his opportunity to find important evidence. Yet the investigator found conclusive proof that this was a murder, not a suicide!

This proof came from a minute particle, so small that this bit of evidence was swept away when the detective placed it under the microscope and accidentally blew his breath upon it. This particle had been found after the neighbors, in their haste to erase the signs of so shocking an incident, had swept and cleaned the house.

The minute particle was a piece of lead.

What actually happened was that the woman was trying to get away from her husband and she dodged behind the stove. He stood over her and shot her. The bullet went through her head, struck the wall, ricocheted to the other wall, struck the woodwork, and then bounced onto the floor. Just by this little piece of lead that adhered to the wall, the investigator was able to establish the points of contact, and finally the trajectory of the bullet. He was able to tell the exact location of the man when the bullet was fired. The other officers had completely overlooked the possibility of murder and the evidence establishing the fact.

In addition to the tiny piece of lead, the investigator found blood spots on the carpet. Then there were blood spots on a piece of paper, and upon examination of these particular blood spots it was evident that the woman was in flight when she was bleeding. The picture was there, plain as day to the investigator. The husband had struck her. She started to run away from him. She ran from the room where the pistol was ordinarily kept and into the kitchen, where he killed her.

There was no longer any question about that woman's death. One could see the picture easily: by tracing the movements of the woman from the point where she was first struck to where she was finally killed.

Such conclusions are easily drawn, because, when dropped in flight, blood makes little exclamation points that show where it struck and indicate the speed at which the person was going. (One can get an approximate idea of how blood looks when dropped in flight, by observing the splash of ink thrown from a pen.)

ALL IN A DAY'S WORK

By LEE OWEN

THE modern detective depends upon everyday facts and minute details, conversations and interrogations, laboratory tests and intuition. In one famous case a detective called a famous microanalyst to help him in the solution. A single hair was found on a shirt which had been discarded by a burglar. The microanalyst's conclusions from an examination of the shirt and hair were that they belonged to a man five feet, nine inches tall, with light brown hair and blue eyes and of slender build. He further stated that the man was wearing an olive drab suit. The next day such a man was picked up. And he was the right man.

Too much emphasis cannot be placed upon the small things in the investigation of crime. But besides dealing with the minute details, a criminal investigator must interpret everyday facts, too. It's all in a day's work. Walking along a road, the detective must observe footprints. He must be able to tell by observing the footprints whether a man was walking rapidly, whether a man was bow-legged or knock-kneed, or whether the person was indeed a man!

One good way to develop his powers of observation is for the criminal investigator to study his everyday associates. He should test himself to see if he really knows the height of his chief of police, the color of his hair, the color of his eyes. He should ask himself questions about his friends. He should always be testing his ability to observe.

Another fundamental principle in the art of crime-detection is that the investigator take the simplest viewpoint at the scene of the crime. He should not worry about how the fiction writer or the movie star would handle the case. There should be no strange, mystic, hypothetical view of the situation.

Rather, the detective must ask himself: "What are the plain facts in connection with this crime?" That does not mean, of course, that there is just one simple theory. But at the beginning of every investigation, the detective should best accept only the facts.

Newspaper men often write about that mysterious term, "clue." They maintain that the police have a clue and that they are working busily at it. The truth of the matter is that police never confine themselves exclusively to one idea until they are convinced that all the evidence points to one man.

The old saying, "Cherchez la femme," is certainly popular in America today. The French police started the idea, of course. French police authorities always have had the theory that the detective should look for the woman that the murderer or criminal is interested in at the time. There is certainly some sense to this procedure, and in police investigations in the United States it is fairly common to search for a woman, as many types of criminals return eventually either to their wives or sweethearts.

Another important point in detective work is that of motivation. Before one proceeds far with the investigation, it is desirable to establish the motive of the crime. This is especially true in murder cases. When a plausible motive for the murder has been discovered, identifying the individual who has committed it, and locating him, are not so difficult.

THE question of fingerprints is always an important one in the career of a good detective. Every detective and every police officer, too, should know how to record fingerprints. In one large city, a young policeman who had attended the police science course was sent to the scene of a murder. He found a pistol there, and taking a piece of paper he placed it underneath the pistol, lifted it, and put a handkerchief around it. Then he carried the pistol to the police station. One of the captains who had never received instruction in the science of fingerprinting, although he had been on the police force for forty years, said, "What have you there?" He opened the handkerchief, seized the pistol, and destroyed the one bit of evidence that would have convicted the man responsible for this murder!

The detective must remember that in all major crimes, the examination at the scene of the event must be conducted with great care and all possible evidence preserved. No detail, however, minute, should be overlooked. Drawings must be made, photographs taken, and facts secured from witnesses. As soon as a major crime is committed, a great number of people intrude. They think they know everything about the case. When they are interrogated closely, they know little or nothing about the facts. They have heard somebody say something. They add a little (or a lot) more to what they heard and come to believe they are important witnesses. The police officer must therefore move these people out of the way and find just those few who actually saw the occurrence or those few who know enough about the facts to permit an intelligent investigation of the case.

Witnesses, then, must be checked. Can this be done easily? Yes, it is possible to check the statements of witnesses as to time, place, distance, and description. If they say that a man is six feet tall, the detective or police officer can take several men and have them stand where the witness can observe them and say, "Was he as tall as this man or as short as this man?" "Did he weigh as much as this man? Was he as thin as that man?" When a person says he was at a particular place for five minutes, his judgment of time can be tested by asking him to state when five minutes have elapsed and then checking him with a watch.

Serenade to a Ghost

by FRANCES M. DEEGAN

Reed sought a rendezvous with another man's wife—and met her husband instead. That's when he burned up . . . but literally!

WHEN he opened his eyes in the cold, wet dark, he knew it was all over. Reed Halliday was still in the lodge, and the lodge was burned.

Sickness and pain and terror racked him, increasing relentlessly, until a retching animal cry erupted in the black stillness. Instantly caution stabbed him with a thin, icy finger, bidding him be quiet. Already they might have started the hunt—for him, Byron Edwards.

He closed his eyes and saw the neon sign flashing his name high above the entrance to the Andover Terrace. It was the last thing he had seen as he drove away last night; but now the bright letters jumped and danced as if pursued by harsh black print.

Byron Edwards . . . WANTED FOR MURDER . . . The Poet of the Violin . . . ESCAPES AFTER KILLING REED HALLIDAY . . . Darlene Gray, Bright Song Star . . . CAUSE OF FEUD . . .

"No—no!" He squirmed painfully and brought down a cold shower from the dripping bushes. His fist pounded the sodden earth. "Not Dolly! Leave her out of it. For God's sake! Don't let her—"

He didn't know whether he was praying or swearing. He didn't know what he was going to do.

The smell of wet mold came to him queerly and painfully, as if it were muffled in thick blood. There was a taste of blood, too. He lay still and moved a shaking hand up to his face. His nose was swollen to an impossible size. It was too painful to touch. Smashed, of course, when the car went off the road. The famous "Byron profile" that his press agents liked to play up, that was gone, too. He wondered sardonically whether his "dark poetic mane" had turned to white bristles . . . or green snakes . . .

He turned his head stiffly and let it sink back into the curve of his arm. Chills and nausea pursued each other through his aching body. He tried to think.

It was too late now to do anything about Reed Halliday. The man was dead. The lodge was burned. It was much too late to report it. Hours must have passed since he had collapsed in the woods, they'd be looking for him now. They wouldn't listen to him, wouldn't believe him. They'd hold him for murder . . . Blackout for a brilliant future. Unless he could make them believe he was not a murderer.

Once upon a time he had studied law; but what defense did he have now?

His fingers dug into the greasy, wet mold. He clung dizzily to a swaying earth as he tried to force his numbed,

Somewhere, everything had gone off the track, like a nightmare running wild

confused senses to tell him what had happened last night. It was like a dream that moved with inevitable sequence from one step to the next, gathering speed as it went, and becoming more and more fantastic. . . .

IT BEGAN with the note. A waiter stood in the dressing room corridor and handed it to him. It was for Darlene Gray, but it was not a request for a special number. It was a vile insinuation and a brazen proposal, carelessly scrawled by Reed Halliday, who thought that all entertainers were fair game for his personal amusement.

By Edwards crumpled the note in a white rage. He had warned Halliday to stay away from Darlene. Only the day before their quarrel had flared into a fist fight in the cocktail lounge at the Andover Terrace. And now this—the final insult.

Halliday was undoubtedly drunk. He had spent the evening at the Terrace with a large party which included his dark, aristocratic wife, and big Bill Cannon, his quietly suave attorney. But even if it were a drunken prank, the note could not be excused, or tolerated.

"Darlene, my darling!" Halliday had written. "I have $50,000 in my wallet —and I am mad for you! Run away with me, my sweet—if only for a day or two. Now that your engagement is closing I cannot bear to let you leave Chicago without knowing that ecstacy you promise me in your songs. Please say you will. With all my heart, your Reed."

By Edwards stalked back to his dressing room and answered the note: "Dear Reed: I am driving up to the lodge at Glace Lake tonight to pick up my summer luggage. However, the place will be deserted, so perhaps you would like to meet me there later, after your party breaks up, and keep me company in case there are any wolves around. Darlene."

He had no plan beyond an angry determination to teach Halliday a lesson; to tell him off, once and for all, where they would not be interrupted.

Firmin Garvet, pianist and arranger, was playing gin-rummy during the intermission break. By called him aside and told him to take over for the balance of the evening.

"I've got to close up the lodge for the season," he said. "I think I'd better run up and do it now. In the last minute rush of closing night here, I might forget it."

Firmin flashed his wide grin. "Okay, Skipper," he said. "I'll carry on. But don't you go gettin' lost up there in the wilds of Wisconsin. Us guys are sure gonna need you when we hit New York. Remember that date at Carnegie Hall."

"I will," said By. And he did. He was remembering it now in the alien blackness of the wet woods. And he was remembering Dolly's gray-blue eyes, her full, sweet lips as she kissed him goodbye. She had a sheet of manuscript in her hand, the lead sheet of his sweet song, "Serenade."

"I wanted you to rehearse it with me," she pouted.

"We'll do it tomorrow, Doll-face," he whispered, touching her satin blond hair. "It will be our theme song, just yours and mine."

"M-hm." She snuggled against him for a moment and stood back. "Wio," she said. It was a code they had. It meant, "Wipe it off." The lipstick. "Wio, By."

"Goodbye, Dolly . . ."

The lodge was a rambling wooden affair built on a hillside above the lake. It could accommodate twenty, and sometimes the whole orchestra piled in for a week-end of madhouse antics, but

it was cold and dreary that night. The phone and lights had already been cut off.

He found an electric torch and changed his tux for a warmer outfit of corduroy slacks, sweater and a shapeless hunting jacket. He packed a bag with odds and ends of clothing and personal possessions, folded the tuxedo on top, and carried it down the inner stairway to the ground floor garage where he had put his car. He built a small fire in the living room fireplace, put a lighted kerosene lamp on the table and unbolted the front door. He went off to check the window fastenings while he waited.

He had completed his tour of the upper floor and reached the kitchen when Halliday arrived. He was swept by a hot indignation as Halliday announced his approach with loud, exultant blasts of his horn. They met in the long living room.

HALLIDAY stood there with his top coat open and his hat in his hand, his sleekness only a little rumpled. When he saw By Edwards, his flushed face darkened, his mouth turned ugly.

"What kind of a gag is this?" he demanded hoarsely.

"No gag," said By, coming into the room. "I wanted to tell you a few things—in private."

Halliday was trembling with rage as his bloodshot eyes darted about the room. A lock of black hair fell across his face and he shoved it back with savage fingers.

"Why, you silly, four-flushing ham!" he shouted. "Who the hell do you think you're kidding? Just because she works for you is no reason why you should have first claim—"

By hit him. He forgot to be careful of his hands. He forgot everything but the dark, sneering face before him. Neither of them was a boxer. They slugged, slapped, punched and kicked like street urchins who had lost all restraint. They fell over chairs, clutched and grappled getting up, and went on with their flailing, panting exertion.

The table tipped, went over with a crush that shattered the lamp. They circled warily in the dim firelight, breathing hoarsely and making short rushes to land a punch. Halliday backed against a chair, grasped it, and flung it crookedly. By ducked, but the leg caught him in the temple and he went down on all fours, gasping. It was then he noticed the smoke. Halliday was coming at him now, ready to finish him.

"Stop!" By panted. "Fire! The place is on—"

Halliday kicked at him and By grabbed instinctively at the foot. Halliday sat down with a thud that shook the floor. By scrambled to his feet and stumbled back to the kitchen. The entire rear wall was in flames, the lapping tongues reaching higher as he looked, consuming the dry timbers with a greedy, crackling sound.

He had no time to wonder how the fire had started. He grabbed a pail, filled it with maddening slowness at the sink and threw it at the blaze. It made a smart spurt of steam. The fire was increasing to a roar. Three times he repeated his futile gesture before he gave up. His hands and face were scorched, his lungs seared by the heat when he staggered back to the living room to find more fire.

The front door was open, the draft sweeping the flames inward from the porch. Halliday was sprawled near the door. It was grotesque. It was almost as if the flames were licking at his feet.

Like the sudden slap of a cold hand, the dizziness left By. The flames were licking at Halliday. His trouser legs were smouldering, burning!

By got down on his hands and knees and went forward with his head down. He groped for Halliday's shoulders and pulled at him. The man was incredibly heavy. It was so slow. And the fire was so fast. Something was wrong about this. Somewhere everything had gone off the track, like a nightmare running wild. The whole thing was impossible. Halliday couldn't be dead! But he was. By looked at his face. It was a ghastly, bloody smear. His mouth hung open in a foolish, drunken grin, teeth bared between blood-washed lips.

By let go and the body slid across his knees and turned on its side with weary indifference. By stood up. He couldn't remember what he did next. He must have gotten out through a window. His car was inside, in the burning building. He had to get help . . .

He was driving a car. Halliday's Packard coupe. He remembered that because he wasn't driving straight. His eyes hurt and his scorched hands were stiff. The car kept going in curves like a long, continuous S. Serpentine . . . serpent . . .

There was a dull crash. After a long time he crawled out of the car and kept going. Somewhere. He had to hurry. He stumbled on in the darkness . . .

BILL CANNON was tall, blond and affable. He carried himself with an indolent grace better suited to a plumed Cavalier, than to a well-tailored lawyer. Smiling and nodding goodnight, he sauntered through his extensive suite, and paused in the doorway of the small office allotted to Ned Aker.

A thin young man glanced up from the brief on his desk, pushing a nervous finger at his glasses. The lenses were lavender tinted and gave his eyes a flat, colorless appearance. The heavy shell frame rested insecurely on the hump of his broken nose.

"Sure you don't want to try that case tomorrow, Ned?" Cannon asked, indicating the thick brief. "You've done some excellent work on it, and you'll have to make your debut in court some time."

"No. No, sir. Thanks." Aker moved his long hands restlessly. "I might blow my— I might blow up and lose the case for you. I think I can be more useful preparing cases for the other men on the staff."

Cannon walked to the desk, put his hat down, and drew out a flat gold cigarette case. He said, "Something happened to you in the past few years to break your nerve. I'd like to know what it was."

"I don't quite—"

"Yes, you do. You know very well what I mean." Cannon flicked the lighter, his eyes crinkling pleasantly. "When you came to me six months ago and asked for a place on my staff, you had only a general recommendation from Carruthers and Blaney, with whom you had worked for eight months. Prior to that, it was the Army. I agreed to give you a chance to prove yourself. Your work has been exceptionally satisfactory. So much so that I began to take a personal interest in you. I looked you up."

Aker's head jerked back stiffly and he fumbled with his glasses.

"That shouldn't surprise you," said Cannon. "Naturally I'd want to know a little more about your background if I intended to advance you in my firm. I learned that you went into the Army shortly after leaving law school in St. Louis. You were reported killed in action three years ago. As far as your friends and relatives know, you are still dead. Do you want to tell me about those three years?"

Aker pressed his hands together, spread them apart, and picked up the

blue bound brief. He placed it carefully in the file basket and stood up, his eyes flat and expressionless. He said, "Sorry, sir. I can't tell you anything."

"You can," said Cannon mildly. "And I think you will. I think you'll have to, if you want to continue your legal career. Somebody else is involved, I suppose?"

"No, sir. There is no one else. It's a solo part and I've got to play it that way. I'm sorry if I've disappointed you."

"You haven't—yet," said Cannon. "There's always a way to lick these things, you know. But I'll have to know something about it before I can help you."

"It's—very kind of you, sir, to take this attitude," mumbled Aker. "Perhaps it would be best if I resign at once."

"That's up to you. It's your future. Better take time to think it over before you make a decision." Cannon picked up his hat. "Meanwhile, since you're not going to court tomorrow, I have another job for you. Divorce petition, charging desertion. Husband missing well over a year. However, we'll have to be particularly careful of the wording. You'll see why when you get out the files. Halliday. Natalie and Reed Halliday. He disappeared about eighteen months ago. He's still wanted for questioning in connection with the murder of that orchestra leader. What was his name? 'The Poet of the Violin.' Byron—Byron Edwards. You probably remember the case."

"Yes." Aker sat down shakily. "There was a fire—"

"Byron Edwards was shot at his lodge and the place burned to the ground. He had gone up there alone to close it for the season, but Halliday's car was found abandoned only six miles from the spot. The men had quarreled over the girl singer with the band. Natalie Halliday wants to name the girl. She got hold of a note, but—What's the matter?"

"Why, that's—that's ridiculous!"

"Of course. We can't bring Darlene Gray into it without implying that Halliday had a motive for murdering the orchestra leader. This is not the proper time to file divorce proceedings. It's going to be extremely awkward unless Halliday can be cleared of suspicion, but Natalie refuses to wait any longer." Cannon smiled ruefully. "She threatened to hire another lawyer, so what could I do? You'll find most of the data you want in the files. Better let me see the rough draft of your petition before you go ahead with it. Any questions?"

AKER stared fixedly at his desk. "No," he said at last. "No questions. I'll draw up the petition in the morning. I suppose you'll want to file immediately?"

"Yes. As a matter of fact, Natalie became insistent at this time because the late Byron Edwards' orchestra, and the singer, are returning to Chicago, but of course, I have no intention of calling on any of the musicians as witnesses."

"What does she want?" demanded Aker with unexpected heat. "More publicity?"

"She has never let publicity bother her," said Cannon dryly. "And she still feels vindictive toward the young lady who sings. Reed Halliday was paying her a good deal of attention just before he disappeared. And I happen to know that the police have been keeping the girl under surveillance in the hope that Halliday would contact her."

"And did he?" asked Aker sourly.

"Not unless he's disguised as a mem-

ber of the orchestra," laughed Cannon. "They open tonight at the Andover Terrace, but I doubt if it will be the same band without Edwards and his violin. I was one of his fans myself." Cannon's eyes twinkled humorously. "I'm no jitterbug, but I did enjoy those symphonic-jive arrangements of his. Ever hear him?"

"Yes." Aker poked at his glasses. "I don't know much about music, but I thought the band was pretty good."

"You ought to get around a little more, take an interest in the brighter side," said Cannon kindly. "No matter how industrious a young lawyer may be, he still needs social contacts, you know."

"I've never gone in for that sort of thing," said Aker, frowning. "I'm afraid I'd be a dud socially, as well as in the court room."

"We can't all be exhibitionists," grinned Cannon. "The onlooker is important, too. What are you doing tonight?"

"Tonight?" Aker looked startled. "Nothing, I—"

"Fine. Then I want you to join me. I'm having dinner with Natalie Halliday— No, don't protest. Since you're drawing up the petition, I'll want you to present during any discussion of her divorce, and Natalie is not available during business hours. We'll pick you up around seven. Is that convenient?"

"Yes, sir. I—" Aker's mouth twisted in a painful attempt to grin. "Thank you. Good night, sir."

NATALIE HALLIDAY'S face was a pure oval, her features delicate. She wore her silky black hair piled high on her head, and walked with an arrogance that spurned a servile world with every step of her slender feet. Soft, flame-colored satin was molded expertly to her long-limbed body. A flared ermine cape hung in careless folds from her shoulders.

Bill Cannon ignored the currents of interest which followed them down the long main room of the Andover Terrace, smiling pleasantly, and nodding to acquaintances.

In contrast, Ned Aker's battered face was stiffly uncomfortable. His tweed business suit sagged loosely on a boney frame, his hair was clipped too close to a skull-like head, and he looked thoroughly out of place.

Mingled with the muted throb of a rhumba and the stir and movement of a crowded supper club, were low exclamations and snatches of words.

"That's Halliday's wife. They say she . . ."

" . . . told you she'd show up."

"Wonder if she knows where he's hiding . . "

The headwaiter was blandly obsequious as he drew out the chairs and flicked the "Reserved" placard from the white cloth.

Cannon grinned up at him. "The usual poison, Albert."

"Yes, sir. Champagne cocktail for the lady, and the imported scotch for you—and the gentleman?"

"I—" Ned Aker's face wore an oddly hunted look.

"He'll have the scotch, too," Cannon directed smoothly. "By the way, Albert, I'm expecting a telephone call here. Will you check up on it? Thanks". He flicked open his cigarette case. "Cigarette, Natalie?"

"Light it for me." Her voice was a lazy, insolent drawl. "You didn't tell him to arrange the interview with the Gray woman."

"Later, my dear. You are causing enough gossip at the moment, simply by being here." Cannon placed the lighted cigarette in her fingers. "Some day you may find out that you can't

go through life making your own rules, and disregarding other people."

"The hell with them," said Natalie indifferently. She continued to gaze idly across the dance floor, oblivious to the interest of the couples dancing by. "You made a bargain, you know. You agreed to come here and talk to that creature if I gave you her incriminating note."

"The note itself is hardly incriminating,'" said Cannon evenly. "There is nothing to indicate it was written on the night Byron Edwards was killed."

"I know it was delivered to Reed on that night in this room," Natalie declared coolly. "You were in the party. You know Reed was drinking heavily. The note fell out of his pocket and I picked it up. I kept it with the intention of facing him with it when he had sobered up. I'm sure you remember that Reed left the party abruptly, because you drove me home."

"My dear Natalie, of course I remember. The point I'm trying to impress upon you is simply this: When Reed Halliday disappeared, he was my client. I am still handling the Halliday family estate. I can see no reason for stirring up a murder case by deliberately producing evidence that would jeopardize a member of that family."

"You needn't be ethical with me, darling," murmured Natalie. "You loathe Reed Halliday. And you've been in love with me for years."

"I suspect that quite a few men have been in love with you, my dear." Cannon lifted a humorous eyebrow. "But love isn't always the desperate thing you'd like to make it. I should think you'd have learned that with Halliday."

HER dark eyes were smokey with anger as the waiter appeared with the drinks, closely followed by Albert. The headwaiter looked politely regretful as he leaned down to speak to Cannon.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said. "There was a telephone call just before you arrived. The gentleman said he would call you again later, and that he would have a message of some importance."

Cannon was gazing past Albert's shoulder and a flicker of annoyance crossed his face. "Isn't that Captain Dasher of the Homicide Squad sitting back there against the wall?"

"Er—yes, sir." Albert coughed discreetly. "He came in just a few minutes ago. He appears to be alone."

"Apparently he enjoys his own company," said Cannon. "He looks unusually happy and satisfied. Ask him if he won't join us, Albert. Maybe we can spoil his evening."

"Really, Bill!" Natalie's delicate face was flushed with anger. "You are behaving abominably. I came here for the sole purpose of confronting that woman with her guilt. You are simply evading the issue by bringing this policeman to the table."

"On the contrary," said Cannon easily. "John Dasher is here for some purpose of his own, possibly to see if we do make any move to contact the young lady. In which case, I prefer to use discretion. I have never been able to convince him that neither you nor I have the slightest knowledge of Reed's whereabouts. I intend to do so now."

"Indeed!" said Natalie coldly. "I can't see that it makes the slightest difference to me what the police may think."

Cannon touched her hand briefly. "All right, dear. Just let me handle this my way. You may be sure that I have excellent reasons for what I am going to do."

Captain Dasher had an easy manner, and a hard face, a face that was beyond disillusion or surprise, or any other

emotion common to lesser beings. He was not a big man, but he carried himself with the effortless co-ordination of a trained athlete. His age might have been anything from 35 to 55. Actually, he was 46. He materialized suddenly at Cannon's elbow.

"Good evening, Bill," he said pleasantly. "Nice of you to invite me over for a drink. Why, how do you do, Mrs. Halliday. How charming you look. This *is* a pleasure."

"Sit down, *El Capitan,*" said Cannon dryly. "You're blocking the aisle with your Latin gallantry. This is Ned Aker, one of the newer and brighter members of my staff."

Aker nodded jerkily and fumbled his glasses back into place. Dasher shot him a keen look before seating himself in the fourth chair at the table.

"If you keep on expanding your organization," he told Cannon, "you'll soon have an outfit to rival the municipal law enforcement agencies. I ran across one of your private investigators the other day. Joe Clancy."

"Is that right?" said Cannon negligently. "Did he tell you he was working for me?"

"You know he didn't. But I happen to know that he has been working exclusively for you for the past year. In fact, he has had to turn away all other business, so you must have him sewed up with a substantial annual retainer."

"I have," Cannon admitted cheerfully. "I'm just as anxious to find Reed Halliday as you are."

"Uh-huh. Well, Clancy seemed to be going about his search in a pretty round-about way. He wouldn't be trying to lead me on a wild goose chase, would he?"

"No. He's merely being thorough, following up some leads of his own. Clancy, you know, never makes the mistake of overlooking any loose ends."

"Neither do I," said Dasher heavily. "That's why I've been keeping an eye on Clancy, among others. And that reminds me, I stopped in here tonight to have a little informal talk with this fellow Garvet. He's taken over the orchestra, you know. And he seems to have been a pretty good friend of Byron Edwards. They'll put on their opening show in about half an hour, and I've sent word to Garvet that I'd like to see him before they go on. I don't want to intrude on your party with police business, so if you'll excuse me—"

"Why not talk to him here?" Cannon's eyes crinkled in a shrewd smile. "I told you I was interested, and I may be able to throw you some hints if you're going to question him—informally, of course."

"Well—" Dasher glanced at Natalie. "If Mrs. Halliday doesn't object. If the subject isn't too painful—"

"The subject is painful, of course," Cannon answered. "But Mrs. Halliday is as anxious, as any one else to have the whole thing cleared up. In fact, she has asked me to start divorce proceedings at once, charging desertion."

"So?" If Dasher was surprised, he did not show it. "Think that'll bring him out in the open, do you?"

"I doubt it. There was some discussion of divorce before he disappeared. I think I told you that he had drawn $50,000 in cash from the estate. He told me at the time that it was their intention to separate, and he thought it would be simpler—and quieter, if I represented Natalie. However, he said nothing about disappearing. I understood it was his intention to provide other grounds for divorce."

DASHER glanced at Natalie, but her face was composed, remote, as she watched the dancers. His eyes flicked

at Ned Aker briefly, at the tight drawn face and the fist clenched on the table, before he returned his gaze to Cannon."

"You didn't tell me this," he said without expression.

"No. There has been nothing definite to tell you until now."

"In other words, you're telling me now that you're quite ready to discuss the whole thing openly, that you might even be willing to assist me in locating Mr. Halliday?"

"Locating him—yes. Pinning a murder on him—no."

"Uh-huh. Well, once I locate him, I won't need any help on the murder angle. You're not the only one who's been holding out information. I have one bit of evidence which nobody outside the Department knows anything about—except the murderer. And it clinches the case against Halliday."

"I doubt it." Cannon smiled confidently. "It's probably circumstantial, like all the rest of it. And I don't think you can make it stand up after I've proved that Halliday wasn't the only person who followed the orchestra leader to his deserted lodge that night."

"I'll be interested to hear about it," said Dasher, displaying no interest whatever as he watched Albert approach the table.

"Excuse me, sir." The headwaiter looked politely inquiring. "Mr. Garvet is available now for a few moments, if you with to speak to him."

"Garvet?" Cannon's blond eyebrows lifted innocently. "He's the new orchestra leader, isn't he?"

"Yes, sir. He played piano with the old orchestra. Most all the men were with the band before. The management feels that Garvet has done very well, holding them together as he did."

"Yes." He didn't waste any time stepping into a dead man's shoes, did he?" Cannon grinned as Albert looked faintly shocked. "Bring him here, Albert. Captain Dasher merely want's a few words with him, and he has nothing to conceal from us."

"Nothing but tangible evidence," said Dasher. "And I didn't happen to bring any of that with me."

FIRMIN GARVET was a lanky, red-headed young man with a wide mouth and big hands. His casual, loose-jointed appearance covered a constant inner tension that betrayed itself in the wriggling of his facile fingers and the comic twitching of his eyebrows.

He showed no surprise as Dasher made the introductions, but pulled up an extra chair and sat between Dasher and Cannon. Natalie surveyed him coolly and then dismissed him by turning a bored gaze back to the dance floor. Ned Aker gave him a surly nod and stared at the smoldering cigarette in the ashtray, his hands clenched beneath the table. Dasher waited with stolid patience while Cannon acted the part of a genial host.

"I'm awfully sorry," Garvet said apologetically. "I'll have to take a rain check on the drink. I never take anything before going on. I even try to cut down on cigarettes."

"I admire your discipline," said Cannon. "I'm sure it's wise. You've taken on quite a responsibility, haven't you?"

"Yes." Garvet flashed his wide grin. "But it hasn't been too difficult. Most of the boys stayed with me, and, of course, I was thoroughly familiar with the routine. I did most of the arranging and directed the band whenever Edwards was off."

"Off?" Cannon looked faintly puzzled.

"Yes. Off the stand. Being the bigshot and main attraction, he felt privileged to step down whenever he felt like it, and let the band carry on without

him."

"Rather conceited, wasn't he?" Cannon remarked.

"Well—" Garvet temporized with an expressive grin.

"I mean that he must have been very sure of himself if he thought the band could satisfy his public even in his absence, with nothing more than his name and prestige to go with it."

"The spotlight does things to people in our business," said Garvet. "Vanity and conceit are necessary to success."

"How about you?" asked Cannon. "Is the spotlight making you temperamental, too?"

"Well, frankly, no. One reason is that I'm not the glamour boy that Edwards was."

"That's an interesting observation," said Cannon thoughtfully. "As a matter of fact, Captain Dasher and I were just reviewing certain details in connection with Edwards' death. We feel that enough time has elapsed now, so that everybody can speak frankly without damaging their reputation—unless, of course, they are connected in some way with the death. As you know, Edwards' death is down on the police records as 'Murder—by person or persons unknown.' Which is a very strong reason why we should all be quite frank, now the the publicity has died down."

GARVET nodded gravely, and Dasher stepped flat-footed into the conversation by declaring coldly, "I am on the trail of a murderer. I didn't come here this evening for a polite chat. I want the answers to several questions that never have been answered satisfactorily. I got the impression that you, Garvet, were a very close friend of Byron Edwards."

"We were closely associated," said Garvet carefully, "in the business of managing the orchestra. I took care of a good many details—"

"You were personal friends," said Dasher flatly. "That's what you told me at the time of the murder."

"Well, yes. In the music business you live together and work together. It's much more intimate than other types of business."

"Uh-huh. Then you'll probably be able to tell me just what the relationship was between Byron Edwards and this singer, Miss Gray?"

"Well—" Garvet shrugged and let his grin flicker briefly. "They appeared to be in love with each other. That's about all I—"

"I think it's only fair to Mr. Garvet," said Cannon suavely, "to let him know that I have certain information about his whereabouts on the night of the—er, so-called murder. Both Garvet and Darlene Gray were near the scene of the crime. Whether it was murder or suicide, I am not prepared to say. But certainly the events which led to the violent death are of prime importance."

There was a sudden, still tension about the table. Natalie's dark eyes had suddenly come alive with anger and indignation as she stared at Bill Cannon. One of Ned Aker's hands had come up to grip the edge of the table, and behind the ill-fitting, tinted glasses he was glaring at Firmin Garvet who had frozen in his chair with a foolish expression on his long face.

"I understand your motive for trying to confuse the issue, Bill," said Dasher. "But let me remind you about that bit of evidence I mentioned, which points to one person. If you are trying to fit the crime to some one else by providing motive and opportunity, you still have to get around that."

"Very well. If you must have a blueprint—" Cannon gestured toward Ned Aker. "Ned, do you mind taking notes, so that Captain Dasher will have all the

specifications of the reconstructed crime in black and white?"

Aker fumbled nervously in his pockets and finally brought out a small notebook and fountain pen.

"All right," said Cannon pleasantly. "How did you happen to go to the all-night filling station on the road to Glace Lake, Garvet? It's located about eleven miles this side of the lake."

Garvet's face twitched and he looked at his long fingers, twining themselves into impossible designs.

"On that night, I— On that night—"

"Yes. On the night of the crime," Cannon prompted gently. "You had a telephone call, but you were not at home. You got the message about two hours later when you returned to your hotel. You immediately went out, took your car out of the garage again, and drove toward Glace Lake."

GARVET'S fingers flew apart in a gesture of resignation. "It was like this," he said jerkily. "I got back to the hotel about three in the morning. There was a message from Darlene— from Miss Gray. She had borrowed a car from one of the boys in the orchestra, and it broke down. She walked to the service station and phoned me. She said she'd wait there until I got the message and came to pick her up. That's what I did. I picked her up and brought her back to the hotel."

"What was she doing there?" asked Dasher harshly.

"She— Well, it seems she got a note from that fellow. I mean from Mr. Halliday. It was something about meeting her at the lodge. He said he wouldn't wait until his party broke up, that he was starting at once, and would probably be there before her. She told me she didn't know what it was all about, but she knew that By Edwards had already started for the lodge, and she was afraid there would be trouble. So, without saying anything to any one, she slipped away early and borrowed the car."

"Had she quarreled with Edwards?" demanded Dasher.

"Not that I— I don't think so."

"How long had she known Edwards?" asked Cannon.

"A little more than a year."

"I suppose he discovered her, made a star of her?"

"Well, no. As a matter of fact, I discovered her. I introduced her to Edwards."

"And how long had you known her?" asked Cannon.

"At that time, about two years."

"You were pretty good friends then," said Cannon. "Whose idea was it to introduce her to Edwards?"

"Why, I don't know. It just came up in the natural course of things. We were auditioning singers and I brought her around for a tryout. Edwards hired her on the spot."

"And when it came to competing with a glamour boy, you didn't have a chance, I suppose," said Cannon humorously.

"I see what you're driving at, Bill," Dasher broke in heavily. "You don't need to add unnecessary footnotes to your blueprint. How does it happen, Mr. Garvet, that you didn't tell this story at the time I questioned you, right after the murder?"

"I can explain that," Garvet gestured with nimble fingers. "When we heard about it the next morning, Darlene was all broken up. I advised her not to say anything at all about our being on the road to the lake the night before. I still had the orchestra to think about. I was sure it would do more harm than good to tell what we knew. As I told her then, we had to try and save the pieces, and the police were already on

the trail of—" He faltered, and looked away from Natalie's cold gaze. "Of the man they thought had done it."

"Nevertheless you should have told it, all of it," declared Dasher sternly. "Is there anything else now that you have omitted?"

"No. That's all—Except that Darlene did say that she saw Halliday's car driving back to town. She was watching for me when the car went past the service station."

"What time was that?" asked Cannon.

"I wouldn't know. It would be after one o'clock, when she called me, and it must have been about four-thirty when I got there."

"Must have been mistaken about that," said Dasher. "Halliday's car was wrecked about five miles further up the road so it couldn't have passed the service station on the way back to town. There's one more question, Mr. Garvet. What about your own activity on that night? Where were you until three in the morning?"

"I was seeing a lady home." Garvet's wide grin was back, flashing a little uncertainly. "I assure you she *is* a lady, captain, so please don't ask me her name."

"Married?" asked Dasher flatly.

GARVET sighed expressively. "As a matter of fact—yes. But she is still a lady, and doesn't deserve to be—"

"All right," snapped Dasher. "If I need her, I'll talk to her privately. In the meantime, I want you to go over the details of that evening and morning, and if you recall any other detail, however slight, I want you to come to me voluntarily and tell me."

"I'll do that, captain." Garvet got to his feet restlessly. "I'll have to ask you to excuse me now. It's almost time for our opening. Show must go on, you know. That's what this crowd is waiting for." He bowed gracefully and made an unhurried exit, threading his way through the tables and smiling in response to friendly greetings.

"You're trying to prove that Garvet, or Darlene Gray, or both of them might have murdered Byron Edwards?" said Dasher.

"No." Cannon turned his head abruptly. "I'm not trying to prove anything. The burden of proof lies on you, Mr. Policeman. I'm merely trying to point out that several other individuals might have had equal opportunity, and perhaps better motives for eliminating the handsome orchestra leader, than your suspect."

"Very helpful, I'm sure," said Dasher dryly. "But it will take a good deal of convincing to get my mind off the evidence I mentioned."

"If I knew what the evidence was, perhaps I could point out the fallacy of clinging to it so tenaciously in the face of facts which discount its importance."

"It sounds good," said Dasher, "the way you say it. But it doesn't mean a thing. I should think you were smart enough to guess what it is that could tie Halliday definitely to the crime."

"Having a very active imagination, I could guess several things, but I'm not going to be distracted by wild guessing at this point."

"No, because you have already guessed correctly. You know very well what the evidence is, but you're not prepared to admit it. Not until you've figured out a plausible explanation that will fit into your elaborate blueprint."

"Oh, come now, John. I'm not as devious as all that. I'm honestly trying to be helpful, and— Yes, Albert?"

"Your telephone call, Mr. Cannon." The headwaiter smirked complacently at having rendered this notable service.

"Mr. Clancy is holding the wire."

"Hah!" Dasher glanced up sharply as Cannon got to his feet. "Still hard at it, trying to circumvent the Police Department."

"Your choice of words is regrettable, John," murmured Cannon. "I prefer the word 'circumflect.' In the sense that I am trying to turn you around in the right direction." He glanced at Natalie's cold profile. "Will you excuse me, Natalie?"

"Yes," she said frostily, "if you will do what I asked you to do."

"Of course. Immediately after the first show," he said soothingly. "It won't be long, they are about to start now."

The South American orchestra which filled in between the scheduled appearances of the name band were finishing a languorous Beguine as Cannon strode off toward the lobby. There was a scattering of applause as the dancers cleared the floor and heavy white satin drapes with a deep gold fringe slid into place, concealing the semicircular platform.

DARLENE GRAY was an exquisite Dresden china shepherdess, in a white tulle gown. She looked like a fragile doll with wide, blue eyes and flaxen hair, who should be kept in a glass case. At first glance the beholder was impressed with this brittle delicacy, but on closer inspection more intimate details became apparent. There was a tantalizing grace about her slightest movement, and the full, bee-stung lips and flaring nostrils were those of a passionate woman.

She sang easily in a clear, light voice that had a peculiar penetrating quality. Unlike most popular singers, she was rarely off pitch, but carried the melody without effort, and the orchestra followed her rather than the other way around.

Firmin Garvet conducted from the podium in the center of the platform, except for an occasional solo when he went to one of the two grand pianos. His wide grin flashed constantly, and he seemed thoroughly at ease in spite of the disturbing interview he had just had.

"The lad's quite a showman," Cannon remarked, as he returned to the table.

"You should be ashamed of yourself," said Dasher sardonically. "Trying to pin a murder rap on him."

"Why, John! What an ugly mind you have. You even suspect me of a lack of integrity!"

"All right. So you're feeling gay. What did your trained ferret find out now?"

"Clancy? Oh, he finds out lots of things. He was just making a routine report, keeping me up to date."

"Cut it out! He's not calling you up at the Andover Terrace at this hour to make a routine report."

"It was routine for Clancy," said Cannon as the floor lights came on. A pair of adagio dancers appeared and swept into an acrobatic waltz. Cannon watched them idly for a moment, and said: "Clancy is a remarkable fellow. He finds out the damnedest things!"

"If you're trying to whet my curiosity," said Dasher, "you're not doing so good. I don't care particularly whether you tell me about it or not. I've got my own lines out, and they're working satisfactorily—for my purposes."

Cannon was studying Ned Aker in the reflection from the spots lighting the dance floor. He said, "Ned, you went to school with Byron Edwards, didn't you?"

Aker's head jerked around and he spent a long moment adjusting his glasses. "Yes," he said clearly. "I

did."

"That's an odd coincidence, isn't it?" Cannon smiled at Dasher. "I didn't know about that myself until Clancy told me just now. They went through law school together, and Edwards paid his way by playing in orchestras. When he graduated he became a musician instead of a lawyer; but Aker became a private in the Army. It must have been a little tough, having to give up your career before you even got started, Ned. You even had an offer from a Chicago law firm didn't you?"

"Yes. Carruthers and Blaney. My acceptance had to be postponed."

"While you were fighting a war," said Cannon, "and getting yourself misplaced. When was the last time you saw Byron Edwards?"

"The last time we saw each other was in St. Louis, just after graduation. That was the summer of 1942."

"I don't see that that's any help," said Dashler with a trace of weariness. "It's too long ago. I can't see any reason for digging that far back into the past when it's obvious that the events leading to the murder had their inception long after Edwards left St. Louis and became a successful band leader."

"Yes, of course," agreed Cannon. "And I'm sure Ned can account for his whereabouts at the time of the crime, if he cares to. He has been with me a little more than six months. Before that, he was with Carruthers and Blaney for eight months—" Cannon was interrupted by the clatter of applause as the breathless adagio dancers took their bows.

DASHER'S voice emerged as the applause died down. "That's only fourteen months," he said. "The murder was committed eighteen months ago. Where were you at that time, Aker?"

"In the army, of course," said Cannon jeeringly.

"I can check up on that, too," retorted Dasher. "But what interests me more than anything else right now, is the way you're scurrying around trying to dig up a raft of suspects all at once. You're even willing to point the finger at a member of your own staff. You must have learned something that upsets all your well-nourished theories. Are you really that desperate, Bill?"

"If I'm desperate," Cannon said carelessly, "it's from trying to pound simple logic into your thick skull."

"It's the devil's own logic," growled Dasher, "that would try to convince me that Mr. Halliday had nothing to do with the death of Byron Edwards. I beg your pardon, Mr. Halliday. I know this whole business must be very unpleasant for you."

Natalie turned limpid dark eyes on him. "Captain Dasher," she murmured. "Do you have any idea where my husband is?"

"No, Mrs. Halliday. I do not," Dasher replied promptly. "But if you were to ask my advice, I'd say you were wise to go through with your divorce."

"Thank you." Natalie smiled wanly, and then frowned as Ned Aker jerked violently in his chair.

The orchestra played a rippling introduction as the lights dimmed once more and Darlene Gray appeared in the spotlight at the front of the band stand. There was heartbreak in her voice, but the words were clear and distinct.

In the bright beams of the spotlight tears glistened on her lashes and the entire room was still, sensing the emotion in her song without knowing what caused it. As she began the second chorus, Ned Aker's arms moved convulsively, his glass tipped and fell to

the carpet, drenching him with its contents. He stood up awkwardly.

"I'm sorry," he muttered. "Excuse me." He disappeared quickly in the dimness.

NED AKER stood in the corridor leading to the dressing rooms, a thin, stooped scarecrow with trembling hands. The lilting music of "Serenade" reached him faintly, smothered by the walls between. He lifted one hand to accent the beat, then dropped it again and stepped noiselessly to the door of a dressing room.

Fragrant odor of powders, creams and unforgettable perfume filled the room. There was a chaise longue, two lounging chairs and a wide, cluttered dressing table. He sat down at the dressing table without glancing into the mirror, opened his notebook and wrote rapidly. At the sound of footsteps in the corridor, he leaped up like a startled ghost, tore the leaf from his notebook and propped it against a powder jar.

The window was covered with heavy drapes of tan monk's cloth. He stepped behind them, slid the window up cautiously and climbed out into a narrow, brick-paved passage. There he leaned his head against the moist stone wall of the building, unable to move away from the window. After a while he heard the door open and close. He lifted his head slowly, almost unwillingly and stared through the opening in the curtains.

Darlene was there, walking softly toward her dressing table. She moved as if she were in a trance, her eyes full of a remote dream, but she saw the note almost at once. Her arm lifted slowly, she picked up the note and read it. She stood there interminably, without any sound or movement. At last she caught her breath with a sob.

"Oh, God!" she said gently. "I knew . . . I knew you weren't dead! By?" Her voice lifted as she turned to search the room. Her eyes swung toward the window as the curtains moved softly in the breeze. She seemed to be looking straight at the trembling scarecrow who clung to the sill, unable to tear himself away.

There was an imperious knock at the door, the knob turned, and Natalie Halliday stepped into the room.

"Miss Gray?" she said abruptly. "I am Mrs. Halliday. I believe we have certain things of vital interest to both of us to discuss. I have the note you wrote to my husband on the night he disappeared."

"Note?" Darlene looked at the note in her hand and smiled, still entranced by the miracle.

"Don't be so stupid!" said Natalie viciously. "I'm talking about the note you wrote to my husband, luring him to that cabin on the night the place burned. There was a murder committed that night—remember? And your note is proof that you were involved. You were there. You were seen on the highway. What do you know about that murder?"

"Oh." Sudden comprehension came into Darlene's eyes. "I'm sorry. I'm awfully sorry, Mrs. Halliday. I don't quite know how to tell you. You see, it wasn't By—Byron Edwards who was killed."

There was a movement somewhere in the darkness of the passageway. A shadowy figure was creeping toward the listening scarecrow. He turned his head and saw it and they both froze, watching each other. There was a shattering report from the dressing room, and the next instant the scarecrow collapsed under the stunning blows of a blackjack.

When he opened his eyes in the cold,

wet dark, he knew it was all over. Darlene . . . little doll-face was dead . . . and he was responsible for that, too. Just like the other one.

He moaned softly and blinding red pain shot through his head He felt the cold, wet bricks of the passageway and a foot scraped close to his face.

"I've got him right here, Mr. Cannon," said a hard voice above him. There was a man there, looking through the window—into Dolly's room. "Got the gun, too," the voice added.

Dasher's face appeared in the window. "All right," he growled. "Let's get him inside." He landed lightly on his feet beside the prostrate scarecrow. Rough hands grasped the limp shoulders, and the long figure came upright with a sickening wrench, to begin the long torture of the shambling march down the passageway.

THE lights in Firmin Garvet's dressing room were a slashing torment, and voices scraped against the pain in his head. Somebody pushed him into a deep chair and he sat there, gasping and sweating, letting the cold, deadly fury grow and strengthen as he tried to gather the scattered pieces of his mind. Gradually awareness came back to him. Garvet was there, and Cannon and Natalie Halliday. Dasher was talking to another man, a lean hound of a man with a long, sallow face.

"Clancy, you're due for some trouble," said Dasher angrily. "I can tell you that much right now. This business of meddling in murder cases, and withholding information—"

"Oh, keep your britches on," said Clancy in a dry voice. "We're handing it to you, aren't we? There's your killer. What more do you want?"

"A little intelligent co-operation," said Dasher shortly. "If we had had it from the beginning, there wouldn't have been another shooting here tonight."

"All right, Edwards," Cannon broke in smoothly. "You're fully awake now. Do you want to talk, or shall I tell it?"

By Edwards lifted his battered face and stared at the blandly poised attorney. The tinted glasses were gone and his eyes were a startling blue in spite of their bloodshot appearance.

"You're making the mistake of your life," he said hoarsely. "And you know it. Don't be a damned fool, Cannon."

"I'll try not to be," said Cannon easily. "First of all, we know you are Byron Edwards by your own written admission which was found in Darlene Gray's hand." By's fists clenched convulsively as he continued to meet Cannon's gaze. "The note was written on a page torn from your notebook, the notebook in which you took notes at the table earlier in the evening. We have that, too. We also have the note which was written to Reed Halliday on the night of his death, as you already know. The note is signed with Darlene Gray's name, but the handwriting is identical with yours. Premeditated murder, Edwards."

"Yes, it was," said By harshly.

"Yes. You deliberately lured the man to his death. But you had not intended to shoot Darlene Gray tonight, had you? There was something you wanted from her. That's why you wrote the note revealing yourself to her. But when she told Natalie it was not you who had died in the burned lodge, you had to shut her mouth."

"I told you not to be a damned fool," said By doggedly.

"Am I a damned fool when I prove that you took Ned Aker's identity, and used it to get into my office? It was smart and simple, the way you did it. You knew Aker well. You knew he was dead, and you knew that Car-

ruthers and Blaney had written him about the time of his graduation, offering him a job with their firm. They still have his letter, requesting them to hold the offer open until he returned from the Army. You simply showed up and took the job and that got you into the law business, and eventually into my office, where you could keep a finger on events connected with your crime and cover up any little loose ends that might crop up from time to time. Is that damn foolishness?"

"No," said By softly. "But it is slightly misinterpreted. I did have a purpose in getting into your office. It was to find the murderer who wrecked my life, deprived me of a name, of a future, of any hope of happiness. And I did find the murderer, Cannon, and all your fine reasoning, and clever manipulation of words isn't going to stop me from exposing that murderer. I was there—in the lodge when Halliday was killed. The murderer had followed him."

DASHER moved forward, and said: "Remember, Edwards, anything you say—"

"Can be used against me," finished By. "But I'll ask you to remember, Captain, that I have nothing more to lose."

"You claim you witnessed Halliday's murder?" demanded Dasher.

"I was not an eye-witness, no. The lodge was set on fire first—at the back. That was to prevent escape. While I was trying to put out the fire at the back, the killer set fire to the front of the lodge, shot Halliday when he went to the front door, and took his wallet containing $50,000. Who knew that both Halliday and I were going to the lodge that night? Dolly . . . Darlene knew, and so did Garvet."

Garvet's long face was white, and working uncontrollably. "By—" he said. "Skipper, you know I—"

"I know," said By wearily. "I don't blame you for anything. You did what any one else in your position would do, and I . . . wish you luck with the band. It's all yours."

"Very magnanimous of you, I'm sure," said Dasher grimly. "Let's leave the music business and get on with the murder business."

"May I have a glass of water?" asked By. Firmin Garvet hastily splashed a glass full of water at the washbowl in the corner and brought it to him. By drank it slowly and put the glass on the floor.

"The murderer," he said, "believed there were two people in the lodge—Halliday and . . . and Darlene. They were both to be eliminated. That's why the fire was set prior to the shooting, to prevent escape if the killer failed to get both of them with the gun."

"It won't do Edwards," said Cannon with deceptive mildness. "You have failed to take alibis into consideration. We know definitely that four people drove to the lodge that night. You and Halliday, Miss Gray and Garvet. All right. Mrs. Halliday and I both knew that Halliday was going to the lodge, and we thought it was Darlene Gray he was meeting. But I drove Mrs. Halliday home from the Andover Terrace that night and went on to my apartment."

"I expect you did," said By. "You went from the Halliday home to your apartment in a taxi, didn't you?"

"Ye-es," said Cannon slowly. "But what—"

"Whereas you drove from the Andover Terrace to the Halliday home in the Lincoln limousine, the car the Halliday's had arrived in. That was the car Darlene saw driving past the

service station on the way back to town from Glace Lake after the murder had been committed. That was the car the murderer used to trail Halliday to the supposed rendezvous. That was the car which carried the gun used to kill Halliday. It was Halliday's own gun. He used to brag about it. How he never drove anywhere in that big, expensive car without his gun. And how his lawyer had gotten him a special permit. Isn't that the evidence you mentioned, Captain Dasher? It was Halliday's gun you found near the charred body in the lodge, wasn't it?" His voice turned suddenly savage. "And whose gun was it that Clancy picked up in the passageway outside tonight?"

"You're doing very well, Edwards," said Cannon softly. "But you don't deserve any credit for intellectual powers. You know all these details, because you are the killer."

"Just a minute," said Dasher gruffly, he pulled the handkerchief wrapped gun out of his pocket. It was a neat, .32-caliber automatic. "Don't you have a permit for a gun like this, Cannon?"

"You know very well I have," said Cannon with a slight edge to his smooth voice. "And it is undoubtedly my gun. I keep it in the glove compartment of my car. We drove here in my car tonight. Edwards could have taken the gun—"

"Except for the fact that I never had access to the front seat," said By. "You and Mrs. Halliday were in the front seat when you picked me up, in front of my rooming house. Several witnesses saw me getting into the back seat. The parking attendant here will verify the fact that I was still in the back seat when we drove in, and never went near the glove compartment at the front."

"Uh-huh." Dasher grunted, still looking at the gun in his hand. "She could have been shot by some one inside the room, and the gun tossed out the window. When I got there, Cannon, both you and Mrs. Halliday were in the room. Mrs. Halliday said the shot came from outside. Clancy is on your payroll, I can't trust anything he might say."

"Thanks," said Clancy dryly. "At least you're not trying to pin the rap on me. And just for that I'll give you a little boost. You expect me to swear I saw this guy shoot through the window —well, hold onto your hair, Cap. I didn't."

"What?" growled Dasher. "Didn't what?"

"I didn't see him shoot. If he fired that gun, he must have had his arm inside the window, because that's where the shot came from—inside. I jumped him the minute I heard the shot. I knew it was no time for polite conversation."

CANNON sighed regretfully, looking at By Edwards. Slowly, his gaze swung to Natalie, sitting coldly aloof in a big chair. Her face was white marble, her dainty head tipped disdainfully, she looked at him with utter contempt in her dark eyes.

"Natalie—" Cannon said gently. "I'm sorry, my dear. There is nothing more I can do. If you had confided in me—if I had known from the first, instead of having to find it out for myself, as I did tonight—" He lifted his arm and let it fall in a weary gesture. "All that is immaterial now. It was your deadly vindictiveness that defeated you. You couldn't let the girl alone. Couldn't bear to let her escape."

"Shut up, you fool!" said Natalie coldly. "The law can't touch me. I don't give a damn what they say. They

can accuse me until hell freezes and I shall deny it! I dare them to prove anything against me!"

"There you have it," said Cannon, turning to Dasher. "There are several ways of describing it. The simplest would be to call it a violent nature, with a superiority complex."

"If you're building up to a plea of insanity with a fancy name to it," said Dasher heavily, "you'll get no help from me. I want to know why she had to shoot that Gray girl after all this time."

Cannon smoothed a hand across his face wearily. "Neither Mrs. Halliday nor I have anything more to say at this time," he said stiffly.

"I have," said By Edwards quietly. "I have plenty to say, and I won't rest until the killer pays the full penalty."

Natalie rose gracefully to her feet. "I have endured enough of this," she declared regally.

"No, dear," Cannon said. He stepped to her side and put her forcefully back into the chair, seating himself on the arm with his hand pressing her shoulder. "Go ahead, Edwards," he said tonelessly.

By looked at them briefly, but there was no pity in his eyes. He said, "Mrs. Halliday thought all along that Darlene had written the note, inviting Halliday to the lodge. She thought that Darlene was taking her husband away from her. She is a possessive woman. She not only wanted to hang on to her husband, but she very much wanted to hang onto his wealth. As Cannon told you earlier this evening, Halliday wanted out of his marriage. He had been trying for some time to get her to agree to a divorce with a nominal settlement. She was violently opposed to it. I learned all this from the files in Cannon's office when he asked me to prepare her petition for divorce. When Halliday drew $50,000 from the estate with the intention of walking out on her, it was too much. She decided to kill him and inherit her full share of the estate as his wife. She is a greedy woman. That's why she took Halliday's wallet containing the $50,000 after she shot him. And as Cannon has said, she is a vindictive woman. She was furious because Darlene escaped, and she was also worried about how much Darlene knew about Halliday's murder. That's why—" By's voice broke on a savage note. "Why she *murdered Darlene.*"

"She—uh, she didn't quite succeed," said Dasher gruffly. "The doctor is still working on Miss Gray. He thinks she'll live, but she may be scarred—her face. She—uh—"

By got to his feet and stood there trembling. "Where is she?" he breathed hoarsely. He started toward the door, and Dasher stepped out of the way.

"Careful now," Dasher cautioned roughly. "If the doctor lets you in, don't do anything foolish to upset her."

DARLENE was lying on the chaise longue. Her eyes and one side of her face were bandaged and she was breathing very lightly.

The doctor had removed his tuxedo jacket, and his collar and tie. The sleeves of his stiff-bosomed shirt were rolled up and he was replacing bottles and bandages in his small, black kit.

"How is she?" asked By flatly.

"By—" Darlene whimpered softly.

"Yes, Dolly," he answered, and sat carefully on the edge of the couch. "It's By. Come back to take care of you. You're going to be all right."

"No," she said weakly. "My face—"

"I think we can fix that up," said the doctor quietly. "Facial surgery can perform wonders. As for your eyes,

I've bandaged them because of the shock to the nerves which has caused temporary blindness, but that will pass too."

By held her hands very gently. "I'm the one who is disfigured, Dolly. Maybe it's just as well you can't see me, right now."

"You told me," she murmured, "in your note. You mustn't mind too much, darling. I don't. But I wish you'd kiss me hello."

By kissed her gently and Cannon stepped into the room. He spoke to the doctor and nodded to By.

"She's going to be all right," he said. He looked tired and old. "I'm leaving now, but I wanted to tell you that I wish you'd stay on in my office. I know that must sound strange after what I did to you this evening, but if you'll think it over, you'll realize that I was fighting for time. The full realization of what had actually happened was a great shock, and much too sudden for any delicate strategy. I had no intention of letting you suffer for Natalie's crimes. Do you believe me?"

"Yes," said By quietly. "I believe you. And I'll think over your suggestion about staying on. I'm going to have to support a wife, you know."

"Congratulations, that's fine," said Cannon. "I'll be waiting to hear from you." He closed the door softly.

"You didn't tell me," said Darlene.

"What, doll-face?"

"About your wife."

"You know all about her. She sings serenades to a ghost."

"That will be the ambulance," said the doctor practically.

"He thinks we're both delirious," By whispered against her lips.

"We are. Wio, By," she murmured drowsily. "Wio . . ."

"That's enough," said the doctor fussily. "You've brought her temperature up, she's getting incoherent, and I had her in fairly good shape for the ambulance."

"Have I got any lipstick on me?" asked By happily.

"For the love of Heaven!" whispered the doctor hoarsely. "Get out of here! You're not responsible either!"

THE BOX DETECTIVE

By SANDY MILLER

IN ORDER for a good police detective to get all available information on a case, he must realize some of the various types of experts that can be called in. It is extremely important that the police know whom to consult in the community for help. In every city, there are certain experts in fields which are closely related to scientific crime-detection. The detective ought to know, for instance, an expert photographer capable of telling from a photograph the time of day a picture was taken. By observing the shadows outside a room, which are recorded by a camera, an expert would have little difficulty in determining the hour of the day. Astronomers and weather bureau authorities are often able to assist the police in this respect, too. Fixing the exact time of a crime is an important part of the solution.

The photographer has much to offer in criminal investigation, for a picture presents a permanent record of what actually happened. In one case, a photograph was taken of the tire marks left on the street curb by an automobile which had struck a man and killed him. With the aid of the photographs, the car was finally traced and certain fibres were found attached to it. These fibres were subsequently examined by the microanalyst of the police laboratory to determine what they were, and he reported that the fibres were from the clothes of the dead man.

In another case, an automobile driving along a pier struck another car and knocked it over into the water. Several persons were drowned. The eye could not catch the marks that were on the pier, but the camera picked up what had actually happened and showed that the car containing a drunken driver had swerved around and struck the other machine. The officer who investigated the case did not see the marks on the pier. The camera, though, picked up the tire marks on the pier which corresponded with marks on the tires of the car causing the accident. The photographs were also used as evidence. It was then possible to prove conclusively that the driver was reckless, and he was sent to the penitentiary.

THE MISUNDERSTOOD DETECTIVE

By LAWRENCE LINCOLN

MANY are the jokes and anecdotes about the "blundering cop," but one of the greatest detectives of Scotland Yard was once grossly misunderstood and, although he could say, "I told you so," after the case in question was finally solved, the harm was already done.

The Road murder case (June 1860) is the case concerned. The infant son of a Mr. Kent was found in the morning to be missing from his cot. His body, with the throat cut, was found in the lavatory in the garden. It seemed evident to the police that the murder had been committed by someone in the house. The chief constable of Wiltshire asked for help from Scotland Yard, and Williamson, who later became chief constable of the C.I.D., and John Whicher, described as a "prince of detectives," were sent down to Road to investigate the case. The first suspect was the child's nurse, but she was soon cleared; she was very much attached to the little boy, and her replies to questions were quite straight forward and aroused no suspicions.

Mr. Kent had been twice married. By his first wife he had three daughters and a son, and by his second three children, who were still quite young. The two detectives from the Yard submitted the entire family to a rigid examination, eliminating one after another from suspicion. Meanwhile, the local people had made up their minds that the guilty persons were Constance Kent, a girl of sixteen, and her brother William, aged fourteen, and that their motive was petty jealousy. Whicher thought the same about Constance, and, having obtained a warrant from the local court, brought her before the magistrates on the charge of murder. The chief ground for suspicion against her was that one of her nightgowns was missing. Whicher produced two of her schoolmates, who admitted that she had shown signs of jealousy of her little brother because of the attention shown to him in the family. The nursemaid, when asked if Constance had shown any animosity toward her brother, replied, "No, sir," and Constance herself said, "He was a merry, good-tempered little boy. I played with him often. He appeared to be fond of me, and I was fond of him."

It was a weak case. The girl was arrested but soon admitted to bail and was finally discharged for lack of evidence.

There was great indignation, not only in Wiltshire, but all over the country. The magistrates and the police were laughed at for their incompetence. Whicher returned to London, stuck to his belief that Constance Kent was the guilty one, but found that the police authorities considered his theory incredible and that he had lost the confidence of the commissioner. Still convinced that he was right, Whicher lost heart and retired from the police force.

An appeal was sent from the magistrates of Bath to the Home Secretary, asking for the establishment of a special commission to reopen the case and investigate the crime, but the reply was that such a course would be unconstitutional.

But the public was not allowed to forget the Road murder case. Nearly a year later, a rumor was circulated to the effect that Constance Kent had confessed to one of her relatives. The detectives, who by now had received much censure from the newspapers, attempted to investigate the case, but they found that the new information was vague. Miss Kent, herself, had been sent to a convent in France. Four inquiries were conducted, but the case remained unsolved.

FOUR years passed. Suddenly, on June 25, 1865, the Bow Street magistrate was informed that Constance Kent was on her way to London to surrender herself to justice. It seemed that, upon her return from France, she had entered a sisterhood at Brighton. There she had come under the influence of a Mr. Wagner, curate of Brighton's St. Paul's Cathedral. Two weeks before her appearance at Bow Street, she had told him of her intention to confess publicly to the murder of her little brother, and Mr. Wagner himself brought her up to Bow Street. The chief magistrate was anxious that she should not incriminate herself without realizing fully what she was doing, and he warned her several times, but she stuck firmly to the truth of her statement, which, as Mr. Wagner testified, was entirely voluntary and had been made without any suggestion from him.

Her confession created a great sensation, vindicating, as it did, the soundness of Whicher's judgment.

She was tried on her own confession, found guilty, and condemned to death. The government requested Dr. Bucknill, a mental authority, to inquire into the state of her mind. He reported that, at the time of the murder, she was probably abnormal, since she was experiencing some of the emotional and psychological strains of puberty. She told him during their conversation that she had made up her mind to confess if the nursemaid were convicted, and to commit suicide if she herself were convicted. She described to him in detail how she had prepared the crime. She hid one of her father's razors, waited until all the household were asleep, took the baby from his cot, and took him to the garden for the murder. She wished it to be known that she had received nothing but kindness in her home.

In the doctor's opinion, she was perfectly sane, but with her peculiar disposition prolonged solitary confinement might bring on insanity.

On this report, her sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. She served in a prison for women and was released in good health after serving the statutory minimum period.

Too Many Crosses

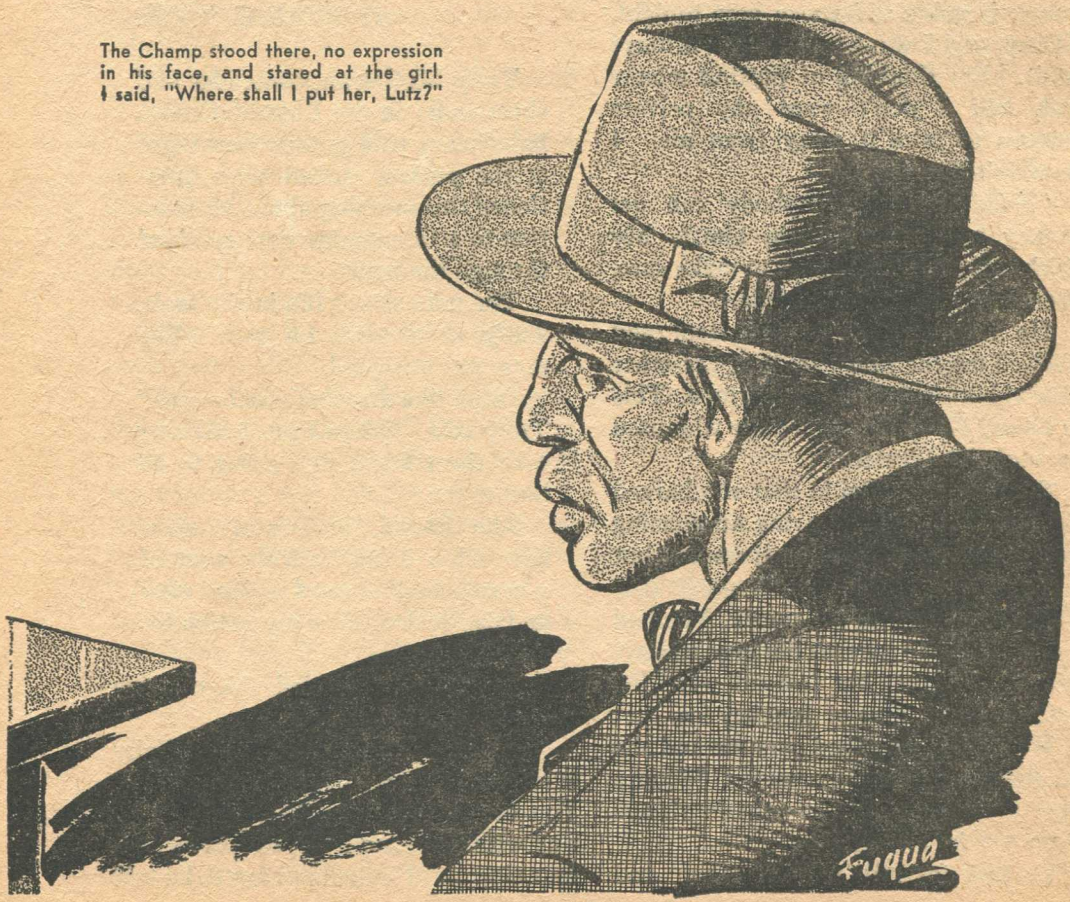
by LARRY HOLDEN

When a girl falls in love with the wrong kind of man, expecting the worst is not enough . . . she should count on it!

A FRINGE of imitation, fireproofed cocoanut palms ringed the room; the bar was a bisected African tribal hut and the stools were real bamboo with leopard skin seats; jungle vines thatched the ceiling and papier mache orchids blossomed ferociously in the green dusk. A fat orange moon hung high in a corner behind the palms and pawed the throng with planned sensual fingers of light. Majestic colored men, in self-conscious tiger pelts, moved slowly among the tables, holding trays of drinks over their heads while the band played *Chloe* a little too heavily in the drums.

That was Bunch Lasker's night spot, *The Tropics*, an honest to God sucker trap for sight-seers. If you went out to the *kraal*—they didn't call it a balcony—you at least got for your money a simple and beautiful view of the Hudson River and the lights of New York beyond, but that's all you got.

In the ordinary run of things I wouldn't have spent the gas it took to



The Champ stood there, no expression in his face, and stared at the girl. I said, "Where shall I put her, Lutz?"

get there, but I owed Denver Parkow a return for a favor he once did for me when I was working for Western Protection out on the West Coast.

He was drinking tequilla at the bar, and when he saw me he stood and let his lips go back from the glittering whiteness of teeth that people mistook for a smile. He was a high, narrow man, with thin black eyes and straight black hair like an Indian. His face had the set, even pallor of marble.

I climbed to the stool beside him and grumbled, "This is a hell of a place to talk business, this damn circus." The barman came up and stood there looking nosy, and I said "Irish" to get rid of him.

Parkow left his smile where it was. "I think something very quiet and very funny is going to happen here tonight, Dinny, and I want you to take a hinge at it. I'm thinking of putting money out, and I don't want any private crosses to take it away from me. I wouldn't like that."

"Hell," I said, "anybody can get money taken away from him." My Irish came and I sipped it to make sure, then dumped it into the soda.

He leaned back on his stool and showed me the slim blonde at the other side of him. "Meet So-So Harmon. This is Dinny Keogh, a square eye who used to work for Western."

She was beautiful in that surcharged light, and she was wearing an evening gown that couldn't be called clothes, but it was that shade of bronze-green that lifts blondes among the angels. You had to look twice to see that her eyes weren't cornflower blue, but instead were the brittle, steady blue of January ice.

Her glance breathed over me and she laughed quietly and murmured, "Square eyes and square circles—that's always been one for Einstein."

Parkow picked up his glass and sipped fastidiously. "So-So's an intellectual," he said. "She sang once some place and the boys said she was so-so, and it stuck. Now she's an intellectual and she's much better. Aren't you, darling?"

"You go to hell," she smiled. Her amused glance swept me again and she picked up her cocktail and murmured, shaking her head, "A square eye!"

"So I'm a square eye," I growled. I looked at Parkow. "Now what's knawing at your bankroll?"

HE TOOK a newspaper clipping from his wallet and laid it carefully on the bar before me. I bent over it.

TUFFY SCOFFS
AT THREAT NOTE

Tuffy McGowan, contender and short-ender in the Lutz-McGowan light-heavy title go tomorrow night at the garden, scoffed when questioned this morning about his reaction to a threatening note received through the mail.

The note said, "It's in the tank, Tuffy, or curtains for you." The note was unsigned.

"Stuff like that don't bother me," Tuffy said. "When I get in the ring with the Champ, it's going to be him or me."

Sam Riegel, McGowan's manager, while declaring it the work of a crank, took a more serious view and demanded police protection for his fighter.

I grinned and flipped the clipping with my forefinger.

"It smells," I said, "of publicity agents. Anyway, who gives a damn? You could put four McGowans in the ring with Lutz and it would still be only four clowns. He doesn't have to be told

to lay down. It's just going to be target practice for Lutz. Unless," I stopped and looked sharply over my glass at Parkow's immobile face, "Unless maybe the Champ's hurt his hand or something."

"I thought of that." Parkow lifted a pencil-thin cigar to his mouth and lit it. "But Lou Faas, the Champ's manager, is a personal friend of mine from Frisco, and I went up to see him. He and the Champ and Clemmy Moose—one of the Champ's pals from way back—were in Charkey's Gym watching one of Lou's boys work out. I showed them the clipping and put it up to them. Square, just the way you did. The Champ laughed, and though Lou tried to stop him, he jumped into the ring and put on the gloves and for three minutes drove a big slugger from one post to the other and dropped him cold. And the other guy wasn't kidding, Dinny." He shook his head. "That's not the angle. Some of the smart money thought of that too, and the odds took a drop for a couple hours; but after the Champ showed what he could do, they went right back up again and they're sitting at five to one. You can forget that one. Any other ideas?"

"There's always Cheap Sam Riegel." I let myself sink into the Irish for a minute and thought it over. "He used to manage a couple lady wrestlers around Newark. They thought he was chiselling and got me to pin it on him. Then they beat him up. But he's only a five-and-ten crook. I don't get his angle, pulling a caper like that."

PARKOW held his cigar away from his mouth and watched the smoke spiral in silky ribbons. "I figure it this way. I think he's laying the groundwork for a proposition he'll put up to Lou Faas. You know how a fight goes. There's always a chance of a lucky punch, and McGowan is a pretty tough boy. He's out of his class with Lutz, but he's tough. Riegel will have his boy take a dive and Lou Faas will pay him a grand or so, and nobody worries. That's the way I look at it." He waved his hand.

I kept shaking my head from almost the minute he started to speak. "Riegel's not that dumb unless he's slipping," I said. "If McGowan takes a dive after all this publicity, the Commission'll dub the fight a phony and McGowan and Riegel will get the ax."

Parkow sighed. "I'm finished trying to figure it out. I can make money no matter how it goes, but I have to know. There's five C's in it for you if you can get it to me by tomorrow afternoon. Two and a half now." He slid an envelope on the bar between us. "The rest when you deliver."

I picked up the envelope and looked inside. It held five fifties. I slipped it into my coat pocket.

So-So said coldly to him, "You're turning yourself inside out for this snoop. If he pulls a cross, they'll turn a red-hot loose on you and it's so long Parkow."

He smiled faintly and patted her hand. "Drink your drink," he said gently.

There was a curious, snowed-in kind of affection between them.

Parkow pointed with his cigar and said, "Over there at the table next to the band is Faas and the Champ, and eight tables back of them is Sam Riegel."

I swivelled on my stool. At the Champ's table sat a tall girl with flaming hair and a sullen mouth. She was wearing a sarong.

"The night before the fight," I said, "and he's out slopping it up. Who's the pancake?"

"He's not slopping it up. He's wait-

ing to hear his woman sing her number, then he'll go home. And that's his woman. Foxy Miraday."

"They sure are a happy couple," I said. "She looks as if he just refused to get up and give Junior his two o'clock feeding, and he looks as if he did it last night and he'll be damned if he'll do it again tonight. They wouldn't be married, would they?"

"Not that I—"

A thick-bodied man, with bushy hair that met his eyebrows, pushed in between me and Parkow and said levelly, "Your car's waiting out front, Mr. Parkow." There were more than hands deep in his pockets.

Parkow held his cigar half way to his lips. "I didn't order my car," he said carefully. So-So's face looked like a scream frozen in aspic.

The thick-bodied man said in the same voice, "Sure you did, Mr. Parkow. Some friends of your dropped in just now you don't want to see, so you're going home."

"I reached around him, grabbed his wrists and turned his hands into his belly. I said, "You heard the man. He didn't order a car."

Without turning his head, he said quietly, "I wouldn't do that if I was you, Bub."

Something hard dug beneath my ribs at the back and I was told, "Pick up your drink, Fatty, and act like you was enjoying the music."

I put out my arm and let it rest on the bar. I didn't turn my head. He put his weight against my back and pressed me into the bar so I couldn't move fast if I wanted to.

PARKOW slowly ground out his cigar in the heavy star glass ash tray and slid off his stool. He warned So-So with his eyes and she stayed where she was, sliding her hand into the purse on her lap.

Parkow took a breath and said, "Let's go."

"The lady goes too." He lifted his right pocket and pointed it at So-So. "And it's better she takes her hand out of that purse. Nobody gets hurt. Just walk out, get in your car and breeze. Move!"

My thug held me to the bar with his weight and his gun as Parkow and So-So walked out under the guns of the thick-bodied hood. They went through the palm-laced doorway.

I braced myself to hear the chatter of the guns outside, when a whisper at my elbow said, "Relax, Dinny, they're just going home." The weight went off my shoulderblades and my kidneys swelled back to normal as the gun was withdrawn.

Bunch Lasker grinned into my hot face and his hand on my shoulder lowered me to the stool. He was a plump, jovial-appearing man with a wide, thin mouth like a cut throat. If you were smart, you believed the mouth, not the pink plumpness. He got his nickname from always saying genially, "Me, I'm just one of the bunch." He wasn't. He was a tough onion.

"That was my boy took him out," he said. "Nothing's going to happen to him this time. Not in my place. It's too expensive. Whitey Larsen just came in with a pair of gunnies. Hopheads, all three of them. They burn too fast."

Gunnies is cute for gunsel, and gunsel is the slang for gunman. Lasker got that way from talking to too many tourists.

"I didn't know Whitey Larsen ran with gamblers," I said. "How'd he get enough in Parkow's class to go gunning for him."

Lasker chuckled, because I think somewhere he'd heard fat men always chuckle. But before he could answer,

the house lights went down and a thin, sharp-faced M.C. ran out on the dance floor in an amber spotlight, dragging a mike with its snaky cord writhing after him.

Lasker whispered, "Catch this. It's good."

A line of metallic chatter spilled out of the M.C. like spoons out of a paper bay; and at the end Foxy Miraday walked into the spot with her head thrown back, her body loosely wanton. As the drums beat in the background, she broke into a throaty chant.

She was good. She was good enough to have been subsidized by Beautyrest, and if she'd been singing that just to me, I'd have had to do something about it or take a walk around the block, cursing.

But it wasn't just for me, so I broke in and said, "Give, brother, you've said too much and too little."

"You're better out of it, Keogh," he said seriously.

"How can I be out of it when I'm already in and at least two of your monkeys know about it, and as long as I'm in I'd like to know what the hell it's all about. Do you owe that to me, or do I have to pick up one of your boys and beat it out of him?"

Lasker's eyes seemed to sink behind his blobby cheeks. His hand became very still on the bar; then he relaxed and dug me in the ribs with his thumb.

"You damn Irish," he chuckled. "All you know to do with your hands is stick them in somebody's snoot. Okay. I'll give it to you short and sweet. Denver Parkow sat in a three-day poker session with Whitey Larsen and some of the boys and took them for thirty G's. Now the word is going around that the day before the game Parkow was flattened, peeled down to his last bill, by Allie Gamp at dice, so he had no right in the poker game in the first place. I don't *know* is the boys are gunning for him, but it's logical. That's the reason I gave Parkow the rush when Whitey came in. By the way," his eyes went down again, "that wasn't thirty G's Parkow slipped you in that envelope, was it?"

IT WAS poke him in the nose or put up, and it wouldn't stop with just a poke in the nose. Lasker wouldn't be original thinking I had the thirty G's, and it would take up too much time shooting down every crumb who wanted to know the same thing. Or just plain wanted it.

So I put up. It wasn't heroic, but it was sensible. I opened the envelope and spread the five fifties on the bar like a poker hand. He looked at them in disbelief and even leaned a little forward to peer into the empty envelope. His eyes were still incredulous as he looked into my face. He folded his hands into his stomach.

"Suckered!" he grunted. "I'll be damned—suckered! Dinny Keogh, the smart mick, suckered for a lousy two and a half. Boy," he tapped me on the knee, "that was the cheapest deal Denver Parkow ever made. If Larsen is out for his money, now you're the target, not Parkow—and for peanuts. Two and a half! Brother, you're a bargain!"

"You wouldn't kid me, would you?" I said.

He put out his hand toward me, palm up, and said, "Hell, Dinny."

"Because," I went on, pushing my jaw at him, "if it is a frame, it's a little too pat, and Parkow wasn't hustled—he was tipped and you lent him the muscle for a strongarm. And I'm left sitting here all alone at the bar. For why? Maybe so you could come over and put the finger on. That wouldn't be the set-up, would it, Bunch?"

"You're nuts. Why should I—"

"Why? Maybe for the same reason you live in this menagerie. It keeps your bankroll healthy; and Bunch, you're a boy likes to feed vitamins to his bankroll." The anger ran out of me. I went on thoughtfully, "Or maybe it's something else. I think I'll find out what it is."

I slid off the stool. The houselights were up. Sam Riegel's table was empty and Faas and Champ Lutz were gone. But sitting at their table was a bulky tow-head and two slim, slick-haired kids, who might have been tap-dancers, but weren't. And Foxy Miraday.

Lasker put his hand on my arm and said urgently, "Now, Dinny, for crisake, I don't want—"

I shook his hand off. "And if you send anybody out to stop me, we'll give the customers some real entertainment."

I didn't give him or his boys time to catch up with me. I went straight and fast across the floor, threading through the dancers, and stopped at Whitey Larsen's table, facing him across it. The two dark young hoods had their backs to me, which was the way I wanted it. He was rumbling at Foxy Miraday; he had that kind of voice.

"Hello, Whitey," I said.

He looked up. His eyes had that pale, flat look some men hide behind.

He said, "Hah?" and scowled.

"I was just talking to a friend of yours—Denver Parkow. Someone said he was a friend of yours. That could be a mistake."

His eyes dipped for an instant to the two dark men, but it was just a flicker. He said stolidly, "I know him. Who the hell are you?"

"Just fishing. That's me. A friend of his. I'm trying to find his other friends so we can have a reunion and maybe play some poker."

HE PUT his big hands on the table, as if to lunge to his feet, but he didn't. His face became hard and lumpy. He snarled, "Dangle, mutt!"

"Sure, sure," I said softly. "But you know how Denver is. Sensitive. He'll feel hurt if you won't be there. He told me particularly about you—ask Whitey Larson, he said. What'll I tell him?"

His eyes licked at the faces around, at the tables, at the bar. He licked his lips and seemed to get smaller. "Tell him," he said hoarsely and with effort, "you can tell him to go to hell!"

The dark man at my right exploded with something Spanish and slapped the table with his hand. He looked at me over his shoulder, then back at Whitey. He said something in Spanish, but it would have been the same in any language—had the same sting and lash.

I put my hand on his shoulder and felt the thin bone under the padding of his jacket. "I know you're disappointed, boy," I said, "but it's just another case of a previous appointment. Right, Whitey?"

The girl rose lithely from her chair and hooked her arm in mine.

"You're buying me a drink," she said. Her voice was a little thick, as if too many people had been buying her drinks already.

I raised my hand to Whitey and might have said more, but she tugged at my arm and I went rather than struggle with her. As we left, the two dark men leaned across the table at Whitey and talked rapidly in furious sibilants.

Foxy clung tightly and said, "Whew! Go ahead and tell me it's your neck."

"Okay. It's my neck."

"And this is mine. You were getting set to push them too far. What was the sense in it? He backed down for you, didn't he? What more did you

want him to do—bark for a fish?"

"He talks too much," I said sourly.

"He talked because he was sore, then he found he was talking too much and got scared. I don't get your act at all, brother. What's Denver want? Whitey called him this afternoon and told him he was satisfied. Why rub it in?"

"I was trying out a new horse liniment," I growled. "Come on. I'll get you that drink."

She had trouble with her feet and she was blinking her eyes too much. She was drunker than I thought. She was better when she was sitting at the bar with something to lean against. The barman poured her a Manhattan and gave me another Irish.

"Y'know, pal," she said, slopping her drink over her hand, "I like you. Cautious men give me a pain in the . . . They give me a pain, see?"

"I wouldn't exactly call the Champ a cautious man."

She sneered. "What do you know about it, brother? What do you know about cautious men? Listen to me. The Champ's cautious, see. He reads the financial page and he wears Hoover collars. He's cautious."

"How does he feel about the fight tomorrow night?"

"What fight?" she jeered. "If you think there's gonna be a fight, listen to this. Fight! The Champ—don't ask me why they call him the wild man—the Champ, see, he's got every nickel he owns in the world on the fight. That's gonna be some fight. If he wanted to fight, why didn't he pick somebody like Woody Stribling? Because why? Ask me. Go ahead. Ask me."

"Okay. I've asked you."

"Because he don't want to fight. He just wants to make investments. He goes into a fight like he's putting money in a mortgage, and you don't put money in a mortgage if the house is gonna fall down, and if he fought Woody Stribling the house might fall on him, see? Then where would the mortgage be? Like me." Her voice was thicker than tar in December.

THE fingers tapping her shoulder and the hand on her arm was Bunch Lasker. He said, "Snap out of it, Foxy. You're on in five minutes for the Cobra number."

"Sure, sure."

She swung off the chair and if he hadn't caught her under the arms she would have fallen to the floor. A couple customers at the bar watched with interest and a girl in a black dress tittered.

Lasker said, "Oh for Crisake!"

He hoisted her and I helped him put her back on the stool. Tears were running down her face, and under the make-up it was a nice face. Without the glamour, without the drunken sag. I hadn't really looked at it before.

"And that's the way it ends," she said dully, "not with a laugh, but a slap. He don't want a wife who says ain't. Maybe it is a laugh. You just have to know when."

Lasker said, "Yeah, it's the timing. Go upstairs and lay down like a good kid."

"Going home."

Lasker looked at me over her head. I shrugged. "Let her go," I said. "She'll just get more slopped up if she hangs around here."

"This is a busy night. I can't spare anybody to take her."

"Hell, I'll take her. Where does she live?"

"Newark." He looked relieved. He'd have handed her to a gorilla to get rid of her. "The Pompadour Apartment on Clinton Avenue." He raised his hand and the cigarette girl came over. He

said, "Get her dressed. She's going home." Then to me, "S'cuse me. I gotta see about that Cobra number."

He waddled quickly away. He didn't want any part of her *or* me. He was that kind of guy.

I was just winding up another Irish when she came back. She looked better and she walked better. She just seemed bewildered and dazed.

I glanced at Larsen's table as we went out, and the three of them sat there watching us go. The talkative dark one said something and a grin slit his face. The hell with them.

I had no trouble getting her out to the car or into it. All I had to do was lead her.

All she said was, "Drive slowly, will you, Dinny?" she cried for awhile, whimpered with her head down, then passed out when we hit Harrison. She wasn't asleep. She passed out.

When we hit the Pompadour on Clinton Avenue, I took the keys from her purse and carried her inside. We went up in a bronze self-service elevator that had been turned by a watchmaker. I opened her door and carried her into her apartment.

And there they were.

A BIG, gentle-faced man, with coarse brown hair like shredded rope, sat lumpily in a lounge chair, smoking a cigar. The other man was standing at the window with his back toward us. He had tremendous shoulders and when he turned I recognized his flat, ophidian head and the jaw that ran almost straight across his face, instead of coming to a point—the kind of jaw you can break your hands on. That must have been a handy thing to have, because he was the lightheavy champ, Wild Man Lutz.

The girl stirred in my arms and I put her on her feet. She could stand. Her eyes opened. She saw him there and she took a step toward him. She held out her hand. I was behind her and couldn't see her face, but it must have been full of pleading.

He took a long step and swung the back of his hand across her cheek. "The squarehead said you were out looping with his monkey, but I didn't believe it." There was no expression in his voice.

Maybe I wouldn't have cared if he'd been sore, but this was too cold-blooded and I growled, "Let her alone. She's drunk."

She stood there swaying. He let her have another one, and this time she went down.

I told him what I thought he was. I told him as many ways as I could think of, even bringing in some Italian, and they are good at that, believe me.

His head went down and his hands up, and he came cat-foot toward me. The gentle-faced man pushed himself up in his chair.

"Take it easy, Champ," he said good-naturedly. "You're getting too old for this kind of shenanigan before a fight. I'll take care of this bird. Hell, boy, I'm down for the works on you tomorrow night, and I gotta protect my investment."

The Champ hissed, "Shut up, Moose!"

He shuffled in, from habit I guess, and I put up my hands. There was nothing to it. I made a couple passes, then hung myself on the end of something that seemed to have been shot out of a gun. I churned into darkness.

WHEN I came to, I was lying on the floor in the lobby of the Pompadour. I stood and brushed myself off and wriggled my jaw a few times and thought how nice it was my teeth were still tight. I didn't want to leave.

I wanted to go upstairs again, but there didn't seem to be much point to it. It was one of those things, for the moment, I'd have to take and like. While I was still in one piece.

I drove back to my apartment and called Denver Parkow at the Glen Appin. It was the least I could do.

"Did I get you out of bed?" I asked.

He said, "Yes."

"Good. I braced your friends, Whitey Larson and Company. Why didn't you say you'd kissed and made up?"

"It didn't seem like the time to argue. But why brace them?"

I told him. He said: "Hell, Dinny, you ought to know me better than that." But I didn't think his heart was in it.

"Yeah," I said. "Silly, wasn't it? Look. I'm going down and tear a herring with Sam Riegel in the morning. I'll bring you the bones. Where'll you be?"

"Right here. And I'll tell you what I'll do. If you bring me anything worth listening to before four, I'll up the ante to a G. You'll find Sam either at the Merritt Hotel on Mulberry Street or over in Sharkey's Gym."

I said sourly, "Maybe you should be the detective." And he said, "Maybe," and we hung up. I went to bed.

It was like jumping in one side and jumping out the other, for the next thing was the telephone ringing. Only I really had been asleep and the sun was shining and the alarm clock hung at nine-thirty. I picked up the receiver and a voice told me it was Foxy Miraday.

"How's the head?" I said.

"Which one? I've got three. Say, Dinny, I'm awfully sorry I let you in for that blitz last night. Was he very tough?"

"I lived. How about you?"

She laughed. "I got a mouse. Just a little one. I think you tired him out. He usually does better than that. Oh yeah, and I also got a nickel-plated brush-off. But honestly, Dinny, I didn't think I would be, but I feel like a million this morning. He's been getting worse and worse, and duller and duller. Ever since somebody told him he was thirty, he's been hiding behind the calendar, adding up his bank account. "She paused and asked, "How old are you, Dinny?"

"Forty or so," I said.

"Life begins. And I'll bet you don't even have a bank account. Say listen, Shanty Irish, how's about coming over for a fried egg sandwich and a cup of coffee. That's what I really called you about."

"Instead," I countered. "how's about my coming over for lunch a little later. I've got business."

"Fine. With pork chops. See you around one."

That was one of the ways of doing it —catch them while they were still bouncing. But I remembered that throaty thing she's sung the night before . . . Oh hell, I was just going for pork chops anyway.

I WENT downstairs and took the jalopy over to the Merritt hotel, but he wasn't there, so I poked up to Sharkey's Gym on High Street.

There were the usual potbellies throwing medicine balls between grunts, some young pugs being very snappy and stylish on the light bag, more of the same being the same on skipping ropes, and in the ring over in the corner a couple kids were trying to tear one another's heads off with sixteen-ounce gloves.

I spotted McGowan, a chunky redhead, standing at a corner of the ring with his hands in his pockets, watching

the go with sparkling eyes.

I lounged beside him and said, "Set for tonight, kid?"

He grinned. "Me? I'm always set."

"How's Sam feel about it?"

His grin widened. "Aw, you know Sam. A bellyache a minute."

A door at the other side of the ring opened and Riegel came out, biting the end off a cigar. When he saw us standing there, he jammed the cigar into his mouth and came running over. A squat man lumbered behind him with his hand in his pocket.

Riegel pushed himself between me and the kid and snapped belligerently, "What's coming off here? This mug been putting anything up to you, kid?" He shoved his vulpine head at me and shouted, "If you've been putting anything up to the kid—"

I put my thumb against the bridge of his nose and pushed him and his cigar back. The squat man came up behind me and grabbed my arms above the elbows. He tried to swing me, but he thought he was stronger than he was, on maybe I was heavier. I didn't feel like playing.

I said to Riegel, "Call off this comedian, Sam. You know me."

He stared into my face, and he stretched his mouth in a grin as phony as a plastic chisel. "Well, well, well, Keogh! Why'nt you say so?" He flapped his hand at the man behind me. "Let him go, you dope. He's a friend of mine. I apologize, Dinny." He took my arm and led me away from the ring. He dropped his voice. "He's protecting the kid," he said.

"On account of that note?"

"The note? What note?"

"I hear tell of a threatening note. It was in the newspapers. Remember, Sam?"

He winked and made a noise mouths weren't intended for. "A smart man like you," he barely hid his sneer, "and you believe the newspapers!"

"Sure I believe the newspapers. Yesterday they said shirts were two and a half in Bamberger's Basement, and sure enough they were. I believe the newspapers. But maybe," I leaned forward and blew a hoople of smoke, "maybe you know more about that story than I do."

"Me? That's foolish talk, Keogh. I should know about the story? I wrote it? *Nu,* that's foolishness. All I know, the reporter comes to me and says, 'Mr. Riegel, the *Dispatch* would like from you a statement.' It's the first I hear of it, so I give him a statement. What can I do?"

"So McGowan didn't get a threatening note. Is that it?"

"Did I say that? Are you putting words in my mouth? I said, it's the first I hear of a statement. Sure there's a note, so I throw it in the basket. Letters like that," he snapped his fingers, "I should go to school to learn to read them." He did it again with his mouth.

I grinned and said, "Who're you kidding, Sam?"

THAT hurt. It really did. He put his hand over his heart. "Mr. Keogh. Listen. I'm telling you. Don't believe it. You're too smart. I respect you. There's nothing to it."

"Still, you gave the story to Joe Maloney and the *Dispatch* printed it."

"Joe Maloney. A reporter. He makes his living printing stories." He was sweating and he mopped his face with a silk handkerchief that had been woven to represent the flags of all nations. He shook his head. "Believe me, my friend. My friend Keogh. Don't let smart people hear you talk. Believe me."

I felt like giving him a lot more of

the same, just to see him standing there knee-deep in his own sweat, but I could take just so much of Sam Riegel.

So I said, "Sure, Sam. I may give you a ring later to see if you can get me a couple ducats for the fight tonight."

He said earnestly, "Do that, Dinny, do that. It's not a promise, but you call me."

I said yeah and strolled out.

Outside, I horsed myself into a phone booth and called Joe Maloney on the *Dispatch*. He was kind of a beer pal from Charley's on Market Street.

"Hi, fella," I said, "This is Dinny Keogh, and the beers are on me if you tell me who tipped you on that McGowan threat story."

"Is there something doing?" he asked quickly. "Did they get to the kid? What's up?"

"Hell, nothing as far as I know. A friend of mine is curious. Hows about it?"

"Now, Keogh, a newspaperman never gives on his source."

"I know, Joe, and I'm a professional snitch, but it's be a big help if you let me in on it. And beers, or better, for you."

He laughed. "Guy," he said, "you just stuck yourself for a mess of beer. It came through the mail. A typewritten carbon. I figured the original had gone to McGowan. That's all."

I swore softly, and Maloney accused me: "There's something on your mind, Dinny. If you hold out, so help me, you're on the out list. Give."

I said, "Maybe there is a story, Joe, but somebody sure buried it. I've just come from Sam Riegel and he spent fifteen minutes convincing me the threat note was a phony. But he's got a gunsel sticking closer to McGowan than tar to a fender, and Riegel himself has the quaking meemees."

I stopped, and after awhile he said suspiciously. "Is *that* all?"

"Yeah."

"I'll be damned. You know, my grandmother would say you're in a tizzy. A tizzy is a very small—"

"I know what a tizzy is, and I'm not in it."

"The hell you're not!" He laughed. "See you at Charley's, guy, and bring your expense account."

He hung up, still laughing.

BEING laughed at doesn't necessarily make me hungry. I have to be hungry to start with. I was. The clock on the dash said it was around twelve-thirty. It could have been. If you have a clock on your dash, you know how they go. I pointed my front bumper toward Clinton Avenue and stepped on the gas.

That was some lobby in the Pompadour. Now that I didn't have a punch in the snoot, I could appreciate it. It had a rug that needed mowing, and too much marble. The architect must have loved the Parthenon, and to a guy from Harvard that would have been very, very funny, because the Parthenon was built in memory of one of those Greek goddesses named Athena, a professional virgin. The Pompadour would have to show me.

The apartment bells were disguised as a hand-wrought iron grill and I put my thumb on the one labelled *M. Miraday*. I wondered what the M was for. It would be nice if it were for something like Maggie or Mary. There was no answer, but there so often isn't, with the kind of superintendents around, and the front door was open anyway, so I went in.

Her door was open, too. Not much. Only about three inches. If there had been a smell of frizzing pork chops I wouldn't have thought much about it,

but there wasn't.

I waited and listened. Inside, the radio was playing something quiet and lush by Irving Berlin. As I listened, it stopped then started over again. It was a record, not the radio. I waited until it started for the third time, then softly pushed the door open and slid into the entrance hall. It was quiet. There was nothing to hear but that over-stuffed music. I went to the door of the living room and slipped my gun from under my left armpit.

But there was no need of it. She was lying between the coffee table and the sofa on her back with one leg drawn up and her arms wide. Over her left eye, looking like a mole or a beauty patch, was a hole, a very small hole, not as big around as a pencil. She had nothing on except one of those wrap-around housecoats without buttons and there had been nothing to keep it closed when she fell. Beside her on the rug was a heavy plum colored turkish towel, so she must have been coming from a bath or a shower when it got her.

I pushed my gun back into the flat holster and went down on my knees beside her. She was still warm and her hands flexed at the wrist. She was not long dead. The blood was not yet brown on her cheek, and lying there she just looked relaxed and resting. I didn't touch her. I didn't have to. She looked as if she were lying in the rug instead of on top of it. She was very dead.

I stood and glanced around, quickly, sharply. There were no upset chairs, no scuffed rugs. I looked into the bedroom. It was smart and tailored and very modern. The bed didn't seem designed for sleeping. It looked like an ironing board. The kitchen was also smart, tailored and modern, but it didn't have a bed in it. It had a gas range, and over an unlighted burner was a frying pan in which lay three plump, pink pork chops—one for her and two for me. All of a sudden her death was very real, personal and poignant.

I TURNED back toward the door and there was something in me, like sand between my teeth.

I took out my handkerchief and wiped everything I thought I had touched, and a lot I knew I hadn't, but I was making sure. Maybe I was destroying evidence, but I had a pretty good idea that the guy who had given it to her hadn't come any farther than the living room door.

I left the apartment, and I left Clinton Street, and I don't think anyone saw me go. I hoped.

I went straight across town to my place on Mt. Prospect Street. I was changing my clothes, just in case somebody had been nosy and might start talking to the police about a short, fat man in a blue suit. I didn't have time to grow a moustache, but a brown suit might help.

I walked in cold, and there he was sitting comfortably on the sofa with a short-barrelled Colt hanging from his hand across his knee. The gentle-faced man who had been with Wild Man Lutz in Foxy's apartment the night before. Moose. Clemmy Moose.

He came slowly to his feet and said in a hard voice. "You took long enough. Turn around."

He shifted his gun to his left hand and came toward me. I turned. He put the muzzle of the gun into my ear. I never felt anything colder. He reached under my coat and snapped out my gun. Then his hand went over me and he wasn't gentle.

"This all you carry?" he demanded.

"Hell, no. I've got a Buck Rogers

atom gun up my sleeve."

"Shut up!" The gun went away from my ear. "You seen Foxy this morning." It was a statement.

For a moment I was sure and I swung on him, hoping to tag him before his bullet tore into me, but he caught me half way around with the heel of his hand and I went skating into a chair and fell over it. He put his gun straight down on me.

"So it was you," he said with grim satisfaction.

I scrambled up snarling, "You damn fool, I just came from there! Weren't you satisfied with beating her up last night? What was the matter, did she hurt Lutz' pride by taking the brush-off with a laugh?"

He backed up a step and said, "Wait a minute."

I came around the chair, and he said louder and sharply. "Wait a minute, damn it!" And backed up another step. He let his gun hang at his side. "You say you just came from there? Straight from there?"

If he had yelled or made his voice tough, I wouldn't have stopped, but he sounded bewildered. I growled, "What now?"

"I was here a half hour before you came in. I came from her place. She was dead then."

"And is that all the gun you carry?" I taunted him. "Don't you have a .22 on you someplace? A little gun that makes a hole no bigger than a nailhead? Aren't you Lutz' private killer?"

He drew his big hand down his forehead and nose and over his mouth.

"Let's have a drink," he said. He took a deep breath. "I guess maybe we both need one."

I looked at him hard. He walked past me and sat on the sofa with his hands hanging between his knees, but he still held his gun and mine was probably in his pocket.

I GOT out a bottle of Old Bushmills and a pair of glasses from the cellarette. I gave him a glass. He watched the stuff come up to the rim, then let it go down his throat as if he were throwing in from left field.

"I ain't Lutz' killer," he said heavily. "I ain't nobody's killer. Except maybe my own, once or twice." He held out his glass, and I filled it again. "I didn't kill Foxy, but I surer'n hell am going to get the one that did." He regarded me moodily. "I don't think it's you. But it might be that pal of yours, the one that called while I was waiting. Denver Parkow." He grinned mirthlessly; it was all teeth. "He thought I was you. He said he found out something and you didn't have to work on it no more. He said something about the Swede putting out more moola on the fight than the Swede ever seen. He said, come over and he'll tell you about it. We're going over and let him tell us, being he's such a talkative fella. He sounded higher'n a kite and I didn't even have to get in a word edgeways. You're driving."

He stood and motioned me toward the door with his gun. His eyes were dark and melancholy and looked as if they didn't care whether I went or not. You can do something with a guy who's sore, or a guy who's drunk, or even a hophead—but the sad ones will pot you every time. They're beyond giving a damn, one way or the other. We went down to the heap still parked in front of the door.

He said dully, "You take me, pal. And I don't like Jersey scenery. I want to go straight there."

I took him straight to the Glen Appin. No arguments. It might have bothered me one time bringing a gun-sick mug like Clemmy Moose in on a

pal, but Parkow had made a tie-up with Whitey Larsen again, and I was beginning to feel that Bunch Lasker had been right when he said—suckered!

We went in through the Grill Room and came at the elevators that way, instead of through the lobby. That was Moose's idea. On mine I drifted in front of him until we came to Parkow's door. He went flat against the wall beside it.

"Ring," he whispered.

I rang. I began to sweat a little as I heard footsteps approach. If there was gunplay and Moose went down, I was in for it from Parkow. If Parkow went down, I'd be in for it from So-So Harmon. Moose had my gun. There was nothing I could do about it.

The door swung open. It wasn't Parkow. And it wasn't So-So Harmon. It was Whitey Larsen, and in his hand was a long-barrelled .22 target gun with a big front sight. It was angled up at my face.

A grin split his square face. "Well," he said, "if it ain't the smart punk! If it ain't the wise guy. And you know, it's a funny thing, I was expecting you. Ain't that nice? Here you're coming, I said to myself, so, I said, why not have a nice party for the fat slob. Only we ain't going to play poker. Remember?"

He was talking too loudly and too much. His eyes flickered hotly, and his grin didn't quite stay put. It danced gleefully on his lips. He was hopped.

"Come in, come in, you old grunt. I'll tell you what we're going to play." He stepped three paces back from the door and I walked slowly in. "We're going to play," he went on, "Button, button, where's the button? Ain't that the damnedest thing for two guys to play?" He guffawed. "Only me, I play it different. See, I got the button in the gun here. Then I shoot it off and the button hides itself. If you find it, you win. It's a pushover, because you don't even have to find it. It finds you. Now ain't that a new wrinkle?"

I WALKED into the small living room. Parkow was sitting in a lounge chair facing me. He didn't move or say anything. His head rested against the back of the chair, and his hands were limp on his thighs. I shot a quick look at Whitey over my shoulder. He grinned and nodded.

"Yeah, yeah," he laughed, "Him and me, we just got finished playing button, button. He won. He found it. Before you showed up, I was waiting for the dame, the blonde. I wanted to play with her. Not button, button."

"And Foxy Miraday?" I managed to say. Rage at this clown was tearing at my throat, fighting the words. I swung around and faced him. "And Foxy Miraday?" I repeated harshly.

He nodded gleefully. "She won, too. See, punk? You're always a winner."

The door was open behind him and Clemmy Moose filled the frame, bulking tall, even over the Swede. His gun was like a rock in his hand, while the Swede's danced from one part of me to another.

Moose said softly, "Turn around, you lousy squarehead."

The Swede pivoted as if he were on ball bearings and their guns went off together. Moose didn't move, but Larsen danced forward on his toes, his arms flipping out from his sides. He went down in a heap. Moose kicked at the .22 that had fallen at his feet.

"I wish I could have made it slower," he said. He looked at me. "My great grandfather or something was a Choctaw. He would have said this rat died too easy. It's in the blood, I guess."

I said, "Did he get you?"

"Hell, I didn't even hear it."

But he was right. It had been too

fast. There was a question I wanted to ask the Swede. Just one.

Moose walked over to the body and went down on one knee beside it. He lifted the head by the hair. "High," he muttered, "High and to the left." He let go and the head bumped against the floor.

He started to heave himself up, and I got him on the way, right across the back of the neck, and if it had been a thinner neck it would have cracked under all I had on it. He went down with his face against the back of the Swede's knees. He didn't even twitch. I put my finger under the hinge of his jawbone and felt the artery bump, and that was all I wanted to know. I slipped my gun from the side pocket of his jacket and got out of there, but fast.

I didn't want So-So Harmon to walk in on me with her man lying there dead. I don't like to have to shoot women, but it would have been the only way.

I didn't stop to call Sam Riegel until I was well downtown. He said he was glad to hear from me, and this time he wasn't kidding. He wanted me in McGowan's corner with him.

"No better place to see a fight, Dinny. The best in the world."

I had to fight to get as far back as ringside—but it was still right at his corner. He was a scared monkey.

I hung up and leaned for a minute against the side of the booth. It was going to be pure relaxation to see two guys doing it with nothing worse than gloves on their hands.

I LIKE a fight crowd. They're all elbows and feet and they're noisy and they smell, but there's a crisp tension in the air that you can feel at your fingertips.

I spotted Bunch Lasker and one of his thugs in the lobby, and he spotted me just about the same time and turned with a scowl and said something to his boy, who immediately searched the crowd with his eyes, not finding me. A friend of mine. But that was last night.

I found my seat and let myself flow into it. I was tired. I closed my eyes.

A heavy, famiiar voice said in my ear, "I'm seeing you after the fight, boy."

I opened my eyes. Clemmy Moose was in the seat beside me, and in the aisle a tough-looking character was scowling at a ticket in his hand.

Moose followed my eyes and said, "I asked him to swap with me. I was a little ways back where you can see better."

"You look as if you had the blue crut," I said.

"Yeah. I got things on my mind. We'll talk about it later."

There was nothing else we could do. Everything was lost in the roar of the crowd as Tuffy McGowan came down the aisle, followed by Sam Riegel and two characters in sweat shirts.

The red-headed kid climbed through the ropes and danced in the middle of the ring with his hands clasped over his head. He grinned from ear to ear as the roar intensified. He went to his corner, did a few knee-bends, rubbed his feet in the resin and looked back over the crowd for the Champ. He didn't like waiting up there alone.

Lutz kept him there for five minutes, then came down swathed in a royal blue robe. His ovation was well larded with boos and whistles, but he took it without a wink. He was a cold potato. He threw his robe over the ropes to one of his sweatered attendants, mitted the crowd perfunctorily, and sat on his stool, talking to Lou Faas.

Officials, newspapermen and photographers milled in the ring for awhile, and after that came the endless introductions and announcements. Finally

the referee crawled into the ring and the crowd noises fell back, like surf from the beach.

The boys went to the center of the ring to him, paused, touched gloves and walked back gravely to their corners.

AT THE bell, Tuffy McGowan shuffled out with his left held stiffly in front of him and his right cocked under his chin. The Champ came out easily with his hands held chest high, the left a little higher than his right.

He put the left into the kid's face a few times, slammed a hard right to the body and clinched when McGowan tried to counter. The referee parted them, and they went around and around until the bell rang. It had been a nice, restful round.

McGowan came out faster in the second and broke through to land a hard right and a hard left but they were high on Lutz' head. The Champ went behind his gloves and let the kid waste a lot of steam battering against them. He came out and peppered Tuffy's face with a tattoo of light lefts, swayed back from a swishing right, then went in again with both hands to McGowan's stomach. He tied the kid up then pushed him away before the referee got to them and sent over a right to the jaw that set the kid down on his cushions. He was up at three and ran into another flock of lefts. He didn't try to cover, but went in with both hands. The bell rang.

Sam Riegel was up on the ledge outside the ring, leaning over and whispering urgently into the kid's ear and McGowan kept nodding and nodding.

The third round started with a lot of boxing from Lutz, and just when it looked like another dancing lesson, they were suddenly toe-to-toe and slugging with nobody ducking anything. The crowd went up with a roar.

McGowan broke first, but it was just lousy footwork. He tried to slide to one side, under Lutz' left, and he tripped. Off-balance, he frantically back-pedalled. Lutz leaped in with a slashing right and McGowan spun around and went headfirst through the ropes, down among the reporters and tickers, thashing on the floor.

Lutz stood, crouched, his head swinging and his arms still moving. He slammed through the referee and went over the ropes and down on McGowan, and the two of them stood slugging in the aisle until the crowd bore them apart and thrust them back into the ring.

The radio commentator was hysterical into the mike. "What a moment, folks, what a moment! The Champ felt the surge of blood lust and—"

There were a million guys in the ring, all swinging their arms, and over in one small corner, still slugging, were Lutz and McGowan. The bell was going like a fire gong, and Riegel and Faas and every attendant they had fell on the fighters and carried them bodily back to their corners.

It took me back to the Dempsey-Firpo go, and the days of needle beer. I watched the circus peaceably. A nostalgic moment.

The officials were conferring and both managers were hissing into their boys' ears. The referee ran to the middle of the ring with both arms over his head and yelled, "The fight will continue, starting Round Four!"

And it was still three minutes before the bell rang.

McGOWAN danced out, fresh and grinning, but Lutz was slower and it looked as if he were favoring his left leg, maybe from the jump from the ring. Tuffy circled him, then went in fast with a left and right. The Champ fell

back and in an instant McGowan was on top of him with a left hook to the body, a right to the jaw, a left to the jaw and another hard right to the jaw, and the Champ fell into the ropes, clawed at them and slid to the floor on his hands and knees, weaving his head. I couldn't hear the ref, and I was at ringside, but I could see his arm pump up and down.

I leaned toward Moose and whispered, "He crossed you, Clemmy. He cooked your Moose. He had it in the third and he spit it up a rope. He's too smart for that. He crossed you!"

The ref's arm was swinging down "eight!" when Moose heaved himself out of his seat with a bellow and charged to the edge of the ring where Lutz was swaying, and roared, "Get up! Get up, you bum! Get up, if you know what's good for you! Get up!"

The last I saw of him, the Garden cops had pinned him close and were hustling him up the aisle. It was just as well. The rest was lost as the ref's arm came down for "ten!" and he lifted McGowan's arm and the crowd exploded and spilled itself over the edge and into the ring.

I jumped into the press into the aisle and fought my way toward the exit, which is easy when you have a police wedge, as Lutz had, but I was on my own, and it was like trying to row out into the breakers at Sandy Hook.

Over the continuous roar, I heard a shrill voice calling, "Keogh! Dinny Keogh!" but I was so wedged I couldn't see who it was.

I beat my way to the dressing rooms. There was no one at Lutz' door. I slipped my gun into my pocket and opened the door quietly.

LUTZ was sitting on the rubbing table and Lou Faas was standing beside him. In a corner of the room were two sweatered stooges, one with a bucket in his hand, and standing in front of them was one of the two hot-eyed gunners I had seen with Whitey Larson in *The Tropics* the night before.

They were all looking tensely in one direction, and it wasn't mine.

They were staring at the floor in front of the rubbing table, where Clemmy Moose was lying on his face, his right hand outstretched and twitching, a scant foot away from his gun. It stopped twitching.

I eased my gun out of my pocket and said to the red-hot, "Freeze, hophead."

He froze, with the gun hanging at his leg. He looked at me from the side of his eye without moving his head.

Lutz leaned forward, resting his hands on the table, and said hoarsely, "Keogh!"

"Yeah," I said. "Dinny Keogh. Your body-maker Whitey Larsen kind of slipped a little, didn't he?"

He darted a quick, searing glance at his gunman and said tightly, "Take him! Take him, you hear me! Take him!"

The man with the gun said, hardly moving his lips, "Take him yourself."

I heard the door open behind me, but I moved too late. The hophead's arm was a blurr as his gun came up, but he didn't fire the shot that rang out.

His gun dropped from his hand and blood streamed from his fingers after it. He moaned and leaned against the wall, covering his right hand with his left and folding it into his stomach, bending over as if he had cramps.

Behind me a tight feminine voice said, "Let go of it, Keogh."

I let my gun bounce on the cement floor. I turned. It was So-So Harmon. The gun she held looked four sizes too big for her, but she wasn't having any trouble holding it steady. She closed the door and, reaching behind her,

locked it.

"That makes it all mine," she said in a burnt-out voice.

I said, looking straight at Lutz, "This is Denver Parkow's woman." His arms scarcely held him up.

So-So held her gun steady on me and said dully, "You're first."

I kicked at the gun I had dropped. "Does this look as if I were among friends?" I said thickly. My mouth was suddenly dry. I wasn't scared. I was jellied. "Lutz is your man, baby. He had Denver gunned by Whitey Larsen because he was asking too many questions and was getting too many answers. Don't believe me. Ask him." I threw out my hand at the dark-hair man against the wall.

For a moment her gun hung steady on me, then swung slowly on him. "Give," she ordered.

His eyes stabbed at Lutz. "Ask him," he said sullenly. "He sent Whitey out. I didn't."

So-So snapped, "God damn it, stop kicking the ball around!" She put her gun on me and held it there. "Now! You tell me, and make it count!"

I WET my lips. "That story in the *Dispatch*, that's what got Denver," I said. "He got too close, and in the end he found that Whitey Larsen was betting more money than a guy like Larsen could logically bet. And when he found how Whitey was betting it, he was tipped off. Only Denver had talked too much. So he got it. Right?"

She nodded and said, "Keep going."

"Then there was Foxy Miraday. You don't know about her, but she was Lutz' girl, and she knew a lot about him. She knew, for instance, that Lutz was too old—over thirty—to turn in a good fight anymore against good opponents. She told me he worried about his money, watched the financial page, watched his back account. Then, out of the blue, she said he had every cent he owned on the fight tonight. That was not the move of a cautious guy like Lutz.

"Unless—the fight were fixed. Unless, say, McGowan was fixed to take a dive. And McGowan wasn't fixed.

"So, Foxy had to go because she knew too much about Lutz. She didn't add up what she knew, but if she had seen that third round tonight she might have realized—she *would* have realized and maybe spilled what she knew. She had to go.

"And I had to go. I had to go because I was with Denver Parkow and because Foxy had talked with me. Just before Whitey was gunned, he told me I was next. Foxy, Denver, Keogh—one, two three, Add it up.

"Whitey was tied in with Lutz. In fact, Whitey called Lutz last night and told him Foxy was shooting her mouth off to me, and that I was hooked up with Denver. Why should Whitey do something like that?

"So now that Whitey's in the picture, you know damn well where he got all that money to put down on the fight—the money that gave Denver the tip-off.

"He got it from Lutz and he was putting it on McGowan!

"Lutz was going in the tank for McGowan. He was going to take a dive, clean up and retire from the ring. Look at the odds he got. He was set to make something way up in the big G's. Five to one, and every cent he had in there working. A clean sweep.

"But then came that third round. That was the only time Lutz lost his head. But he didn't lose it when he jumped out of the ring. That's when he caught humself. He lost his head the way a pug would. He had McGowan off balance, and he did instinc-

tively what a smart fighter would—he went in for the kill and knocked McGowan out of the ring.

"What a minute for him! Standing there alone in the ring watching every cent he had in the world floundering around down there in the press row while the ref counted six, seven, eight . . . Cleaned out, penniless, and too old to fight long enough to get it back. I'll bet sick wasn't the word for what was going on in his belly!

"So out he went—but not after McGowan. After the big money. Hell, he'd killed two people for it, and thought he'd killed three. He wasn't letting three ropes stop him then. In the fourth he took it on the chin and went down. He even faked a bum leg. No more chances.

"Now you're back to that threat story in the *Dispatch*. Lutz wrote it himself. He sent it to the *Dispatch* because he wanted it printed, so the headlight would be on McGowan and even a crook like Sam Riegel wouldn't send his boy in to take the dive. He wouldn't dare. And Lutz had to have McGowan in there fighting to make it good.

"But the picture gets prettier as it goes along. Lutz crossed his own manager. He crossed his woman and had her shot, and his best friend, Clemmy Moose, had his last dime on the Champ to win. How many others he crossed, I don't know, but I'm sure he was set to send Moose out after Whitey, just by telling him Whitey gunned Foxy, because Lutz knew how Moose felt about the girl. Then. . . ."

Lutz broke, and faster and harder than I had expected. He was over the table and his swinging legs caught So-So and staggered her against the wall. Her gun clattered down the room. He scooped up my gun and turned it on her. It made no more noise than clapping your hands.

But I was behind him. As quickly as he turned, I had the red-hot's rod and let him have all I could get out of it, angling up from the floor.

He stopped, his knees together and the gun sagging in his hands. He tried to put it on me, but the effort was too great. His face drew together, tied in a knot with unbearable agony and he fell straight forward.

I jumped for So-So and held her from the floor, but she had taken too many too close and there was blood in her mouth.

"A square eye," she whispered. A grin ghosted at the corner of her mouth. "That sure is one for Einstein!"

DOUBLE-TROUBLE

IF IT pays well to act as counsel for one side of a case, it must be even more lucrative to handle both sides. Or at least so thought one woman attorney in Chicago when she arranged, by using a friend's name, to defend both persons in their counter-suits for divorce.

For a time it seemed like a sure thing. When the husband in the case received his divorce he paid his fee of $200. The wife, however, considerably angered by the turn of events, called the matter to the judge's attention. Found guilty of contempt of court the attorney was fined.

WHY IT'S SCOTLAND YARD

SCOTLAND YARD took its name from a lodging of the Kings and Queens of Scotland when they visited the English Court. Adjoining "Scotland" was York Place, the London Palace of the Archbishop of York. In 1519 Cardinal Wolsey acquired from the Westminster Abbey authorities the "parcel of land formerly belonging to the King of Scotland," as the grant describes it. In 1529, Henry the Eighth dispossessed Wolsey of York Place and joined it to the new York Palace of Whitehall. In an Act of Parliament of 1531, defining the boundaries of the new palace, reference is made to the "Croft or piece of land commonly called 'Scotland'." The plan of this palace, as it was in Stuart times, shows at the northern end a double court or yard named "Scotland Yard" because it included ground once known as "Scotland." —*Frank Lane*

The shower of coins fell at her feet and her eyes flashed with sudden anger

You Can't Run Forever

By PHILLIP SHARP

What made it such a busy night were a tough stranger, a lovely redhead and a few guys who meant to settle an old score

I WAS sitting in a local saloon, catching a few quick ones, when I saw him for the first time. He was bigger than most men and broader. But that wasn't what got my attention. I puzzled over it as he sat down at the stool next to me. What was it about the man that seemed different? What set him apart? I studied him surreptitiously over the rim of my glass. Our eyes met.

"Want my autograph, Jack?" he said. His voice was flat, a monotone. He might just as well have asked me to have a drink. I gave him a chicken smile.

"Sorry," I said. "No offense."

He turned his attention to the drink the bartender had put in front of him and, despite my good intentions, I went

back to studying him. Whatever it was about the man that was different suddenly seemed to center in his clothes. He was well dressed and the suit he was wearing was obviously brand new, yet something I couldn't quite put my finger on stuck out like a sore thumb. What the hell, I thought.

Just then the big man turned toward me and caught my eye again. Before I could move a muscle he had hopped lightly off the stool and was towering over me. Now, I'm not a coward—which is to say I'm not frightened until there is really something to be afraid about. This was something to be afraid of. What would I do if he took a poke at me? The skin on the back of my neck tightened. It's a good trick but I can do it only when I'm scared. I was scared.

"You've been watching me for ten minutes. Recognize me?" Again his voice was that cold impersonal thing that said nothing.

I put aside the suicidal impulse to say, "There's no law against looking at a guy." Instead, I said, "I know it's bad manners to stare at a stranger, but you remind me of someone I used to know in Altoona. Ever been there?"

Something like interest flickered in his eye. "Yeah," he said. "I was born there. What was this guy's name?"

I improvised hastily. "Morgan. In the lumber business."

He shook his head. "Never heard of him. You say he looked like me?"

"Oh, not really *like* you. It's just that something about you reminds me of him." I was sweating a little now.

Then he surprised me. "Come on, I'll buy you a drink."

"Sure," I said. "For old time's sake in Altoona."

We had a few back and forth. But I wasn't feeling any easier in my mind. He was still a pretty strange customer even if he was buying drinks. He had a healthy bankroll, I noticed.

I was getting higher all the time, but no matter how much I drink there is always a little department in my thinking that stays clear and objective. It has saved me in many tight spots. I don't claim any credit for it—it's just a physiological freak. The little department was working furiously now, warning me not to get involved with this guy.

But if *I* was getting drunk, the big fellow was getting paralyzed. He reacted to the liquor like a man who hadn't had a drink for a long time. He had some curious habits. He paid for the drinks with large sized bills from his heavily stuffed wallet, then when the change came, he scooped up the crumpled bills and silver, stuffing them into a side pocket of his suit. The thought occurred to me that he was passing phony dough. The same idea must have occurred to the bartender, because I saw him take one of the bills to the boss for a check. It must have been all right, though, because he was back serving us and making change again.

SUDDENLY the big guy became confidential. "Listen, he said, looking furtively around to see if he was being overheard. "I'm gonna tell you something."

"Yeah?"

"This guy you mentioned in Altoona . . . what was his name?"

I thought hard. "Morgan."

"Yeah," he said with satisfaction. "Morgan. *What* Morgan?"

"Uh—Charley Morgan. In the coal business."

"You didn't say coal business before," he said severely, trying to sit up straight.

The little department was working overtime. "I said lumber business. He's

in the coal and lumber business."

That seemed to satisfy him. "Okay. Well, I'll tell you something."

He was breathing heavily in my face. "I'm gonna tell you something," he repeated with ponderous slyness.

I drew my face back. The fumes from his breath were stronger than the whiskey I was drinking. "All right," I said peevishly. "Tell me."

He closed one eye. "Charley Morgan is my brother."

I wished he were as non-existent as his alleged brother.

"That's fine," I said. Then, maliciously, I asked, "Is Charley still in Seattle on business?"

"What? Oh, he came back."

"I'm glad to hear it. I always worry about Charley, flying his own plane around the way he does."

"Yeah," he said uncertainly. "It's risky."

"Elaine worries too."

"Elaine?"

"His wife."

"Oh, sure. His wife." Morgan (that's what I started to call him) got off the bar stool. "Let's get out of here. I want to go some place where I can spread my wings."

"Okay," I agreed. Once I got out of this place, I thought, I'd be able to shake him somehow. But it wasn't going to be so easy, I found. Morgan took me by the arm as though he were escorting a girl. He called a taxi and bundled me in ahead of him. I didn't hear the directions he gave the driver.

Inside the cab he leaned back against the cushions with his eyes closed breathing softly. I studied him again. *What was it that kept knocking at my mind for recognition? What was it that I saw and yet didn't see?* All at once it came to me! Without any logical, directed thinking, my mind had of its own volition threaded its way to a conclusion. The clothes he was wearing were the last word in style—*for 1929!* Nothing unusual about old clothes, lots of people wear old clothes, but these were brand new. Hadn't been worn more than a couple of times. It was as though he had bought the suit, put it in the closet and gone to sleep for fifteen years. Gone to sleep for fifteen years? That was it! What takes a man out of circulation for fifteen years so he doesn't need civilian clothes except the army or —*prison!* I discounted the army idea at once. Prison was the answer, all right. But what sends a man to jail for fifteen years? A murder rap could be the answer.

Without moving, his eyes were open and on mine. Still without moving he spoke. "This is the time."

I put my hand on the door handle with the wild idea of throwing myself out. "Time for what?" I asked.

"Time for another drink." He pulled a bottle out of his topcoat pocket.

IN A sheer excess of relief I ignored the clamoring of the little department and took a long pull on the bottle. Morgan did the same. By this time we had arrived at our destination. I peered out. We were parked under a brightly lighted theater canopy. One glance was all I needed to tell me that it was a burlesque theater.

Morgan paid the cabby with a big bill from his wallet and carelessly stuffed the change into the side pocket of his suit again. He bought our tickets and we went in. I'll admit that a seat up close is a desirable thing at a burlesque show, but it seemed to me that sitting in a box that extended on to the stage and made us as conspicuous as the performers, was a little too much of a good thing. Unconsciously I tried to pull my head into my shoulders like a turtle.

The show was already on. A chorus of lackadaisical girls were going through an extremely uncomplicated routine. It was the customary unmatched assortment of babes one sees in the line at burlesques. All shapes, colors and sizes. Morgan was leaning well over the railing of the box. It only confirmed my suspicion that he was just out of prison. Only a man who had been away from *all* women for fifteen years would be interested in this chorus, which was about as exciting as a delegation from the Old Ladies' home.

After the chorus had tottered off into the wings, a tall, well-upholstered blonde did a solo of what was supposed to be a dance. She stripped down to a G string with only mild applause from the audience. Mild, that is, from everyone but Morgan. The guy was actually drooling at the blonde. And she played back to him. His handclaps sounded like pistol shots. It didn't seem to bother him that he was the only one in the theater applauding. But at last he let her go.

We took a few more drinks from the bottle while the next act was on. It was a slapstick comedy routine with red-nosed, baggy-pants comics. The jokes were the same ones I had been hearing in burlesque for twenty years. When they pulled that one about why do firemen wear red suspenders, I got unsteadily to my feet and stood reverently at attention with my hat over my heart. Morgan pulled me down into my seat with drunken exuberance. We had another drink.

Then the first nice thing of the evening happened. A stunning red-head came on with a little fanfare from the band and went into a dance. The gal had a terrific figure which was very much on display beneath her skimpy costume. Her face was just a shade too sullen for real beauty, but with a figure like she had, it was enough that she had the normal amount of eyes, and a nose in the middle of her face. Surprisingly enough, she was a legitimate dancer. Not a big talent, you understand—Eleanor Powell had nothing to worry about yet—but good enough so that she didn't trip over her own feet.

MORGAN was interested in her too. He was sitting up, weaving a little, pounding time with his fist on the box-rail. The red-head finished her number, got more applause than the blonde stripper, and came back to do an encore. Morgan suddenly started pulling money out of his coat pocket and throwing it on the stage. Fistfuls of bills and silver. The audience roared with delight and then happily began showering the stage with pennies. The red-head stood it for a few seconds, then, after giving Morgan a murderous look, she walked off into the wings.

"What's the matter?" Morgan asked stupidly. "She wasn't through, was she?"

"You just killed her act, that's all." I told him.

Morgan was penitent. "Gee, I didn't mean nothing. I just wanted her to know I liked her. Hey, maybe we'd better go see her—I want to apologize." He got up.

I tried to pull him down. "Let it go, Morgan," I said. "She'll brain you with a cold cream jar if you see her now." Then I added pacifically, "We'll come back tomorrow if you want to. She'll have cooled off by then."

But the big fellow was obdurate; so, willy-nilly, I found myself walking through the short alley from the street to the stage door. Nobody was at the door to stop us and we went right in. The chorus was lining up for the finale.

"Where is the red-head?" Morgan asked one of the girls.

The girl gave him a startled look. "What?"

"The red-head," he explained. "The girl who danced."

"Oh. She's in her dressing room." She jerked her head vaguely toward the rear.

We walked around a maze of ropes and pulleys in the direction the girl had indicated, when we saw her. She was dressed for the street. She saw us at the same time and came to meet us. Her face hardened.

"You got a nerve coming back here," she shot at Morgan, "after crabbing my act. If you want your dough, see the janitor. He swept it up." Then summoning an insult she added, "Good-time Charley!"

"That's his brother," I said.

She turned on me. "Oh, another comedian, eh?"

Morgan interrupted. "Listen, baby, I'm sorry I queered you. I wasn't trying to be a wise guy. I just wanted to show you how much I liked your dancing."

She sniffed, but I could see she wasn't so angry. "A nice way to show it! What if a talent scout had been in the audience? You might have ruined my career."

I had a vivid mental picture of a talent scout lurking in burlesque houses unearthing fresh talent. She must have seen something in my face, because she said, "What's the matter? Don't you think any of the big entertainers came from burlesque?"

"Sure," I said. "That's where they found Margaret O'Brien and Lassie."

Morgan shouldered me aside. "Don't start anything." Then he turned to the girl. "How about taking a few drinks with us?"

"We-ell," she said, "I was just on my way out to dinner."

"All right then—dinner. It'll be more fun than eating alone."

She gave me a kind of nasty look. "I'm not so sure."

But she took his arm anyway, giving him a smile that purposely excluded me.

"All right. I'll eat with you. It will give you a chance to make up for what you did."

"I'm coming too," I reminded her, a little nettled at being pushed out of the picture.

"I can't do anything about that," she said. "I'm not in the Immigration Department."

BY THE time I thought of an answer to that, we were already on the street and on our way to a restaurant. I might just as well not have been with them for all the attention they paid me. The red-head (she told us her name was Myra Cheney) was hanging on to Morgan's arm and he was all eyes and ears for her. A couple of times they didn't even answer when I spoke. Now was my chance to get away from the big lug—and he'd have welcomed my leaving him now—but that red-head had burned me up just enough so that I wanted to hang around. Maybe I'd think of something nasty to say to her later.

I realized suddenly that we'd been walking for ten minutes without getting any place. "Hey! Where are we going?" I asked.

The red-head looked at me. "Are you still here?"

"Sure," I said. "I'm haunting you."

"Why don't you find an empty house instead and leave me alone."

"Hey, you two," Morgan broke in. "Why don't you lay off each other." He turned to me. "If you don't act polite to Myra, I'm gonna send you home. You're spoiling my evening."

There it was. I could bow out

gracefully and go home in a mild huff. But I didn't want to go home. The red-head would have loved that. She had scored all the points so far and I was determined to get even.

"All right," I said. "I'll behave, only tell her not to play so rough. I'm a sensitive guy."

The red-head smiled—but not too pleasantly. "I'll be gentle with mama's baby. I'll handle him with kid gloves."

"That'll be better than the boxing gloves you've been using," I said.

Morgan beamed at us. "That's better. I want you kids to get along. Now let's all have a drink." He pulled the bottle out of his coat pocket.

"Make mine anti-freeze," I said sourly. "Every time this dame opens her mouth, she gives me a chill."

She made a big thing of it. A mockery of being sorry for me. "Oh, is the poor man cold? Let's make him warm." Nothing would do but I had to put on Morgan's topcoat. And that made me look twice as silly, standing there in a coat about three sizes too large with the old-fashioned huge roped shoulders. Morgan, falling in with her mood, insisted that I wear it.

It was then that I noticed the two men about thirty yards behind us. Dimly, I realized that I had noticed them ever since we had left the theater, but it hadn't registered with any special significance until now. Just to make sure I wasn't imagining it, I maneuvered a turn at the next corner. Halfway down the block, I glanced back. We were being followed all right. The two men, still about thirty yards back were in the shadows of the buildings, adjusting their pace to ours.

Why were we being followed? A stickup? Hardly. Two blocks back would have been an ideal place for that. Now we were about a block and a half from a well-lighted intersection. I was about to say something about it to Morgan, when a sedan with headlights blacked out came down the street, slowing up for the two men to jump on the running board. Before I could organize myself to any kind of action, they had pulled abreast of us. The two men hopped off the running-board and came at us with pistols.

Morgan stepped back, with his hand going to the inside of his coat. Myra, who was no fool, grabbed his hand.

A MAN stepped out of the back of the sedan. He was expensively but conservatively, dressed. His face, a disciplined mask, told me nothing. He walked with cat feet across the sidewalk. Morgan started.

"Galen!" For an instant his voice was uncontrolled.

"Who else?" The man was completely master of himself and the situation. I couldn't help admiring his confidence, his poise. He completely ignored Myra and me. His eyes bored a hole through Morgan. "I've been waiting for you, Fryer, to give you a proper homecoming. It's the least I could do for a friend who has been away for twenty years."

Morgan had recovered some of his defiance. "Seventeen years. You're forgetting the time off for good behavior."

"Of course." Galen made a small gesture instead of a face as anyone else would have done. "Silly of me to forget it—especially when I had been counting so *much* on your good behavior."

Morgan's eyes darted to the two stolid men holding guns on us. They were like two statues.

"And how nice of you to bring a committee along to welcome me. Are you going to kill the fatted calf or the prodigal son?"

Again the gesture. "I see you haven't wasted your time in prison, Fryer. Spend a lot of time in the library?"

"I worked there. Would you like to hear about my career in jail?"

"I'd like nothing better. In fact that's what I'm here for . . . to take you home with me where we can have a long talk about old times."

"I'll go with you," said Morgan. "But let these kids go. They don't know anything about me. I just picked them up for laughs."

"I'm afraid they will have to be my guests too," Galen said flatly. "It's going to be a big party."

"Listen . . ." Morgan took a threatening step towards Galen. I called out warningly to him, but I was too late. One of the gunmen brought his pistol down with vicious force on Morgan's head. Myra buried her head against my shoulder.

The chauffeur got out of the car and helped one of the men dump Morgan in the back of the car.

"I'm afraid Fryer's education is merely a veneer. He reverts to the physical under stress." Galen might have been talking about the weather.

Myra was staring at him wide-eyed. I don't think she was really afraid. A little shocked maybe. I was scared, though, and together with a maddening feeling of impotence, aching to do something violent. However, I had too much brains to start anything.

A little foolishly I asked, "What are you going to do with us?"

"And what are you going to do him," Myra broke in, motioning to the automobile.

"That depends on a number of things," Galen said. "I'm really a very good-hearted man. If you're all very sensible—especially Fryer—this will only be an interlude of a few hours. If you have any influence with Fryer, it would save a lot of trouble if—"

One of the men shifted impatiently. Galen got it. "All right," he said. "Get in."

There wasn't much point arguing, so I let Myra get in first. As I stooped to get into the car, I was warned by a faint shuffling of feet balancing for a blow, but I didn't move quickly enough to dodge. A blackjack hit me on the back of the head. I had the strange jarring sensation of jumping fifteen feet to concreate. Then I blacked out.

THE first thing I was aware of was the pain in my head. After a few moments, voices were buzzing around, trying to make sense, but they only sounded like double talk. Then:

"—and even if I did know what this is all about I wouldn't tell you a thing." It was Myra's voice, spunky as hell.

I opened my eyes. I was lying on a couch in a huge sunken living room. One side of the room was made up entirely of French windows instead of a wall. The place had the impersonal splendor of an interior decorator's touch backed by a big bankroll. Painfully I raised my head. Galen was sitting languidly with his legs crossed. Opposite him was the red-head.

Galen was talking. "You seem to think I'm playing some sort of game, young lady. Believe me, I'm not. You've seen too many movies—"

"I've seen enough to appreciate how corny this is," Myra snapped.

I tried to get into a sitting position. One of the men whom I hadn't seen was standing over me.

"Hey, boss," he called. "He's comin' back."

I finally managed to sit up. Myra came over and took hold of my hand.

"Are you all right?" she asked it like she meant it.

"I'm okay." It was nice having the red-head hold my hand and I had no intention of being a big strong man.

Galen came over. "I'm afraid Gus was over-enthusiastic with the blackjack. No ill effects, I hope?"

"Nothing—if you discount the back of my head feeling like a sponge. Gus didn't pull a muscle or anything, did he?"

Gus smiled crookedly. "If I'da known you was a copper you wouldn't have had a head left."

"Copper? What are you giving me?"

Gallen tapped a wallet he was holding. It was mine. "Don't try to be a Boy Scout. We know all about you. Your identification card says you're a private investigator. You won't deny that, will you?"

"Of course not," I said contemptuously. "But that doesn't make me a copper. My work is tracing missing persons. I suppose looking for kids who have run away from home makes me a Sherlock Holmes."

"I don't know," said Galen. "But we'll find out. Right now I'd like to know how well you know Al Fryer?"

"Fryer? Oh, you mean Morgan. I never saw him before tonight. I met him at a bar, then we went to a burlesque where we picked up the girl. That's all."

"I see you've all got your stories pretty pat."

"That could also mean it's the truth, couldn't it?"

"Possibly," Galen admitted. "We shall see."

A door opened and the chauffeur and the other gorilla dragged Morgan in. And I mean dragged. He was unable to walk. His hair was water-soaked. Apparently they had revived him by dousing water on him. After he had been dumped into a chair, Galen, his hands toying idly with a flexible twelve-inch ruler, spoke to him.

"Don't make up your mind to be difficult, Fryer, because I can make it tougher for all of you than you can possibly imagine."

I could feel Myra shiver with her hand in mine. I didn't feel so good myself. Morgan swayed a little. That rap on the head hadn't done him any good. I was certain that the reason he couldn't walk was due to same injury to the brain.

"Well," said Galen. "What are you going to do? Make trouble?"

"I wouldn't trust you for a second," Morgan said thickly.

"I happen to be holding the whip, which doesn't leave you much choice in this matter. But as an evidence of my good faith, why do you suppose I had you and your friend knocked out before I brought you here? It was so after we had concluded our little business, I could let you all go knowing that the location of this place was a secret."

Morgan laughed shortly. "More likely so we couldn't call a cop on the way. What did you do with the girl?"

"We merely stuffed a gag in her mouth and held her in a somewhat undignified position till we arrived here. There she is." He pointed to us.

MORGAN saw us then for the first time. He tried to smile reassuringly, but it was a pretty sad effort. We smiled back. I guess it was about as sad.

"Now then," said Galen. "There's a matter of eighty-five thousand dollars I'd like cleared up."

"No part of that money is yours, Galen."

Galen bent the ruler almost double like a rapier. "What are you saying, Fryer? Weren't we all in the bank stickup together? Didn't I plan the whole thing?"

"Including having one of your boys

kill a guard and leave me to take the rap for it, I suppose!"

"That was unfortunate. Nobody could foresee what would happen."

Morgan gripped the arms of the chair. "Galen, I've had seventeen years to think it over. I know you tipped off the cops to my hideout, but you didn't know then that I had the money. *Deny that!*"

Galen sighed. "Very well, it's true. It doesn't matter whether you know or not. Yes, I was going to throw you to the cops to cool them off. It wasn't in the book for you to grab the money. Now tell me: *where is it?*"

Morgan jeered. "Wouldn't you like to know!"

The ruler swished through the air and landed on Morgan's face with a crack like the snapping of a stick on a frosty day. The flat of the ruler raised a welt on his cheek, the metal edge drew blood.

I felt like I was going to be sick. Myra closed her eyes and tightened her grip on my hand.

"That's nothing," Galen told Morgan. "I'm just being playful. Now tell me where the money is."

Morgan shook his head. Like a tennis player using forehand and backhand, Galen hit him a half dozen times. His face puffing and bleeding, Morgan again shook his head even before any question had been put.

"You won't get nothin' out of him that way, Boss," said Gus. "Let me have a crack at him."

Galen nodded for Gus to go ahead. Unable to close my eyes, I saw Gus draw back his clublike fist and smash Morgan with a blow that would have taken the head from my shoulders. Morgan's mouth was a gory mess. Gus drew his fist back again. This time I had to close my eyes. I heard the blow land. Then again . . . and again . . . again. . . .

I couldn't stand it any longer. I had to do something—anything to stop it. I made a sudden rush for the French windows trying to create a diversion. They weren't locked. I rushed out on a flagstoned terrace. I realized I wasn't being followed. Without slackening speed I raced across the terrace and was brought painfully and abruptly to a stop by a short stone wall. Dangling halfway over, I was looking thirty stories down into the street. Shakily I climbed back to the terrace. Galen was standing there.

"Go on," he said. "You're free to leave. And that's the fastest way down."

"No, thanks," I said, still trembling from that look down. "I prefer to leave the way I came."

BACK in the living room, I sat with Myra again. Morgan was an indescribable sight. A less strong man wouldn't have been able to survive. Gus, I saw, was now wearing a glove. After a few minutes spent in bringing Morgan to, he started in again. Then the chauffeur took over.

Myra's face was on my shoulder. Every time a blow landed she made a retching noise. If I hadn't had her to look out for, I'd have been sick myself.

They were talking to Morgan again. Mopping his bloody face with a wet sponge. Gus was shaking him.

"Just tell us where you've hidden the money," Galen said. "And I'll let you all go. Is it in your apartment? Where have you got it?"

Morgan mumbled something.

Galen spoke quickly. "2062 Mayrose. Write that down, Gus." Then shaking Morgan again. "Is that where the money is? Come on—talk!"

Morgan looked up dully. Then he raised his arm trying to point. It

seemed as though he were pointing at Myra. All at once he collapsed. Even I could see that they wouldn't bring him to with water. This time the guy would need a doctor.

Gus's eyes narrowed with suspicion. "The dame? What was he pointing at her for?"

"What difference does it make." Galen was impatient. "I don't think he ever saw them before tonight." He spoke to the chauffeur. "Get Harry and meet me downstairs with the car. We'll go out to 2062 Mayrose and tear the place apart. Gus, you stay here with these two."

They stretched Morgan out on the couch, and then herded us into a bedroom off the living room. Gus left the door open but was out of our line of vision some place. I heard Galen leave with the others.

Desperately I searched the room for a weapon, but there was nothing I would dare use against a pistol. Myra watched me helplessly. I sat down beside her on the bed, defeated. Despairingly I looked around the room. A few lamps . . . some pictures on the wall . . . *Pictures!*

That was it! Quickly I took two pictures down and removed the picture wire. I knotted two lengths together. Then, working against the wall so I couldn't be seen from the outside and praying that Gus wouldn't come in to check on us, I screwed the eyescrew on which the picture had hung, into one side of the door casing. It was the work of a few seconds to screw the other eyescrew into the other side of the casing. Then I drew the wire tight.

Myra had been watching me with wide-eyed wonder. I hastily explained the plan. She was quick, all right. She knew what I was saying before I had finished. She nodded. We walked back in a straight line from the door to the far end of the room, so that Gus could see us from the living room. Then we began our play.

"No you won't," I shouted. "I'll kill you first." I grabbed her by the throat and she began to scream. The screams were pretty realistic.

"Louder," I whispered. She increased the volume.

"What the hell—" Gus was standing about twenty feet from the door with his gun in his hand. This was it. I shook her.

"No," I yelled. "You'll never live to tell where the money is!" I must have been pretty hammy, but Gus didn't take much convincing.

With a bellow, he sprinted for us. The wire caught him, just as I had figured, in the neck. His feet shot out from under him and he lay there, quivering. His gun slid to Myra's feet. She handed it to me. I didn't wait for any formalities. I just walked over and kicked him in the groin. That would give him something else to worry about, besides not being able to swallow for a couple of weeks.

I was just starting to lift Morgan from the couch when the phone rang. Startled, Myra and I stared at each other. Gently I put Morgan down. The phone rang again. Gingerly picking up the receiver, and making my voice anonymous, I said, "Yeah."

IT WAS Galen. He was talking fast and seemed excited.

"Gus?"

"Yeah, boss."

"Listen. We've just taken this place apart and the dough isn't here. That guy and the girl must know where it is. Keep an eye on them. We'll be right back. Do you get that? Gus!"

I hung up slowly while he was still talking. Myra was watching me intently.

"What is it?" she asked.

"It was Galen. They didn't find the money. They'll be back soon." Having said it aloud reminded me that this was no time for fooling around. I picked up Morgan again. He was breathing shallowly. I don't run to muscle, and ordinarily Morgan would have been a terrific weight for me, but there is an old saying to the effect that you never know how much you can do until you have to do it. That's the way it was. I don't even remember if I had to exert myself to carry him.

We took a private elevator down and when out to the street through a private exit, probably the one we were brought in through. Once on the street I looked at the building. It was one I knew well by reputation, one of a row of cooperative apartment houses occupied by wealthy people. And just money wasn't enough to buy an apartment in one of the buildings. You had to be Somebody, otherwise a blackball from only one tenant would be enough to keep you out. The address spoke volumes for Galen's place in the community.

There didn't seem to be much sense in going out on the street carrying Morgan, so I put him down in an alcove of the building.

"Keep an eye on him, Myra. I'll scare up a taxi."

She nodded, and settled herself in the shadow with Morgan's head in her lap.

The street was deserted. It was one of those semi-private drives where the only traffic would be people going or coming to one of the buildings. I walked to the corner, but couldn't find a taxi. Just as I was thinking I would have to go three blocks to the boulevard, a sedan turned the corner, rubber tires screaming at the pavement. I recognized the car as Galen's. It stopped in the driveway and the three men tumbled out, racing into the building.

I hurried back to Myra. "Did you see—?"

She seemed to have gone to pieces. "Listen—"

"Let's not waste any time. They'll be down in a minute. Come on, we'll grab their car."

She didn't seem to understand. "But—"

I picked up Morgan and practically had to carry her as well. The boys had considerately left the motor running in their hurry to get upstairs. I eased Morgan gently in the back, pushed the red-head in the front and jammed the accelerator down to the floor getting away. It was like being able to breathe again after being under water for a couple of minutes.

"And now," I said, "well see if the police will be interested in Mr. Galen and his friends."

Myra plucked at my sleeve. "I-I think Morgan—" Her voice trailed off. I took a quick look at her. She was a little green.

"What's the matter, honey?" I said. "Knocked out?"

Her voice came faintly. "I'm trying to tell you. I think Morgan is dead."

"WHAT!" I pulled over to the curb. It didn't take a doctor to see that Morgan was gone. He must have died sometime after I had carried him downstairs. My plans were knocked for a loop. I climbed back under the wheel wondering what the hell I was going to do now.

The red-head had pulled herself together. "Is he dead?"

"Permanently," I told her. "And now we're really in a mess."

"Why? We'll just tell the police what happened."

"We'll just tell the police what happened," I mocked. "They'll give us medals and we'll get on the radio and make speeches."

She looked at me, bewildered and a little hurt.

"Don't you get the picture, Myra? With Morgan dead it's our word against Galen's. We were seen with Morgan tonight; Galen wasn't. You and I are nobodies and Galen seems to be a very important guy. Why, if we went to the police with our story, they wouldn't be satisfied just to put us in the pokey—they'd give us straitjackets as well. In fact, I hardly believe the story myself. Are you sure we haven't made all this up?"

Her eyes went to Morgan in the back.

"Yeah," I said miserably. "It's true. Well, there's only one thing to do now. We'll ditch the car—yes, and Morgan, too—and get as far away as we can till we think this thing out."

"Leave him—just like that? It—it seems so—"

I pretended a callousness I didn't feel. "What do you suggest? That we take him to the nearest bar for a few drinks? Or maybe back to the burlesque? He enjoyed it the last time he was there."

"Don't rub it in," she said. "I don't know what I'm saying or doing."

"Neither do I," I admitted. "But I do know that we're going to have to do something quick. And just the two of us," I added significantly.

"Oh, all right," Myra said spiritlessly. "I suppose you know best."

"If I do it's from instinct and not from experience."

I drove to the edge of the downtown district where cars were parked twenty-four hours every day. I figured nobody would pay any attention to a parked car and that with any kind of luck it might remain undiscovered for a week. I didn't think Galen would report his car being stolen. Anyway, it was our best bet.

We took a bus to my apartment, not exchanging a word during the trip. I was thankful that I had an unlisted phone in case Galen got the bright notion to look for my address in the phone book.

"So this is where you live," Myra said, looking around the untidy mess the apartment always was.

"This is it. Maybe it needs a woman's touch."

"It would take a brigade of women to straighten this place out." She was becoming herself again. A couple more insults and she'd be back to normal.

"Well, amuse yourself while I change. Then we'll have a council of war and take notes on each other's headaches."

I slipped out of Morgan's topcoat. Not really expecting to find anything—Galen was pretty thorough—I went through the pockets. I wasn't disappointed. A few match books, a key to his apartment on Mayrose, most likely, and a street car transfer folded into an impossibly small square which bespoke incredible strength. I hung up the coat and quickly changed into a dark suit of nondescript cut that I used in my business when I wanted to make myself as self-effacing as possible.

"Well," she said, when I came out of the dressing room. "You look like a new man."

Then we both said together, "—and it's an improvement."

I BROUGHT her a drink, poured one for myself and sat down.

"Now let's face it," I said. "In a short time—hours, days, or maybe a week—the cops are going to be looking for us. It won't be hard to establish that you and I were the last living peo-

ple to see Morgan, which, of course, logically makes us the fall guys. Separately or together, sooner or later, somebody will recognize us and yell copper."

"If we only had a baby," she murmured.

"That would take time," I pointed out.

"I mean for a blind, stupid."

"Don't call names; remember we're a team. Besides it's bad enough now without picking up a rap for kidnapping. Anyway, what we've got to do is get away for a while till we can figure something out. Not that there seems to be much hope of that right now. The chair will entertain motions from the floor. Miss Cheney?"

"Don't be so democratic. I'll do whatever you say."

"Fine. This isn't very brilliant but it's the best I can do off the cuff. We'll get the late commuter's train to Lake Trent. It's only ninety miles out of town which leaves us close enough to operate and nobody will ever notice us in the commuter crowd. We'll think up our next move out there."

"How long will that take? Dreaming up the next move, I mean."

I shrugged. "Who knows? Maybe a couple of years."

"I think I'd rather go to jail," she said, making a face. "I spent a weekend once at Lake Trent, picnicking, and believe me it was no picnic."

"I know what you mean—the place is the Siberia of creation, but that's just why we're going there. It's enough of a resort town to pay no attention to transients and not popular enough to be filled with people we might know."

I threw a few things in a zipper bag, more to give us the appearance of vacationers than for any reason of utility. Just as we were getting ready to leave Myra's red hair hit me in the face.

"Hey, wait a minute!" I said. "Why don't you wear an identification tag? Or carry a sandwich board saying 'I am Myra Cheney'."

"What are you talking about?"

"The hair, honey. The *red* hair. It's a tipoff."

"Oh." For no reason at all she looked in the mirror, then got her compact out and started to apply fresh makeup. "I suppose I could cover it up somehow. Do you have a large handkerchief or maybe a bandanna or babushka left over by some obliging young lady visitor?"

"My only lady visitor—before you—is the woman who comes once a week to clean. And she isn't obliging—about anything," I added.

I dug down in one of the drawers and came up with a flashy silk kerchief I had bought last year, but never had the nerve to wear.

"Will this do?"

"Why, it's perfect. And in such good taste." She fastened it over her head, concealing most of her red hair. Enough, anyway, so it didn't scream at you. "There, how's that?"

"Fine. Now all you need is a mask."

"Won't that attract too much attention?"

Then we both said together, "—yes, but it will be an improvement." There was no getting ahead of her.

WE HAD to stand in line at the station to get our tickets. When my turn came, I said, "Two for Point William."

She piped up, "I thought we were going to—"

I stepped on her foot—not very gently—got the tickets and joined her at the bench where she had gone to nurse her foot.

"What's the matter with you?" she demanded. "First you say we're going

to Lake Trent, then when I try to tell you you've made a mistake, you try to cripple me. Is this thing getting you down?"

"I'm sorry about your tootsie," I said, "but you certainly had it coming. Wouldn't we be a shrewd pair if we bought tickets for Lake Trent so we could be easily traced? Point William is a stop beyond Trent where, of course, we're going to get off. Do you dig it?"

"Oh, sure. What am I worrying about? Modern science will probably patch up my foot so it can't be told from a baseball bat. It's lucky I only dance for a living."

"You can do bumps on your knees," I assured her. "And now let's get on the train before it gets crowded. I wouldn't like to stand for two hours."

She was still muttering under her breath as we got on the train and sat down. From the occasional stray phrases I made out, I gathered that I was the subject of some very unflattering remarks. A little bantam of a man with a waxed moustache and butterfly ears was sitting behind us. He leaned forward.

"I beg your pardon, Miss. Is something bothering you?"

His breath was two parts whiskey one part beer and one part onions. I had an urge to follow up and mix well. Myra turned to him, with a phony martyred look.

"Yes," she said and pointing to me. "Him. He beats me."

"Only at gin rummy," I said.

"Your husband?" the little man asked sympathetically.

Myra nodded. "I was so young."

I snorted. "Young she says. Listen, I was her third husband."

"My second," said Myra.

"Third."

"Second."

"We'll leave it to this gentleman," I said. "Would you call a common law marriage, which is recognized in this state as legal, a bona fide marriage to be included in the count?"

The little man was distressed. "I—I really couldn't say—"

"Well," sniffed the red-head. "If you're going to include every casual relationship I've ever had with a man I suppose that would make me the world's champion."

"Now you're talking. Mister, let me tell you what she did with a one-armed Javanese in Newark last May."

"It was April," Myra murmured.

"Excuse me." The little man was getting up. "I just remembered I've got to see a fellow in the smoker." He fled.

"Listen," I said to Myra. "We're supposed to be inconspicuous. What are you trying to do—give a floor show?"

"You tried to cripple me. Am I supposed to take it laying down?"

I leered, but didn't say anything.

"You should give your mind a thorough cleaning with DDT."

She settled down in the seat and closed her eyes.

WHEN we arrived at Lake Trent, there was the usual rush of commuters to waiting automobiles. I grabbed Myra's arm and walked towards Main Street. Strangers hanging around the station would be remembered.

"Where are we going," Myra asked breathlessly, trying to match my pace.

"I recall some tourist cabins near the highway, it seems to me. It shouldn't be crowded at this time of the year. I can't think of anything else. Can you?"

"It sounds all right—and for Pete's sake, slow down or get me a bicycle."

"Sorry," I said, and reduced my pace.

The Evergreen Cottages was the name of the tourist camp. A shifty-eyed character, who introduced himself as Mr. Gromilkin, the proprietor, greeted us.

"Sure, I got an empty," he said. "Where's your car?"

I gave him the story I had prepared. "We had a little accident down the road. It's being repaired. I'll pay in advance."

Gromilkin accepted the money I gave him, then looked knowingly at Myra and said, "I hope you and your —er—wife will find the cabin comfortable."

I played along with his filthy little animal mind. "We don't want to be disturbed, you understand?"

"Of course—of course. I know how it is. Say, I'm no blue-nose." He gave Myra one last greedy look before he left us.

Myra exploded. "What a disgusting man! Did you see the way he looked at me? God, I feel dirty all over!"

"Take it easy," I soothed. "Anybody who's been renting cabins as long as he has can tell an unmarried couple at a glance. You can't blame him for what he thinks. In fact, it's better this way."

I turned to look out of the window. Up till now I had been moving like a fleeing animal, without planning or thinking. That's all right for running away, but I realized that we couldn't run forever. My head was beginning to ache so I couldn't concentrate.

"Hey," Myra called from the kitchen. "Somebody left a can of coffee here. How would you like a cup?"

"Wonderful," I called. "Do you know how to make it?"

"I'll have you know I'm a good cook. I'll have coffee ready in a few minutes."

We sat down to drink coffee out of the cracked cups and chipped saucers the cabin boasted.

"How do you like it?" Myra asked anxiously. "Is it good?"

"It's hot," I replied evasively. Then, "I wish there was something we could do about your hair. It's dangerous the way it is now."

"So I've been told."

"Don't preen yourself, my pigeon. We're not talking about the same thing. Say! I wonder—"

"What?"

"I wonder if coffee grounds wouldn't make a good dye . . . ?"

"Oh, no!"

"Oh, yes. You can bury your vanity. This is self preservation."

"You're so smug! I hope that halo drops and strangles you!"

I HELD her head over the sink while she dipped her hair in a pan of hot water and coffee grounds.

"There," I said at last. "Now we'll see how it looks when it dries."

"Oh, how I hate you," she said, looking in the mirror. "You've ruined me."

"It's not so bad," I said. "Only we sort of overdid it when we dyed your neck as well as your hair."

"You dog!" she wailed. "You dog, you dog!"

"I'll bite your ears off if you don't quiet down. This is no beauty parlor. Come on, let's get some sleep."

She was sniffling a little as she started to pull the zipper on the side of her dress. I sat on the wicker couch smoking a cigarette.

"What are you looking at, you moron?" she said. "Turn around."

"Don't mind me. I've seen you with practically nothing on. Remember?"

"That was different. I was working then. Face the wall."

Reluctantly I turned away. "All this fuss," I grumbled. "A thousand men

can see you prancing around with an ounce of clothing and all of a sudden you turn coy on me."

"It isn't the same thing at all. That's an audience. It's—it's impersonal. Besides, I'm not going to marry *them*." I heard her pop into bed.

"As if that's a reason," I scoffed. "I suppose—" Then I did a double take. *"What did you say?"*

"You heard me."

"But," I said dazedly, "it sounded like you said you were going to marry me."

"That's what I said."

"Darling!" I started to get off the couch.

"Stay where you are," she warned. "It isn't legal yet."

I sank back. "But that's wonderful! I can't believe it."

"It's the only way I can get even with you."

Dreamily, I said, "We'll be so happy honeymooning in jail."

"At least I'll always know where you are."

The idea of jail sobered me. The couch, too short, was causing my back to ache. An uneasy feeling that way back in some corner of my mind there was something I should examine, was disturbing me.

Myra spoke up. "What's the matter? Do you want to back out?"

"I should say not," I said. "I was just thinking of us—this jam we're in . . . Tell me, what do you—did you, that is—think of Morgan?"

"How can you ask that? Wasn't he trying to get us out of the whole mess, not worrying about himself? I thought he was very brave."

"Yes, that's what I thought. He took a lot of punishment and still his only thought seemed to be not to implicate us. But how do you explain his pointing to you at the end, when Galen asked him where the money was?"

Her voice was troubled. "I've thought of that. Only I didn't think he was pointing at me. I thought he was pointing at you. But I can't understand why."

"All right, so he was pointing at me. Now let's look at this thing logically. Morgan had taken a great deal of punishment without talking. Then, after protecting us all evening, he suddenly tried to give Galen the impression that we knew where the money was. Why? *Why?"* Then I caught my breath. It couldn't be! It was too wild! Yet what else? I jumped to my feet and switched on the lights. Myra sat up in bed, holding the blanket over her.

"What's the matter with you?" she said. "You look crazy."

"I am," I told her. "And I've got a wild idea that we have to investigate. If Galen is as smart as I think he is, he'll have the same idea. We've got to go back to town right away."

"What is it?"

"I can't tell you. If I'm wrong it doesn't make any difference, but if I'm right, it would be dangerous as hell for you to know. Come on, get dressed."

She was a wonderful girl. Without asking any more questions she dressed quickly although she must have been eaten up with curiosity. Twenty minutes later we were standing on the highway trying to flag a lift.

DAYLIGHT was just breaking when we began thumbing. An hour later, in the bright clear light of day we still were trying to be picked up. Cars whizzed by without even slowing up.

"They do this much better in the movies," I said glumly, as another car went by, tooting its horn derisively.

"Don't give up, darling," said Myra. She stepped squarely out into the road in front of an oncoming automobile.

With a screech of brakes the car came to a halt.

"Are you nuts?" the driver demanded, sticking his head out of the window. "Do you wanna get killed?"

Myra gave him a big smile. "I'm so glad you stopped. I've got to get my brother in town to a doctor. A matter of life or death."

The man thawed under Myra's smile. He motioned briefly. "Get in." Then, as we scrambled in and started off: "What's the matter with him?"

"Why-uh-it's a pretty rare disease. Something he picked up from an African pigmy. It affects his sense of balance."

"It ain't catchin'?" the man asked in alarm.

"Oh, no," Myra assured him. "—except from pigmies."

"Well," said the man, far from reassured, "if you say so . . ."

We rode along for an hour. Myra was listening with wide-eyed interest to the driver's unbelievably boring account of an adventure he had had in a clip night club. I was busy with my own thoughts. Suddenly the radio music in the car was cut out and the announcer's voice broke in:

"We interrupt this program to bring you a news flash. Today, just outside the downtown district, the body of Al Fryer, recently released convict, was found in an abandoned car. Even hardened police officers were shocked at the battered condition of the body. According to the medical examiner, Fryer was beaten to death. A state-wide police net is being thrown out for the last two people who were known to have been with him. They are a man and a red-haired girl. She is Myra Cheney, a dancer. The man is—"

Myra looked archly at the man. "How do you know that isn't us?"

"Well, in the first place you ain't got red hair, and in the second place you wouldn't be goin' to town if you were." He was pleased with the soundness of his reasoning.

Twice in the next half hour programs were interrupted for the same news bulletin. At last our driver stopped.

"This is far as I go. I hope your brother is okay. It's his balance, huh?"

"Yeah," I told him as we got out. "My bank balance. I'm overdrawn."

We got a taxi. I wasn't foolish enough to give my address. Instead, I merely told the driver to go down my street past the house. Just as I had thought, there was a police radio car parked in front of the house. We got out a block away, dismissed the cab and walked back. The apartment building next to mine was built flush against the wall of my building. We went by the police car into the next building. The elevator took us to the top floor. Then up the stairs onto the roof. I lifted Myra across the masonry partition to my roof and hopped over after her.

For the first time she showed uneasiness. "This seems awfully risky. What do you expect to do?"

"I'm just hoping," I told her grimly. "I've made up my mind that if this doesn't work—if I'm wrong—that we're going to give ourselves up anyway, so we're really not losing anything."

LUCKILY the roof door was unlatched. We walked down eight flights to my floor. Outside my apartment, I had misgivings about the outcome. But I was too far in now to go back, even if I had wanted to. I put the key in the door and we went in. I heard the red-head gasp and turned to see Galen and Gus standing in the doorway of the bedroom. Gus was holding a gun on us. He looked at me murderously.

"So," said Galen, his face as much a mask as ever. "It's you two. This is a rather unfortunate meeting. May I ask what brings you here?"

"The same thing that brings you here," I said.

"Bravo. You figured it out, too?"

Myra didn't know what it was all about, but she came loyally to my defense. "Certainly he figured it out. You haven't got the market cornered on brains."

Galen waved a hand toward Gus. "In any event, I seem to have the market on muscle."

"How long have you been here?" I asked.

"A minute before you. Your key in the door gave us quite a start. I was afraid it might be the police."

"What are you going to do with us?"

For the first time there was a ghost of a smile on his face. "Is that a sensible question? You will be disposed of, of course. Thank heaven for these modern sound-proof buildings."

"But not soundproof enough to keep a shot from being heard," I reminded him.

"Oh, yes. If the gun is held against you. And then it will also look so much more like suicide. Especially if Miss Cheney is found strangled in the same room." Swiftly he grabbed Myra, holding her arms helplessly against her sides. He nodded curtly in my direction.

Gus advanced slowly on me with his pistol held waist high. I stopped breathing. Slowly he came on. Just as he was abreast of Myra and Galen, she lashed out with a dancer's high kick at his gun hand. He didn't drop the gun, but for an instant his hand was knocked aside. I tackled him in a flying leap almost from where I had been standing. We went down together upsetting the telephone table. Still holding his gun wrist with one hand, I picked up the telephone and started clouting him over the head. I might as well been hitting him with a feather. He wrenched the telephone from me and threw me to one side. But I didn't let go of his wrist. I don't know where the strength to hold on came from. Dimly I realized I was being hit from all sides now. Gus with his free hand and Galen from above with something that looked like the leg of a chair. Still I hung on.

Then when I knew I'd have to let go—the room was beginning to spin like a merry-go-round, the door burst open and uniforms started pouring in. Blue, my favorite color . . . blue . . .

It seemed like hours, but it was only a few minutes later, that I opened my eyes. I was on the couch. Myra was putting a cold cloth on my head. The room was full of people, mostly cops. I recognized a stocky plain clothes man from the central office by the name of Logan. He seemed to be in charge. He came over when he saw I was awake.

"What's the story here?" he growled. "The dame won't talk, you're asleep—"

"Ask them," I said.

"Ask who?"

I sat up painfully. Then I saw that Galen and Gus were lying on the floor, toes up.

I said, "So they won't talk, eh?"

"They made the mistake of pointing a gun at a policeman," Logan said briefly. "Now, what's it all about?"

Still shaky, I got to my feet. With my fingers crossed I went to the clothes closet. Morgan's coat was still there. I brought it back into the room.

"This was Fryer's coat," I told Logan.

"All right," said Logan impatiently. "So it was Fryer's coat. So it's a little out of style. So what?"

I took out my pocket knife and

opened the seams of the big over-padded shoulders. Neatly sewed in the padding, thousand-dollar bills were distributed there. Eighty-five of them.

Logan's eyes popped. "The bank dough!"

"Right," I said. "And now I know why they say money never brings happiness."

LOGAN snapped his notebook shut. "That's it, then. I'll take it down to headquarters. You can come down later and sign a detailed statement. Anything else?"

"Yes," I said. "There's one thing. How did the police get here so quick and what tipped them off?"

Logan smiled. "We had the telephone wire tapped. When you knocked the phone over, we radioed the car downstairs to investigate right away. Simple."

"Sure," I said. "Simple. Nothing could be more so."

After every one had gone, I turned to Myra. She was crying.

"Don't cry, honey," I said. "It's all over."

"All over!" she flared. "Look at my hair!"

"Oh, that," I said. "I love you for little things like your face, your figure and your skin. Besides your hair will grow back."

"How about my disposition?" she asked.

"Really, darling," I said. "Suppose we don't talk about that."

THE END

THE ORIGINAL GOLDBRICK

A SWINDLE which is almost as hard to believe as the sale of the Brooklyn Bridge —is that of the sale of gold bricks. The invention of this infamous racket can be credited to Reed Waddell, an American citizen, we are sorry to say, who was born a few years before the outbreak of the Civil War. Despite the fact that Waddell was a member of a prosperous and highly respected family, he soon succumbed to the ways of a thief and a cheat. His family cast him out of the house and breathed a relieved sigh when he was gone.

In 1880 at the "tender" age of twenty-one he appeared in New York with the first gold brick ever offered for sale. True enough, part of it was gold. But there was a greater quantity of lead in its composition than one might suppose at seeing its triple gold-plated outer rough coat. To aid in the disguise in the center there was sunk a small slug of solid gold. The brick was marked in the manner of a regulation brick from the United States Assayer's Office, with the letters "U.S." at one end and below them the name of the assayer. Underneath the name appeared the weight and fineness of the supposed chunk of solid bullion.

Waddell's method of relieving a sucker of his money was the very obvious one. After interesting the fellow in this supposed sale of a gold brick at a bargain price, he showed his anxiety to be "fair and honest" by taking his victim and the brick to an assayer to test its genuineness and estimate its true value. Always the assayer was an accomplice, a man who could act the role in a convincing manner. Waddell saw to it that he had the proper setting to the act with an office and equipment to suit the profession.

This man tested the brick, and if the prospect was still dubious, Waddell impulsively dug out the slug of real gold and suggested that the prospective buyer himself take it to a jeweler. This test, of course, showed the slug to be actually of precious metal.

Needless to say, Waddell's profits from this confidence game quickly soared. He sold his first gold brick for four thousand dollars, and after that never sold one for less than three thousand five hundred dollars.

In ten years of a rather active career it was rumored that Waddell was able to pocket more than $250,000 by the sale of gold bricks and supposedly counterfeit money, known as the "sawdust game." Waddell became a specialist at this last named racket. He was always able to find an accomplice to help him perpetrate his crimes. The sawdust game required two operators who simply sold the gullible victim a package of genuine money and then exchanged it for a bundle of worthless sheets of green or brown paper—or, if the currency was packed in a satchel, for another bag of sawdust.

It was not long before Waddell extended his crooked operations to Europe. There in Paris he met death at the hands of one of the members of his gang of swindlers—depriving the law of an act which they rated as a privilege in this particular case. Reed Waddell was gone forever.

—*A. Morris*

Meet My Murderer

by HENRY GADE

DAN HALEY, tall slender homicide dick, had a mere glimpse of the girl as he trotted up the steps to Centre Street headquarters. But just the glimpse was not bad.

She was wearing a two-piece summer suit made to fit a figure of about one hundred and ten pounds. And it fit, nicely. The girl, slim and dainty, had curves in the correct places and nice features and, if he wasn't mistaken, blond hair. It was just growing dusk, and along with the fleeting glimpse of her, he couldn't be certain. Besides, she was wearing a summer fur piece that partially concealed the back of her neck, and this was what he was looking at as he paused a moment, at the doorways, watching her inserting a key in the door-lock of an expensive-looking, low-built coupe.

Then he swung into the building.

But a moment later, lanky Dan Haley shot out of headquarters like a Notre Dame back going through a wide-open hole in the line. He took the stone steps four at a time. Halfway down to the sidewalk he roared: "Hey! Hey, you!"

The classy-looking coupe was just pulling away from the curb. It eased out into traffic and started to gather speed.

So did lean-jawed Dan Haley. His long legs pumped. He hurtled between two machines that were parked bumper to bumper near a fire plug. He gained the street and kept going, pacing a truck that was behind the girl's car. The truck driver leaned out and yelled, "Hey, dope, you want to get killed?"

Haley paid no attention. The girl was slowing the coupe for a left turn at the corner. The homicide man leaped forward. He made the running board of the car, clung to door handle and the windshield frame support just as the girl cut her wheels left. He was almost thrown clear.

Hard muscles in his arms strained. His straight back was a ramrod. He thought his fingers would snap.

Then they were around the corner and the strain on his arms lessened. Clinging recklessly with one hand, he yanked the door open and eased his

A good cop lets nothing stand in his way, whether it be bullets, corpses, or a woman's lips. . . .

After wielding the shovel for a moment, Haley stepped back with a grimace. He had found the body

wiry form inside the car, into the seat beside the girl.

Instinctively her foot slammed down on the brake. Her slim hands froze hard on the wheel. She stared at Dan Haley—and he was normally a pleasant gray-eyed man not hard to look at—as though he were some sort of ring-tailed monster.

"Oh!" she cried.

The car came to a squealing stop. Behind them, other brakes yammered as tires burned against the pavement. The truck driver let go with an upholy blast of his horn.

In that instant, Dan Haley saw that her hair was blond. He liked her eyes better; they were blue-green and clear. She had a nice mouth.

But intense fear was in those eyes now. The girl slid away from the wheel, her wild eyes on Haley. Her left hand made a frantic clutch for the door handle.

Haley said pleasantly, "What's the rush? I want to see you."

She screamed then. She let out a yell that, Dan Haley thought, ought to stop traffic within a two-block radius.

Anger, for a moment flashed across his face. For Dan Haley, known from Broadway to Brooklyn as the ace of the homicide squad, detested publicity. He also disliked screaming women—and unless this one shut up in the next moment there were going to be a whole lot of curious bystanders crowding around her car.

He grabbed the girl's slender arm, shook her firmly and snapped, *"Will* you shut up!"

For an instant, her mouth remained open and she stared, too frightened to utter a sound. Haley took advantage of the interval.

"You were looking for a cop," he got in swiftly. "Well, *I'm* one. So what the hell you yelling about?"

He thought she was going to faint. She relaxed and swayed back against the seat. A shuddering sigh came from her curved lips. She gasped:

"Then . . . then you're not one of *them?"*

Haley didn't get it. So he flashed his shield. He said, "Lady, you were in headquarters asking for a detective who would be free to accompany you. Specifically, you asked for Dan Haley. Well . . . I'm him!"

Relief was swiftly in her eyes.

"Oh!" she breathed. "I'm so glad."

Behind them, seemingly all around them, car horns were making a boiler factory din. A uniformed cop strode over from the street intersection ahead. His heavy red face was grim. He waved an arm and bellowed:

"What's the blasted idea of . . ."

The man recognized Dan Haley and he looked startled. He said apologetically, "Sorry, sir. I thought some dame was blocking traffic . . ."

"Please drive!" the girl whispered beside Haley.

He slid behind the wheel, instantly liked the feel of the expensive machine. He grinned briefly at the taffic cop and nodded his head slightly in the girl's direction.

"She certainly could, couldn't she?" he said to the officer, and eased the car away from there.

FOR a block, he said nothing. Traffic was thick. Then he turned off at a side street and was able to give the girl more attention.

He asked quietly, "Now. . . who's after *who?* And why were you looking for a detective?"

Out of a clear sky, the girl said, "You were assigned to the Manhattan Trust case, weren't you?"

It was Dan Haley's turn to give a start. He swung the car into the curb,

yanked on the emergency brake and turned to stare at the girl's level blue-green eyes.

"What do you know about the Manhattan Trust job?" he demanded.

For the Manhattan Trust robbery was still the major case still marked "open" on the books at headquarters. A hundred thousand dollars in cash had been stolen in one of the boldest daylight robberies of a bank in New York. Two bank workers had been murdered. And though two of the escaping robbers had been shot down and instantly killed, no trace had ever been found of two other men who had accompanied them.

And one of those two was famous Skipper Maloy, never once located again since the time of the robbery. Skipper Maloy, along with a hundred grand in cash, had disappeared completely. That had been six months ago.

Though the bank robbery had not taken place in Dan Haley's district, he had later been assigned to the case. He had been given a free hand to investigate any angle of the robbery he chose, because, at headquarters, Dan Haley was known as the detective who knew every shady character in New York. He never forgot a face. He had probably solved more murder cases than any dick living. He knew more about what was going on in the underworld than crooks themselves.

And now, this girl, coming to him. . .

Puzzled, Haley prodded further: "How did you know about me?"

The girl was tense as she explained breathlessly, "I read about you in the newspapers. You name was mentioned a lot, at the time. They said you had been assigned to track down that killer . . . that Skipper Maloy."

Haley smiled tightly. "That was a gag to keep the reporters from crying for blood," he explained briefly. "They were riding the department plenty for letting a case like that go unsolved."

The girl nodded. "I know. I read a lot about the case."

Haley still didn't get it. "What is *your* connection with this thing?"

"I'm Mary-Ann Warner," she stated quietly.

For the second time within moments, Dan Haley gave a start.

"You mean," he started, "that your father is . . ."

". . . president of Manhattan Trust," finished the girl with a nod. "That's why I came to you. It's about father."

"Yes?"

HALEY was leaning forward, tense. If this girl had a lead that would crack that case—

The girl's trembling hand was clutching his arm. "You've got to help father!" she cried. "That's why I came to headquarters. I'd heard of your reputation. You've got to come with me and help him!"

"What do you mean . . . help your father?" Haley asked. "Is he in trouble?"

"No! But he's going to be. You see, this person called him today from New York. He's coming up to see father tonight. He's threatened father, besides warning him not to contact the police. And so you've got to stop a murder!"

Haley stiffened. "*Stop* a murder?" he demanded. "Look, miss, I try to *solve* them!"

"Yes, I know." The girl jerked her pretty head, "but this time you've got to stop it before it happens. It's my step-brother. He says he's going to shoot this stranger as soon as he comes to see father. So don't you see? You've got to *stop* him!"

Dan Haley's thoughts were racing. He had handled some cockeyed assignments in his day; but this was a new one. Stop a murder. He wondered if perhaps the girl's imagination wasn't running away with . . .

He prompted, "But look. Why would your brother want to kill a guy . . ."

He didn't have a chance to finish, because the girl blurted, "Don't you see? Harold—he's my brother—has every reason to believe that Skipper Maloy is coming to see father tonight. I guess you'd shoot a man like Skipper Maloy yourself, wouldn't you?"

Haley swiftly had the car in gear again. He exclaimed, "I guess I would." He was usually pretty calm about crime cases. He was that sort of guy. But now he felt excitement tremble through him.

Skipper Maloy, killer! A bandit with a hundred grand hidden somewheres! A guy sought throughout the United States, Canada and Mexico. At the moment, Skipper Maloy was practically Public Enemy No. 1! If Haley could grab the killer . . .

He shot the car toward the next corner, swung right into a through avenue that would take them quickly uptown. He asked, "What part of Manhattan do you live in? I mean, the apartment building where—"

The girl looked worried. "That's just it!" she cried. "That's why we've got to hurry so! Father is up at camp. It's forty miles from here!"

The detective groaned.

Mary-Ann Warner was asking him to stop a murder—and at a spot still forty miles away! An impossibility . . .

He glanced quickly at his watch. It was just eight-thirty. He said, "What time was your father going to have this appointment . . . I mean, with this man your brother figures is Skipper Maloy?"

"Ten o'clock," Mary-Ann said. "If you hurry, you can drive to Peekskill in an hour. Follow the Sawmill River Parkway. The camp's at Lake Cacawanna, just outside Peekskill."

"You've made it in an hour?" Haley asked.

"Yes. Easily."

"Hold on, then," the lean-jawed detective suggested.

In three minutes, they were on the Elevated Highway that led northward out of the city, an express thoroughfare. Haley cursed his luck that this wasn't a police car with a siren. But still this machine had more power than anything they had at headquarters, and he had a good horn.

At 9:15 Haley was on the turnoff from the Parkway, the side highway that led toward Peekskill. At 9:20 he had swung onto another route that the girl indicated. It led to the lake, she explained. At 9:30 he had covered five miles of dusty, lonesome side road that skirted the long lake. Now and then a cabin was visible through the trees, illuminated briefly by the car headlights as they swung around one of the many sharp, narrow curves in the road.

At 9:35 Haley was quite positive that the car which had been behind them for the past fifteen minutes was distinctly on their trail.

HE HAD been watching the machine in the rear-view mirror; or rather, observing the car's headlights. They had swung in behind him at three different turning points before Haley had reached this winding lake road. And now, as the trail mounted into the hills surrounding the lake spot, he saw the twin lights, like moving firefiies, appear from time to time behind him.

He looked at Mary-Ann and said, "I think there's someone following us. I'm going to try a little trick. Don't

get alarmed."

The girl looked at him, puzzled.

Haley put on a new burst of speed, proceeded for perhaps three hundred yards before he located the break in the trees, alongside the dusty road. He swung the wheel sharply right, shot the sleek nose of the machine up into a natural lane between tall trees. He immediately snapped off all lights.

"Sit tight," he ordered, and got out of his side of the car. He stood in the gloom, waiting.

He heard the steady engine sound of the trailing machine. Shortly it was approaching. It shot past the spot where the girl's car was concealed as though the driver were in one hell of a rush.

Dan Haley tried to see who was in the car. He thought he saw two figures —men—in the front seat, but that was all. Then the heavy sedan had disappeared along the woods road. Quiet settled down over the lonesome spot. Somewhere—from the lake—perhaps —came the steady croaking of bullfrogs in the night.

The tall detective stepped back into the car and was hurriedly backing it out onto the roadway. He smiled wryly.

"Now we'll follow *them*," he announced.

"Who was it?" the girl asked, wide-eyed.

"That's what I intend to find out!" Haley said.

The girl had glanced at the illuminated clock on the dashboard. She gasped, "But we've got less than twenty minutes to reach the camp!" A new thought struck her, and she gripped Haley's right arm. "Do you think . . . that sedan . . . it could be the man who said he was coming to see father? Skipper Maloy?"

"That something else we'll find out," Haley said, as he forced the machine recklessly around the narrow, sharp turns.

What he hadn't figured on was the situation that lay directly ahead.

The sedan had been pulled quickly across the lake road. Its lights had been extinguished. But Dan Haley brought the long coupe around the turn just in time to see the two men piling out of the blocking car.

The two held guns in their fists.

DAN HALEY had been in gun fights in the past. Plenty of times. But never with a girl at his side.

He sent the machine skidding in a sidewise skid, had the left-hand door open and was rapping orders at the girl all in the same fleeting heartbeat of time.

"Get out! Run for the woods! Lie down there!"

The car stopped but Dan Haley was out on the ground even before the front bumpers ran down thin saplings growing alongside the road. His .38 was in his large fist. He ran in a crouch toward a protecting screen of trees alongside the narrow road. The whole maneuver had taken place within seconds. Behind him, he heard the girl scrambling through the underbrush. Then there was . . . silence.

Haley listened, straining to see the two figures who had leaped from the machine blocking the roadway ahead. Those were the two who had been in the sedan, for it was the same machine.

But he could see no one.

Then a gun blasted. The lead slammed through the leaves of a tree directly over the detective's head. Source of the gun flash was clear in his mind.

Haley took careful aim and fired. Lead spanged off metal, the sound echoing off into the night. He had hit only their car.

Another shot answered his own, then two more in quick succession. Haley was running now, bent low, keeping to the woods and trying to circle toward the spot where he had seen the two men leap from the car.

There were no more shots. Instead, the loud racket of running feet ahead. The sound faded.

Haley straightened, listening. He cursed softly. If this was an alleyway off Times Square or Broadway, he would be right at home. But trying to do a Daniel Boone trailing two escaping thugs in dark woods. . . .

Haley ran, his eyes slowly becoming accustomed to the night light. Off to his left somewhere, the frogs made their croaking sounds. And it was from this direction that the trampling sounds came. Heavy feet pounding through underbrush!

Haley tripped once, went into a sprawl, picked himself up quickly and kept going. He realized now that Mary-Ann's request was no imaginative gesture. Something was scheduled to happen here at the lake tonight. Could these two men be somehow connected with Skipper Maloy, killer?

Haley intended to find out, and damned quick. They still had to get on to their camp, he and the girl. She had said that her brother . . .

HE DROVE his legs furiously, seemed to observe a spot ahead that was somewhat lighter. The lake. That was it. He was coming out of the surrounding woods. He ran forward . . .

And pitched in a headlong dive down the embankment that was high above the shore at this point. Pine needles dug into his fingers. The heavy blanket of stuff was slick as glass.

He ended up with a jerk against an exposed tree root. The impact almost yanked his head from his shoulders. But he was still clutching his gun.

Off to his right, at the water's edge, there was the sound of oars rattling in creaky oarlocks.

Dan Haley waded out into the warm water, tried to get a view around a bend in the shoreline. An instant later, some distance away, the boat shot out into view. The man at the oars was frantically propelling the boat out into the wide lake. Already the small craft was a dim blur against the background of trees on the far shore.

"Hold it!" Dan Haley roared, leveling the .38 in his hand.

The man in the boat kept rowing furiously. At the same time, the detective swore.

For, wisely, the escaping man had headed into the shadow created by a tiny island off-shore. And around that island, at precisely this moment, appeared a light. Another boat moving down the lake. Perhaps a couple of vacationists unaware of impending danger.

Haley slowly lowered the gun and stared. Then he was back on shore, searching for a boat for himself. He saw none . . .

From behind him, filtering through the woods, came the roar of a car motor. He thought: the other one! The second man had gone back to the car.

Thinking also of the girl, of her precarious situation, Haley plunged back into the woods. As he ran he heard the intermittent racing and slowing of the car motor. From the sounds he judged that the driver must be turning around in the roadway. He was bent on escaping.

Several moments before Dan Haley reached the lake road again, he had heard the car motor roar for the last time. Then it was a fading hum in the night. He emerged into a cloud of dust

that swirled up over the road. And saw —nothing save the girl's car.

Worried, he shouted, "Mary-Ann!"

For seconds, there was thick silence. Then a faint sound in the night. This was followed by the girl's strained cry: "Mr. Haley!"

He ran down the roadway toward the source of the cry and shouted, "Here. Are you all right?"

The girl stumbled out of the woods and into his arms. She was trembling like a frightened faun. She stammered, "I . . . I thought maybe they had killed you!"

"Which way did that fellow go?" Haley asked, steadying the girl. He was sharply aware of a seductive, and yet delicate perfume on her hair. Her hat was askew, her suit torn in several places. Even in the vague light he could see, where one leg was exposed, that she was nicely built.

"It went back!" she said pointing. "But there was only one man in the car!"

"I know." He explained about the one who had escaped across the lake. "But there's no time to follow him now. We'd better get to your place first."

HALEY had helped the trimly built girl back into her car. They were proceeding deeper into the lake wilderness again. Earlier, Mary-Ann had explained to the detective that their place was at the very end of the lake, isolated from any other summer homes.

"Do you think," the girl asked tensely, "one of those gunmen could have been Skipper Maloy?"

For a moment, Dan Haley did not answer. He was driving as swiftly as he dared along the narrow road. His brain was turning over facts quickly.

As though reviewing a past situation for his own benefit, he said, "I don't know. Skipper Maloy was always a crafty character . . . not a man to go seeking a fight. He was only deadly when cornered. He was like a fox." He added, "That's why I can't understand . . ."

"What?"

"That if one of those two *was* Maloy, why he stopped for a gun fight. It isn't like him. He would be more apt to try for an escape."

The girl was abruptly pointing ahead. "Turn at the side," she directed.

Haley swung the car in between two stately elms. A well-kept drive cut through a lane of tall poplars. It hardly seemed that they were in wilderness now. It was more like entering the driveway of a Long Island estate, Haley thought.

"You call this place a *camp?*" he prodded.

"It's our summer place," the girl said simply.

Haley's cool gray eyes opened wider when the house came into view. Of block stone, with red tile, gabled roofs, it spread to right and left at the end of a circular turn in the drive. Haley estimated that the place must contain at least two dozen rooms.

He commented dryly, "Just one of those little summer bungalows like you see advertised in the papers!"

The girl gave him a brief smile, then her deep eyes were fearful. "Oh, I hope nothing's happened!" she exclaimed, and had the car door open before Haley had come to a complete stop.

"This way," she said, as he piled out after her. Both he and the girl looked, he realized, as though they had been chasing gophers through the woods. His own Palm Beach suit was a mess. The girl seemed unaware of her own appearance, so worried was she in getting into the house.

They were halfway across a patio that led to a wide veranda when both

drew up with a start, hearing the sound.

It was a dog's yelp, quickly followed by a series of whimpering cries. The cries seemed to fade—or weaken—then stopped entirely. There was something weird, upsetting, about the cries.

Light from a nearby window struck the girl's smooth features. Her face was strained, pallid. She looked at Dan Haley and said breathlessly, "That . . . that sounded like Duke!"

"Duke?"

"One of our dogs," explained the girl. "It sounded like he was *hurt*."

Haley took the girl's arm, urged her on toward a screened doorway.

"You're just upset," he said. But he wondered if his words were convincing. That animal's yelping *had* sounded mournful!

They entered the house through a wide, paneled center hallway. Just as they crossed the threshold a huge grandfather clock located against one wall gave forth a reverberating boom.

The girl gave a start, indicated the clock.

"Quarter past ten!" she cried. "Heavens, I hope we're not too late . . ."

HALEY shrugged, swept his around to indicate a deserted, wide library on their right, a living room off to their left.

"There doesn't seem to be anybody here at all," he said. He relaxed a little. Maybe this was all a—

But the girl had rushed on ahead, was heading toward a doorway at the rear of the long hall. Just as she neared the point, a woman appeared through the swinging door.

She had fat arms bared to the elbows. Her round, heavy face was flushed. She wore an apron.

"Anna," Mary-Ann Warner asked quickly, "have you seen father . . . or Harold? Who's here?"

The stout woman looked scared about something. She was next blurting, "Mercy, an' there's something terrible wrong on the place, ma'am! Your father . . . a little while ago . . . went running down across the terrace like he was after somebody. He said there was a man prowling the place! An' your brother, Master Harold, he's gone out too. I heard a racket down toward the lake—"

Haley was already started toward the door when the girl, eyes fear-filled, jerked back toward him. "I'll take a look around," the detective started to say. He didn't know where he was going to look, but he was thinking of that whimpering dog. Funny . . .

But the girl clung with him. She ran out the door behind him, motioned to steps that led downward beyond the patio.

"That leads toward the lake," she cried. "Please hurry! Father—"

Haley didn't have to be urged. Could the man who had escaped in the boat have reached this place ahead of them? Haley had noted that the lake road circled to the upper end of the lake on its approach here. A person rowing *across* the lake could have arrived here quickly.

They skirted a tennis court, passed barns that were located behind the rambling house. There was a wide stretch of smooth lawn beyond. Haley had brought along a flashlight from the girl's car; he shot the powerful beam around . . .

He was aware of a thrashing sound at some distance away from them. His sharp gaze veered toward the woods that separated the grounds from the lake. He swung the light beam.

The man emerged from the woods and ran toward them.

With a fearful gasp, Mary-Ann clutched his arm. She started to cry,

"Who is . . ."

And then she gave a cry of relief.

"Father!"

The man who came up into the revealing beam of light was stocky. Though almost fat, he was a sharp-eyed man with a severe jaw. He was breathing hoarsely.

Warner, the banker, jerked a thick thumb toward Dan Haley and demanded, "Who . . . who's this?"

The detective noted that there was a gun in Warner's right hand.

Quickly, the girl explained about picking up Dan Haley in New York. She raced on: "Father, I *know* that someone called you today and threatened you . . . unless you made some sort of deal with them! It's something to do with the Manhattan Trust robbery, I know. I was worried, and got Mr. Haley, here, who was on the case at the time."

DAN HALEY remembered the rotund banker well. But in the next moment Warner acted almost as though the detective were a deadly enemy.

He glared at Haley and snorted, "We don't need the police here. We don't need anybody! I'll handle this my own way!" He swung his steely gaze to his daughter.

"Harold shot off his mouth, didn't he? He knew about that call!"

The girl clung to her father's arm. "Please!" she begged. "What difference does it make *how* I found out? Your life is in danger!"

Watching Warner, Haley was under the sharp impression that the banker was scared about something—damned scared!

He said quietly, "I'll admit this is a bit unusual, Mr. Warner. I'm sort of off the reservation, as it were. But I've been on that bank case ever since Skipper Maloy disappeared. It's my job to find that killer. That's why I came out here. The girl said . . ."

Again there was that expression of fright in Warner's bright eyes. But his mouth was shut grimly. Haley could see that the man was going to be difficult to handle.

They had all started back toward the house, and Mary-Ann said worriedly, "Don't you see, father, he's here to help you? Can't you cooperate?"

Abruptly, the banker's thick shoulders sagged. He looked, for the moment, like a tired old man.

They had reached the porch, and Warner led the way into the wide library of the house. His clothes were muddy; his face scratched from pushing his way through the woods. He was still breathing hoarsely.

Warner slumped into an armchair, sighed, then looked at the tall detective and shrugged.

"All right," he said, "I'll tell you. But I'm only doing this because of Mary-Ann."

Haley waited.

The banker continued: "Someone . . . I don't know who . . phoned me today about the hundred thousand dollars still missing in the Manhattan Trust holdup. They wanted to make a deal."

Haley had started to reach for a cigarette. His hand paused halfway into his pocket.

"Deal?" he prompted.

"Yes. This fellow who called claimed that he knew where the money was hidden. He wanted five thousand dollars to reveal where that place was!"

"But why, if he knew, didn't he get the money himself?" the detective wanted to know.

Warner leaned forward in his chair. "I thought of that, too. But the man was scared. You could tell that just from his voice. I'm figuring he was a

former pal of Skipper Maloy's, and now he fears that killer. He merely wanted to get a price for squealing. He is apparently afraid to go after the money himself."

Haley was thoughtful a moment. Then he asked, "And he came here?"

Warner bounced to his feet. His face was flushed again. He snapped, "No dammit! Harold, that damn fool son of mine, heard someone outside. He went chasing out after him . . . and probably scared him off." He indicated his own mussed appearance. "I was out there looking for *both* of them, when you arrived."

Dan Haley thought of the big sedan that had passed them on the way up here. The driver of that car had turned back. That meant *someone else* had been here to the estate. Who? Perhaps someone who had previously been connected with Skipper Maloy. Perhaps it had been . . . Maloy himself!

Haley started across the room toward an open French door that gave onto the veranda. "I'm going to have a look around," he said. "I suggest you wait here in the house." He turned and continued across the richly furnished room.

And drew up with a start.

The young man was sound asleep on the divan, sprawled out in a long, twisted manner. His mouth was open and on the floor beside him stood a liquor bottle and half-filled glass. The reek of alcohol coming from the fellow's open mouth was enough to knock one over.

Haley turned back and asked, "What's *this?*"

IN A glance, the tall detective saw that the girl's lovely blue eyes were troubled. But her father looked disgusted.

"That's Jimmy," he said coldly. "A nephew of mine. I took him in because he didn't have a dime to his name. I got him a job in the bank, but we had to let him go because of his drinking. He isn't worth his salt."

Haley noted that the girl was on the verge of making a protest. But her lips clamped shut and she turned away.

Haley shrugged and continued out of the house. He was wondering what the son named Harold, her step-brother, would be like. He was also wondering where Harold was.

Outside, the night was quiet, warm. There was no moon and it was dark. He used the flashlight, prowling the grounds. He kept thinking of the dog that had been whimpering as though it were hurt. And the girl had said there were *two* dogs. Why hadn't the second one made any sound?

He passed the barns at the rear of the house. Inside, horses stirred restlessly in the quiet night. He moved on.

Haley reached the broad weep of lawn and stood quietly, listening. There were the soft insect sounds of the night; frogs croaking somewhere in the distance. Haley tried to disregard them and pick out any noise that might be foreign to the place.

But dammit, he wasn't used to the country. He was accustomed to the yammer and racket of taxicabs and street cars and the traffic of Broadway. He felt lost.

He switched on the flashlight and shot the beam right and left. Somewhere, far to his left, there was reflected light, something shining. He flicked off the light and moved silently that way.

Shortly, he saw what the light beam had struck. A small glass structure—a greenhouse. Haley murmured, "Nuts!" and started to move on.

But then he drew to a stiff halt and stared with revulsion at the object almost at his feet.

It was a dog, and it had been brutally

beaten to death. It lay in a shaggy, bloody heap.

FOR long moments Dan Haley stood there gazing at the broken body of the animal. He knew now why they had heard the whimpering sounds as they had climbed out of the girl's car. Could someone, afraid of being detected on the grounds, have beaten the animal to death?

He stared around, using the flashlight, wondering if he might be able to locate footprints.

But the lawn here was firm and solid. No chance of a print being retained in the ground. He straightened up and realized he was almost before the single doorway leading into the small greenhouse. There was something on the ground . . .

Haley bent down, his keen eyes sharp. The earth was bared here, and the lines that were evident in the dirt looked just as though something might have been scratching . . .

The dog!

The scratches led right up to the closed door of the greenhouse. It was though the dog might have been trying to get inside. Haley tried the knob.

The door was locked, but in a moment Haley was going to work on the simple lock with a set of keys he always carried with him. He got the door open and stepped inside.

Being shut up, the glass structure was was stifling hot. He loosened his collar . . .

As Haley prowled the two short aisleways of the house, it occured to him that the building had not been used recently. Dirt was dry and old-looking in the boxlike flower beds that were built along the aisles. The air was stale, heavy. There was something sickening about it.

Haley moved down one aisle, noting the empty flower beds. He wondered why the dog had tried to get in this shut-up place.

He returned and covered the second aisleway. At the back of the greenhouse, beyond the boxlike tables, was a large bed built into the floor. Here, strangely, some flowers were growing, despite the closeness of the stale air and the dryness of the earth.

Dan Haley hardly knew a geranium from a tulip, but he did know that the cluster of pale-red flowers at which he was gazing were growing regardless of the dry earth elsewhere in this building.

And he knew something else!

The sickening odor was more distinct back here. It was . . . repulsive! He stared around, seeking its source, and his gaze returned to the bed of flowers, close by his feet. The earth here looked as though it had been recently turned. He stooped down . . .

A rat scurried between his feet. It had come from the flower bed. Puzzled, Haley leaned closer. The terrible odor bit his sharp nostrils like the smell of some dead thing.

Immediately he straightened, shot the light beam around in a search for some sort of implement. He saw a shovel.

And then he was quickly digging in the earth. The ground was not hard—but loose. The stifling heat of the place brought sweat streaming down Dan Haley's face as he worked swiftly.

The shovel dug into something that felt like a chunk of solid meat. Haley paused, a funny feeling flowing through him. Then, hurrying, he renewed his efforts.

A trouser leg came into view first. Then another. Trying not to think about the odor, Dan Haley dropped to his knees and quickly scooped the loose dirt away with his hands. He uncovered the body further.

The form was slender, fairly small. The man had been wearing good clothes, a neat pin-striped suit. There was only one thing wrong with him—outside of being dead.

He had no head.

DAN HALEY was tough. He had seen some pretty gruesome sights in his life. But never anything like this. His back felt cold, despite the heat of the greenhouse. But, grimly, he set to work.

He uncovered the corpse further, dragged it clear of the hole, and then hurriedly started going through the clothing. He had a wild hunch, but he had to be certain.

But after ten minutes search, he gave up in disgust. Someone else had made a search before him. Pockets of the expensive clothing had been turned inside out. Nothing was in them. All labels, also, had been removed.

Haley dusted off his hands, picked up the light and started toward the door.

A form loomed in that doorway. It moved suddenly as Haley started toward the opening. At the same instant, an object was whirling through the air.

Dan Haley went to his knees, reached for his .38. The object that had been hurled at his head thudded into a small boiler located in a rear corner of the building.

He had snapped off the light. He heard the strained breathing of the man near the doorway. He raised the gun again . . .

But then he lowered it. He wasn't sure who his attacker might be. He lunged forward in a reckless, fast dive.

The man was just coming through the doorway. He was caught in the stomach by Haley's hard shoulder and knocked backwards in a wild sprawl. The dectective was on top of his long, wiry opponent. The man seemed to have no other weapon. This explained why he had hurled a brick or something.

The fellow put up a terrific struggle for several moments. But Dan Haley was tougher. Slowly he started to get the other man under control. His hand, the palm held flat cracked against the fellow's jaw until the eyes bleared.

Then Haley got to his feet and dragged the man with him. He stared into features that were vaguely familiar in the night light. There was the same stubborn jaw, the sharp eyes.

"Harold?" Haley asked.

The man in his grip gave a start. "How did you know? Who . . . who are you?"

Briefly, Dan Haley explained about coming up here with Mary-Ann. He finished with: "Where have you been?"

Harold Warner—he was blond and not more than twenty-five, the detective judged—said shakily, "There was a man prowling the grounds. I went out looking for him. I thought, when I heard you in there in the greenhouse . . ."

"Wait!" Haley ordered, and swung around to enter the small building a moment. He picked up his light, locked the door behind him. For the time being, he had reasons for saying nothing about the headless corpse he had found in there.

Leading the way toward the house, Haley said, "You'd better stay indoors. You've been taking a small chance of getting your head blown off!"

Questioning the young man further, Haley saw that his story checked with the banker's explanation that Harold had heard somebody out on the grounds. Haley added: "About this call your father received . . ."

Harold Warner said quickly, "Father's in danger. Someone had threat-

ened him. That person was supposed to come up here tonight. He wanted to make a deal. We don't know who he was. But father strung along, hoping to get a lead to where that bank loot is hidden."

Haley nodded, thoughtful. They continued in silence toward the large house.

THE doors had been locked now. But Harold Warner had keys. Shortly they were in the library.

The drunken cousin, the one called Jimmy, was still in a stupefied sleep on the divan. Mary-Ann had apparently retired to her room.

Someone was approaching from another room across the hallway. Dan Haley swung around.

Short, stocky Warner came into the room, relief showing on his face at sight of his son Harold and the detective. With the banker was a small, frail-looking woman of middle age. Haley immediately recognized the same delicate features, the soft blond hair. It was Mary-Ann's mother, he knew.

The girl did not resemble her brother or father. She had called Harold a step-brother. It must be that Mary-Ann was a daughter of a previous marriage, and her mother had married again. Warner himself must be her step-father.

Warner demanded, "What did you find?"

Young Warner said excitedly, "Nothing . . . except this man here . . ." He indicated Haley.

Haley said nothing about the headless corpse. Instead, he shrugged. "I don't think there is anything to worry about tonight. I suggest you all go to bed. We've probably scared off whoever was prowling the grounds . . . if there *was* anybody!"

He said this for the woman's benefit, she looked so frightened about something. The banker introduced them, then agreed with Haley's suggestion.

"Yes, we'd better get to bed."

Mrs. Warner herself led the way to a guest room on the second floor, as the others followed upstairs. She stepped into the room, switched on the lights. She turned to Haley and explained, "Most of the servants had the night off. They usually go into the city. But if there's anything you want . . ."

He smiled. There was something about the woman that made him feel sorry for her. He couldn't explain the feeling.

"Thanks," he murmured, "I'll be all right." He knew he wasn't going to go to bed. He merely wanted the others out of the way, so he could prowl the estate alone.

Turning toward the hall again, the small woman paused, looking back at Haley. She seemed on the verge of saying something. Her eyes were worry-shadowed.

But then her husband stopped at the doorway, and she continued out to meet him. Haley, puzzled, wondered what had been on her mind.

When they had gone, Haley hardly noticed the large room. He smoked three cigarettes, pacing the floor quietly. There was something about this house, a still air of mystery that got beneath his skin.

He waited a half hour, then listened. There was not a sound in the huge house. Carefully, he opened his door and peered out into the hallway. There was a dim night light glowing at one end.

He slipped out into the carpeted hall and headed for the stairs. He reached the first floor without meeting or hearing anyone. He went out the front door, closing it quietly behind him, after he had left it on the latch.

Haley returned to where he had seen the dead dog near the small greenhouse. It occurred to him that Harold Warner had not mentioned the animal. Perhaps he had not seen it . . .

Haley drew up, his eyes coldly sharp.

The dog had been removed.

DAN HALEY moved quickly to the door of the greenhouse. It was still locked.

He continued on, determined to make a thorough search of the grounds. Haley moved in ever widening circles until he had covered every bit of cleared area. He was close to the fringe of woods that bordered the lake, using the flashlight guardedly. The idea of being shot in the back didn't appeal to him.

He located the pathway that led down to the lake. It was worn, dusty. In the dust were the imprints of a dog's paws. Haley remembered the *second* dog that the girl had mentioned. Odd that he had not seen it . . .

He continued along the pathway, moving almost soundlessly.

In a few moments he saw the lake. It was utterly still, as smooth as a sheet of glass.

Emerging onto a stretch of coarse, sandy beach, he observed a rowboat drawn up on shore. He thought of the man who had escaped on the lake, in a boat . . .

Abruptly, tense, he drew back into the shadow of a tree. A man was bent over not ten paces from the boat, examining something on the shore. He seemed, from his attitude, intensely gripped by something.

Luckily, Dan Haley had not been using the light now. It was light enough here by the shore to see clearly without it. Stealthily, he started forward, the .38 held ready in his fist. This must be the fellow who had escaped in the boat.

Step by step, his shoes soundless in the loose sand, Haley went forward. Until there was only five feet separating him from the crouching figure. Three feet . . . two. . . .

The man whirled like lightning and flung himself at Dan Haley's legs. The gun went flying from the lanky detective's fist. They landed in a fighting, twisting heap in the sand. At the very last moment, Haley knew, the man must have sensed his quiet approach.

The man was solid, fast. As one hand fastened in Haley's coat, the other smashed at his face. Rough knuckles scraped his jaw. Haley took the blows off the side of his face. They merely jarred him a little.

He uncorked a right that brought a grunt of pain from his assailant. For a moment, the grip slackened on his coat. Instantly Dan Haley whipped the man to his feet and let go with a sizzling uppercut.

The fellow was lifted completely off his feet, to land flat on his back in a limp heap. He was out cold.

Haley got out his flashlight, located his gun, then returned to shine the light beam down in his victim's face.

He let out an exclamation. "Rocky Peters!"

Haley felt, suddenly, as though he were right back on Broadway. He felt right at home now.

Because Rocky was a small-time crook who had been around the main stem for years. He had been in and out of jail a dozen times, always with minor charges. But he had never been with Skipper Maloy!

Haley stepped over to see what Rocky had been looking at.

It was a Shepherd dog, crushed and dead.

DAN HALEY stood a moment gazing down at the animal. There

were thoughts tumbling through his brain; he was trying to get them lined up in orderly fashion. There was something . . .

He turned, walked to the water's edge and, fists cupped together, scooped up some water. He stepped back and flung it in the unconscious crook's face.

A second later, Rocky Peters regained consciousness, sputtering and gasping. Haley dragged him roughly to his feet.

Recognition was mirrored in the man's wildly bulging eyes.

"Haley!" he cried. His face paled.

In New York, Dan Haley had a reputation. When the well-known homicide dick was on the prowl, looking for a suspect, crooks scurried like rats for cover. Haley was tough. Haley was a guy who would take you over. He didn't fool!

That thought was plain on Rocky's heavy features. He half whimpered, "Look, Haley, I ain't done a thing. Hones' I ain't!"

Haley's open palm whipped out and caught the fairly big man across the jaw. He snapped, "All right, let's have it fast and let's have it straight!"

"Okay, okay," Rocky cried. "I'll talk!"

There was something about the man's terrified manner that said he was going to tell the truth.

He stammered: "Me and Johnny Lewis was . . ."

Haley interrupted: "You were the two guys in the sedan. You two tried to nail me on the road up here."

Rocky started. "That was you! We figgered . . . it was somebody maybe tryin' to cut in on the racket . . . Johnny got scared and went back. But me, I thought I'd try to work it."

"Work what?" the detective rapped.

"It's about all that dough that was stolen from the Manhattan Trust!" Rocky blurted. Then he was swiftly gripping the detectives' arm. "But, look! I wasn't in on that job, Haley. I wasn't . . ."

Haley nodded. "No," he agreed. "You wouldn't have the guts."

"All right," continued the small-time crook. "But Skipper Maloy's never been caught. An' no one's ever located where that money's stashed, have they?"

"Right," snapped Haley. "Go on."

"Well, we got the idea, Johnny and me, we'd make a deal with this guy Warner. We'd pretend we knew where that money was. We'd ask a price for our information, provided he wouldn't call in the cops!" Rocky stood trembling. "You believe me, don't you?"

For a moment, Haley said nothing. He was thinking swiftly.

Then he asked sharply, "But you didn't see Warner yet?"

Rocky shook his head. "I was prowling around here, and then this guy came down after that dog." He jerked a nervous finger at the crushed animal nearby. "That mutt was snooping around down here, and the guy killed him!"

"Who?"

"I dunno," the man gasped. "I hid out for awhile. I didn't know what the hell to think. I just sneaked back, when you . . ."

"You said the dog was snooping around?" Haley prodded.

"That's it."

Dan Haley abruptly seemed to come to a sudden decision. His gaze went beyond Rocky's head, saw the small boathouse near the water.

He murmured, as though to himself, "I think I have it. I think I've got this thing figured . . ."

And then, coolly, he said, "Sorry, fella, but I won't have time to worry about you too!" At the same instant, Haley's fist shot out and delivered the

knockout punch. Rocky Peters swayed against him, out on his feet.

SWIFTLY Dan Haley hefted the limp figure into his arms and strode toward the boathouse. It was not locked. Inside he found rope and a piece of canvas. Shortly he had his captive bound and gagged. He left him on the floor and hurried out, intent on some purpose he had in mind.

He paused only a moment to stare toward where the dead Shepherd dog was lying. There was a job he had to do, but he would have to let that go until morning. It would have to be done in the daylight . . .

He returned to the house.

Silently, Dan Haley let himself in the front door. He remembered seeing a table phone in the hallway earlier. There was a call he wanted to make. If he kept his voice low, perhaps . . .

He was ten feet down the dark hall when something made him pause, tense, listening. He had the distinct *feel* that someone was moving in the house, downstairs here, not far from him. And yet he heard nothing. It was just a thought that persisted.

Silently, he stalked forward. A rectangular blue ahead indicated an open doorway. Haley reached the threshold of the room, stared inside. Slowly his gaze became accustomed to objects, for there was vague night light coming through a large window.

Oddly, he had the impression that someone, a moment ahead of him, had stepped into this room. He stared into the gloom.

It was a study, fairly small, crowded with bookcases. Across from the doorway, directly ahead of the detective, was a blackness even deeper than the surrounding gloom. It puzzled him.

And then the sound came faintly to his ears. From right out of that deeper blackness ahead. It was as though . . . someone had taken a step some distance away.

Haley wasn't the type to stop and ask questions. He usually acted first.

He moved in a plunging, smashing drive across the room.

And went through apparent space, and seemed to be falling crazily, until his head struck something that was solid and unyielding. Struck it so powerfully that wild lights danced madly through his skull.

He passed out cold.

WHEN Dan Haley regained consciousness, he had no way of knowing how long he'd been unconscious. Because he was surrounded by complete, abysmal darkness. There was a dank smell all around him. He was flat on his back.

He raised himself up, got slowly and painfully to his knees. He felt like he had been run through a clothes wringer. His foot kicked something hard and unyielding. He reached down, touched the object. He felt another, above it. Steps. He had fallen down a flight of steps!

Searching in his pockets, he located a pad of matches. He struck one and stared around. His head was pounding like hell.

He was in some sort of tunnel! He shot his gaze up the flight of steps. There was a door at the top—and it was closed!

He turned the other way. The tunnel led forward to a heavy door that was also shut. Trying to disregard the pain that lanced through his skull at each step, Haley approached the door, cautiously tried it. It was solid, heavy, but it opened slowly at his pull. He passed on through.

The tunnel, apparently underground, continued downward at a very slight

grade. He used the matches, trusting they would hold out until he had found something. A spot of light showed ahead; he quickened his stride.

And in a moment he saw that the light was daylight, visible through screening trees. It gave Haley a start. It meant that he'd . . . *been unconscious most of the night!*

The end of the tunnel was cleverly concealed by heavy foliage that grew at the shore of the lake. Not only that, but the passage ended in a bank that rose sharply above the shore. It would be a hard place to discover from outside.

Haley was just ready to push through into the outside air when something on the tunnel floor caught his attention. It was a dried smear that looked like caked. . . .

Blood!

Nearby, leaning against the wall, was an ax!

Dan Haley, tense, pushed his way through the concealing brush that covered the tunnel opening. He swiftly climbed the bank, located a pathway that led along the shore. And soon found himself at the spot where he had captured Rocky Peters during the night.

He stared around. The second dog was missing now, also. Every nerve in the lean detective's body vibrated with a surging energy. There was so little time. At any moment the killer might strike again.

He glanced upward at the morning sun. It was still early.

Peeling off his coat and shirt, he hurried toward the water's edge. He was thinking about what Rocky Peters had said last night, of the dog's prowling, of the animal being *dead.*

He plunged into the cool water . . .

A HALF hour later, his sodden clothes clinging to his hard lean frame, he headed toward the Warner home. In his hand he carried a large potato sack, sagging beneath the weight of some object stored within.

He was halfway to the house when he met Mary-Ann, running across the lawn. He drew up with a start. He had figured he was early enough to finish before the girl was up.

She ran up to him, her lovely eyes wide with worry.

"Heavens!" she cried. "What's happened to you? I thought you were still in your room!"

Haley said nothing about what had occurred during the night. He took the girl's arm, said quietly, "Listen, there's something you've got to do—and quick!"

Her eyes were puzzled. "Yes?"

"Where's the nearest trooper barracks from here?"

"Outside Peekskill." She looked startled. "But why . . ."

"Then get there!" Dan Haley said. "Don't stop for anything. Send somebody back. This case is about finished . . . and it isn't going to be nice. You'd better wait there at the barracks until I see you, later."

The girl was astonished. She clung fiercely to Haley's arm, her wide-eyed gaze veering to the sack in his other hand.

She gasped, "I know what you've got! That whimpering cry we heard last night! One of the dogs . . ."

Haley urged the girl on. "Please," he said again. "There's need for hurry. Don't stop for anything."

She gave him one last fearful glance, then disappeared around the long house. A moment later, a car motor started and roared off into the early-morning quiet air.

Dan Haley cut back toward the greenhouse. There were things he had to do yet. It was a wild plan, but there

was a chance that it would work . . .

THEY were all gathered in the study of the Warner home. Dan Haley had asked them to step in here after the household had awakened. There was the banker himself, looking sleepy-eyed and angered at all this confusion. But for all that, his attitude was alert.

And there was his son, tall and blond Harold Warner. He acted still distrustful of the detective.

Jimmy, the cousin, was a good-looking tall young man with deep circles beneath his blue eyes. His features were flushed from drink, though he was sober now. He looked scared about something.

And there was a State trooper and an elderly, stoop-shouldered man who tended the stables on the estate.

Haley was saying, "I've asked the women—Mrs. Warner and the cook, Anna—to stay outside. This isn't going to be very pretty—or pleasant. But it's got to be done."

All eyes swung between tall Dan Haley and the screen that had been placed across one corner of the room. Haley stood near that screen, his clothes a mess, his eyes showing fatigue. But there was a grim set to his determined jaw.

He continued: "There is some greed in all of us. Only, in some men, it is a strong motive for murder." He stared coldly at the watching group. "Skipper Maloy was that type."

The atmosphere of the fairly small room was suddenly charged with tenseness. All knew about the Mantattan Trust case. All had read the details about Skipper Maloy, killer.

The State trooper looked puzzled. He had just arrived. Haley had not explained all the details to the man. The trooper had stated that he was the only man available at the moment.

"Maloy," the detective continued, "with *someone else,* planned the robbery of that bank. It was an inside job. But later, Maloy held out on his accomplice. He figured he had that person in such a spot that the man dared not squawk! Maloy wanted more than a fifty-fifty split!"

Harold Warner, his young face white and strained, gasped, "You mean . . . you've *located* Maloy?"

Haley nodded.

"For months after the crime at the bank," Haley went on, "Skipper Maloy remained in hiding. Things were too hot for him to contact his accomplice in murder. And then, just a few days ago, he made that contact. Things went wrong. He wouldn't reveal where the money was hidden. His accomplice wouldn't agree to the right cut. Perhaps Maloy feared that the stolen money was known by serial numbers. Anyway, there was an argument . . ."

It was bleary-eyed Jimmy, the cousin, who demanded, "How in hell do you *know* all this?"

Surprisingly, Haley snapped, "I don't. It's supposition. But"—his hand moved toward the concealing screen—"perhaps Maloy himself can tell us!"

He whipped the screen aside. Gasps of amazement came from the men's throats.

The man seated behind the small table was small and thin. His face was the color of wet ashes. He had a small, ratty face and deep pouches beneath his sunken, wide-staring eyes.

Harold Warner swayed, clutching at his father for support. He cried:

"That man is dead!"

SKIPPER MALOY sat there staring sightlessly at the group. A small man, he looked awesome sitting there with a heavy winter muffler wrapped

around his throat.

His eyes . . .

Before anyone could move, there was a terrible scream from the doorway leading into the room. Mrs. Warner was swaying there, her hand at her throat. The frail-looking woman must have been listening.

She suddenly cried, "I knew it . . . I knew it! This had to happen. He was here . . . two nights ago . . ."

The trooper suddenly bellowed, "Haley, *look out!*"

But Dan Haley had been ready.

He saw the banker, stocky Warner, move with snakelike speed. The man plunged past the others, bumped against the table behind which the dead man sat. A peculiar whimpering sound came from the banker's throat. His eyes were wild with insane fright.

He was sobbing, "No! No! It isn't Maloy!"

His plunge shook the table, carried it a foot backward. It bumped the figure seated in the chair behind it.

The figure toppled sideways in the chair. Cries of horror swept through the room. For the head of Maloy, the killer, came off and landed on the table top with a sickening thud. It lay there, eyes staring sightlessly and horribly.

With an ungodly scream, Warner continued his wild plunge. Haley dived after him.

But too late. Warner hit a sectional bookcase located across the room. It swung out. The banker dived into the black pit that was beyond it and immediately the secret opening closed with a resounding crash. There was a sound of a heavy bolt snapping into place.

Haley brought up against the bookcase in a skidding halt. He pushed against it. The thing did not budge.

The trooper was beside him again. He was a six-footer, solid. He rapped, "Here, let me do it." He threw his heavy weight against the case.

Out in the hallway, a woman was sobbing horribly. Young Harold Warner had leaped out there to aid her.

Haley spoke swiftly to the trooper who was battering the bookcase-doorway.

"Stay here! I'll be back!"

He whipped past the others, raced out of the house and cut across toward the woods at the back of the estate. His .38 was in fist as he ran.

Haley reached the pathway along the lake shore, climbed the bank, located the brush that covered the tunnel exit. He moved toward it . . .

And stocky Warner came plunging out, the ax raised in his hand. He was several feet higher up the embankment than the detective, and he dived downward wildly, the ax swinging.

Warner stumbled. His left hand flung out in a desperate attempt to grab hold of something. He missed.

He hurtled downward, finally brought up against the rocky shore line. There was a scream . . .

He had fallen with the ax blade beneath him, and it had pierced his throat!

Haley turned away . . .

LATER, at the house, Dan Haley spoke to the small group. He said simply:

"I kept wondering about Maloy. I wondered if he was dead." He explained about finding the headless body. "That's why Warner hid it. Without a corpse, Warner could never be held for murder. He also made doubly sure that, if Maloy was found, there would be no head to identify the body. He placed the head in a sack, weighted it and dumped it in the lake. That explains the dead dogs. They had been snooping around, tracing the smells of a dead body. Warner *had* to kill them."

Young Harold Warner was ashen. But he had guts, Haley observed. He asked: "But the money, where is that?"

Haley said, "Your . . . father planned the whole robbery. Then Maloy held out. For that, he was killed. Warner figured he had information somewhere on him that would tell where the loot was hidden. But he never found it. That's why he wanted to make a deal with these small-time crooks who called him up. They knew nothing—but he *thought* they did!"

"And that means—the money will never be found?" the young man asked.

Haley shook his head slowly.

"No," he said quietly. "I know the location now."

Everyone stared.

"Warner overlooked one thing," Haley explained. "At that last moment, when Skipper Maloy must have known he was going to die, he slipped something into his mouth. On it, was printed what I wanted to know."

"You mean . . ." someone started to ask in awe.

Haley nodded. His own face was a trifle pale. "Yes," he said, "in the head that I found in the lake."

The trooper accompanied Haley out into the hallway. He said, "Mrs. Warner wants to see you, up stairs." Then, puzzled, he asked, "But blazes, Haley, how did you *know?*"

"I didn't," announced Dan Haley. "But I fixed up that body. I figured maybe a dead man could point out his own killer. I had a hunch about Warner, but I wasn't sure. You saw how Warner reacted?"

He added: "There's a job to do . . . you'd better get some help."

The trooper nodded and went out.

Haley met the girl's mother upstairs in a sitting room. She was wearing a light coat. She was not crying, but she looked very frail, very weary.

She leaned on Haley's arm and said. "I've suspected . . . for a long time. And then, two nights ago, when Maloy was here and didn't return, *I knew.*" She looked at the detective. "Take me to my daughter."

Haley asked quietly, "Do you want me to tell her?"

The small woman shook her head. "She knows. I've phoned her. I'm so glad he . . . he was not her real father. I made a terrible mistake in marrying him."

Going toward the stairs, the woman added: "She asked me . . . to bring you with me. She said she'll need someone . . a man . . ."

Haley nodded silently.

The grimness was gone from his jaw now. He thought, there were two sides to being a detective. This was the really hard side of it. This was the tough part.

THE END

SCIENCE AT THE HELM

By L. POLK

NOT SO many years ago, the old-time policeman scoffed at the use of any scientific appliance. This same old-timer thought the only way to solve a crime was by experience and hard knocks. If even a magnifying glass were brought into a police station, it was laughed at. No detective of the old school dared admit that a scientist could tell him anything about police work.

Times, of course, have changed. Today the criminal's mysterious and increasingly effective enemy is Science. Many municipal and state police departments are seeking the aid of Science by establishing detection laboratories. The following cities boast scientific laboratories (to name only a few): St. Paul, St. Louis, New Orleans, Boston, New York City, Detroit, Wichita, Berkeley, and Los Angeles. Among the state police, Michigan has been for several years developing a successful crime laboratory. At Washington, D.C., under the supervision of the Department of Justice, Uncle Sam's scientific laboratory has solved many a baffling crime.

There is no doubt about it—Science is now a capable detective.

KIDNAPPER'S CHASE

By OWEN BLAKE

ONE of the most atrocious crimes in history was committed against a hard working family in Princeton, Florida, a small town on the fringe of the Everglade jungle.

On the fatal night of May 28, 1938, Mrs. James Baily Cash bathed her son—a happy, curly-haired child of five—tucked him in his crib and read to him till he fell asleep. Then, as was her custom, she tiptoed out of his room, locked the screen door at the back of the house, and hurried to her husband's store—one block away—to help him close up. Three quarters of an hour later, she and her husband returned to find the crib strangely empty.

Thinking that their son was mischievously hiding, they thoroughly searched the house. Then they searched the neighborhood. Soon the entire town was out to help them. But still the child was nowhere to be found. The terrible word "kidnap" never entered their minds.

Soon after they returned home, their sister-in-law, Mrs. Asbury Cash, burst in carrying a jagged piece of paper which, she said, she had found slipped under her front door. In scrawled handwriting, it instructed Mr. Cash to pick up the ransom note at the house of old John Emanuel.

At the same time they discovered a hole in the back screen door, and now understood the awful implications of the note. Following its instructions, they rushed to Emanuel's house, and found the second note hanging on the door knob. It demanded $10,000 for the return of the child.

$10,000 amounted to the life savings of John Baily Cash, owner of a filling station and a general store. But by Monday at midnight he had collected the money. Following the instructions, he took the first oil road to the left of Princeton, drove to Moody drive, to Myra street, to Homestead and waited for the light to flash two times. But no light flashed and he returned home.

Waiting for him was Harry Wright, an employee of another filling station. He turned over to Cash the third ransom note which had been found at his station by a young man, Frank McCall. It explained that too many people had been watching, and ordered Cash to take the same route at 4 A. M.

The second trip was successful in a sense. The two lights flashed, and Cash placed the shoebox containing his life savings at the base of a telegraph pole as he had been instructed to do. He then went home to wait with his wife for the return of their child. But the hours passed by, and to the despair of the Cashes no James Bailey, Jr., appeared.

Mr. Hoover, having been notified, rushed to the scene to direct in person. First he publicized the numbers of the ransom bills, and distributed photographs of the boy. Next he sent groups of searchers into the swamps on the edge of the Everglades. Included were G-men, local police, representatives of the American Legion, the Civilian Conservation Corps, members of civic organizations, and citizens generally. At the same time he ordered Navy and Coast Guard planes to circle the entire territory.

AFTER carefully questioning all the people in town, Mr. Hoover locked up Franklin Pierce McCall. His story of the discovery of the ransom note didn't sound plausible. It seemed unthinkable that he could be involved in the crime. He had been a close friend of the family, had roomed in their house and held the boy on his knee. But Mr. Hoover intended to make sure.

Flattered by the attention given him by Hoover, McCall began to talk. He said he knew where the ransom money was hidden, but he insisted that he had nothing to do with the crime. Accompanying him to a point not far from the pay-off spot, Hoover found $9,750 in bills under a large stone and $245 in an old oil drum in a shed nearby. A mere $5 was missing.

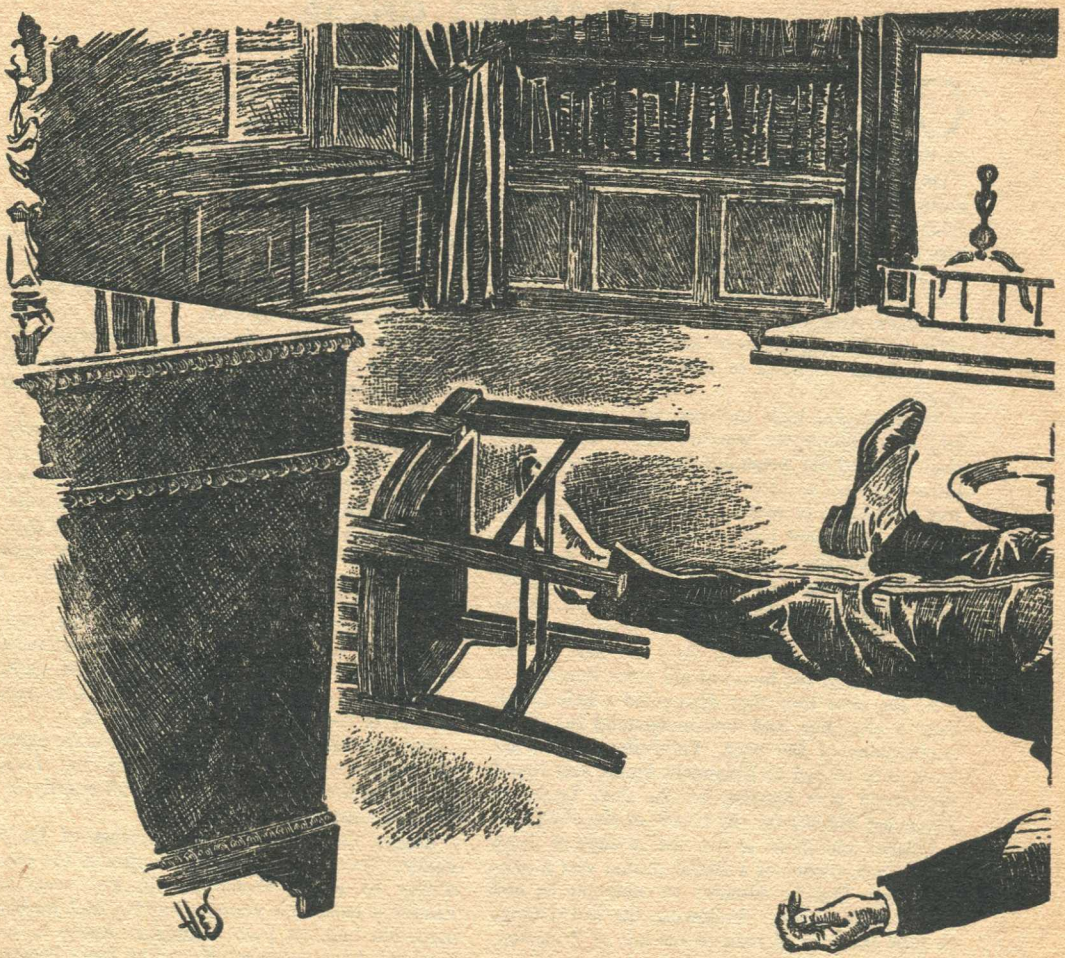
Unexpectedly McCall admitted that he knew the name of the guilty party. It was, he announced with a sense of exhilaration, the baby's uncle, Asbury Cash. To prove it, he promised to take Hoover to the body of James Bailey, Jr.

Painstakingly they journeyed through the palmetto thicket to the base of a lone pine tree. There lay the remains of the child. McCall angrily denounced Asbury Cash.

Asbury Cash was the older brother of James Bailey. Several circumstances suggested the possibility of his involvement. He had come to Princeton before his younger brother, had worked hard, but had not been successful. Aware of his brother's bank account, he might have become jealous. The first ransom note was found on his property. His home was located near the pay off spot. Last, he couldn't account for his actions during the hour in which the child was kidnapped. But Asbury Cash had pleaded that he was innocent, and asked to be given the lie serum.

By this time the picture of McCall was completed, and Hoover turned his attention back to him. Instead of being the irreproachable young man that he appeared to be, he was an ex-convict who had married and left his wife, and contracted a venereal disease in his strayings. During the last year he had lived in Princeton and attended to odd jobs when they came up. To Hoover he seemed a much more likely suspect than the baby's uncle.

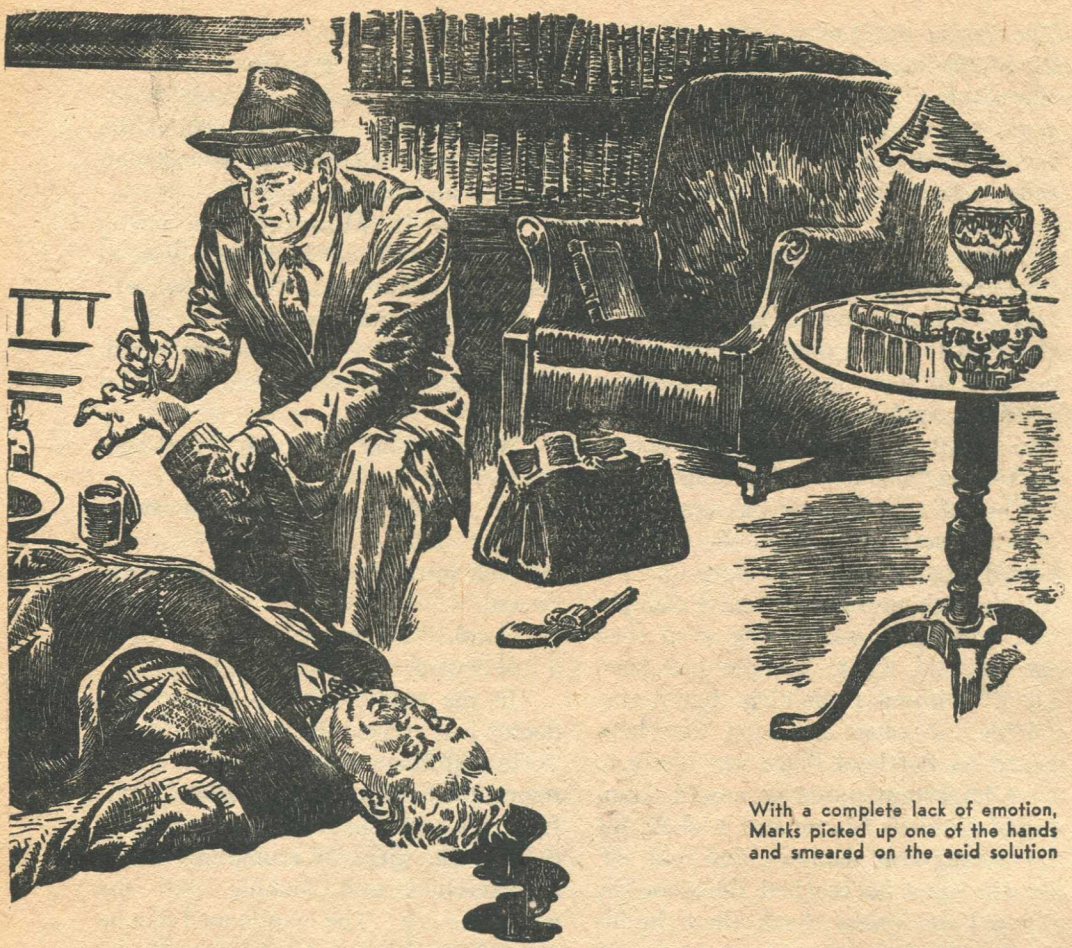
Encouraged to talk by Hoover, McCall came clean. He admitted that Asbury Cash had nothing to do with the crime, that he had implicated him because he had difficulty with him over money matters. He confessed that he alone had planned and executed the crime.



MURDER TAKES

by ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS

While the police were in the other room questioning the suspects, a little man with a bag filled with bottles was next door holding hands with the corpse



With a complete lack of emotion, Marks picked up one of the hands and smeared on the acid solution

THE ACID TEST

ED MARKS was the new technical expert on the homicide squad when John Temple was killed. In fact, he was the first technical expert ever assigned to homicide, and the old heads on the force were betting he would be the last. A mechanic, they called him down at headquarters, and there was talk of sending him out to the police garage to work on the squad cars. Yes, they had squad cars then, but they weren't equipped with two-way radio sets like they are now. At that time, anyone on the force who could tell a .38 slug from a .45 was considered qualified as a ballistics expert, and no one in the whole department had ever heard of the nitrate test.

Ed Marks showed them how the nitrate test worked. And he also showed them how important it was to be able to prove that a man had *not* fired a gun.

The way he did it even convinced Hannegan, the lieutenant in charge of homicide, who thought that only stool pigeons and third degrees were useful in solving crime, that there were sometimes other avenues of approach to murder.

Temple was an eccentric old man who had made a fortune out of manufacturing patent soaps. He lived out in Portland Place—a plenty snotty neighborhood in those days—in a rambling marble mansion that the sight-seeing buses used to point out to the rubbernecks as "The house that soap built."

The call that Temple was dead came in about seven o'clock in the evening. Grand, the old man's secretary, put the call through, and he must have thought that something was wrong even then for he said, "Mr. Temple has been killed" without explaining that it was suicide. Because anything that happened on Portland Place was likely to have important publicity angles, Hannegan grabbed Fisher and Rickey, his two strong-arm shadows, and took off. By the time he reached the door, he thought of Marks, back there in his cubbyhole full of microscopes and chemicals, and went back after him. So Ed Marks, and his suitcase, went along.

Marks and his suitcase were inseparable. He carried most of the equipment he needed in it, including a small microscope, a lot of chemicals, fingerprint powder, and a camera. Marks took a lot of kidding because of that suitcase and the stuff he had in it, from detectives who thought all they needed to catch a murderer was a blackjack and a pair of bracelets. He never let the kidding disturb him. He believed implicitly in himself, in his tools, and in what he called the scientific method. Eventually a lot of other people believed in him, in his tools, and in his method.

A SHAKY butler, trying hard to maintain his English accent, let them into the house that soap built. Answering their ring right behind the butler was a square-faced young man wearing horn-rimmed glasses.

"Who is it, Morlake?" the young man asked. Then Hannegan flashed his badge and he said, "Oh, the police!" in a startled tone of voice.

"I'm Richard Grand," he continued. "I am—or I was—Mr. Temple's secretary."

"What's going on here?" Hannegan asked.

"Mr. Temple is dead," Grand said.

"Um. How?"

"Shot in the head," the secretary answered.

"Umph!" Hannegan's grunt dropped a full octave. "Where's the body?"

"In the study," Grand said. "The doctor just arrived. He's in there now."

He led them into a huge drawing room filled with ornate period furniture. A girl and a man were sitting there. The girl was crumpling a lacy handkerchief and looking like she wanted to cry. The man looked like he wanted a drink. Grand introduced them to the girl.

"Sylvia, this is the police." To Hannegan he said. "This is Miss Temple."

"Daughter?" Hannegan asked.

"No," she answered. "I'm Mr. Temple's niece. We didn't know what to—do. We called the doctor. Richard thought we should call the police too."

"You did the right thing," Hannegan said. He looked at the man.

"My name is Tompkins," he was promptly told. "I am Mr. Temple's real estate agent. Look after his properties for him, collect rents, you know."

Hannegan said he knew. He also said he wanted to see the study.

The study opened off the drawing room. The door was closed now, but

Grand opened it.

The study was richly furnished. Bookshelves reached from floor to ceiling. There was a Persian rug on the floor. Several comfortable chairs and an antique Chippendale desk completed the furnishings. The study had two doors, one opening from the drawing room and the second from the back. And the tall french windows on the side were also doors opening on the side porch. The windows were open now.

Beside and a little behind the desk, John Temple was sprawled on the Persian rug. The desk chair was overturned. There was a hole in Temple's forehead and the skin around the hole was blackened by powder marks, showing that the gun which killed him had been held almost against his head. The gun itself, a nickle-plated revolver, lay beside his right hand.

A MAN busy with a stethoscope was bending over the body. He stood up when they entered the room.

"You a doctor?" Hannagan grunted.

"I am Dr. Partridge," was the answer.

"Dead?"

The medico nodded.

"How long?"

The doctor shrugged. "Thirty minutes. An hour."

"He a regular patient of yours?"

"I guess you could call him that."

"You guess?"

The doctor tapped his stethescope with his index finger. "Temple was a hypochrondiac," he said. "I've been seeing him for the past two years so I guess you could call him a patient of mine. But he went to see almost every other doctor in town too, so he wasn't exclusively my patient."

"What's a hypo—hypo—"

"A hypochrondiac is a person who imagines he is sick," the doctor explained. "Temple, to my acknowledge, at various times thought he had cancer, gall stones, and angina pectoris. Actually there wasn't anything wrong with him except his imagination."

"Do you mean he was slightly nuts?"

"Not necessarily," the doctor answered. "However he had periods of bitter despondency during which he was perhaps not completely normal."

"Um?" Hannegan said. "Did he ever threaten to kill himself?"

"Often. However, I never thought he'd do it."

"Did you ever see that gun before?" Hannegan asked, pointing to the pistol on the rug.

"Yes. It belonged to him. He kept it in his desk."

"I see," said Hannegan. "Well, thanks, doc. We'll call you if we need anything more from you."

"Very well," the doctor answered. As he was putting his equipment into his bag, Hannegan turned to Marks.

"Check the gun for prints," he said.

So Ed Marks got busy on the gun. He could see that Hannegan had already made up his mind, and for all he knew or suspected then, Hannegan was right. There were a lot of angles that hadn't been cleared up yet but of course the lieutenant would check them as a matter of routine. And as he began to brush powder on to the butt of the gun, he heard Hannegan say to Fisher and Rickey: "In a place like this, they've probably got a raft of hired help. Round 'em up and bring 'em in one by one. You can give the boys a list of the help," he said to Grand, who was waiting quietly in the room. "Then you can wait outside."

"I'll tell you," Hannegan said, as the three men left the study, "when to send the first one in."

Marks finished his task. "Temple's prints on the gun, lieutenant," he said.

"Any other prints?"

"Some smudges that don't mean anything. The gun had been wiped off recently and Temple's prints show up very clearly."

"So it's suicide," Hannegan said. "That's what I thought." He sounded a little disappointed.

"It looks like suicide all right," Marks said. "But I'll double-check to make sure."

"Double-check?" Hannegan grunted.

"Sure," Marks answered. "I'll check to see whether Temple has fired a gun within the past few hours."

TO HANNEGAN, this sounded like so much damned nonsense. He didn't know of any way to determine whether or not a man had fired a gun. If you found a man's fingerprints on a gun, you knew he had held it in his hand, and you assumed he had fired it if it had been fired. Temple's prints were on this gun, it was his gun, one shot had been fired from it—Hannegan had checked this himself—and Temple had threatened to kill himself, so what more was there to the case? It was open and shut suicide. But here this mechanic was talking some kind of damned nonsense about double-checking to make certain Temple had fired the gun. Double-checking was all right—Hannegan, fundamentally, was a thorough and competent detective—but how in the hell were you going to find out if a dead man had fired a gun?

"You going to ask him if he shot himself?" Hannegan asked, jerking his thumb toward the corpse. The tone of his voice had the sneering jeering rasp of a saw tooth file in it.

Marks flushed. "Yes, lieutenant," he said.

His words, and the way he said them, made Hannagan so damned mad that he got up and stalked out of the study. As Marks went to work double-checking, he could hear the lieutenant begin to question the household assembled in the drawing room.

"Who found the body?" Marks heard Hannegan ask.

"I did, sir," the butler answered.

"Tell me exactly what happened."

"It was about seven, sir, and I was in the pantry preparing the wine for dinner. I heard a shot and went immediately to the study."

"Why did you go there?"

"Because the shot seemed to come from there, sir."

"How did you know it was a shot?"

"It sounded like one, sir. I have—ah—heard shots in the movies—"

"Let it go," Hannegan grumbled. "How long did it take you to get from the pantry to the study?"

"Possibly two or three minutes. The pantry opens from the dining room. I went into the dining room and then came here into the drawing room and looked around. Seeing no one, I went to the study and knocked. When no one answered, I ventured to open the door—"

"The door was closed?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did you find?"

"I found Mr. Temple lying on the floor apparently expiring, sir."

"Did you see a gun in the room?

"Yes, sir. It was lying on the floor beside Mr. Temple."

"Did you recognize it?"

"I think it belonged to Mr. Temple. At least he kept a pistol that much resembled this one in his desk.

"Okay. Was there anyone else in the room?"

"No, sir."

"Did you see anyone else?"

"No, sir."

"What did you do next?"

"I hastened to call Miss Sylvia, sir,

but as I left the study I encountered Mr. Grand coming down the stairs."

"Okay, Grand, you take it from there," Hannegan said.

MARKS, busy daubing paraffin on Temple's hands and hastily preparing his acids to make the paraffin reactive, heard Grand pick up the story.

"I heard a sound that I thought was a shot," the secretary said. "I was coming down stairs to see what had happened—"

"Where were you when you heard the shot?"

"In my room preparing for dinner."

"You live here?"

"Yes. Mr. Temple insisted on it. He treated me as one of the family."

"And when you got downstairs, you saw Morlake coming out of the study?"

"That's right."

"What did you do?"

"I went into the study," Grand answered.

"Were you surprised at what you found there?"

"Naturally!" There was a hot rasp in Grand's voice as he answered.

"That's all," Hannegan spoke. He turned to the girl.

"Miss Temple, did you hear the shot that killed your uncle?"

Marks, working feverishly in the study, had to listen closely to hear what she said. Her voice was low with a catch in it.

"In my room, dressing," she said.

"You live here too?"

"Yes."

"Are you Temple's heir?"

"I—There are no other living relatives—but I don't know."

"I can answer that," Grand spoke up. "I helped Mr. Temple draw up his last will. She is his sole heir."

"His last will?" Hannegan questioned. "Did he draw up more than one will?"

"He drew up a new one every time he got mad," Grand answered. "Once, when he was angry with Sylvia and me, he drew up a will leaving all his estate to a cat and dog hospital."

"Um," Hannegan said. "Why was he angry with you and Miss Temple?"

"I scarcely think that is important," Grand answered.

"Um." Marks could hear Hannegan hesitate. These were important people, and they were able to toss their weight around politically. The detective didn't want to press them too hard for answers. But he went ahead with this question. "Ah—Are you and Miss Temple ah—that way—in love with each other?"

"That's none of your business!" Grand snapped.

Hannegan promptly shut up. He turned to Tompkins. "How did you get in on this?" he asked.

"Mr. Grand called me," Tompkins answered.

"He had been here earlier in the evening talking to Mr. Temple about business matters," Grand spoke. "I called him because I knew he would want to know what had happened."

"I see," Hannegan said. "What time did you leave?"

"I had just reached home when Grand called," Tompkins answered. "Possibly I had been gone about thirty minutes. Do you remember what time you let me out the front door, Morlake?"

"No, sir, I don't," the butler answered. "It was possibly twenty minutes before the shot. Or it might have been less than that. I really don't remember."

"It doesn't matter," Hannegan wearily said. "You had been here talking to Temple about business. Is that right?"

"Yes."

"Was Temple having financial trouble of any kind?"

"Actually, no. However he always thought he was in desperate financial circumstances."

"Was he well off?"

"We was worth several millions at least," Tompkins answered. "His real estate holdings alone were worth more than a million and a half at present market values. I, of course, have no information on his holdings in stocks and bonds."

"If he had that much money, why did he think he was in financial trouble?"

Tompkins took his time about answering this question. "I can't say, exactly," he said slowly. "It was something in his mind. He imagined things. He was afraid we would go through a cycle of inflation which would ruin him. He worried about strikes and the generally unsettled economic conditions. And then he had—well, frankly, he had lapses of memory and there were times when I had the definite impression that he was losing his mind."

Tompkins spoke with reluctant emphasis but he brought out into the open one important fact in this case, namely, that Temple had suffered lapses of memory and that he worried about losing not only his money but his mind. Added to the information the doctor had furnished, that Temple was a hypochondriac and that he had threatened to kill himself, a clear picture of suicide in a fit of depression presented itself.

Two other important facts strengthened this conclusion: One, the butler had arrived on the scene within two or three minutes after the shot that killed Temple had been fired and he had seen no one. Two—and this always had been the clincher in Hannegan's mind—Temple's fingerprints, and only his prints, had been found on the gun.

"That's all." Hannegan said.

And that would have been all there would ever have been to the case if Ed Marks had not appeared in the door of the study and said, "I'm sorry, but that's not all."

"What do you mean?" Hannegan snapped at him.

"Temple didn't fire the shot that killed him!" Marks answered.

In that suddenly quiet room, his words had all the explosive force of a bomb.

PROBABLY Hannegan was the first one to get all the implications of what Marks had said. The big lieutenant, whatever else was true of him, was neither slow-witted nor a fool. He could think on his feet and think fast. Marks didn't get a chance to say anything else until Hannegan had shoved him back into the study and slammed the door behind them.

"What the hell are you talking about?" Hannegan demanded.

"I said Temple did not fire the shot that killed him," Marks answered. "I mean he did not fire the gun here on this desk, the gun we found here in this study."

"You mean he was bumped off with some other gun?"

"No. This was almost certainly the murder weapon. But he didn't use it to kill himself."

"Then how," Hannegan said. "How in the hell did he kill himself?"

"He didn't," Marks answered. "He was murdered."

How the big lieutenant ever held his temper then was a mystery. As hot as he was burning, he must have built up a tremendous head of steam. This technical expert, this *mechanic,* was telling him how to run homicide. But he didn't blow his top. All he did was say:

"Prove Temple didn't fire this gun."

So Marks told him about the nitrate test and about the invisible backfire from every pistol which blows microscopic pieces of powder into the hand that holds the gun while it is being fired. And he showed him the method by which that invisible powder could be recovered from the hand of the man who held the gun. And he said:

"Since I can't recover any microscopic pieces of powder from Temple's hand, the only conclusion is that he didn't fire the gun."

The nitrate test is old stuff now. Every police department in the country uses it. But it was new then and Hannegan had never heard of it. To him, it probably sounded like so much stuff you read in a book. He may even have thought that Marks was pulling his leg, but he kept his temper.

"Okay," he said. "We'll just pretend you know what you're talking about. We'll pretend that Temple didn't fire this gun. So how was he killed?"

Marks had been thinking about that too. "In the first place, we've got to assume that the killer had access to this room. Otherwise he couldn't have gotten possession of Temple's gun. But, having access to the room, he got the gun. Maybe he got it this afternoon, maybe he got it yesterday, maybe he got it a week ago. He *got* it. That much is certain. Then he walked into the study with the gun in his pocket, shot Temple in the head, wiped the gun clean, pressed Temple's fingers around the butt so the murdered man's prints would be on the gun, and walked out the back door or out the french windows. It would have taken him maybe a minute to do all that. By the time the butler got here, he was gone."

IT WAS as simple as that. Probably the fool-proof simplicity of the scheme Marks had outlined appealed to Hannegan, who knew that murder is always simple. It's only the finding out about murder that's complicated. Anyhow when Fisher stuck his head in the door and said Tompkins wanted to know if it was all right for him to leave, Hannegan told him nobody was to leave.

"It *could* have been done that way," Hannegan said to Marks. "Yes, it could have been worked like that. But that would make it pre-meditated murder and *that* requires a motive. Have you got the motive figured out too, maybe?"

"Motives are your business, Lieutenant," Marks answered. "That's your end. All I do is furnish you with facts."

"Umhuh, umhuh," Hannegan grunted.

"For that matter, a million bucks is a good enough motive," Marks continued. "And that girl in there is going to inherit more than that as a result of Temple's death."

"She only had to wait a while and she'd get the dough anyhow," Hannegan pointed out.

"*Unless* Temple changed his will again," Marks said.

"Uh!" Hannegan said.

"I'm not saying she did it," Mark continued. "Grand has the same motive."

"How?" Hannegan challenged.

"She inherits the money and he marries it," Marks answered. "For all we know they may be secretly married right now."

"Well," said Hannegan. "What about Tompkins and the servants?"

Marks shook his head. "I don't know about them," he answered. "But I know that Temple did not kill himself, I know he was killed by somebody he knew, and I know a way to find out whether anybody in there—" he pointed toward

the drawing room—"has fired a gun within the last few hours."

Hannegan thrust has hands into his hip pockets and kind of lifted himself up on his toes then.

"You can go into that room and tell me which—if any—of that bunch has fired a gun?" he said.

Marks nodded.

"All right," Hannegan said. "You asked for it and you're going to get it. You're going into that room and tell me if anyone in there has fired a gun. And so help me Hannah, if you make a mistake, I'm going to kick you—and your suitcase—down the front steps of headquarters when we get back there."

Hannegan meant every word he said, and more. His neck was out a mile and he knew it. If he let Marks go into the drawing room and make a fizzle, well, the way two or three million dollars can kick a police department around is nothing to laugh at. Probably Hannegan let Marks go ahead because he could see the sincerity of the technical man. Marks believed what he said, he believed in himself, he believed in what he was doing and what he could do. His belief impressed Hannegan.

Marks gathered up his suitcase full of equipment and they went into the drawing room. It was Grand who hopped out of his chair and came straight to Hannegan.

"This man," he pointed to Fisher, who was standing by the front door, "Says we cant' leave. I want to know why."

"Murder is why, Grand," Hannegan said.

The secretary's face went paper white at the words. Behind his thick-lensed glasses, the pupils of his eyes dilated in sudden fear.

"Murder!" he whispered.

One thing about Hannegan, he stood back of his men. Once he had told Marks to go ahead, he backed the technical man's conclusion.

"That's right, buddy," he told Grand. "You got anything you want to say?"

Grand glanced quickly back over his shoulder at Sylvia Temple and shook his head. Sitting stiff and erect in her chair, the girl looked like she was about to faint. Tompkins swallowed nervously. The butler, the cook, and the two upstairs maids stiffened in apprehension.

Murder had walked into the house that soap built.

Marks set his suitcases on the table. He opened it up and took out his paraffin and his acids. Then he turned to the group.

"Somebody here has fired a gun," he said. "I'm going to check the hands of everyone here."

HE STARTED with the help first, probably because he expected less opposition from them. The butler submitted to having paraffin daubed on his hands. The cook and the two maids came next. Then Marks turned to Miss Temple.

And Grand was on his feet again.

"Are we charged with murder?" he demanded.

"No." Hannegan said.

"Is Miss Temple charged with murder?"

"No."

"Is she under arrest? Are any of us under arrest?"

"No," Hannegan was forced to admit.

"Then I demand that this farcial witch hunt stop!" the secretary said.

"Shut up," Marks said.

Grand almost choked then. "Miss Temple is on the verge of hysteria!" he shouted.

"So am I," Hannegan grunted. Probably Marks was the only one in the room who fully understood what the

lieutenant meant.

"Please, Richard," the girl protested. "I don't mind."

"Grand is right," Tompkins spoke up. "I dont have the vaguest idea of what the lieutenant is attempting to do but I know that he is exceeding his authority."

"It's my neck," Hannegan grunted. "Keep working, mechanic."

So Marks daubed paraffin on the girl's hands. Then he repeated the process on Tompkins and Grand. They sat there with paraffin cooling on their fingers while he went back to the butler and began taking the paraffin off and soaking it in acid.

"I don't understand what he's attempting to do," Tompkins said.

"This is a new scientific test to determine whether or not a man has fired a gun," Marks explained.

"Oh," Tompkins said.

"And the person who fired the gun killed Mr. Temple?" Grand said. "Is that what you think?"

"What do you think?" Hannegan answered.

Fisher was loafing around by the front door and Rickey was standing in the broad opening that led to the dining room. The door to the study was open.

Marks worked very fast peeling paraffin off the hands of everybody, soaking it in acid, then checking it for the microscopic particles of powder blown back into the hand of the person who held the gun when it had been fired.

When he had finished checking the servants, Hannegan came over to the table.

"What are you getting?" the detective whispered.

"Wait until I've checked them all," Marks answered.

He peeled paraffin from the girl's hands, from Tompkins, and from Grand.

He took a long time running these three tests. When he finished he stood up and walked over to Tompkins.

"You fired the gun," he said. "You murdered Temple."

Then Tompkins was on his feet and diving toward the open study door as fast as his legs could carry him.

Fisher grabbed him before he got through the door. Fisher was a good man for something like that. He had the real estate man on the floor and was sitting on him before Tompkins really knew what was happening.

Above the turmoil in the room, Hannegan was saying to Marks. "But the motive, Ed?"

"And Marks was answering. "Motives are your business, Lieutenant. My end of this racket is just to dig up the facts."

IT TOOK a staff of accountants to dig up the motive, plus some half-burned papers they found in a fireplace in the apartment where Tompkins lived. The motive was embezzlement. Tompkins, in charge of Temple's real estate, had been helping himself to his employer's money. And Temple had discovered what was happening. He had the evidence on his desk when Tompkins called to see him that evening. He had fired the real estate man and told him he was going to press charges, which meant a good stiff jolt in the penitentiary and Tompkins knew it. So Tompkins, when Temple was out of the room, had helped himself to the old man's gun. Then he had made certain that the butler let him out of the house. He had gotten in his car, driven around the block, came back, walked in through the french windows, shot Temple, wiped his own prints off the gun, pressed Temple's hand around it, picked up the damning evidence, and walked out again, safe, as he thought, from any

question of murder. Like Hannegan, he had never heard of such a thing as the nitrate test, although it must have haunted his dreams many a night before they hanged him for murder.

When Hannegan and his boys had found the partly burned papers in Tompkins' fireplace and had turned the accountants loose on Temple's books, the big lieutenant came around to the cubbyhole where Ed Marks worked with his suitcase full of tools.

"Look, Ed," Hannegan said. "When you get a little spare time, will you teach me something about this technical stuff. I believe we can use it in this racket."

It was the closest he could come to an apology. And Marks accepted it for what it was.

They made a great team, those two, one to find the facts, and the other to find the motive. And never again did anyone at police headquarters call Marks a mechanic and hint that he ought to be out at the garage repairing cars, not, at least, while Hannegan was within earshot.

THE END

THE CRIMINAL'S TRADEMARK

By
LEE SANDS

EVERY criminal, in some way, leaves his characteristic "trademark" behind him. Suppose a man did nothing but go into a house and come out again. That in itself is a characteristic trademark because it so rarely happens! These trademarks are always there, for no two human beings do anything exactly the same. Identification of criminals, then, is made simpler by the understanding of this "trademark principle."

An Englishman, Major-General L. W. Atcherley, originated the system of identifying criminals by their individual characteristics of working. Today, tracing a crook by his manner or mode of operating is known as the "modus operandi" system of identification. An important consideration is the way a burglar enters or approaches a house. Did he climb over the rear fence? Did he enter through the front yard? Where did he attempt his entrance? Therefore, one can readily see that insistence upon a careful examination of the yard leading to the house before any other investigations are made is logical. Perhaps tell-tale tracks in the yard could be found, too.

Even the heel of a shoe has just as much identifying property as a fingerprint impression. (You can make this test yourself sometime: observe your heel print when you are walking across a strip of clean plain color linoleum; then have someone else walk across the same floor; the heel marks will differ because of the make of the heel and the manner in which you walk.)

Many police departments have found that the best way to perfect this art of identification is to have the policemen specialize. Certain men are assigned to certain types of crimes. This plan was used by England's Scotland Yard in its early years, soon after the reorganization of the police forces and the use of "plain-clothes men" by Robert Peel. Today, especially in the large cities, we have detectives who work on the capture of burglars only, or of pickpockets. Others learn to know the ways of check passers, auto thieves, or safe crackers.

To know the ways of each criminal is a task requiring long years of observation and a trained memory. It means that a police officer must study the habits of criminals and, if possible, cultivate their acquaintance.

IN THE Berkeley, California, police department, there was a remarkable case of this sort. Detective Frank Waterbury specialized for years in the cultivation of acquaintances with criminals. One day, Waterbury was seated at his desk, writing a report of a crime. At a desk nearby, Clarence Lee, Captain of Detectives, was listening on the telephone to an account of a robbery committed in an adjacent city. As the Captain wrote down the "modus operandi" and the description of the robber, he repeated it over the telephone: brown hair, six feet tall, and so on.

When the telephone receiver was hung up, Waterbury, without lifting his head, or seemingly displaying any interest, said to the Captain of Detectives, "Have Charlie bring in Abe." Half an hour later, Charlie Ipsen, policeman, patrolled his beat which adjoined the city where the robber had been working. And Abe, with his gun and the stolen goods still in his possession, walked along the street and straight into the arms of Officer Ipsen!

Detectives like Waterbury certainly baffle the criminal. To the criminal, it seems uncanny that an officer can apprehend him so soon after the crime has been committed. But to the expert detective it is just one phase of the complicated art of crime detection.

EMBEZZLER'S REVENGE

By
JAMES NELSON

ALL criminals are the victims of their own vanity which prompts them to begin a career of crime and, oddly enough, usually makes them so smug and self-assured of their skill in planning and carrying out nefarious schemes, that vanity, too, spells their doom and final apprehension. The colossal fraud case of 1902 is a perfect example of such a criminal routine.

This case involved a number of interesting characters—with one, Thomas Peterson Goudie in the stellar role—the great Bank of Liverpool, and minor criminals.

On November 21, 1901, certain facts had come to light which revealed some tampering with the books of certain large accounts in the bank. Upon investigation, it was found that the ledgers of these depreciated accounts were in charge of Goudie, who had been a trusted employee of the bank for eight years, twenty-nine years of age and well educated, Goudie, to all appearances, was a hard-working and decent man who lived quietly off his moderate salary which he received in his responsible position.

Other points about this trusted employee were also considered to be in his favor, for he was thought to have no obvious extravagance and it would seem that he would probably be the last of the employees of whom the bank would have suspicions. One thing did seem strange, however, and this was the fact that Goudie, who managed on a modest budget, appeared to have a steady surplus and should, by all logic, be saving money. Actually, Goudie was penniless. So it was believed that he had no motive for committing such a crime as fraud; however, it was Goudie himself who shattered this veil of innocence when he broke down and confessed to the series of embezzlements and forgeries which had cost the bank's accounts the tremendous sum of 160,000 pounds. While he was telling his story, he was given the opportunity to fetch his books. Goudie, instead of fetching the evidence of his crimes, escaped from the bank, only to be apprehended and arrested several days later. While in custody, he made additional confessions which directly led to the arrest of three of those who had driven him on the road to committing his crimes.

GOUDIE had never been suspected up until this fateful day; however, his secret vice of betting on horse racing would have quickly drawn attention to him had he not been so careful to conceal his love of the track. He was a betting fool and a heavy loser with the result that his losses were so great that he found himself unable to meet his obligations to the bookmakers. Fearful of the great shame which such an exposé would cause him, Goudie yielded to the temptation of stealing funds from the bank and his first crime—forging a check for 100 pounds—unfortunately, escaped detection. Like all other weaklings, once he succumbed to such a temptation, he continued embezzling the funds of the bank's accounts, hoping against hope that such deeds would enable him to replace the money. It turned out that even Lady Luck refused to be a part of his evil scheming.

It seemed amazing that Goudie continued such embezzlement from 1898 until 1901 without having been suspected or detected, despite the bank's system of constant checking and auditing. As ledger clerk, Goudie was responsible for accounts beginning with the letters H to K, and among these accounts was the firm, Hudson's Soap, one of the bank's important accounts. Large sums of money were continually being transacted in behalf of this account and Goudie made sure that his entry would cover his embezzlements.

Since he had no access to the serial numbers of the check books issued to accounts, he opened an account at the bank and thereby got the right to obtain checks without arousing suspicions. He simply filled out Hudson's name, forging it almost perfectly, and the check was duly presented and paid. When the check reached his desk for entry into the journal as if the ledger had been posted, carefully omitting any entry in the ledger he continually remained at the mercy of chance.

IT WAS some time later, however, that it was discovered that two bookmakers, Kelly and Stiles, had been blackmailing Goudie, for they also knew that as a bank clerk, Goudie was strictly prohibited from placing bets. The embezzled money actually was being paid to the two men as hush money.

Banding like a hoard of vultures, another set of men—Burge, Mances and Marks—also descended upon Goudie and so greedy were their lusts for the bank's funds, that Goudie embezzled 91,000 pounds in October, 1901—in one month alone. The sums were reaching stupendous scales and it could not be expected to last long without discovery. So it was that after forging one check after another during that month that the discovery was finally made, but Mances and Marks quickly disappeared and were never charged, while Goudie, Kelly, Stiles and Burge were arrested and brought to trial.

All were charged with conspiring together, and Goudie himself was charged separately for his many offenses. There was no doubt that the evidence against him was conclusive. His own confession of guilt seemed to be the climax of the case.

No Excuse for the Dead

by LEONARD FINLEY HILTS

With great care Carver placed the sheet of paper on the desk where the police must find it

It was one of those perfect plans for murder; the kind you read about in books. But Jess forgot that old saying: "The wicked flee when no man pursueth."

JESS CARVER threw the switch which turned out the lights in the drug store, then locked the front door and went into the back room. He pulled out the typewriter they used to write the labels for prescriptions and rolled a sheet of paper into it.

He found himself laughing at the ease with which everything was working out. The bottle of wine, for instance. That had been incredibly easy, like child's play. And Fred had been so grateful for the gift, because he enjoyed a good bottle of wine. Jess had made sure that he had bought the best. After all, at a time like this, the best was none too good for Fred.

He had bought the bottle downtown and carried it to the store in a paper bag. Before presenting it to Fred, he took it into the washroom and very carefully removed all the fingerprints from it. Then he gave it to Fred.

"Hold it up to the light, Fred," he had coaxed. "See how clear it is." Fred had done just that, turning it

around several times, so that he put plenty of his own prints on the bottle.

"Gosh, Jess, this certainly is swell of you," he said beaming. "There's nothing I like better than a good Port, but I don't often get the chance to drink a bottle. When I go home tonight I'll chill her up and have a wonderful evening. Chilled wine always makes me feel cooler on these hot evenings."

Jess nodded. "I just happened to see this in a store downtown and remembered how much you like it, Fred."

Fred reached in a drawer below the prescription desk for a knife. "Here, let's open it now and have a sip."

That was what Jess wanted. He had been worried about opening the bottle before his partner took it home. Now that little problem was settled. They drank a toast to each other's health and to the future prosperity of their drug business.

Fred smacked his lips noisily for Jess' benefit. "Yes sir, Jess, I'm really going to enjoy this stuff tonight."

Putting the sleeping powder into the bottle a little later was easy, too. When Fred went out front to wait on some customers, Jess took the bottle from the place where he had hidden it and poured enough powders into it to put three men to sleep—permanently. The powders dissolved quickly and left no visible trace. He knew that they would effect the taste of the wine only a little. By the time Fred noticed that it had an off-taste it would be too late. . . .

JESS stared hard at the empty sheet in the typewriter for a few moments before beginning. Not that he was afraid to go ahead. This part had been carefully planned too. It was just that he wanted the phrasing of the note he was going to write to be exactly right. When people read it the next day, it had to have the proper sound.

He began pecking at the keys. He was deliberate and careful because this part of his plan was important. Fred used the store typewriter frequently for his letters. If they traced the note to it, that was all right. But if they decided to test the typing for individual marks, Jess' plan might fall through unless he was careful.

Whenever he typed Q, W, P or O, he hit the key lightly. Fred had learned the touch system but didn't practice much and his fingers didn't hit all of the keys evenly. At the end of every sentence Jess punched the period deeply into the paper. Every third or fourth sentence he pushed the shift key in only part way, so that the capital letter beginning the new sentence came out raised above the line.

The finished product, when he rolled it out of the machine, looked as much like Fred's work as was possible. Jess had spent a week studying his partner's typewriter work and knew it almost as well as he knew his own handwriting. The forgery before him, he thought, would pass a pretty rigid test.

He read through the note.

To my dear wife and to my friend and partner, Jess Carver:

I know that you will be grieved when you learn of my decision, but please believe me when I say it is for the best. The world can well do without me.

I suppose it's only fair to give you my reasons for taking my life, so I will. First of all, I'm fifty years old now and my health is beginning to fail. Betty, you're twenty years younger and have your life ahead of you. I have lived in a terrible fear throughout our seven happy years together that someday I would become a burden on you. This will solve the

problem.

Jess, you're a young man with progressive ideas. I've left my share of the drug store to you because I know you'll do well with it. You and Betty like each other a lot. Take care of her. I find myself hoping that maybe that liking will grow into love. Betty would make you a fine wife.

I've put a good strong dose of sleeping powders in my bottle of wine and so will go out the easy way. There will be no pain. I suppose I'm a coward to flee from my worries this way, but the idea of growing old and sick and causing pain and trouble to you, Betty, and to you, Jess, is too much for me. I never have been a very strong character and I guess this proves it.

Now goodbye. My fullest love to both of you.

Fred

It was in character, Jess decided. Anyone who had ever known Fred very well could read it and say that it was just like him to write such a note.

HE GLANCED at his watch. The dial told him that it was eleven-twenty. He had a half hour's drive to Fred's apartment. That would be just right. He wanted to be there around midnight. Fred by that time would have had ample opportunity to drink his wine. All he had to do was open the door, walk in and plant the note. He could leave the rest for the police in the morning when Fred's body was discovered.

It was too hot for even a suit coat, but out of habit Jess put on a hat. He locked the store carefully behind him when he left, then checked the keys in his pocket. The key to Fred's apartment was there. Everything was all set.

He chuckled. Even Fred didn't know that he had a key to his apartment. It had been merely a question of taking the key from Fred's coat pocket a few weeks before. He always carried his keys in the right hand pocket of his suit coat. And in the store he removed his coat to put on a gray druggist's jacket. The suit coat always hung in the back room.

Jess made a weekly trip to the post office for stamps. He took the key from its ring, dropped it off at the hardware store on his way to the post office and then picked it up, with a newly made duplicate, on his way back. Nothing to arouse suspicion, nothing out of the ordinary. It all flowed along smoothly, inevitably.

The drive to Fred's apartment was an easy one. A short trip to the outer drive, then a pleasant twenty minute drive south. Fred drove along without haste, thinking of how it all began. Now that his plan was so near completion he could afford to look back.

It all began with Fred's marriage to Betty. It was a May and December affair that no one thought could work out. She was young and active, while Fred was in his forties, but growing settled in his ways. He collected stamps and tropical fish, and would rather spend the evenings at home, fooling with them, than taking Betty out.

Betty and Jess had become acquainted about a year after the marriage. Jess smiled broadly in the darkness of the car when he remembered how quickly that friendship had ripened into something more. Fred couldn't give Betty the necessary things for a happily married life. Jess could and did. At first, when Jess arrived at the store at noon time, after spending the

morning with Betty, he couldn't look Fred in the eye. Then gradually he began to resent his partner, finally to hate him for standing between him and Betty.

Fred opened the store early in the morning and stayed until six in the evening, then went home to his collections. Jess came on at noon and closed the store at ten-thirty. The schedule was so regular that Jess had no trouble in getting to Fred's apartment just after he left in the morning and staying until he had just enough time to make the store by noon.

And gradually, as his hate for Fred had grown, Jess began to notice things in the store. The two of them made a comfortable living from the drug store. But there was a lot more in it. Jess wanted to expand the business and take advantage of all of the money-making opportunities, but Fred discouraged him. He was satisfied. He admitted the possibilities, but said that he wanted no more than he had now.

With Fred out of the way, Jess thought, the store would be his to handle as he liked. And there was big money in it. Not only his share of the good money an expansion would bring in, but Fred's also. And then he would have Betty all to himself.

He wondered what Betty was doing tonight. Two weeks ago he had suggested that she go to the country for a month. He promised her that when she came back he would have everything straightened out between Fred and himself. He smiled smugly. In just a few minutes now it would be all straightened out. Then it would be a matter of the future and unlimited possibilities.

IN FRONT of the tall apartment building in which Fred lived, Jess nosed his car into the curb. He sat for a moment after parking to see that nothing unusual was going on in the neighborhood. The car was fifty feet from the entrance to Fred's building, far enough not to attract attention. And the surrounding area seemed quiet. Jess alighted from his car, leaving the keys in the ignition so that he could get away in a hurry. He had reached the climax now and nothing must happen to mar the final result.

The key worked in the lock like a charm. Jess pushed the door to the apartment open and walked in. He stepped down the short hall to the living room and stopped under the archway. He shivered in spite of himself.

Fred sat in a soft, unholstered chair. The windows were wide open and a soft breeze, warm with a hint of coolness from Lake Michigan, ruffled the curtains. The radio played softly in the background. On the table beside him stood the bottle of wine in a bucket of ice cubes. The cubes were half melted and the water was near the top of the bucket.

Beside the bottle lay a thick stamp album, open half way. Several stamps and an envelope of stamp hinges were on the table. Fred had been working on his collection right up to the last.

Now he sat, slumped over, like an old man who has nodded off after dinner. His chin rested on his chest, and one arm hung limply over the side of the chair. The fingers just touched the rug on the floor. But even from where he was standing, ten feet away from his partner, Jess could see that the man wasn't breathing.

Carefully he crossed the room and felt the pulse in the arm that dangled beside the chair. There was none and the body had already begun to grow cold. Straightening up, Jess took the note he had so carefully typewritten from his pocket and laid it under the

cover of the stamp album on the table.

That way it looked as if Fred had planned the suicide. That he had brought his stamps out and worked on them while he drank the wine and waited for it to take effect. Jess smiled a little weakly. It was a nice dramatic touch. But the knowledge that Fred was dead and that he had killed him began to fret his nerves. It was the close presence of the body, he decided. He'd be all right when he got outside, away from it.

His work finished, Jess hurried from the room. At the front door he wiped both knobs with his handkerchief so that no prints would be found. Too late he remembered that if fingerprints were taken in the apartment, the police would become suspicious when they found that there were no prints on the door knob. They would know that Fred had come in that way and that his should be there.

Jess went down the stairs quickly. His collar began to cut at the soft skin of his neck and tiny drops of perspiration showed on his forehead and under his eyes. By the time he reached the bottom of the stairs he was panicky. What if the police became suspicious of the lack of prints? Everything else was perfect, but an investigation might . . .

Jess was running by the time he reached the front door. He went through it looking neither one way nor the other, and made the distance from the building to the car in a few long, jerky steps. He pulled the door of the car open viciously and jumped in behind the wheel. He had to get away from here!

He had driven only a few blocks when he began to quiet down again. He reasoned it out carefully. The lack of fingerprints was a possible clue, but they might not notice it and they might not follow it up.

The key in his pocket! He remembered that now. If the police should begin an investigation he couldn't afford to have the key on his person. He had to get rid of it.

JUST ahead of him the Outer Drive passed close to the lake. Great boulders had been dumped right at the shore line to prevent the lake from tearing up the roadway during bad storms, as it had once done, some years before. Jess stopped the car near the boulders and got out. He climbed up on them, pulled the key from his pocket and threw it into the water. The surface of the lake was a dark blue and he couldn't see the splash, but he heard it. And he knew that near the rocks the water was deep. So deep the key could never be found.

He hurried back to the car and started off down the drive again. Something in his mind kept telling him that he was safe, that he had nothing to worry about. After all, the suicide setup was so well done that they probably wouldn't even bother to look for fingerprints.

Fred was locked in his apartment. The suicide note beside him was authentic in every detail. The bottle was easily accounted for and so was the sleeping medicine. The key was gone now and there were no traces of his visit . . . except that lack of fingerprints.

In his mind Jess argued back and forth.

He glanced into the rear view mirror as he passed Oak Street. There was a car right behind him. He hated to have people driving right on his tail. It made him feel as if he were driving too slow. He stepped on the accelerator and once again looked in the mirror.

The other car had speeded up, too. Then he noticed the tall, shivering aerial sticking up from the right rear of

the car. It was a police car!

The sweat broke out again. Had someone found Fred's body so soon? No. He didn't think so. And even if they had, the police wouldn't be looking for him yet. But why was the squad car tailing him. By now he had little doubt but that was what they were doing. They matched his speed whenever he changed it.

Then he remembered. He had *run* from the apartment. Nothing attracts attention more than a running man at night in a residential section of the city. Someone may have become suspicious at seeing him run and reported it. He may even have been followed all the way out on the drive. Then, if that were true, the police had seen him get rid of the key.

Hands began to close in on Jess' throat and a leaden weight pushed at the bottom of his stomach. The plan had been perfect, but he had let himself become nervous and had given it all away. He cursed aloud and began to increase the speed of the car.

They'd never get him. He'd give them a race that would show them. The eight lanes of the Outer Drive stretched ahead of him. There was only light traffic and fast driving was easy. He passed forty, up to fifty.

The police car stayed glued to his tail.

He forced the accelerator down further. The needle of his speedometer began to climb.

"I'll show you!" he breathed. His hands were moist on the wheel, and his breath came shorter. "You'll never get me!" His voice was louder. Somehow he felt it a relief to shout in the car, though he knew that the men behind him didn't hear it.

He was doing seventy now and the sharp turn at Foster Avenue was ahead. He'd lose them on that turn. They wouldn't dare take it as fast as he was going to. His hands closed tighter on the wheel.

A blinding light hit his eyes as the squad behind him turned on their spotlight in a signal for him to stop. He ducked his head so that the light did not get in his eyes.

"You'll never get me!" he screamed. "Never! Never!" He ended up with a long laugh, filled with tension, that was almost a sob. The curve at Foster loomed just ahead of him. He braced himself to make the turn. Then he saw that the squad was pulling up along the left side of his car.

He gave the wheel a swift jerk to the right. His car careened and screamed wildly across the drive, hit the low cement embankment at the edge of the road and stood up on its radiator, then toppled over the embankment through a landscape hedge and down a few feet. It stopped rolling.

IT TOOK a brief interval for the squad to stop and turn around. When they got back to the spot where the car had gone over the embankment, the two uniformed men in the car jumped out and ran down to the wreck. Silently and efficiently, with the skill that comes to men who have been near tragedies often, they forced the door of the car open and pulled Jess' body from the front seat. Long slashes had been cut in his head and face from the glass of the windshield, and an ugly gaping wound in the side of his neck bled badly.

One of the men looked up after they had laid him on the ground. He shook his head slowly. "He's gone."

The other nodded and sighed. "These fools!" he said softly. "This guy stole a a car. What would he get out of that? Six months at the most, unless it's habitual. But from the way he drove,

I don't think it was."

"Hell!" the other one answered. "This car wasn't even stolen. According to the report I got on the two-way phone, a doctor had parked it in front of an apartment building on the south side and left the keys in the lock. This guy came out and got in and drove away. But his car, one just like this, is still out there. We were only supposed to tell him to go back and get his own car."

They stood looking at the body on the grass. "Well," the first one said, "call the coroner. The sooner we get out of here the better. I still don't like stiffs."

THE END

WHY KILL YOURSELF?

★ ★

By
WILLIS WHITE

PSYCHOLOGISTS have wrestled with the causes and control of suicide ever since the mysteries of the mind first opened themselves to study. They have come to some interesting conclusions—none of them very startling—but all of them worthy of thought and of mention here. These conclusions were possible only after the patient examination of thousands of suicides and attempted suicides, through the medium of personal interviews with relatives and friends and objective newspaper accounts of the individual cases. The occurrence of suicide in past eras and civilizations was studied as well as the comparative frequency among various national groups.

Historically suicide weaves an unusual tale. In the ancient Orient, before that civilization was influenced by contact with the West, Europe in particular—suicide was a national custom. It was a religious and patriotic ceremony practiced on specific holidays and feast days. People regarded self-destruction as a noble death—a mark of honor.

Quite the opposite view of the practice was held in Europe. There the Church condemned suicide as a sin—and he who killed himself was regarded as a murderer. And in Europe cases of suicide were almost non-existent. Psychologists very rightly were able to conclude that even the very rash act of self-destruction can be completely controlled by custom. Masses of the people can be made to commit suicide or to refrain from doing it, depending upon the strength of the social code, the power of group allegiance.

Europe and America look upon suicide with disfavor. The act carries with it no honor in our western civilization, only the idea of failure. Psychologists account for the wish to die as the natural solution in the minds of those frustrated individuals who find themselves unable to adjust to the problems of life. It is a sign of weakness.

Unsatisfied ambitions, disappointments in love and in business, illness, quarrels, the death of someone close—all these are often causes. A most important factor to be taken into consideration is temperament and personality types—for while everyone has experienced despair during times of crisis, a person who is normally cheerful and resourceful can overcome that despair. Those that are extremely introspective and melancholy see no other way out.

STATISTICS show that suicides occur in greater numbers in cities, while it is very rare in rural communities. More men commit suicide than women. The widowed and divorced have higher rates than the happily married. In studying the statistics on suicide rates of the large cities, it was found that people made attempts to take their own life in only certain sections. These were largely the transient areas, the neighborhoods where cheap hotels and rooming houses predominated, where pawnshops, taverns, prostitutes, and dope addicts were most numerous. Suicide rates are high in the very same areas that murder and other crimes most frequently occur—and where juvenile delinquency is an acute and ever-present problem.

The findings of the psychologists lead us to believe that this problem, as so many others, lies deeply rooted in social organization. Partial solution can be achieved by educators who can train and develop resourceful, reflective characters who will be able to adapt themselves to the changing conditions and crises of life. There is a definite need for counseling agencies staffed with trained psychologists and sociologists to study, analyze, and diagnose the trouble before utter desperation takes hold. And vital, too, is the rebuilding of the blighted slum areas of the city, for grim surroundings lead to a grim outlook.

"Sign it," Burgess said, "and I'll guarantee you won't get the chair"

Let's Cry For The Dead

by W. T. BRANNON

Perhaps the most interesting fact about that diary was the peculiar type of ink used in making the fatal entries

"SO THE lady was a tramp?" Detective Jim Burgess folded the paper he had been reading, shoved it in his desk.

"Yeah," said Tom Wall. "Chicago floosie. Minor police record, but no convictions."

"Anything unusual?"

"Well, she spent a couple of nights with one of the Barker boys. Made the small fry look up to her."

"Not a bad looking babe, at that," said Jim. "What about the guy in the roadster?"

"They found him out near Green Lake. The sheriff's bringing him in."

"Good. When they get here, I wanta have a little talk with him."

"What you going to do—charge him with disorderly conduct?"

"Naw. Murder."

"And all the evidence you got is that somebody saw her in the car with him?"

"Yeah. But—"

"Don't tell me," Tom interrupted. "You gotta hunch."

"Uh-huh."

"You and your hunches," Tom said disgustedly.

"Sometimes they work."

"Well, they won't work on this baby. When he's on the pan all he does is

bawl."

"Sure, I know," Jim said good-naturedly. "They're rough on rats in Chicago. Too rough. You got to play with 'em a while before you trap 'em."

"What's the game this time?" Tom asked. "And what part do I play?"

"Just bring him in and stick around." Burgess stood up and put on his coat.

"Where you going?" asked Tom.

"To the dime store. Some things I got to buy."

WHEN Tom Wall came in with the gangster in tow, Burgess was sitting at his desk thumbing through the pages of a small book on whose imitation leather cover the word "Diary" had been embroidered.

The gangster was short and stout and dressed in a tan suit. He wore a tan hat, pushed back jauntily on his short, fat head.

"Sit down," said Jim. He tossed the book into the basket on his desk. A faint aroma of perfume was discernible. The hoodlum eyed the book for a moment before he spoke.

"Okay," he said, adding with a leer, "constable."

Burgess grinned good-naturedly.

"Let's see," he said in his easy-going manner. "Your name's Joe 'Cry-Baby' Carboni. You run a pop-gun for Nick Nitti's mob. A sucker for the dames. Been up the river a couple of times. Out at present on parole."

"So what, wiseguy? Did you pull me in here to give me a lecture?"

"Naw. Thought you might answer a few questions, is all."

"Well, I don't know nuttin', see?"

"Who was the girl you dumped out of your roadster, Joe?"

"What girl?"

"The strawberry blonde."

"I don't know what you're talkin' about, copper."

"The girl who was with you when you bought gasoline in Stateville. Remember now?"

"Oh, her!" The hoodlum shrugged. "Just some broad that was hitch-hikin'. She wanted a lift to Lincoln. I don't know who she was."

"Yeah? Ever hear of the Mann Act, Cry-Baby?"

"Whaddaya mean?"

"From Stateville to Lincoln you cross the state line."

"You mean you're holdin' me because I give her a lift?"

"Naw. Plenty of other things I could hold you on. Like murder, or violating your parole." Burgess opened a drawer of his desk, extracted a newspaper clipping. He stuck it in front of the gangster. "See this?"

Cry-Baby Carboni licked his lips. "What about it?"

"It's a picture of the electric chair in our county jail."

"So?"

"The seat gets mighty hot sometimes."

"What's that got to do with me?"

"It would be too bad for a nice guy like you to burn, is all."

"Don't gimme the business, copper. I ain't goin' to burn."

Burgess shrugged. "Okay, Joe, if that's the way you feel about it. I just thought I might help you."

"Don't do me any favors, copper."

Burgess reached down, threw a switch. The big overhead lamp spotlighted Cry-Baby Carboni. He squirmed, started to move. "Hold it," Burgess said crisply. . . .

HE TURNED to Tom Wall, ignoring the hoodlum. "Tom, you think the Dodgers will win the pennant?"

For two hours, they talked of routine matters. Carboni was ignored completely, except when he attempted to

'I TALKED WITH GOD'

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Dr. Frank B. Robinson

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move. For two hours, Cry-Baby Carboni squirmed under the hot light, perspired freely. He lived up to his nickname. He began to bawl.

Finally Burgess had lunch brought in. He and Tom sat at the broad desk and ate. Carboni wept as he watched them. They paid no heed to his plea for at least a drink of water.

After the dishes had been taken away, Burgess got out a checker board. They began to play checkers. The heat continued to beat down on Carboni.

Suddenly the hoodlum stood up. "Jeez!" he cried, his face puckered like a wailing infant's. "Jeez! Lemme outa here."

"What's the rush?" said Burgess. "Don't you like checkers?"

The gangster whimpered, wiped his eyes with his fists. "I gotta have a drink. Cripes, I'm burning up."

Burgess made a jump on the checker board.

"Fun, huh?" he remarked casually.

"Lemme out!" Cry-Baby Carboni shouted. "Lemme out!"

"Ready to talk?"

"I wanna see my mout'piece."

"Not a chance, Cry-Baby. The trial would be over before he could get here." Burgess made another move on the checker board. "You've heard about how fast the court works in this town. Or don't you read the papers?"

The tears were rolling from Carboni's eyes. "I gotta have water," he screamed hoarsely.

"You can start talking any time," said Burgess. "I *could* turn that light off and give you some water."

"Cripes! I can't stand it."

"S'pose you tell me about killing the dame?"

"Hell, I told you I don't know nuttin' about it."

"Okay," said Burgess. "Stack up the checkers, Tom, while I make a call." He lifted the phone, dialed. "Hello, Chief. . . . Yeah. Listen, Chief, I'm fryin' a rat. . . . Yeah, him. How about you having some ice water and a pot of coffee sent in? . . . Okay, thanks."

"Your move," said Tom. . . .

THE coffee didn't interest the hoodlum much, but he viewed the pitcher of ice water with feverish eyes. Suddenly, when neither man appeared to be looking, he lunged for it.

Burgess swept the pitcher from his grasp and it crashed to the floor. There was the tinkle of broken glass and the gurgle of escaping water. Carboni watched the liquid seeping into the carpet as if it were his life's blood.

He sank back into the chair with a defeated look on his fat face.

"Ready to talk now?" said Burgess.

"No," Carboni replied weakly.

"I guess you're not warm enough. We got another light like that one. I bet that would help."

"You can't do this to me," the gangster screamed. "It ain't legal."

"Yeah, I know. It's not legal to murder, either."

"You can't keep me here forever," Carboni said, as if trying to convince himself on this fact. "You gotta let me go some time."

"No, I don't. I can fry all the water out of you and keep you here for a mummy."

"Aw, nuts!"

Burgess turned back to his desk, reached in the basket and picked up the leather-bound book. The hoodlum eyed it curiously as the detective brought it around in an arc so that the smell of perfume was spread.

"What you got?" asked Tom Wall.

"A diary. Funny the way women keep diaries, isn't it?"

"Yeah," said Tom. "Writing stuff in

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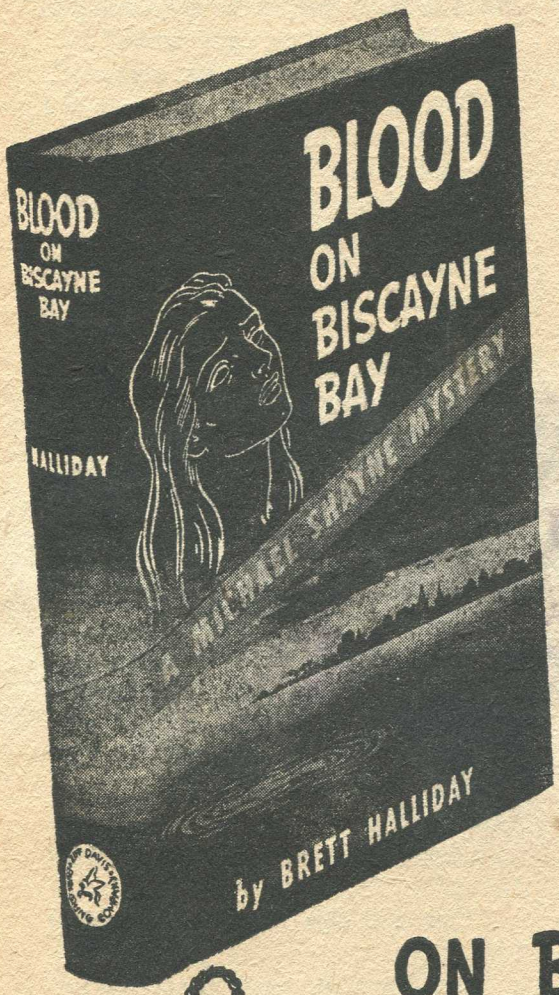

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it like that movie actress."

"U-huh." Burgess flipped through several pages and stopped. "Listen to this: 'Nick Nitti came up to the flat last night. He was half tight and mad as hell. He started bawling me out because I had been out with another man. But when he saw me—I just had on shorts, Diary—he calmed down and warmed up. He got plenty warm before the night was over.' Hot stuff, huh?"

"Yeah. Where'd you get it?"

"Found it. Out somewhere on the Lincoln road."

"Whoever lost it," said Tom, "sure likes perfume. Smells familiar, too."

"Yeah, I think it's *Le Joie.*"

"I know now," said Tom. "It's the same kind of perfume that strawberry blonde had on."

"Maybe," said Jim. "A lot of girls use it." He flipped the pages of the diary. "Listen: 'Nick Nitti was ready to murder me last night. Somebody had told him I was out with another guy. He said he'd cut the guy's head off if he ever found out who it was. But I got him quieted down, all right. You know how that's done, don't you, Diary?' "

"Don't let me stop you," said Tom. "And to think you made me play checkers when all the time you had that!"

Burgess flipped to another page: " 'Daisy dropped in for a few minutes. She said Nick Nitti had found out who the other guy was and I'd better get into my best scanties—' "

"Stop it!" yelled Cry-Baby Carboni. "Stop it!"

"What's the matter, don't you like spicy stuff?"

"Turn off this damn light," cried the gangster. "God, I'm scorching."

"Ready to talk?"

"I might. Turn off the light and stop readin' from that book."

BURGESS switched off the light. He went to a water tap and returned with a glass of water. Carboni gulped it.

"You can get more when you get outside," he said.

"Outside?"

"Yeah. On second thought, I've decided to have one of the boys run you into Chicago and turn you loose."

"What you doing that for, copper?"

"You're on parole in Chicago. If I kept you here, I'd be a party to violating your parole."

"Why don't you just turn me loose here?"

"No soap," said Burgess. "We cleaned all the rats out of this town a long time ago." He turned to Tom Wall: "Tom, how would you like to take a little trip into Chicago?"

"Okay by me," said Tom.

The hoodlum was standing now. Slowly he had edged toward the desk where Burgess had been sitting. Swiftly he reached toward the wire basket for the leather-bound book. Just as swiftly Burgess snatched it out of his grasp.

"You can have that," said Burgess, "as soon as we get you back to Chicago."

Carboni sank back into his chair. "Nuttin' doin', copper. I ain't going back to Chicago."

"Okay. Then let's hear what you got to say."

"You said this morning you might help me."

"Sure," said Burgess. "I showed you a picture of the electric chair in our county jail. You willing to talk to keep out of it?"

"Whatcha mean?"

"You tell me about killing the girl and I promise you don't burn. I promise the most you'll get will be life."

"Jeez! . . . Life . . . God, that'sa long time." He mopped his dripping

face. "I'd be a sap to do it!"

Burgess shrugged. "Okay. Get ready to go to Chicago, Tom."

"Don't do it! Hell, I'll talk. I'll talk."

"All right, it's a deal. You talk and I guarantee you don't burn. Right?"

"Yeah," Carboni replied, all the fight gone. "You're makin' a sucker outa me, but—I done it. Hell, the dame was two-timin' me. No broad can two-time me and get away wit' it. So I brought her for a ride out in the sticks. And the hell of it," he added ruefully, "is that I was in love wit' her."

"Okay," said Burgess. "Tom, take him away. And don't forget to tell the Chief I promised he wouldn't burn."

WHEN Tom came back, the confession had been written, signed and witnessed. There was a bewildered look on his face as he sat down opposite Burgess.

"I don't understand it," he said. "I was there when they picked the dame up, but I didn't see any diary."

"Don't you have any imagination, Tom?"

"I don't get you."

"Well, look. All bad girls keep diaries. I don't know why, but they do. Maybe they like to brag about their conquests or something. And that perfume was a very common brand. Gangsters don't make fine distinctions like that, so their women can buy their perfume in the dime store—just like I did."

"You mean there ain't anything in that diary? You just pretended to be reading from it?"

"Sure. But I've read spicier stuff than that from real diaries. You remember the Little Audrey case in Chicago? Well, the girl's diary showed she had been playing two guys at the same time. One of 'em got tired of it and rubbed her out. They still don't know

who it was."

"So you figured the motive in this one was jealousy?"

"It usually is between a man and a woman. I didn't know who the other man was, but I did figure that if this hood *thought* it was Nick Nitti, he'd take life here rather than go to Chicago and face Nitti's firing squad."

"I get that. But there's something else. What right you got to promise he wouldn't burn? You know Judge Johnson won't go for a deal between the police and a crook."

Burgess grinned. "The Chief didn't argue about it, did he?"

"No. That's what is so funny."

Burgess reached in his desk and pulled out the clipping. "The trouble with you and that hood," he remarked, "is that you don't read the papers."

"I saw that picture before. What about it?"

"Plenty." The detective pulled out the rest of the paper. "It was clipped from under these headlines."

The headline read:

GOVERNOR SIGNS BILL OUTLAWING CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

THE END

THE THOMPSON MURDER

By

JUNE LURIE

ONE of the most sensational crimes solved by Scotland Yard was the Thompson and Bywaters case. Chief Inspector Frederick Wensley, distinguished through the effectiveness of his past work, was selected to take charge of the investigation.

On October 4, 1922, a little past midnight, young Mr. and Mrs. Thompson walked down an ill-lighted street. Suddenly for no apparent reason Mr. Thompson staggered, and then dropped unconscious on the road. Mrs. Thompson supported him as long as she could. Then knowing not what to do, she became hysterical, and called to a passer-by for help. Immediately a doctor was brought to the scene. He examined Mr. Thompson and pronounced him dead from a seizure. Upon investigation by the police, no additional information could be obtained from Mrs. Thompson, who quite naturally appeared to be on the verge of collapse. She was accompanied home by a policeman. The body of her husband was taken to a mortuary.

At the mortuary it was discovered that Mr. Thompson had been stabbed several times, once deeply in the back of his neck. At once the detectives under the direction of Wensley went to the home of Mrs. Thompson. They found her in a distraught state, incapable of giving them any explanation. No suspicions were directed against her. Her reactions appeared perfectly normal.

The following day Wensley questioned Mrs. Thompson, and learned that she was twenty-eight and her husband was thirty-two years old, and they had been married for seven years. They had lived a contented and happy life together. The night of the crime they had been to the Criterion Theater with their Aunt and Uncle. . . .

Wensley continued to question Mrs. Thompson but could obtain no more information from her. She refused to reveal the name of any person who might have committed the crime, or any possible motive.

From talking to Mrs. Thompson's relatives Wensley and his men learned that Mr. Thompson had a brother. Immediately they contacted the brother. Much to the surprise of everyone, his revelation gave the case an entirely new turn. He spoke frankly and to the point. He explained that there was conflict between his brother and his brother's wife over a young man named Bywaters who lived in their house. Bywaters had become overly friendly with Mrs. Thompson, and her husband had asked him to leave the house. But he remained. Concerning Bywaters, Mr. Thompson's brother said: "I never could understand how my brother tolerated the situation." But he believed that Bywaters, a ship's writer, was away on a voyage now and so could not be involved in the crime.

Upon receipt of this information, Wensley knew that the relationship between the couple had not been what it was made out to be. He returned to Mrs. Thompson and asked her: "Who was Bywaters?" She explained that he was a friend whom she had known for many years. He was then on leave from his ship, but had to rejoin it the following day. When questioned more concerning him, she refused to cooperate, insisting that she knew no more. At this point Wensley's suspicions were aroused.

Scotland Yard Police all over the country were ordered to watch for Bywaters, and to prevent him from escaping to the sea. Finally at six o'clock that evening Bywaters was seen entering the home of Mrs. Thompson's parents at Manor

Park. The police forced him to accompany them to Ilford Police Station.

Bywaters was twenty years old, tall and handsome. He told little that was not known to the police. He gave an elaborate account of his activities on the day and the night of the murder, trying to absolve himself from any suspicion of guilt. In the course of the questioning Wensley noticed some stains on his shirt sleeve. The divisional doctor was called to examine the stains and determine their origin. After a careful examination, the doctor proved that they were blood stains. Bywaters was then told that he would be detained. To this he indignantly replied "I know nothing about it."

Next, the home of Bywaters' mother was searched. The only evidence found there was a suitcase full of letters. These were filled with endearments. Here and there were words that suggested sinister intentions on the part of both. For example, Mrs. Thompson wrote: "Don't forget what we talked of in the tearoom. I'll still risk and try if you will. . . ."

Twenty-four hours had passed since the crime had been committed, and little progress had been made. There were no grounds on which to make a charge against either of the individuals. But both were detained at the Police station—Bywaters in the library, and Mrs. Thompson in the matron's room.

Not until the following day when Mrs. Thompson passed by the library window and saw her lover did she agree to speak.

"Oh, God!" she screamed hysterically. "What can I do? Why did he do it? I did not want him to do it. . . . I must tell the truth."

Then back in the office she told all. "When we got near Endsleigh Gardens, a man rushed out and knocked me away and pushed me away from my husband. I was dazed for a moment. When I recovered I saw my husband scuffling with a man. The man whom I knew as Freddie Bywaters was running away. He was wearing a blue overcoat and a grey hat. I knew it was him, though I did not see his face."

Wensley contacted Bywaters and told him that both he and Mrs. Thompson would be charged with murder. Immediately he defended Mrs. Thompson, placing the crime entirely upon his shoulders. But after further investigation it was found that the murder had long been planned by both Mrs. Thompson and Bywaters. Mrs. Thompson had twice tried to poison her husband. In her letters she had asked for instructions as to how to proceed.

The court trial aroused much public interest. During the post-war years, sensationalism was run after by the people. They offered large sums for seats in the public gallery. No valid defence could be built up for Bywaters. For the most part he attempted to defend Mrs. Thompson.

After five days of trial, the jury returned a verdict of guilty against the two people. They were both hanged on January 9, 1923.

STRICTLY FOR DOPES!

By GARY LEE HORTON

TO THE drug addict, or "dope fiend," goes the credit for the vast and ever-increasing volume of illegal narcotic smuggling that is presently conducted on an international basis. While the laity is familiar with the term "dope fiend" and regards the drug addiction habit merely as the cowardly pastime of a depraved, spineless individual, only those who have delved intimately into the subject and have had occasion to deal personally with those enslaved by the deadly and often life-consuming drugs know what anguish is suffered by the victims and to what lengths they will go to secure the cherished, pain-deadening, nerve-quieting narcotics.

Dr. Kolb, in one of his reports for the United States Health Service, describes the thoroughly drug-dominated addict as follows: "Morphine and heroin, when taken in large doses, sap the physical and mental energy; lethargy is produced, ambition is lessened, and the pleasurable feeling makes the addicts contented. These various effects cause them to pay less attention to work than formerly; consequently they tend to become idlers and dependents. Those who depend upon the illegitimate traffic are sometimes unable to work because of discomfort and weakness due to insufficient narcotics, and at other times they stay away from their work in order to look for the drug. There are cases in this series who have gone to distant cities regularly to get an ounce of heroin or morphine, and others who have lost as many as a dozen jobs through neglecting work to meet their peddlers, or through lying in bed in the morning instead of going to work because the dose that would have put energy into them was not available. Often, when these cases secure a supply, after their short period of deprivation, they take more than is actually necessary to keep them comfortable. The result is that they alternate between physical and mental irritability, and physical and mental lethargy. Both extremes make for emaciation, physical inefficiency and unusual mental reactions. The dreamy satisfaction and the pleasurable physical thrill produced by opium in many addicts in their early experiences with it are of themselves forms of dissipation that tend to cause moral deterioration. Addicts as a rule are compelled to associate with persons of low moral character in order to continue with their addiction. Financial embarrassment resulting from idleness or the high price of peddled narcotics impels them to beg money from their friends, or to obtain it from members of their families by subterfuge, or to steal in order to supply themselves with drugs. They suffer in manliness through feeling what they often feel, the just contempt of the public; they suffer more through their constant fear of arrest or because of a term in the penitentiary served for having narcotics in their possession. The whole train of events above described brings about unfavorable character changes and gradual moral deterioration, and converts what might have been fairly useful citizens into outcasts, idlers, or dependents."

IT IS these products of the ravages of narcotic drugs, at the mercy of those who supply the life-giving balm, who make possible the huge profits of the underground narcotic traffic. While it is obviously impossible to determine what proportions this trade has reached, the authorities have roughly estimated that it equals and even surpasses the voluminous distribution of the narcotic drugs under legal supervision.

Since it is necessary by Federal law that every medical practitioner account for the use of all drugs allotted to him, the drug addict has no recourse but to seek out the illegal narcotic peddler who may supply him in various ways. Some of the distributive methods used by the peddlers is through delivery of daily newspapers wherein is glued between two pages the small packet of white powder. The portability and potent quality in small quantity so characteristic of narcotics makes it possible for a shop-owner, under the guise of carrying on legitimate trade, to distribute the drugs in artificial flowers, umbrellas, necklaces, fountain pens, wrist watches, etc. The possibilities for secreting the drugs in articles of every kind are endless and a notorious method of passing the all-important narcotics into the hands of eager addicts is through the mail. One of the cases of this kind discovered by government narcotics officials was that of a man and wife in California who were found to be conducting a huge mail-order business in morphine, their fame having flourished by the grape-vine system among addicts throughout the United States. Thousands of ounces of morphine had been transported to all points of America through the medium of apparently harmless "samples of no value," accompanied by picturesque advertisements of fictitious products.

But these peddlers are merely "middle-men" in this enormous industry and while hundreds of them are arraigned and sentenced to prison every year, the menace still flourishes and will continue to do so unless a means is devised to prevent illegal *international* smuggling. It is like cleaning out the back yard, only to find after a gust of wind, that the former refuse has been supplanted by that blown in from the neighbor's yard. It is

to the foreign manufacturers of the narcotics and their abettors here in the United States who by devious means manage to smuggle the forbidden and disastrous products past our shores that Federal authorities look for solution of the problem. The international narcotics smuggling is where the limitless profit is found and while the officials are constantly on the look-out for peddlers in the United States, their chief objective is to capture the huge shipments of morphine, heroin and other drugs before they are distributed and to discover the original source of such shipments.

THE attempts to control smuggling of narcotics are universal and the need for concerted action against the growing trade on the part of all countries was recognized in 1909 when a conference was held in Shanghai to discuss the possibility of remedying the situation in the East. While this convention in itself did not accomplish much in the way of apparent progress, it paved the way for the Hague Convention of 1912 whereat delegates of China, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Persia, Portugal, Russia, Siam and the United States were present. The provisions drawn up at the Convention were in essence to the effect that the use of manufactured drugs, such as morphine, heroin and cocaine, was to be limited to strictly medical and legitimate requirements, and that the traffic in smoking opium was eventually to be suppressed. This was followed by the origin of the Advisory Committee on Traffic in Opium and Other Dangerous Drugs shortly after World War I, composed of large countries, such as Great Britain, Egypt, France, Germany, Italy, Mexico, Portugal and many others. It was the duty of the Committee to keep under control illegal import and export of drugs. The Committee recommended various measures, such as submission of annual reports by the interested countries as to the consumption, manufacturing, import and export of the drugs, as well as the prevailing status of illegal traffic. Most notorious of the Committee's suggestions was the system of certificates which required that each manufacturer must secure an export certificate before shipping out any drugs and the recipient must likewise obtain an import certificate for each shipment addressed and delivered to him. This system, however, was not followed through by all countries alike and therefore did not provide an effective check on the underground narcotic traffic. Then, too, many of the certificates were loosely drawn, making it possible for traffickers to use the law for their own purposes. Even if discovered, upon being confronted by customs officials with questions as to why products were deceptively described, they were able to claim that false declaration was used to prevent theft. Through minor legal technicalities, the manufacturer was, and is today, able to pour his goods into the illicit traffic, wreak its mighty profits, and still remain within the law.

Some of the various methods used by these "higher-ups" in the "profession" can best be described by examples. In 1928, Rotterdam police uncovered a gigantic scheme involving shipments from French, Swiss and German manufacturers through a Dutch wholesaler. In one year, nearly three-and-one-half tons of morphine were distributed through this Dutch wholesaler. Since the Netherlands at that time required neither import nor export certificates, this factory served as a clearing house for various manufacturers who were violating no statutes. All of the parties involved escaped prosecution because they were all acting within the letter of the law.

ANOTHER outstanding case of illegal smuggling was that of a shipment composed of eight large packing cases and labeled "brushes" which were transported from France and addressed to a Philadelphia company. In spite of the fact that the cargo was landed at New York, it would not ordinarily have been subject to customs examination until it reached Philadelphia. However, for some reason, the shipment was suspected and opened by the New York officials. The result of the examination was that only one of the cases contained brushes, while the others were brimful of morphine, cocaine and gum opium. Upon investigation, it was proved to be one of eight shipments which had been transported under similar conditions in less than a year.

The world does not know to what extent the practice of illegal narcotic smuggling is carried on. One relatively simple method used to obscure the identity of persons involved in a contraband shipment is to send the shipment made out "to order." Such a consignment is often forwarded to a bank, the contents fictitiously labeled. If everything goes according to schedule without discovery, the interested consignee can make his appearance at the bank and produce the necessary papers to establish his rights to the bill of lading. He then has authority to remove the goods and disappear with them. Since no names are used, all efforts to trace the shipment are in vain. This method is foolproof to a large degree, for should the traffickers have reason to believe that the shipment is under suspicion, they simply do not show up and allow it to lie unclaimed.

Another system used to smuggle large quantities of drugs is the "short-landing" trick in which a shipment is marked for a certain destination, distant enough to require a stop-over at an intervening port. Since customs officials examine only those items being disembarked at their particular port, it is not too difficult a task to spirit the articles off the side of the boat just before it leaves for the subsequent destination.

It is not unusual to ship huge cases of legal merchandise, in which are lodged securely the deadly narcotics. In one instance, drugs were smuggled into Cuba inside the walls of iron safes where they were so effectively sealed that the

safes had to be destroyed in order to remove the drugs.

MEDICAL men who have given much time to the study of what they term the "addiction-disease," lay the blame of illegal traffic upon the misinterpretation of the public. The concept that a drug addict is to be looked upon as a social derelict, a weakling, subject to the scorn of decent people, drives the drug addict to disguise his affliction and seek the services of the dope peddler. It has been discovered that while addicts are to be found to a large degree in the underworld, a greater majority than is commonly realized of people high up in professions of every kind have found themselves victims of the drug habit through innocent means. Some of these latter citizens have succumbed to the treatments of quack doctors, or have taken the drugs for a long period of time in order to fight fatigue under strenuous working conditions, only to find themselves enslaved by the soothing qualities of the drugs. Such people shrink from confessing their infirmity and thus are obliged to resort to the underground for their supply.

When, these medical men tell us, the world realizes that individuals in the advanced stages of the addiction no longer experience any pleasurable feeling, but sheer, indescribable agony when deprived of the narcotic, that they are afflicted with a disease which requires treatment as all other diseases, that they are pitifully eager to be rid of the addiction and willing to undergo all possible torture to cast off this affliction—then and only then will it be possible to curb to a great extent the illicit narcotic traffic which is fed by every available dollar of the drug victim who dreads and will go to any length to avoid the accusing finger and the sneering title of "dope fiend."

THE END

CRIME AT THE CASINO
By JAMES RUEL

SURELY one of the most adventurous spots in the world is Monte Carlo. Yearly thousands upon thousands flock to its warm and lovely Mediterranean site to take in the lure and excitement of the famous Casino.

At a nearby railway station international express trains stop many times every day bringing travellers from all parts of the world. Here are to be seen the most varied people—millionaires and paupers; criminals and freaks; young women and old, beautiful and ugly. All are obsessed by the excitement of the Casino.

Yet the outstanding attraction of Monte Carlo is its skillful management. There is absolute honesty and fair play in its gambling rooms, something previously unheard of in gambling establishments. Only once in the history of Monte Carlo was there a successful attempt to cheat the Casino. It was only through the keen eye of the Sûreté, the police who are constantly on guard there, that the fraud was discovered before it could irreparably damage that institution.

While going about in his daily search for trickery in the gambling rooms a police officer was given a report of strange occurrences at the roulette tables where a certain Guilio Orsini was croupier. It was at once apparent that the Casino was sustaining great losses at his tables—half a million francs had been paid to one man alone, an American whose name was Marlow.

For fifteen years Orsini had been a trusted croupier at Monte Carlo. Though he had strange and solitary ways, he was well regarded by his superiors and had even been offered promotions, which, however, he had always refused. When the Sûreté began its investigation he was about forty, an Italian from Milan. He had come from a family of artists and musicians, and he, too, had the pale long face and beautifully tapered fingers of an artist. It was this background which remained the leading clue for the police.

The investigation began, and for three days a police officer watched the activities at Orsini's tables. He learned several valuable facts, but remained completely baffled regarding the fraud that was obviously being committed. The investigator noted that six persons played Orsini's tables most consistently: two Englishmen, two Italians, a small pretty Italian girl named Gina Maiolani and the American, Marlow.

Each day Marlow approached the table and staked the maximum. He won appaling sums of money, as did the others. Casual observers soon followed the lead of the winners and began raking in large winnings. Then, each day as Orsini would be relieved from his duty at the table, Marlow would also leave and the others would follow his example for their luck would run out after his departure.

Constant observation revealed to the policeman that certain gestures of Orsini's indicated to the six principals who gambled at his table where to place their bets. For instance, he found that when the croupier closed his right hand, left no fingers showing and scratched his nose with his left hand, it was the sign to place the bet on black and even. It was uneven and red when the tumb and index finger were stretched out.

The question remained how it was maneuvered, for never in Monte Carlo's history had such a situation come up. When the tables were closed for the night the wheels were carefully examined by experts. None had been tampered with; they were in as perfect a condition as they had ever been. And the roulette wheels of Monte Carlo are the finest in the world. Yet it was impossible to believe that it was by skill alone that Orsini controlled the wheel.

The tiny slips of metal that divided the numbers were changed for the following day's games, to see what that might bring, though the investigator had already concluded that it was only in the unnatural skill of Orsini the croupier that a fraud was being played on the Casino. The changing of the metal dividers did change the luck of the gamblers the following day, proving the investigator correct.

That evening at midnight when Orsini left his wheel to go to his rooms he was followed. Before entering the police heard sounds of arguments and accusations against the croupier. A strange sight greeted them when they burst into the room: ten people stood around a roulette wheel indentical to the ones in the Casino.

Orsini told a pathetic story to the police, a story of his youth and how he had, like many in his family, wanted to become an artist or a surgeon, but out of poverty had sought work and found it at Monte Carlo. There he conceived the idea of learning to control the wheel with his wonderfully sensitive fingers. The roulette wheel found in his room was an exact replica of those in the Casino. In all his spare time he had practiced it, and he had mastered the miraculous feat of gauging the force exerted by his dextrous fingers so that the ball would actually roll into the section he wished it to.

Here was an incredible skill, and only after a demonstration did the police believe it possible. Orsini himself felt no guilt as to his deed. He had worked hard, he said, to arrive at such a height of perfection and he fairly deserved to keep that which he had won by his own labors.

He was fired, of course, but for his many years service at Monte Carlo he was given a pension and told to leave with the pretty little girl who was his fiancee. Soon after he left Orsini asked for a position as croupier at the San Remo Casino, but was refused because of the sudden and suspicious nature in which he had left Monte Carlo.

The others were dismissed. Though they had been cheating the Casino there was no evidence against them. Their admission cards to Monte

Carlo were taken from them and they were instructed to leave immediately.

For some time nothing more occurred in the case. Then suddenly, a totally remote police investigation at Monte Carlo—involving the suicide of an English woman—revealed that the syndicate of crooks headed by Marlow was still at work. The woman had lost a fortune, as many another credulous gambler, in a private club apart from the Casino. A raid there came too late, however, and all had left the premises.

The next move came when counterfeit money began flowing into Monte Carlo. Several bundles of thousand franc notes were returned from the bank and handed to the Sûreté. They were among the most perfect forgeries these experts had ever seen and for a while the police were at a loss to know what to do next.

Then a turn of events in Orsini's love life, favored the investigation. Jealous and unhappy, Gina the little Italian girl, came to the police to make her confession and accuse her beloved. In tears she told of how Orsini had become the tool of Marlow, how they had escaped to Marseilles when the English woman had died, and how, there, as an engraver of fine talent, he had made the counterfeit money which was being passed in the gambling rooms. Quantities of thousand franc notes had been printed from Orsini's plates, and under Marlow's direction criminals of his acquaintance had been sent to Monte Carlo to use the money.

But Orsini's downfall came when he fell in love with a dancer in Marseilles and abandoned Gina. In revenge and bitterness, the girl had finally given herself and her lover up. She was present, by her own request, when the police arrested the two of them and Marlow in Marseilles.

Somehow, Marlow had expected them, and had prepared in advance, for he shot himself the instant of their arrival. The police found careful accounts, books which had been kept of the entire ring, so that they were able to capture them all.

Orsini was sentenced to fifteen years imprisonment but died two years later in jail. The plates that he had so perfectly counterfeited were placed in the private collection of the Banque of France.

Thus ended an attempt, which had it succeeded, would have ruined Monte Carlo and its reputation forever.

WHO'LL PROTECT THE COPS?

IT IS to be hoped that the police will do better at protecting other people's possessions than they do their own. These instances will explain what we mean.

The first involves a retired Omaha policeman who was planning to go to Florida. He travelled first to Chicago to buy an automobile for the trip. Shortly after he arrived he reported to Central Station police that his pocket had been picked! A billfold containing $1,400 had been stolen from him.

An honest deputy sheriff in Illinois suddenly became aware of the dishonesty all around him,

but the lesson cost him his blue coat and official star. Parking his car outside a marketplace the policeman decided to go in to the butcher shop and get some meat. The meat shortage at that time was still acute, and being a man of fair play the sheriff didn't want to unduly impress the butcher with his uniform or make him feel that he demanded special attention. He removed his coat and badge and leaving his car window open, went into the shop.

When he returned to the car an hour later, without meat, he found that his coat and star had been stolen. His chief sympathetically issued him a new badge.

Another policeman, while en route to pick up a drunk very early one morning, lost one of his most valued possessions, and subsequently the drunk. As the cop jumped out from his squad car he stumbled in a hole. The jar dislodged his false teeth, which fell out of his mouth.

With the use of flashlights, the spotlight of the car, and assistance from his partner, the frantic policeman looked everywhere for his missing lower plate. The search proved fruitless, so the two summoned another squad. The hunt continued for another hour and a half. Finally, one of the deputies solved the mystery of the disappearing teeth. In falling they had become tightly attached to the clip on the policeman's galoshes! In the meantime, the drunk, who had been completely forgotten in the vain search for the teeth, made a complete disappearance. —*Wayne Harris*

ESCAPE THROUGH FIRE

(Concluded from page 47)

against each, suggesting the period of the owner's stay. The Texas police promptly answered Heinrich's hurried wire. They reported that G. W. Barbe was an itinerant preacher named Gilbert Warren Barbe. The people of Berkeley remembered Barbe as the poor evangelical preacher who had recently disappeared from his little shanty, and who had been particularly friendly with Schwartz. There was no longer any doubt as to the identity of the murderer and his victim.

A great manhunt was begun. All over the United States, the forces of the law were on the lookout for Schwartz. Weeks slipped by before any news of the wanted man was received. Finally the owner of an apartment house in Oakland, California, called upon the Berkeley chief of police. The suspicious actions of a new tenant had given him good reason to believe it was the missing murderer. Half a dozen policemen were dispatched to the apartment building. There was no reply to repeated knocks on the door. As the door was being broken down, a shot rang out—and there, sprawled across the bed, a revolver gripped loosely in his fingers, a stream of blood trickling down across the coverlet, was the body of Charles Henry Schwartz. His fugitive days were ended by his own hand. A coward to the last, he chose death rather than face a court of justice.

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Charles Atlas

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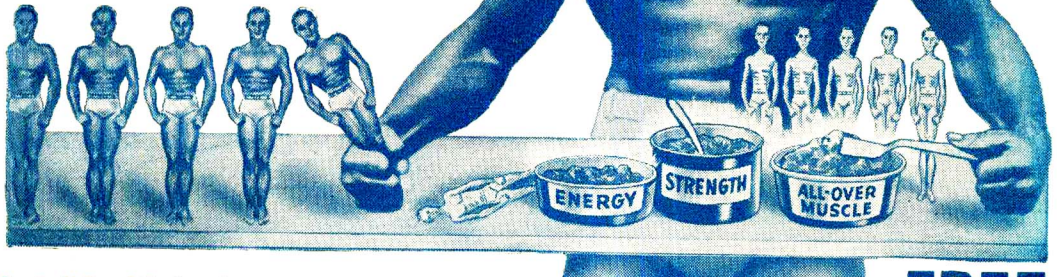

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