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# MIKE SHAYNE



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July-219

# MIKE SHAYNE



**MYSTERY MAGAZINE**

JULY, 1968

VOL. 23, NO. 2

**NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL**

## THE LADY WHO KISSED AND KILLED

by **BRETT HALLIDAY**

*Who was he? What was his strange, dark secret, the man who lived three lives, each one more deadly than the other? Only one woman knew the answer. One woman—and Mike Shayne, who went alone to bring back a killer—dead or alive!*

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MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE, Vol. 23, No. 2, July, 1968. Published monthly by RENOWN PUBLICATIONS, INC., 56 W. 45th St., N. Y., N. Y. 10036. Subscriptions, One Year (12 issues) \$6.00; Two Years (24 issues) \$12.00; single copies 50¢. Second-class postage paid at New York, N. Y. and at additional mailing offices. Places and characters in this magazine are wholly fictitious. © 1968, by RENOWN PUBLICATIONS, INC. All rights reserved. Protection secured under the International and Pan-American copyright conventions. Printed in the United States of America. Postmaster—return 3579 to 56 W. 45th Street, New York, New York. 10036.

# The LADY Who KISSED and KILLED

by BRETT HALLIDAY

*Who was he, the shadowy phantom who hid from the world and a hundred foes—and died alone and unmourned? Only Mike Shayne dared guess the incredible, deadly answer.*



**M**ICHAEL SHAYNE, driving fast on his way back from a case that had taken him to Tampa, saw the headlights ahead just in time to get out of the way. Lights on the wrong side of the highway and coming fast.

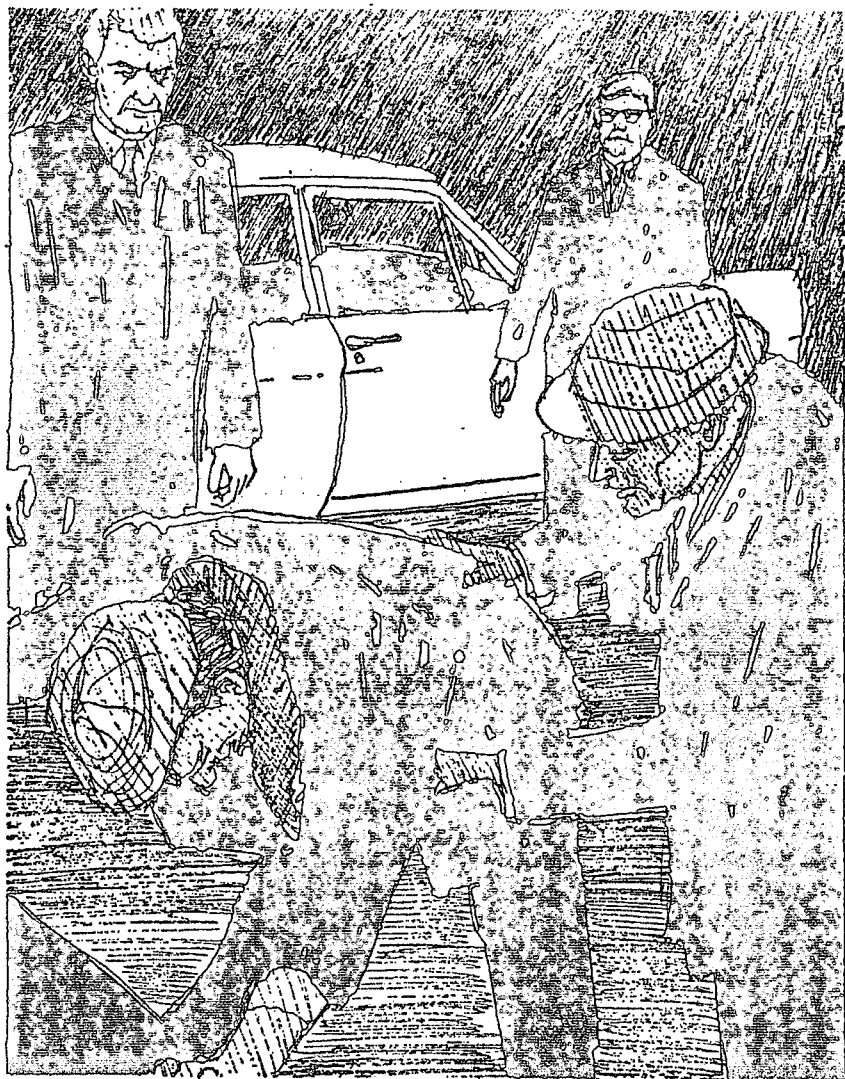
The redhead hit his brakes. The car came on. He waited until the last moment to see if the speeding car would pull over. It didn't. It

came straight on down the wrong side of the road.

Shayne jerked his steering wheel, and pulled into the left lane. The car roared past as if the driver hadn't even seen Shayne in front of him. The redhead had a flashing glimpse of a pale face hunched over the wheel of the other car—staring, dilated eyes; a slack mouth; both hands gripping

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**COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE**  
**The New MIKE SHAYNE Short Novel**



the steering wheel like a drowning man clinging to a raft.

Then the car was passed and going away, still on the wrong side of the road.

Shayne swung in a screeching U-turn and went off after the car. The chase went on for two more miles, and four near collisions, and ended in a shattering crash against a tree and then a burst of flame.

Suddenly, without warning.

The car had been going right on in a steady, straight line, under perfect control—except that it was on the wrong side of the road. Then, in an instant, it lurched, skidded sideways, and hurled off the road and against the tree.

Shayne skidded to a stop, leaped out of the car, and ran to the wreck. The flames were hot but not yet impossible. He scrambled to the door, pulled it open, and dragged the driver clear. He laid the man down on the edge of the road. Other cars were stopping now. People came running.

Shayne stood up, and glanced at the hurrying people. "No hurry. He's dead."

"God, what a crash," a man said. "Killed instantly?"

"No, he died slow."

"Slow?" Another man said.

"The crash didn't kill him," Mike Shayne said grimly. "His death caused the crash."

Shayne looked down at the dead man. There was a blackened

hole in the front of his shirt. A small, round hole and a wide stain of blood.

## II

THE CHIEF OF Miami Police stood with Mike Shayne and Lieutenant Bob Edwards of the Florida State Police in the morgue. "Shot once with a thirty-two automatic," Will Gentry said.

The three men were looking at the body in the crypt drawer. Edwards was there because death had come on the highway. Chief Gentry was there because it had happened inside Miami City Limits.

"His license says he was Gary Blake, forty-two, a Miami address," Edwards said.

"Lived alone in a hotel, The Osceola," Gentry said. "We found nothing at his apartment. It's a middle-class hotel, reasonable but clean. Quiet and respectable. No signs of any shooting."

"The car was his. We're trying to find out where he'd come from when you spotted him, Mike," Edwards said.

"I don't think he could have come far," Shayne said. "He must have been driving by reflex anyway with that hole in him."

"And he must have had a powerful reason to try to get to some special place to have driven at all," Gentry said.

The three men thought about

this as they left the morgue. In the corridor, Mike Shayne stopped.

"I guess that's all you need from me," he said.

"We've got your statement," Edwards said. "We won't need you again until the inquest."

"Then I guess that ends it for me," Shayne said.

"Thanks, Mike," Gentry said.

Shayne left the two policemen and went out to his car. It was early morning by now, very early, with that dark silence that hangs over even the biggest city about four in the morning. Shayne drove home to his apartment-hotel and went to bed. He did not even think about Gary Blake. He should have though.

The knock came on his door at eight o'clock on the nose. He knew because that was what the clock told him when he finally focused his eyes. Insistent knocking that sounded as if it had been going on for some time before it dragged him from his sleep.

He got up, groaning, threw on a robe, and jerked open the door. The angry words he had been about to bestow on his unwanted caller faded on his lips.

"Mr. Shayne?"

She was small, slender, pretty and looked every day of fifteen. Her hair was as red as Shayne's, and she had a female version of his stubborn jaw. On her it looked better. The detective stepped back, instinctively holding his robe close



around him. She looked that innocent.

"Come in," he said.

There was the smallest of hesitations before she entered. The reluctance of a young girl to enter the apartment of a strange man clothed in a bathrobe? If that was it she conquered it, and stepped inside. Shayne waved her to a chair.

"How about some coffee, Miss—"

"Rowe," she said. "Rowena Rowe, and I don't need any coffee, Mr. Shayne. I—"

"I need coffee," Shayne said bluntly.

He headed for the kitchen. He needed coffee badly, and he also needed time to clear the fog out of his head. When he had made the coffee, he took two cups out into the living room. She watched him put a cup down on the table beside her chair. She did not touch it. Shayne sat down facing her. He drank.

"I've got an office, Miss Rowe," he said.

"I— I don't have a lot of time, Mr. Shayne. I called your office, and when I said it was urgent they gave me your secretary's number. She gave me your address."

Shayne gulped at his hot brew and thought about his pert secretary: Lucy Hamilton, the sucker for all stray waifs. The girl must have given Lucy quite a good sob story.

"Why don't you have much time?" he asked.

"I expect the police will be keeping me busy for some time soon," Rowena Rowe said. "If they don't charge me with murder."

Even the way she said "murder" had an innocent, childlike air about it. But, close and talking, she no longer seemed fifteen. Not old, but not that young, either.

"Who did you murder—according to the police?"

"My fiance, Gary Blake. You see, I was supposed to meet him at ten o'clock last night. He never showed up. But I read in the paper that he was killed just about ten. I have no way of proving that he didn't show up. I read that you were the man who found him. So I came to you."

"Where were you supposed to meet him?"

"At his apartment. I have a key. I went there, but he didn't come."

"At The Osceola Hotel?"

"No, his apartment is in the Riviera Court Apartments."

"How long has he lived there?"

"As long as I've known him. Almost a year."

"The fact that you had a date at the time of his death doesn't mean you killed him."

"No, Mr. Shayne, but I can't think of any reason for Gary to be killed, or anyone who could have killed him. He was a shy, solitary man. Almost—almost too solitary."

"Did you kill him?" Shayne asked bluntly.

"No."

"All right," Shayne said. "What motive would the police find? Even they need a reason to suspect someone."

"Would jealousy do?"

When she said the word her childlike face aged another few years. Shayne decided that she was about twenty-two, and not as innocent as she appeared.

"Were you jealous?"

"Yes," Rowena Rowe said. "A week ago I found Gary with a woman. I had never seen her before. He refused to tell me anything about her. We had a terrible fight. Last night was to have been our first meeting since."

"That's not much motive, Miss Rowe."

She nodded. "I know, but if they haven't any other suspects, what then? Besides, I want Gary's killer found and punished!"

"So do the police."

"Not as much as I do, Mr. Shayne. I—I never had a chance



to tell Gary I was sorry for being jealous!"

Shayne watched the girl. It was a thin story, and yet—Besides, Gary Blake was beginning to take on a strange shape. A man who drove frantically somewhere when he was literally dead on his feet. A man who had two residences? A man who was "almost too solitary?"

"Who was the woman you found Blake with?"

"I never knew her name. A blonde. Tall, very—very well built. I—I envied her, I'm afraid."

"What did Blake tell you about her?"

She looked down at her small hands in her lap. "Nothing. That was one thing that made me so mad. He wouldn't tell me anything about her."

She looked up at Shayne with her wide eyes. "There—there was something strange about Gary, Mr. Shayne. I never really thought about it until now, but he was so alone. He seemed to have no past to talk about."

"Never?"

"Oh, vague stories now and then, but always without names or places. As if he were talking about someone else, not himself."

Shayne thought a moment. "What are you going to do now?" he asked.

"Go to the police," she said quietly. "I know they'll be looking for me. I want to go to them my-

self. That's why I had to see you so early. Will you take the case, Mr. Shayne? Find out who killed Gary?"

Shayne nodded. "Okay, Miss Rowe, I'll take the case. Now tell me all you know about Blake."

"I've told you all I know. Except that he worked for the Ames Institute. That's a kind of private commercial school for adults. Gary taught accounting."

"All right. What else? How did you meet him?"

"I met him at a concert. Gary loved music. And that's all I know. I—never cared about anything else except being with him. Until now."

"All right, Miss Rowe. Give me a retainer. Anything will do."

"Oh, thank you!" she said, looking fifteen again.

She gave him a twenty, and he gave her a receipt. She left, and he rubbed at his gaunt jaw for a time. He did not believe her story for a second, but Gary Blake interested him.

### III

THE RIVIERA COURT Apartments was one of those new California-style apartment houses—two-story buildings with balconies set on all four sides of a grass-and-flowers courtyard. It was on the edge of the city, not more than two miles from where Gary Blake had died in the wreck of his car.

Shayne went into the office. A woman sat behind the desk. She didn't look up as Shayne came in. A grey-haired motherly looking woman. Everyone's grandmother, except for the cigarette dangling in the corner of her mouth, the blood-red of her fingernails, and the flat, cold eyes she turned on Shayne, at last.

"What can I do for you, big fellow?"

"Tell me where I can find Gary Blake's apartment."

"Number twelve, second floor, rear building," she said. "He ain't in."

Apparently she didn't read the newspapers, and the police had not yet learned of Blake's second address.

"I'll be back," Shayne said.

"Swell," the motherly type said.

Shayne went out, climbed into his car, drove around the corner, parked, and walked quietly back. He skirted the office, and climbed the stairs from the central court to number 12 in the rear building.

No one and nothing seemed to move in the early morning courtyard. Shayne slipped his ring of keys from his pocket and went to work. The fourth key opened the door of Number 12. He slipped inside and locked the door behind him.

The apartment was clean, neat and pleasant with morning sun through clean windows. The furniture was typical Florida furnished

apartment, but not ugly. Gary Blake had apparently liked to live in a decent place. All three rooms were neat as a pin.

Shayne turned his attention to what was inside the furniture. The refrigerator in the small kitchen was almost empty. What food was in it was of the longer range kind—no milk, butter or eggs. No beer. The cupboards contained an ample number and amount of staples. There were no dishes in the sink or drying rack. Not even a glass.

The living room yielded no trace of occupancy, not even a dirty ashtray or a match stick. Shayne frowned as he looked over the living room. A maid probably came in regularly, but certainly not every day. He made a mental note to check it.

The bedroom was equally untouched. Shayne checked the drawers, the closets, and the bathroom. The drawers held the usual socks, underwear and accessories any man would have. The closets were not full but were well stocked enough with suits, jackets and slacks.

Shayne went through everything carefully. When he had finished he had found nothing of interest. But he stood out in the middle of the bedroom and frowned thoughtfully. All the clothes had Miami labels from local stores. The socks and underwear and accessories all seemed relatively new and about

the same age. The four pair of shoes were all slightly run down at the heels, and none had been resoled.

Everything, in fact, had a peculiar uniformity, as if most of it had been bought at the same time in one large batch. Some garments seemed brand new, but nothing seemed very old.

There wasn't one single dilapidated, well-used item in the entire apartment, as far as Shayne could tell. And that was very strange. Bachelors had a tendency to keep old favorite items like pack rats. At least a few cherished possessions. Here, there was nothing.

There was also no trace of blood, violence or trouble.

The desk in the living room contained few papers. Nothing but some local letters, mostly about the business of teaching and accounting, and some papers connected with The Ames Institute. There were a few letters from Rowena Rowe: simple mild love letters, apparently written after Blake had been away for a time.

Shayne was thinking about the strange sense of uniformity about the place, when the key turned in the lock of the outer door. Shayne jumped for cover behind the door, his hand on his automatic.

#### IV

THE MAN WHO came in was short and stocky and had a limp. His face was florid, and his watery

blue eyes glanced about. His left hand opened and closed spasmodically as if twitching from some inner turmoil.

Mike Shayne stepped out. "Looking for something special?" he said.

The man did not jump or whirl. He stood for a moment, and then his hand stopped its spasms, and he turned with his blue eyes calm.

"I'm looking for Gary. Have you seen him?"

"No," Shayne said. He watched the man. He could see no trace of knowledge that Blake was dead.

"Are you a friend of his, too, Mr.—"

"Shayne. No, I'm a private detective. I want to learn some things from Blake. Who are you, by the way?"

"A detective?" The man hesitated. "Then there is something funny going on around Gary?"

"What makes you say that?"

"A woman came to the school looking for him. She didn't use his name. In fact she didn't use any name; she just described Gary."

"At the school? Ames Institute?"

The man nodded. "We both work there. I'm Mort Vried. I teach bookkeeping."

"When did this woman come asking about Blake?"

"About a week ago. The old man must have steered her away. He likes Gary. I would have done the same. I didn't like the look of her. A hard blonde type."

"Who's the old man?"

"Doc Ames himself. He owns and runs the place."

"What kind of school is Ames Institute?"

Vried looked shrewdly at Shayne. "What kind? Small, cheap; a bit of a racket in my opinion. We get mostly people who never had the chance for an education, or could never learn much. Now they're bogged down, they've got a few bucks, and they think a few courses will open the door to bigger and better things for them. Usually they can't even learn. But Ames takes their money."

"It sounds like a gold mine."

Vried laughed. "Hell, Ames just skins through most months. There aren't enough suckers, and they don't hang around too long. No matter how easy we all try to make it for them, they can't cut the mustard, and when they realize that they blow. Some months Ames barely makes the payroll, and, believe me, he doesn't pay the faculty more than peanuts. For most of us it's just an extra job for extra dough."

"For you, too?"

"Sure. I'm a bookkeeper down at General Cigar."

"How about Blake?"

"No, Gary is full time at Ames. I never knew how he does it. Of course, he isn't married, and he works three classes."

"Three classes gives him enough to live on?"

"Barely," Vried said, and his blue eyes watched Shayne. "Is Gary in trouble?"

"Not any more," Shayne said. "You must be a close friend? You had a key."

"Gary went out of town sometimes. He's got four days off at Ames, and he liked me to come in and take a look at his place. He gave me a key," Vried said. "I—I used the place sometimes, you know."

Shayne nodded. "What else can you tell me about the woman who came to—"

Mort Vried was not listening. Shayne heard the sirens, too. Close and coming fast. Rowena Rowe must have gone in and told the police about Blake's second apartment. Vried looked at Shayne.

"Blake's dead," Shayne said. "They'll be coming here."

Vried blinked, and his florid face paled. "Dead?"

"Murdered," Shayne said. "Last night. They'll want to talk to you."

The redhead strode to the door. Vried seemed frozen where he stood. Shayne held the door for a moment, but Vried did not move, and the detective went out and down to the court. He slipped out a side exit just as the police sirens ground to a stop in front.

He did not want to talk to Gentry's men just now. He waited until they had passed, then circled around and went into the office again. The grandmotherly type had



WILL GENTRY

not moved a hair or an inch. Only the police must have unnerved her. She looked up.

"I came back," Shayne said.

"So did the cops. What's with Blake? Trouble?"

"You might say that," he said. "How long has he lived here?"

"A year, about." She looked at him. "You a cop, too?"

"Private."

"What's the ideal? He was kind of a loner always. Took trips. That part of it?"

"What kind of trips?"

She shrugged. It was a grotesque movement for a woman who looked like she should be rocking on a back porch. "He didn't tell

me where he went. He just goes, two or three days."

"Did he pay on time?"

"Sure did."

"Visitors?"

She shook her head. "Like I said, quiet and a loner. No parties, no brawls, one girl. A few guys sometimes, not much."

Shayne described Rowena Rowe. "That the girl?"

"Sounds like her."

"How often does your maid clean the apartments?"

"Once a week. This ain't a hotel."

"Did she clean Blake's place yesterday?"

The woman craned her neck around to look at a work sheet tacked to the wall. "Nope. Due tomorrow."

"Thanks," Shayne said, and started for the door.

Behind him the old woman said, "Ain't you gonna go look at the apartment with your buddies?"

"They'll tell me about it," Shayne said as he walked out. He turned to walk toward his car. He had a glimpse of the man half hidden behind a palm tree across the street.

A small man, thin and short, in a dark coat even in the Miami sun. The little man had both hands in his pockets, and he slipped back out of sight almost the moment Shayne spotted him.

Shayne started across the street, and stopped. He blinked. He could

see behind the palm tree now, and there was no one there. The little man had vanished. The man had slipped from palm to palm like a wraith and was gone.

Shayne went on to his car.

## V

THE OSCEOLA HOTEL was a small, red-brick hotel in a quiet small-business area of Miami. It looked clean and dull.

The lobby was just as clean and just as dull. Three older men sat around as if they had been born in the lobby. The clerk was a middle-aged man reading a book. It looked like nothing much ever happened at The Osceola, and it looked as if that was okay with the clerk.

"Can I help you?" the clerk asked Mike Shayne, laying down his book.

"I'd like to take a look at Gary Blake's room."

"Are you from the police?"

"In a way. I'm a private detective working on his murder. The police know I'm on the case." He showed the clerk his credentials.

"Well," the clerk said doubtfully. "I'm not sure—"

"Have the police sealed the room?"

"No. In fact they said I could get it ready to let again, as soon as they pick up his things."

"Okay. You can call Chief Gentry."

The clerk smiled. "Well, all

right. I don't suppose you can do any harm anyway. It's four-C."

Shayne took the key. "When did he first take the rooms?"

"Just under a year ago. He was out of town quite a lot. I never knew what he did. A salesman, I figured."

"Did you get a previous address?"

"No, he paid in advance. We try to keep the place nice, but we can't be too choosy. If they pay in advance we don't require references."

"Did he have many visitors? Friends?"

"None I ever saw. Funny. Just no one."

"Girls?"

"Especially no girls."

"Not even the last week or so?"

"No one. The police asked about that. He was here a few days, but no one visited him."

He went up in the ancient elevator. Like everything else in the Osceola, it was neat and clean and respectable and tired. It let him out on the fourth floor, and apartment C was at the end of the corridor.

He locked the door behind him and surveyed this apartment. Gary Blake had been a consistent man. This apartment, too, was neat and clean and pleasant—but shabbier, more austere, and cheaper than the apartment at The Riviera Court. At first glance, this place, too, was devoid of anything really personal.

This apartment was more lived-in, but only barely. There was beer in the refrigerator, and butter. Dishes and a glass dried in the drain basket. Only here there were no papers, no letters, no hint of where Blake had worked, or that anyone on earth had known where to write to him.

The closets held about the same quantity of clothes, with the same recent air and all Miami labels. The drawers repeated the same pattern. Once more there was nothing that seemed more than a year old, or that had come from anywhere except Miami.

Except one item—a small, brown leather notebook without name or address, but with the legend on the cover, stamped in worn gold: *Krause Stationery, Syracuse, N.Y.*

Shayne sat down on a ragged easy chair and thought about it. Gary Blake had lived the life of a bird-of-passage—in two permanent addresses. A stripped-down life without personal trivia of the kind most men accumulate over the years, and with no past beyond a year back.

As if he had materialized a year ago in Miami.

Blake's address of record to The Ames Institute, his few friends, and his woman, Rowena Rowe, had been The Riviera Court Apartments. Yet when he had died the address found on him was The Osceola Hotel. The last place he

had lived had been The Osceola, except that he had had a date at The Riviera which he hadn't kept.

The dead man had had a job that paid little. Yet he had kept two apartments, and had actually lived in both. In each place they had thought he went on trips, when it was pretty obvious he was just living more or less alternately at both places.

It added up to a man hiding. A man afraid of something, and yet hopeful that he was safe—at least hopeful enough to tie up with a steady woman. But not hopeful enough to tell her all.

It also added up to a man who had been found.

Gary Blake had had a good reason to be afraid.

How had such a careful man, scared of something and hiding, been trapped and shot?

There was the blonde woman. If Rowena Rowe was telling the truth, and Mort Vried, it looked like the blonde woman had come looking and had found her man. But where and how had Blake been shot? Why not at The Riviera or The Osceola? A man hiding does not usually go visiting anyone likely to kill him.

It was then that Shayne's glance fell on the wastebasket. The basket beside the cheap hotel desk was empty, but behind it, just visible at the edge of the rug, was a piece of paper with some colored printing on it. It had a familiar look.

Shayne pulled it out from under the rug. It was an envelope. The kind of envelope used to hold airline tickets. Shayne looked for any notations, but there were none. Just the envelope that had certainly contained tickets to somewhere.

Shayne heard the light step behind him while he was still on his knees. He half-turned. He saw small, pointed black shoes. Narrow, razor-creased black trousers. The bottom of a black topcoat—and nothing more.

The gun-butt slammed against his skull and he went out.

## VI

MIKE SHAYNE dreamed of a great storm battering all around him. The house he was in shook. Furniture fell over. Walls splintered. Once something heavy smashed his head and the storm subsided, only to begin again, and then, slowly, calm and grow quiet. Silent and unmoving. Peaceful . . .

Shayne opened his eyes. Sunlight streaked the ceiling above him. Silent sunlight, bright and warm. He turned his head.

He lay on his back in the room in The Osceola Hotel. He was alone. An emptiness and silence seemed to hang in the sunny air. His head throbbed and felt sticky. In the back. There was another pain on the side of his head, but no stickiness.

He sat up slowly and touched

the back of his head. It hurt. A soft, pulpy spot that had bled but was already drying. On the side of his head there was only a bruise. He tried to get up. The room swam and he rested. Only then did he look at the room.

His dream had become reality. The room was a shambles. The storm he thought he had imagined had swept through the room leaving drawers pulled open, closets flung out, furniture ripped and turned-over, the carpet piled in a corner.

Shayne shook his head and winced. No, not a storm. The storm had been a dream, but he must have half-awakened from the first blow, heard the search of the room, imagined it to be a storm before he was hit again.

Slowly, he stood up. Whoever had attacked him had been looking for something, looking hard. Shayne touched his pockets. Everything was still there, including his automatic, the small leather notebook he had found, and the airline envelope.

He looked around the shambles of the room. What had the man wanted, and had he found it? There was no way he could tell. Unless—

He began to inspect the damage. Shakily, he looked into the bedroom. It was the same.

Ten minutes later he found the hole. In the floor where the carpet had been—and just about where the airline envelope had been. A



loose section of floor-board came up and the hole was beneath.

A hole a foot long and a foot deep between floor beams, and spreading out beneath the floor itself. An empty hole.

Shayne looked at the hole for some time. There was nothing to show what, if anything, had been in the hole. But something told him that this was where the search had ended. In success or failure? His hunch told him an answer—failure. Whatever had been in the hole had been removed by Gary Blake himself, if there had ever been anything.

Shayne stood up quickly and pain slammed him between his eyes. He swayed and held onto the desk. After a time the room calmed down again. The pain settled into a dull throb.

More carefully, the redhead turned and walked from the room. He stopped on the way only long enough to note what looked like the marks of a picklock on the lock of the outside door. An expert and silent job of lock-picking, he hadn't heard a sound.

He went down and out without bothering to talk again to the clerk. A man who picked a lock that well would not have been seen entering by the reading clerk.

In his car he drove first to his doctor in the Flagler Street building where he had his office. The doctor clucked like a mother hen, and talked about rest and hospitals.

"Just bandage me up, Doc, and I'll take some pills to keep me happy and clear-headed."

Bandaged, he went on up to his office. Lucy Hamilton clucked louder than the doctor when she saw his hat sitting on top of bandages.

"Just a bump, Angel," Shayne said.

"Is that what the doctor said, Michael?"

"Of course," Shayne lied.

"You, Michael Shayne, are a liar," his brown-eyed secretary said, and then became serious. "Are you all right?"

"I can walk, Angel, and think. Now here's what I want you to do," Shayne said. "Check with the police in Syracuse, New York, about an outfit called Krause Stationery. Find out all about them, and if anything happened to them, or around them, about a year ago."

Lucy nodded. "Krause Stationery."

"Then call Missing Persons down at Headquarters and find out if anyone answering this description was reported missing about a year ago, probably from Syracuse," and he described the dead Gary Blake to the last detail he remembered.

"Anything else?" Lucy said.

Shayne frowned. "Call Mack at the credit bureau and see what they maybe have on Ames Institute, Dr. Ames who runs it, and a teacher there named Mort Vried."

"That's all?"

"For now. If Gentry or anyone wants me I'll be back after lunch. For you, I'm going out to the Ames Institute. Don't tell anyone unless you think it's vital, not even my client. She hasn't called, has she?"

"No," Lucy said. "And Michael, eat some lunch."

He grinned as he went out, but the grin faded before he reached the elevator. He held onto the wall and let his head blow apart. After a time he decided that it was not going to explode after all, and that Lucy was right—he needed to eat some lunch.

## VII

THE AMES INSTITUTE was a massive old brownstone mansion from the days when Miami millionaires, and millionaires everywhere else, believed that size and thick walls indicated a wealthy house. It still stood behind a heavy iron fence, but the grounds, small to begin with in the fashion of mansions of sixty years ago, had been paved over with easy-upkeep concrete.

Mike Shayne parked in the almost empty parking lot, his stomach full and feeling stronger, and looked the place over. It had the air of a middle-aged bookkeeper who wore a suit cleaned too many times, and had grown pinched from years of counting other people's money. A few over-age students crossed the grounds as if they knew

they were going nowhere of any importance.

The place looked half asleep in the afternoon sun. It was not exactly bustling with academic fervor, and Shayne had the feeling that financially the place was not in the high-return bracket.

He went inside into an odor of cheap paint and old wood. A few more students wandered in the airless corridors. He passed an open door labeled *Faculty Lounge*, and saw two weary looking men catnapping, and a stained coffee urn that needed cleaning.

The office of the president also had an open door. A fat blond chewed gum at a desk inside the door. Filing cabinets surrounded her. Her eyes brightened as Shayne strode in.

"Hello, you," she chirped. "Faculty job?"

"You flatter me. Do I look like a scholar?"

"You don't look like a student, honey. What's your field?"

"Criminology," Shayne said.

She considered. "We've never offered that, but if you can bring in ten students the old man'll kiss you."

"What would he do if I brought in twenty-five?"

"Don't even imagine it," she said, and wrinkled her nose. "So you're not in the teaching market. From the smart lines, I guess you're a cop."

"You're wasting your time here.

You should read tea leaves. Is Dr. Ames in?"

She nodded. "He's got a class in fifteen minutes, if they show up."

"Don't they usually show up?"

"They didn't yesterday. We do most of our business at night."

"How is business?"

"Look around," she said. "I've seen morgues do better business."

"Morgues always do good business," Shayne said. "Ask Dr. Ames if he'll give me ten minutes. The name's Shayne."

The girl manipulated switches and announced his visit. Dr. Ames would see him. He let himself into the inner office and watched a tall, cadaverous man unwind from a chair and rise like a column of black smoke.

"Mr. Shayne? My young lady informs me that you're some kind of policeman. Just what can I do for you?"

Shayne sat in a hard wooden chair where Ames waved him. Ames sat down behind the desk. The tall man had red-rimmed eyes that peered and blinked as if from too much reading. There was something shabby about the man, and something furtive. Ames may have begun by reading too many heavy scholarly tomes, but now he looked like a man who never got deeper than the racing form.

"Have you heard about Gary Blake?" Shayne said.

"Indeed, indeed," Ames said gloomily. "My most reliable in-



structor. I don't know what the school will come to."

"The police have been here?"

"Everyone has been here," Ames said wearily. "The police, Vried, Miss Rowe." Ames looked at Shayne from under his shaggy brows. "They all appear to be at sea, one might say."

"What about you?"

"Me? Oh, you mean do I have any ideas concerning poor Gary's demise. I'm afraid I haven't an inkling."

"What did Miss Rowe want?"

"To find out if I knew anything. I don't."

"And Vried?"

Ames leaned back and studied the ceiling. "I'm not quite sure what Mort wanted. Apparently to find out what I knew, also. However, he seemed nervous about certain matters."

"What matters?"

"Primarily the visit of a lady to

my office about a week ago. I got the impression that he would be pleased if I forgot to mention that he had talked to the lady."

"Had he?"

"I'm afraid so. I saw them talking for some fifteen minutes, at least."

"Who was she?"

"She called herself Mrs. Kerr. She said that she was looking for her husband. I couldn't help her, so she went away."

"That's all?"

"Yes," Ames said, his red-rimmed eyes blinking.

"What was her husband's name?"

"John Kerr."

"Didn't she describe him?"

Ames squirmed. "Yes, she did."

"And it fitted Gary Blake?"

Ames sighed. "Yes, but why should I hurt Blake? He was my best man. I needed him."

"So you steered her away."

"Yes. How did I know—"

"Did anyone else come looking for Blake, or Kerr?" Shayne asked. "A little man, skinny, in a dark suit and coat?"

"No, no one else."

"How long was Blake here?"

"A year."

"Don't you need references, credentials, an academic record for men you take on?"

Ames spread his hands in a tired gesture of defeat. "There was a time I did. But Gary came cheap, and he proved that he knew accounting procedure thoroughly. He

asked for a trial without pay if he failed. He gave me some story about his past. I forget what it was now. I didn't believe it anyway."

"But you hired him?" Mike Shayne insisted.

"As I said, he worked cheap, and he proved he knew his work, and students liked him."

"The woman, Mrs. Kerr, told you nothing else? Only that she was looking for her husband?"

"That's all. I sent her away. Perhaps that was an error."

Shayne stood up. "All right, Dr. Ames. When can I find Mort Vried?"

Ames gave him Vried's home address. He left the cadaverous educator slowly picking dirt from under his fingernails.

## VIII

THE SUN WAS low when Mike Shayne reached the tract house where Mort Vried lived. An old and shabby tract where laundry hung on wash lines as if it was put out and forgotten.

Vried's house was at the end of a circular cul-de-sac, the other houses so close hands could have been joined between kitchen windows. Shayne rang the bell. He knocked. There was no answer and no sound inside the house. He went around to the back. The door was locked and even the kitchen shades were drawn.

Shayne returned to the front of

the house and his car. He got into the car, and then he saw her.

She was a woman about forty-five, all dressed up in a dark blue suit, white blouse, blue hat with veil. She carried a large handbag, and she came along the semi-circular walk of the cul-de-sac from the direction of a bus stop.

Shayne watched her. She marched along as if on parade, her eyes looking neither right nor left. Yet there was something about her that made Shayne think she felt a hundred pairs of eyes watching her.

She may have been right. From where he sat, Shayne became conscious of curtains drawn an inch aside, faces seen for an instant, at the windows of more than one house on the cul-de-sac. The residents were interested in the woman who advanced as steady as a tank toward Mort Vried's house.

She reached the front walk of Vried's house and didn't even break stride as she marched straight up to the front door, raised her gloved hand, and began to knock loudly and furiously. Shayne got out of his car.

"I know you're in there! You hear me?" the woman cried to the silence and the closed door.

"You'll have to come out sometime!" she cried, and knocked again, steadily, pounding the door in a rhythm like some strange blacksmith.

Then she turned, and sat down

on the front step. She sat primly, her bag in her lap, the very proper hat on her head, and her eyes looked around all the neighbors' houses, defiantly.

Shayne walked up to her.

"Can I help?" the detective said.

She glared up. "Who are you?"

"My name is Michael Shayne. I'm a private detective looking to talk to Vried. Why do you want him?"

"Detective?" she said, "Hah! What's the SOB done now? Steal from a poorbox?"

"I just want to talk to him, Mrs. —?" He had noticed the wedding ring on her finger. A cheap ring with a matching solitaire about the size of a gnat's eye. A small gnat.

"Mrs. Vried. Who else?" the woman said. She looked up at him and her lips suddenly trembled. "I'm his wife. What else? Why else would I bother with him, with this? He'll come out. They'll both come out. Then—"

"Then?" Shayne said quietly.

"Then we'll talk," Mrs. Vried said.

Shayne watched the woman who sat now primly, but firmly, on the single step. She looked like some nice, respectable mother on a sit-down protest at a draft board.

"You don't have a key, Mrs. Vried?"

"Would I be sitting here if I did?"

"Why don't you have a key?"

Are you Vried's ex-wife, maybe?"

"Not yet. He doesn't wipe me off that easy," she said, and then she looked at me again. "You want the story, don't you? Why should I tell you the story?"

"I don't know," Shayne said, "but I think you will."

She looked at something in the distance. It was a boy pulling a wagon. She sighed. "A month ago I found him with her. They were drinking in my living room. I blew a fit."

She stroked her handbag slowly. "I've never had much of a life with Mort. No children. My fault. No money. His fault. I guess I badgered him, so he took the moonlighting work at Ames. I guess he met her there. Young, real young. Not pretty, no, but young. New, you know? She can have children, I guess."

She sighed long and slow. "So I blew up. He tried to calm me, chased her out, all that. I—I guess all the grey years just fell all over me. I wouldn't let him talk to me. I walked out. I went to my brother's house. I didn't call. I talked to a lawyer. I—"

She stopped and turned to look at the silent door of her house. Shayne waited but she said nothing more for a long minute.

"Did the lawyer talk to Vried?" Shayne asked gently.

"Yes, that's what did it. I guess that was my mistake, one of them. After a week or so I sort of calmed

down. I began to feel real noble, you understand? I'd forgive him. So I came home. The door was locked. My key didn't open it."

"He'd changed the lock?"

"Yes. I called. He told me maybe it was for the best. I heard her in the background. I suppose I'd done it all too well. I suppose he decided that if it was all over, he might as well have something. I—I never thought, really, but I suppose life had been bad for him, too."

"So you've decided to come and try to talk to him, get him back?" Shayne said.

"Now I have. Smart me," Mrs. Vried said.

"But you didn't right away after you found the lock changed?"

She made a sound. A chilling sound, somewhere between a sob and a snort of derision. "I blew higher. I was insulted. How dare he not be pining away for a doll like me, eh? I went down to his office and raised hell. I attached his money. I tried to get him arrested. I screamed about the girl."

She sighed a long sigh. "When the smoke cleared, just last week, Mort had lost his job, the girl had lost her job, and I was out of luck."

"Vried lost his job at Ames Institute?"

"No, not that one. His real job, at General Cigar."

"Last week?"

"Yeah. I've been camping here ever since. I got to make it up to

him somehow. Only I guess he doesn't want me to. He's got her in there. Moved her in last week, too. My fault. I drove him to it, I know. Now I've got to make it up to him, help him out, and try to get him out of the clutches of that bitch!"

She glared at the silent door. "What's a wife for if not to help save a man from his own mistakes? If I'd stayed with him, he'd never have gotten in so deep. She'd never have gotten her hooks in him if I'd been around."

As if a spring had given way, the front door of the house suddenly flung open. Before Shayne realized what was happening, a slim, dark girl darted out through the door and clawed at Mrs. Mort Vried.

"You dirty old—" the slim girl hissed.

Mrs. Vried was no panty-waist. The girl had her claws in the older woman's hair, knocking the prim little hat awry, before Mrs. Vried knew what was up. But she responded quickly with a wild round-house slap that connected and staggered the girl.

"You cheap slut!" Mrs. Vried snarled, and slapped the girl again, hard.

The girl was knocked back and lost her grip in Mrs. Vried's hair. But she was no quitter, either. She aimed a vicious kick at the older woman. Shayne stepped in and grabbed them both.

The girl kicked at him. "Lay off, you—"

Shayne evaded the kick. "Calm down, honey. What's your name?"

"None of your damn business!"

Mrs. Vried said, "It's Cora, Cora De Gardo."

The girl stepped back. "Shut up, you old bag! Haven't you done enough to Mort?"

"We've both done enough to Mort. I'm surprised you're still around with all the troubles he's got now."

"I'll stick by him, which is more than you would, you bitch!"

Shayne said, "Where is Vried now?"

"Where else?" the girl cried. "Out trying to get some money! Trying to find a job! She's just about ruined him with her lawyer and her screaming."

"I'll ruin him all the way to save him from you!" Mrs. Vried snarled. "You slut!"

Shayne said, "Where was Vried last night, Miss De Gardo?"

"Mrs. De Gardo," the girl said, "I'm good at picking losers. Last night? I don't know, out. I guess he was at Ames. I don't know where else, he got back late."

"How late?"

"Who knows? I was asleep, and he didn't wake me up," Cora De Gardo said. The girl jerked her head toward Mrs. Vried. "She's got him so worried out he can't remember why we got together."

"That leaves you with nothing to

do for him, doesn't it, honey?" Mrs. Vried said.

"At least I can if he wants to," Cora De Gardo snapped, and, before Shayne or Mrs. Vried could move, the girl jumped back into the house and slammed the door.

"Why—!" Mrs. Vried began, and gave one of her long sighs. "I'm getting old, too old. Poor Mort. Two bitches like us."

"He got himself into it," Shayne said. "Can I give you a lift somewhere, Mrs. Vried?"

The woman shook her head. "No, but thanks."

"She's not going to let you in."

"I know. I'll wait here as long as I can. He has to come home sometime. I'll leave when I have to, and I'll come back."

Shayne left her still seated on the single step of the shabby tract house with the closed door and silent house behind her.

## IX

WILL GENTRY was in his office at Headquarters. Mike Shayne had to wait a half an hour before the Chief of Miami Police was free. Gentry got busier every day as the city grew, and the gruff Chief did not like the enforced paper work.

Gentry was standing at his window as Shayne came in. The Chief spoke without turning around. "You become a policeman because you get the call, some kind of call. Help people, make the

world safe, punish evil—whatever the call was. Then you find yourself an executive, a public relations man, and a politician."

Shayne said nothing.

Gentry still stood looking out. "You've been busy."

"Trying to be," Shayne said.

Gentry turned. He did not have his perennial cigar. "I thought you were finished with Blake."

"I got hired. By the Rowe girl. She seemed to think you might tag her for the killing."

Gentry went to his desk and sat down. For a moment the Chief looked sourly at the stacks of papers on the desk. Then he leaned back and started fumbling for a cigar. He talked while he looked:

"We just might at that. What story did she give you?"

Shayne told Gentry about the Rowe girl's story of her fight with Blake, and the meeting at The Riviera Court that never came off. Gentry nodded slowly, found his cigar:

"We did some checking out," the Chief said. "Her story holds water up to a point. She was at The Riviera that night all right, but she left pretty soon. There's about an hour of her time not accounted for—says she was driving around thinking, the old bit.

"On top of that, it turns out she's not such a nice, innocent chick as she seems. Has a record of 'borrowing' money from men she was engaged to, and then breaking the



engagement and not paying the dough back.

"And add to that that we've got two witnesses who think they saw little Miss Rowe tailing Blake for about a week. Now maybe she was just checking up on the blonde she saw Blake with, and maybe it was something else. Blake seems to have been in hiding, with two places to live in."

"Did you peg the blonde woman? Mrs. Kerr?"

"Sure. We've pegged her, but we haven't found her. It's a big city, Mike, and getting bigger."

"What about a little, skinny guy? Topcoat, black suit, moves fast and easy."

Gentry shook his head. "Not a word about anyone like that. Tell me."

Shayne told Gentry about the small man he had seen at The Riviera Court, the man who had slugged him at The Osceola.

Gentry finally got his cigar going. "I don't like that, Mike. He sounds like a professional gun. You say he was searching for something at The Osceola?"

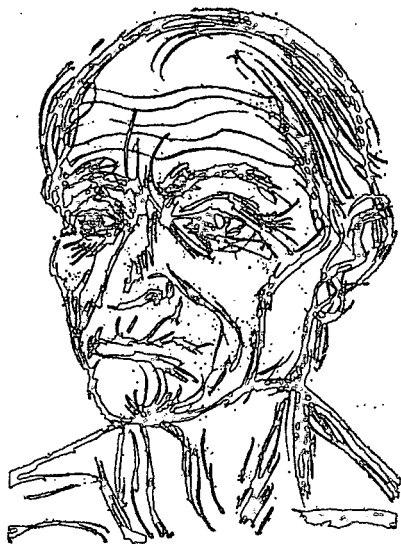
"Hard," Shayne said. "I don't know if he found it or not, but my hunch says no."

"I'll alert my men about him. I don't like out of town guns. We have enough of our own."

"You talked to Mort Vried?"

"Yes. Anything interest you there?"

"I'm not sure, and I'm not sure



about Doc Ames. Both of them knew about Mrs. Kerr. Both of them say she told them nothing, and they told her nothing, but I'm not sure. Have you found where he was shot yet?"

"No. Maybe he was shot in the car."

Shayne thought about that. Then he let his gray eyes fix on Gentry's face. "Blake was John Kerr, right, Will?"

"Yeah, he was. We checked with Syracuse. He was reported missing about a year ago by his wife. Missing Persons had a sheet on him."

"Anything special on the sheet?"

"No. Just ran out one night. The wife waited a week. No report of any reason for the rabbit act, at least not according to the Syracuse police."

"Yet it sounds like a gunman was after him, and he had something someone wanted," Shayne said.

"Not even a hint of anything like that in the MPB sheet," Gentry said, and studied the smoldering tip of his black cigar. "About two weeks ago Missing Persons got a trace on Kerr. One of their men was doing a routine check, you know the pattern. He made a call on a pawn shop, and the owner, Ned Pattman, had a mental flash. He stopped the MPB man, and dug into his set of circulars and came up with Kerr's sheet."

"Did he remember seeing Kerr?"

"No, but he had a pawned item. He didn't think anything about it when he took it in. You know how it is with the stuff we hand out to pawn shops—filed and forgotten. But the sight of the MPB man gave him the brain wave. He dug out the item, and sure enough it had the name John Kerr on it."

"What kind of item? Pretty careless for a man in hiding."

"No, not so careless. Just a mistake," Gentry said. "If they didn't make some mistakes we'd never find them. It was a pocket watch, gold and good but very old, according to Pattman. It had hinged covers back and front, and an inner hinged cover on the back. Kerr's name was scratched inside the inner back cover. He probably just forgot it was even there."

"Why would he pawn it? He didn't seem to need money?"

"Pattman said the watch looked like it hadn't been used for a long time, had been lying around gathering dust. Maybe he just cleaned house," Gentry said. "Anyway, when Pattman reported it, the MPB man checked out the address and it was a phony. So he notified Syracuse and forgot about it. No one came down from Syracuse."

"Except the wife."

Gentry shook his head. "She came, but not to Missing Persons."

Shayne bit a thumbnail and rubbed at his jaw. He looked at Gentry. The Chief looked back. Both men seemed to be waiting for the other to speak.

"So she wanted to find him on her own," Shayne said at last. "She had something on her mind."

"It looks like it, Mike."

"Murder, maybe?"

Gentry puffed smoke. "Maybe. Or maybe a warning for him that a gunman was after him. Or maybe something else."

"So the first order of business is to find Mrs. Kerr?"

"That's how I see it," Gentry agreed. "And maybe this gunman-type of yours."

Shayne nodded. But he was thinking about the pawned watch and the sudden arrival of Mrs. John Kerr in Miami. Something had sent the blonde woman to the Ames Institute, and, finally, to Blake himself—Blake, who was

John Kerr, a missing man in hiding. At least, the elusive blonde had found Blake-Keer if Rowena Rowe's story was true.

Gentry was watching him.

"Something on your mind, Mike?"

"Maybe. What did Missing Persons tell Syracuse? That they had located a lead to Kerr, but the address was phony?"

"Right. That they had evidence he was, or had been recently, in Miami, but that they had no definite further lead as to where he was now."

"No check-back on the pawn shop?"

"I don't know. I can ask Missing Persons."

Shayne stood. "Never mind for now. I think I'll go and have a talk with Pattman."

Gentry was thoughtful. "It sounds like a good idea. Let me hear what you find out. Meanwhile, I'll put out the bulletin on your skinny gunman type."

Shayne nodded, and went out of the office and down to his car.

## X

ON HIS WAY to the pawn shop of Ned Pattman he stopped to call his office. Lucy Hamilton reported no results of her calls yet, and no call from Rowena Rowe.

"She's not very interested in how I'm doing, is she, Angel?" Shayne observed.

"Have the police been keeping her busy?" Lucy said.

"Gentry didn't act like it. Did she leave her number?"

"Yes, Michael," the brown-eyed girl said, and gave him the number.

"I'll be in touch, Angel," Shayne said.

He hung up and dialed Rowena Rowe's number. He let it ring a long time, and got no answer. He hung up and went back to his car. He lit a cigarette and sat thinking for a time. Then he drove on to the pawn shop.

It was early evening by now, and sun slanted into the windows of the pawn shop. A chaotic pile of junk littered the windows. No one seemed to be in the store. An aura of abandonment seemed to hang as Shayne entered to the tinkling of a small bell that echoed in an emptiness.

Shayne waited, but no one appeared.

The redhead rested his hand on his automatic in its shoulder harness. He stepped slowly farther into the shop. Still nothing moved. Shayne reached the caged-in rear counter.

"Remain just there, sir!"

The voice came from Shayne's left, from deep shadows inside the cluttered shop. Shayne stopped and let both his empty hands be seen.

"You have a pistol, I think," the voice said. "So have I. I am now going to call the police. They will

be here quickly. I think surrender is your better course now."

"Pattman?" Shayne said.

There was an ominous pause.

"Yes, I'm Pattman. You have some reason to be here other than burglary."

Shayne breathed more easily. "You've got it wrong. I'm no burglar."

"You watched my store, you came in carrying nothing to pledge, you were alert, and you obviously were prepared to draw a weapon. I can't see—"

"I'm a detective, Pattman, private. I came to ask you some questions."

"About what?"

"John Kerr. The man you reported to MPB about the watch."

Another silence. "Use your left hand to obtain your license. Place it on the floor. Kick it behind you."

Shayne did as instructed. There was a sound behind him. A silence. Then, "Shayne? Yes, I've heard your name. However, private detectives have been known to act beyond the law. You may drop your hands, sit in that chair to your right, smoke if you need to, but remain looking the other way. We can talk in that position if it is truly talk you wish."

"You must have been burned a few times."

"Every pawnbroker has been burned. Few criminals realize it, but there is a deep-seated hatred of pawnbrokers in our society, and

in the poor and criminal in particular. An atavistic fear and hate of the money-lender. An ancient, primitive despising of the man who lives by wits and money instead of brute courage and violence."

"You're a student of history."

"And people, Mr. Shayne. What do you want? It is closing time. I have my home."

There was something eerie about sitting with his back to a voice, staring at a great pile of swords, binoculars, electric toasters, and other junk of Pattman's trade, talking to nothing. Shayne focused on the sound of breathing somewhere behind him.

"Can you describe this Kerr?"

Pattman described Gary Blake in detail. "He did not come back. I told the Bureau man he would not. In this business you come to know instantly when a man is actually selling you an item, not borrowing with the intention to redeem."

"And his address was a phony?"

"I don't know, Mr. Shayne, but it would be normal."

"Is there anything about Kerr you didn't happen to tell the police? Something that came to you later? Something not important at the time, maybe?"

"Not anything they asked me, or were interested in."

"Nothing at all? No matter how small?"

The silence again. "Well, during my conversation with him I did get the impression that he was an ac-

countant of some kind, and had done some instructing—he mentioned the use of the watch to tell him how much time passed while trying to instruct fools. The man from MPB did not appear interested in that when I mentioned it, but the woman did seem interested.”

“Woman?” Shayne said quickly, and started to turn.

“Calm, Mr. Shayne. I’m sure you’re what you say you are, but I live by caution. Remain as you are,” Pattman said. “Yes, a woman came inquiring about Kerr just last week. She said the police had sent her, so I told her what I knew.”

“What did you know?”

“Only what I have told you—the watch, his address, and my impression that he was involved in some kind of instruction about accounting. I told her all I knew because she was quite thorough in her questioning.”

“You didn’t tell the police she was here?”

“Why should I? They had sent her. I had no reason to waste more time on the matter.”

“And you gave her the phony address?”

“I gave her the address I had.”

“Did anyone else come looking for Kerr?”

“No, until now.”

“A skinny little man? Dark coat?”

“No, not to me.”

Shayne stared straight ahead at the mounds of pawned junk that



did not look worth five cents an item, but were certainly worth more than Pattman had given for them, so must be worth something. He was thinking about how Mrs. Kerr had found the Ames Institute from what Pattman had told her. Perhaps she hadn’t. Perhaps there had been some other lead, or perhaps—

“What was the phony address Kerr gave you?”

“I told the police.”

“Tell me. I didn’t ask them.”

There was the sound of rummaging in a file drawer. After a time the rummaging stopped.

“The address is twenty-seven twenty Grange Way. I understand it turned out to be an abandoned old mansion.”

Shayne tried to visualize Grange Way. He had an impression of the

street—a long street in an old section of once-rich big houses. He also had an impression that there was something else special about the address.

"Thanks, Pattman. Is it okay if I leave now?"

"Of course. Simply keep your hands in sight, and walk straight to the door."

Shayne turned and walked to the door. He saw only a vague shadow in the dim light of the shop where Pattman was standing.

Outside he went to his car. As he started the motor, he saw the shades go down in Pattman's shop, and a thin, pale face watching him without a smile.

He drove across the city to the 2700-block of Grange Way. He did not have to look at 2720, or even wonder any more what was special about the address.

He knew instantly what his mind had known was special. 2720 Grange Way was only two blocks from Ames Institute.

Blake, or John Kerr, had probably passed the abandoned mansion many times, and when he came to give a phony address it just came into his mind. The human mind was like that. It could have nothing in it that had not been, somehow, put into it, and it had an inescapable tendency to give itself away if a man knew enough to interpret the evidence.

Mrs. John Kerr would have known enough. With the clue about

Kerr instructing in accounting, and the area of the phony address, she had just looked for schools in the area. Not sure, so had been forced to ask, but she had been led to Ames Institute.

The question was—how had Mrs. John Kerr been led from Ames Institute to The Riviera Court Apartments?

## XI

THE PARKING lot of Ames Institute was slightly fuller now in the late evening. It was still not exactly jammed with the vehicles of hordes of eager students.

The same aura of tired and feeble hope hung over the ugly building as Mike Shayne parked and walked into the grubby corridors. There were a few more students wandering through the halls, and four instructors now lounged silently inside the opened door of the Faculty Lounge.

The door to the office of the president was still open, but the lively secretary was gone, the typewriter at her desk covered and abandoned. The inner door to Ames's office was closed, and there was no light showing under the door.

Shayne went back out into the corridor and crossed to the faculty lounge. Two of the four occupants looked up at him; lazily, as if they really couldn't care less who he was or what he wanted. But one of

them struggled up to his feet with a great effort.

"Can I help you?"

"I'm looking for Doctor Ames," Shayne said.

"Ames?" the man said as if not sure he had ever heard the name. "Well, I—"

"He's in class," the other awake man said.

"Yes, I suppose . . ." the one on his feet said.

Ames Institute seemed to be floundering in its own lethargy. As if no one could make up his mind what to do as the ship sank under him.

One of the sleeping men spoke, his eyes still closed. "No, Ames doesn't have a class now. It bombed out, remember?"

"Yes," the man on his feet said, "I remember now. It was advanced copy-writing. It didn't make the quota." And he said to Shayne; "The Doctor doesn't have a class now."

Shayne was getting lost in the pointless repetition. "What does he have now?"

"Nothing," the asleep one said. "Communing with the racing form. Advanced four-horse parlay twelve, one student."

"In his office?" Shayne translated.

"Yes," the standing one said. "He should be there now, the way I figure it."

"He's not. No light."

"Well—" The standing-one

frowned. "Perhaps he's gone over to The Cat's Fence."

"Not now, for God's sake. He's got a class in an hour. Get him in. The Cat and he's there till he roots!" the asleep one said.

"Well . . ." the standing-one said. "Maybe he's asleep."

Shayne said, "Let's see. Okay?"

Reluctantly, the standing-one nodded agreement. Shayne went back along the corridor to the president's office. The hesitant teacher followed him. There was still no light under the door of Ames's office. Mike Shayne knocked, and then knocked louder.

"I guess he's out somewhere," the teacher said.

Shayne tried the door. It was open. He pushed it wide and went in. The office was pitch dark, curtains drawn. Shayne switched on the light.

The teacher said, "Dr. Ames?"

The cadaverous man sat in his chair with his head on his desk. The way a man falls asleep at his desk when he has worked too hard. Only no matter how hard he may have worked, Dr. Ames was not asleep.

The teacher said again, "Dr. Ames?"

Then the teacher saw the ice pick like a growth on the back of Ames's neck. Exactly at the occipital bulge. Dr. Ames was neatly, expertly, bloodlessly dead.

The teacher fainted.

Shayne left the teacher lying

where he had fallen. He went to Ames and looked down at the ice pick. An ordinary ice pick, with an unmarked handle. Certainly no more than three inches long in the blade, and filed to a needle point.

There was no point in touching the dead president—he was very dead. Shayne looked carefully around the office. He found nothing. He did not think that there would be any use questioning people. A man who killed with an ice pick would not have been seen coming or going.

But he looked for any clues that Ames might have left. He found only an appointment book, open, with a series of doodles covering an otherwise blank page. The doodles were of numbers—with dollar signs: \$100,000 . . . \$100,000 . . . \$10,000 . 10 . . 10 . . . 10 . . . 10 . . .

They had all the appearance of doodles while on the telephone.

There was nothing else, and the teacher on the floor was beginning to come around. Shayne picked up the telephone and called Chief Gentry. Then he turned his attention to the white-faced teacher who, awake now, looked as though he were going to be sick. He was.

Ten minutes later, the teacher lying flat out on the bathroom floor, Will Gentry strode into the office followed by his men in a troop. Everyone went to work at his appointed task.

Shayne told Gentry his story, in-

cluding how he thought Mrs. Kerr had come looking at The Ames Institute. Then they waited. An hour later everyone on the team was ready with at least a progress report.

"Dead about two hours. One wound severed the spinal cord. Quick and neat. The killer knew his anatomy," the M.E. said.

"Or at least had a lot of experience with an ice pick," Shayne said.

"No fingerprints except the dead guy's, and some others that are all over the place, new and old," the fingerprint man said.

"Lift them all anyway," Gentry growled.

"Nothing under his nails, or on his clothes that looks good," a technical man said. "No blood to speak of."

"No forced entry," a detective said. "Looks like the killer just walked in."

Gentry snorted. "Easy as robbing a hungry widow. The place is full of students. Who notices a stranger? What do you think, Mike?"

"He just walked in and did his job," Shayne said. "The question is why, and what about those figures on the pad?"

"He had money on his mind."

"The school is shaky, from all I hear. I figure he needed money bad."

"So he talks to someone on the phone about \$100,000, and about



ten percent of it," Gentry said. "It looks like some kind of deal for a cut of some money. Maybe a pay-off?"

"It crossed my mind," Shayne said. "Blake, or Kerr, had something someone wanted. Maybe it was one hundred thousand dollars and Ames thought he knew something worth ten percent to the man who had the money."

Gentry frowned. "But Syracuse didn't report that Kerr was supposed to have stolen anything, or that he might be carrying that kind of money."

"No," Shayne said. "I wonder why the wife never checked in at Missing Persons? She went out on her own."

"Yeh," Gentry mused.

"Any luck on her yet?"

"No, but we've found where he got it."

"You mean where Kerr was killed?"

Gentry nodded. "It looks like it. Edwards is out there now. I was just going."

"We can't do more here," Shayne said.

"Okay, come on," Gentry said.

They went out to their cars, and Shayne followed the siren of the Chief.

## XII

IT WAS A motel less than five miles from The Ames Institute. On the highway, not a mile from where

the car driven by the dying John Kerr, alias Gary Blake, had first passed Mike Shayne on the wrong side of the road.

The Ponce De Leon Motel, with a neon fountain of youth spouting forever over its sign. A series of semi-attached cabins in pale yellow stucco fading off into the dark away from the highway. The manager almost collapsed at the sight of Gentry. The manager knew the Chief on sight.

"How do I know? It was just a little blood. I figured maybe the guy cut himself," the manager stammered. "I mean, he wasn't around, he wasn't dead like? The place was neat as a pin. He'd paid up and left. He didn't have a mark on him."

"Who?" Shayne said, puzzled.

"Mr. Makarios, the guy who had unit ten," the manager said. "I saw the blood next morning. I cleaned it up. It wasn't so much. I'd never of thought about it if you cops hadn't come around."

"What time did he check out?" Gentry asked.

"I told you all that. Eight o'clock."

"And no one went into the unit until the morning?"

"No. We was slow and the maids was off."

"Tell us about the other men," Gentry said. "The two you told Lieutenant Edwards about."

The manager squirmed. "The first one came around about ten



o'clock. He asked for Number ten. I told him it was empty; the guy had checked out. He seemed sort of confused about that, but he didn't say anything. He just left; and I went back to watching TV. Hell, it was only when the lieutenant come around I remembered him."

"Describe him," Gentry said.

The manager described John Kerr, or Gary Blake, perfectly, including the exact clothes he had been wearing when Shayne found him dead in the wreck of his car. Gentry looked at Shayne, and then back at the manager.

"Now the other guy."

"Wait a minute. I didn't see him," the manager protested. "One of my tenants, Number six, come into the office about ten that night, and tells me she saw this guy sort

of staggering across the parking lot to a car. This other guy comes after him. There's kind of a tussle, the second guy goes down, and the first guy gets into his car and drives off. Like a bat out of hell, the tenant says."

"What happened to the second man?"

"He got up and ran to another car and drove off, too."

"Did the tenant describe him?"

"Not to me. She's still in Number six. Ask her. I checked around that night, but all my tenants were accounted for. I figured it was a couple of drunks usin' my lot. It happens."

"Describe the car the first man drove off in—the man who was staggering," Shayne said.

The manager gave a vague description that fitted John Kerr's car—the car Shayne had followed into its final crash.

They left the manager making his official statement to one of Gentry's men, and went across the dark court to the open door of unit No. 10. Lieutenant Edwards greeted them inside the unit.

"Nothing here connected to Blake, or Kerr," the State Police lieutenant said. "In fact, nothing of any kind except the blood. You can see where it was, there near the table. Not much. We're trying to pick up enough traces to type it."

"No indication he ever stayed here?"

"None. The place seems to have

been empty since the Makarios guy checked out that night."

Shayne said, "The manager said that Kerr seemed surprised, confused, to find no one in unit ten."

"You figure Kerr had an appointment to meet someone here?" Gentry said.

The three men looked at each other. In the silence of the motel unit the only sounds were the police working over the room for evidence, and the passing cars on the highway. Edwards bit his nails.

"Someone lured him to an empty motel unit? Set him up for a trap, got him into an empty unit, and killed him there?" the trooper lieutenant said.

"That's the way it sounds," Shayne said.

"So someone who had to know that Number ten was empty, and had to be close enough to move fast and quiet. Kerr couldn't have been here more than six or eight minutes," Gentry said.

"Someone living here?" Edwards said.

"It looks that way," Gentry said.

Shayne rubbed at his gaunt jaw. "Not necessarily, Will. That's going on the assumption that there's something special about this motel. There doesn't have to be. There're a lot of motels around here. The killer could simply have looked around until he found a motel where someone was checking out, and the vacancy sign was up."

"Then he called Kerr, lured him to an empty unit, waited outside, and killed him," Gentry said. "No record of him, and no trace. It could be."

"And if it is," Edwards said, "we'll have a hell of a time."

Gentry swore. "I'll get my best team down here to go over this place. We've got to get a lead."

One of Gentry's men came into the unit and nodded to the Chief. Gentry stepped over to the detective and listened to what the man said in a low voice. Gentry's eyes bleamed. The gruff Chief of Police came back to Edwards and Shayne.

"It looks like the first theory is right," Gentry growled. "Our killer didn't just pick a random motel. My boys just went over the whole clientele. They've come up with a Vincent Renzo, unit fifteen. Been here just over a week."

"What about him?" Shayne said.

"Manager described him: about five-foot-two; a hundred-and-ten pounds; sharp-faced; wears a black topcoat all the time, buttoned; quiet; never talks; cold eyes."

"Our little gunman," Shayne said.

"He sounds like it."

Shayne tugged at his left ear. "If he killed Kerr, why hang around still?"

"Maybe for one hundred thousand dollars," Gentry said. "His car has New York plates."

"Let's find out," Edwards said.

## XIII

BUT UNIT FIFTEEN was dark and empty. The manager produced a pass key, and the three detectives went inside. The manager went back to his TV, worried and nervous.

In unit 15 they found one suitcase, a black suit hanging in the closet, and extra pair of shoes on the floor, a half-empty pint of the best Scotch, a box of expensive cigars nearly empty, and nothing else.

"A box of shells in the suitcase," Edwards said. "Almost full, forty-five caliber. Nothing else: underwear and socks, some books, decks of cards, another box of cigars."

"Look for another gun," Gentry said. "A thirty-two automatic. Any shells for a thirty-two."

They did not find a .32 of any kind, or any ammunition for one. They found no knives, or ice picks, or any other lethal instruments. What they did find was a sheet of dates and amounts of money listed under the letterhead of The Tiberius Import Co.

"Expense account," Gentry said. "I wonder what we'd find out about Tiberius Import Company if we asked the Syracuse police?"

"I can guess," Lieutenant Edwards said.

"What do you want to do, Will?" Shayne asked.

"Wait. We haven't found him by looking, and I figure he thinks

he's safe here. He probably figured on moving out after he shot Kerr, but he got a break when Kerr lived long enough to run for it."

"He knows Kerr wasn't registered here. Since we haven't been around, he probably thinks we've got no lead to the place," Edwards said.

"Okay," Shayne said. "We wait. But you better get your men and cars out of sight, and keep some men in the office to watch the manager in case he stops there first."

Gentry sent the detective who had brought the news of Vincent Renzo. Then the three men took up positions in the dark to wait. It was a long, tedious wait. Shayne found himself yearning for a cigarette. Gentry at least could chew on his unlighted cigar stump.

The time passed like the flow of cooling lead. Time crawled. It limped and hobbled, punctuated by passing cars on the highway, and the noises of the motel—doors closing, female giggles, the wracking coughs of some man who smoked too much, the arrival and departure of cars.

At each arriving car the three hidden waiters tensed, held their breath, but no one came.

An hour and a half passed, and then a car arrived. There was silence, and then light footsteps just outside the door of unit 15. The door opened, and a small shadow groped for the light switch.

The lights went on.

"Hold it there!" Gentry cried.

The thin little man's hand moved like lightning.

Mike Shayne had his automatic in his hand. "No!"

Edwards moved in fast. Cut toward the door. The skinny little man made a move. Edwards was there. Gentry barked:

"Nothing, Renzo! Just nothing at all. Police."

The little man, Vincent Renzo seemed to hang suspended in the light of the room. Then he let out a slow breath and laughed aloud. It was a warm, Latin laugh.

"Police, you're telling me?" Renzo said, laughed. "Hell, now, there's a surprise. I'd never of figured it out."

Gentry nodded to Edwards. The State Police lieutenant moved in on Renzo, careful to not get between the little man and Gentry or Shayne. Edwards relieved Renzo of his automatic in a shoulder harness. A big, ugly, well-worn .45 automatic.

"See what else," Gentry said.

Edwards frisked the little man slowly and carefully, missing nowhere, not even the back of his belt, a favorite spot of careful hoods once TV had given out the idea.

Edwards stepped back. "He's clean now," he said.

Gentry scowled. "You're sure?"

Edwards nodded. The trooper sniffed the big .45, released the

clip, examined the chamber after ejecting the shell in it.

"Not been fired. Full clip," Edwards said.

Renzo had been watching all this, and Shayne had been watching the small gunman. Renzo seemed completely relaxed, even amused, but behind the amusement was a careful and serious man. When Edwards had finished examining the .45, he started for the door. Renzo watched the lieutenant leave, then looked at Gentry. The little gunman's voice was calm and reasonable.

"You're looking for the other gun, right? I only carry the one piece, Chief. I didn't hit Kerr."

"How do you know he was killed with a different kind of gun?"

"I can read, Chief, and I can add. Your trooper buddy and you wanted a different cannon on me. I know Kerr got his. I don't figure how you got onto me, unless this shamus here got smarter than I figured, but I know I'm clean on this hit."

The little man was lounging down on the arm of a chair by this time. Shayne studied the man's cool, practical, manner.

"You slugged me?" the redhead said.

"Sure. I figured you pegged me outside The Riviera Court joint, Shayne."

Gentry said, "You seem to know all of us pretty well."

Renzo shrugged. "That's my

trade, Chief. I got to come to Miami, I find out who's who, right? I get here, I see people, I find out. You I know before I come, sure; but I got to find out who the trooper is, and the peeper here."

Edwards came back. "Nothing I can find in his car. The boys are going over it again, but it looks empty."

"It is," Renzo said. "You guys want to tell me how you got to me? I kind of don't like I got found and trapped so easy? How did you figure me for this place?"

Now Renzo had slid down into the chair and was lounging at his ease, like a man who had nothing more on his mind than a good night's sleep and a full day in some quiet office tomorrow. Gentry watched the gunman with a scowl on his blunt face.

"First let's hear your story, Renzo. You didn't come down here for the swimming," the Chief said. "Remember I can hold you on the known-criminal statute, and contact Syracuse."

Renzo nodded. "Sure, sure. I figured you had me pegged. Okay. Mind if I smoke?"

"Go ahead."

Renzo took out an elegant thin cigar, lit it carefully, drew a few mouthfuls, and exhaled with pleasure. "Right. I can tell you because this time I'm simon-pure. This guy Gary Blake was really a boy named John Kerr. You already figured that, right? Okay. So he was a

cashier up in a joint in Syracuse. I mean, outside Syracuse. No names. You can dig on that, but it's a gambling joint. I work for the guy who runs it, sort of a peace-keeper, you might say. Right?"

Renzo grinned, and when no one else even smiled, he shrugged and went on. "So. Kerr is a cashier, real whiz with the figures. Helps keep the books, too. About a year ago he don't show up for work one night. The boss is the suspicious type. The boss he checks the cash. About a cool hundred grand is missing, too."

Renzo studied his cigar thoughtfully. "The boss isn't a man to take that, you know? So, he gives me the job. Get the money back. He don't care about Kerr, and he don't want no publicity. I mean, if Kerr gets dead the hard way there'll be questions, check? If Kerr gets too scared, maybe he talks too much, check? I mean, the boss wants that money quiet. You got it?"

"Income tax?" Shayne said. "Kerr dies and maybe questions lead to one hundred thousand dollars of unreported income."

"You got a head, shamus. That's it. So no cops, no report about the loot going away. Just find Kerr and get the money and don't do nothings brings attention. It's kind of a touchy job, see? I mean, I got to lean hard enough to scare Kerr and get the loot, but not so hard he panics and gets hurt or runs to the cops. I got to scare him but not do

nothing. It's a rough play. I mean, I got to balance good—not hurt him, only not let him know I can't hurt him."

Renzo stopped and looked at them all as if wanting them to sympathize with his technical problem, to understand the problem such a task presented to a professional workmen. Nobody said anything.

Renzo nodded for himself. "It was tricky. Only right at the start it don't matter much. He's gone good. I mean, I can't get no leads. This Kerr, he don't have friends much. A couple of brothers, a wife, that's it. They don't look like they know nothing. They act like he's gone for them, too. The wife waits a week and goes to the cops."

Renzo puffed on his cigar, frowning. "Lucky for us she don't know he done the rabbit with the boss's lettuce. I set up some guys watching them, and I do the Sherlock Holmes bit. No luck. Nothing. Kerr does a good run-out. I can't find a lead, and the wife goes nowhere.

"I'm a patient man. The boss says keep at it. The money's big enough, sure, and he got to get it back anyway for the record. I mean, people got to know no one steals from the boss. The dough got to come home. The boss tells me stick with it all the way. So I do.

"A whole year nothing. Then about a week ago the wife makes a move. I tail her. She leads me down



here. To a pawnshop, then an empty house, then all around to all sorts of schools. I begin to get the message. The guy's a whiz with the numbers. All the time I'm looking, and got people looking, I never figured he's maybe teaching, you know? A mistake. I should of figured it.

"Anyway, I follows her and finally I hit paydirt. She finds the guy at The Riviera Court, and—"

Shayne broke in. "How did she find him?"

"Who knows? She talked to some guys at that Ames place."

"Guys? More than one?"

"Yeah. A tall joker, and another guy with a limp."

"Did you talk to them? The two guys?"

Renzo was surprised. "Me? Hell

no. I'm keeping quiet, see? I just followed the wife."

"Go on," Gentry said.

"So she meets with Kerr. I take up the tail. I move slow, I don't want him scared too much. A couple days later he does another vanish. I run back to that Ames Institute and stake out. He shows, and I follow him to this Osceola place. Then I make my move. I go up and have a talk with him.

"He's scared green, naturally. I tell him I want the bread, all of it. I tell him I'm watching. I let him figure I got help with me. He's real nervous, only I got a feeling it ain't so much me as that wife of his.

"Anyway, I give him a day. I tell him where I'm staying, he should call me when he can deliver the dough. I mean, like he says he ain't got it on hand. I go away, only I stake him out again, naturally."

Renzo suddenly reddened, his eyes darkened. "He comes out that night and he slips me! Me! I lose him. He's in that car of his. What do I do? I figure I got it all to do again. I go to the Ames Institute—he ain't there. I try The Riviera Court, he ain't there. I go back to The Osceola. No dice. So I come back here and wait. Maybe he'll call. I'm in that bad shape. I think he'll call!"

Renzo scowled, took a deep breath, and then sighed. "So I spend the night building up a mad. I'll get to that guy sooner or later,

and when I do he'll beg me to take the money. I dream about it. In the morning I get the papers and I find out—he's dead. No money mentioned, right? It looks bad for me—with the boss. I mean, he'll mark me lousy.

"So I knows a guy or two on the police beat here. I talk to them. It don't look like you jokers got any money, or even know about it. Only I figure sooner or later you know, or maybe you find it. I figure maybe he stashed it somewhere. So I start looking. The peeper there he spotted me at The Riviera, and at the Osceola I slugged him. I found where he had the money sure as hell, only it was an empty hole in the floor when I found it."

Renzo stopped, and smoked his cigar with deep speculation in his eyes. The little gunman kept shaking his head as if he couldn't figure how he had done so wrong. Gentry looked at Shayne. Edwards just looked tired.

"That's your story, Renzo?" Gentry said. "You lost him, and you stayed around to try to find the money?"

"Why else would I stay? I sure don't stay if I hit him. I figured I botched it, and if I got to face the boss, at least I better have a try for that money. Only it figured all along that the guy who burned him got the loot, so I guess the boss ain't gonna be happy with me."

Shayne said, "And you never



talked with anyone else down here?"

"Not me, peeper. Maybe I should have."

"Why do you say that?" Edwards said.

"Because it looks like someone fingered him for the money."

"How," Gentry snapped, "if no one but you knew about the money?"

Renzo shrugged. "Someone found out. The wife was acting kind of funny. I mean, how come she didn't go to you guys?"

Gentry said, "How come Kerr was killed here?"

Renzo blinked at the Chief, his cigar suspended in midair. The little gunman stared all around him.

"Here? He was killed here?" Renzo cried. "No, the paper said he died up on the highway! He—"

"He was shot here, Renzo. In unit 10. He made it to his car. How come here? You're telling us that was some kind of coincidence?"

"I never saw the guy here! He was supposed to call. How do I know if—"

Renzo stopped. "Christ, Chief, you think I'd stay right here if I'd killed him here? How dumb do you think I am? I'm a pro; I was after the money. I was on a job. No, not me. Never! Someone must have spotted me, and—"

Renzo stopped again, looked at them all. "The wife! Sure, that's got to be it! She spotted me and she tailed *me* here!"

"The wife?" Shayne said. "All right. Where is she?"

Renzo cried, "I know where she is. I'll show you! It got to be her!"

#### XIV

IT WAS ANOTHER motel about two miles away. Gentry, Shayne and Renzo drove there in the Chief's car. The clerk at the motel, The Tampa Motel, told them that Mrs. John Kerr had cabin 7, and he thought she was in.

They approached the cabin warily. There was light inside, and nothing happened as they walked up to the door. Gentry knocked. Shayne rested his hand on his pistol in its shoulder harness. The woman opened the door.

"Yes?"

She was a tallish blonde a long way past her best years, but still with the memory of a pretty fair beauty on her face. She wore a light summer suit, and her bags were standing packed on the floor behind her. Only one bag was still open on the bed.

"Police, Mrs. Kerr," Gentry said, and forced the woman back into the room with his pressure. Once inside he turned on her. "You didn't come to us, Mrs. Kerr. Why? Your husband has been dead two days, and you still didn't come to us."

The blonde was hardly listening to Gentry. Her grey eyes were fixed on Vincent Renzo. The small

gunman watched her like a snake, a faint smile on his face that had no amusement in it.

"You killed him. Tell them. You spotted me, followed me, set up a frame. Tell them. Where's the gun?" Renzo hissed at her.

"Murderer!" the woman cried.

"You damned bitch!" Renzo snarled.

The little gunman took a step toward Mrs. Kerr, but the blonde moved even faster. She hurled herself straight at Renzo, her fingers clawed and slashing at his face.

Gentry caught the woman.

Shayne grabbed Renzo, lifted the little man clear off the ground.

Mrs. Kerr screamed: "Killer! For your lousy money! Just for that money you killed poor Johnny!"

Gentry pushed the woman away. She sprawled on the bed, her grey eyes almost insane with rage. Gentry leaned toward her, his face down toward her:

"You knew about the money, Mrs. Kerr?"

"What?" she said, grunted from the bed. She opened her mouth to say more, and closed it slowly, light of understanding in her eyes. She had not meant to let anyone know she knew about the \$100,000 Kerr had vanished with.

"How did you find out about it, Mrs. Kerr?" Gentry said quietly.

"Johnny told me."

"No," Gentry said. "No mention of it ever appeared anywhere.

Renzo says his boss wanted it quiet, kept it quiet. I believe him that far."

The woman laughed. "Sure. Mingo wouldn't want anyone to know he lost, or had, that kind of loose money."

Gentry ignored this. "You waited a whole year, no mention of money. If you'd really wanted Kerr just found, and you knew about the money early, you'd have mentioned it."

"Hell I would. He stole it."

"Okay. But if you didn't know about it until you found him again, you'd have come to us, to Missing Persons, when you got down here. You didn't. You went straight to the pawnshop—because you wanted to find him privately. Which means you knew about the money before you came down here. It probably means you wanted the money more than you wanted Kerr back."

She sat up on the bed, looked around, looked at Renzo and Shayne, then she shrugged. "Okay. Agarn told me. He's a stickman for Mingo back home. After Johnny ran out, we . . . well, we got friendly. I knew Agarn a long time. So we sort of got together when it was pretty sure Johnny wasn't comin' back. I mean, hell, Johnny never even wrote me a—"

"So you got friendly with this Agarn," Gentry said.

"I know Agarn all right," Renzo said.

"Shut up," Gentry said. "Go on, Mrs. Kerr."

"Anyway," she said, "about four months ago Agarn told me he figured Johnny had a good reason to run, and he's sort of heard that Mr. Mingo had lost a bundle just about when Johnny did his vanishing act. We talked about it. So, when the police told me about the watch down here in Miami, and the pawn shop, I came on down.

"I didn't want no cops in on it. I mean, it was stolen even if Mingo wasn't about to report it. Then I figured Mr. Mingo wasn't going to stand still for it. I'd heard from Agarn that Mingo had someone looking for Johnny. I didn't know who, but I wasn't about to lead anyone to Johnny if I could help it."

"You mean not until you'd gotten the money?" Shayne said.

She glared at Shayne, and Renzo laughed a nasty laugh.

"Honey, you lead me like a seeing eye dog. I was on your tail all the way."

"Shut up, Renzo. I won't tell you again," Gentry said, and to the woman, "When you talked to your husband what did he say?"

"You mean about the money? He said he didn't have any money. I told him he was a liar, but he stuck to his story. Then he ran out again. I couldn't find him. I started looking around again."

"You spotted Renzo and followed him," Gentry said.

"No! I didn't know he was any-



where around," she said. She glared hate at the little gunman. "I'd have warned Johnny. He probably scared Johnny away, and then killed him!"

"You stupid bitch! You killed him! All you wanted was the money, anyone can see that," Renzo snarled.

While they radiated accusations and hatred at each other, Shayne's gray eyes narrowed into steely points. The big redhead rubbed at his jaw.

"Did you tell anyone else about the money, Mrs. Kerr?"

"What?" she said. "Well, yes. Before I found Johnny I told Ames and that Mort Vried that Johnny had a lot of money. I told them it was mine. I hinted that the cops were after Johnny. I figured they were law-abiding citizens and

would help me find him. Ames told me about The Riviera Court."

"He said he told you nothing," Shayne said.

"Then he's a liar. You let me talk to him."

"He's not talking to anyone," Gentry said. "He's dead. Killed tonight. Why?"

"Dead?" Mrs. Kerr said. "Who—"

She looked at Renzo. The little gunman bared his teeth at her.

Shayne said, "Ames needed money. It looks like he figured on collecting at least ten percent from someone."

"But collected an ice pick instead," Gentry said. "Why?"

"Maybe because he knew who had the money," Shayne said. "Will, remember what that manager at The Ponce De Leon said? About one of his tenants seeing another man grapple with Kerr?"

"I remember," Gentry said. "Maybe we better talk to her. You two come along."

They all climbed back into Gentry's car and drove back to the Ponce De Leon Motel.

## XV

MIKE SHAYNE tried to call Rowena Rowe again from the Ponce De Leon office. There was no answer. Frowning, he went back out to where Gentry and Edwards were with the manager. Renzo and Mrs. Kerr were sitting sullenly in

the office under the steady eyes of Gentry's men.

Gentry said, "The tenant in unit six isn't in. We'll have to wait, Mike."

"We'll need a warrant if we get a decent description," Edwards said. "I still say it'll be Renzo."

Gentry scowled. "I don't know. It's awful messy work for a pro to hang around the scene like this. Especially since it looks like Kerr really had the money on him. If Renzo killed him, and got the money, why hang around?"

"It's a good question, Will," Shayne agreed. "I've got a hunch Renzo and the woman are telling the truth. I think our killer is someone who wanted the money. Ames knew who he was, so he killed Ames. I think our killer was someone on the outside who tailed Renzo, saw it all, then lured Kerr here to frame Renzo."

"How the hell would he lure a running man, Mike?" Edwards said.

Shayne's eyes were cold points in the night. "By being a buddy, a real friend. I've a hunch our killer was someone who offered to help Kerr run for it again, knew Kerr wouldn't leave the money, and arranged a meeting here in the empty unit.

"Kerr came here expecting to meet a friend. He had the money. He didn't know this was where Renzo was staying. So our killer got the money, shot Kerr, and

figured Renzo would get the rap. He probably planned to dump the body in Renzo's unit, but Kerr had enough in him to run again, and got away."

Gentry nodded. "It holds water, Mike. Who do you have in mind?"

Shayne shook his head. "I'm not sure. Look, Will, you stay and get the description. Get a warrant. I've got something I want to check."

Gentry watched the big redhead. "No grandstanding, Mike. The guy's a killer."

"I know. I'll be back," Shayne said.

He left them all there in front of the motel office, and went to his car. He lit a cigarette. Because will Gentry was right, it was going to be a grandstand play. But he had a hunch that there was little time.

If his guess was right, the killer would be ready to run now, maybe was already running. There was only one way of proving that the killer was a killer—find the money. Once the money was gone, there would be no evidence. Not with Ames dead. That was the one big key to Shayne's hunch—Ames ten percent dreams that had led to death.

He drove out of the lot and across the city. He drove in silence. He reached the dark and brooding tract in record time. Nothing had changed. The shabby tract house still stood in its cul-de-sac. Only the step in front was empty now.

The wife of Mort Vried had given up her vigil. The locked door stood solid and dark. There was no light in the house. Mike Shayne approached cautiously on foot. He circled the house twice, listening, watching. The garage was empty.

He found a rear window, locked badly. He slipped his thin pick lock in between the two halves of the window and sprung the lock open. He raised the window, climbed in, and found himself in a bedroom.

The bed was empty, but it had been recently slept in, or at least used. Suitcases stood packed on the bedroom floor. The closets were almost empty. Vried was going somewhere—and, from what Shayne found in one suitcase, his girl friend, Miss De Gardo was going with him. Poor Mrs. Vried.

The redhead sat on the bed and thought. The suitcases had not contained \$100,000. Wherever Vried was, it was not likely he would have the money with him—not when he was going to come back to the house for his suitcases. Two trips only made everything twice as dangerous.

No, wherever Vried was, it was some last minute necessity, or Shayne would have found only a cold bed and an empty house. Unless Vried had the money already in his car. Which was not likely. The instructor would reason that to have the money was a risk. In case someone was suspicious.

No, again, Vried would not have

the money until he was ready for his final, quick run. So, where would a man like Vried hide \$100,000? An amateur, a bookkeeper. Outside? Too risky. The neighbors were too close for a man to risk digging in the open.

Not in an obvious place, because Mrs. Vried might get a court order to enter the house at any time. So somewhere she would not look. But too clever—the over-cleverness of an amateur. The kind of place an amateur would think very original, but the police would know by heart.

He went to the water tanks of the two toilets. No.

The refrigerator freezer? No.

He thought. That much money would take up space, no matter how large the bills were.

The laundry hamper. Only dirty clothes.

Then he saw the registers—the house had forced air gas heating. With large registers in the floor and walls. He went from one to the other. He found it in a small leather satchel behind the register in the small study.

Only two screws held the register over the heat duct, and behind it, shoved back, was the small bag. Mike Shayne pulled it out and opened it.

The door creaked behind him.

Shayne fell flat on his face, and rolled left. His head banged the desk. Something heavy and breathing hard slam onto the floor to his right. Shayne came up like a great

cat and did not turn. He lunged to his left again.

A lamp crashed against the desk where he had been.

Now Shayne turned. Mort Vried was clutching the desk, off balance; still holding the shattered base of the heavy lamp in his right hand.

The florid face of the stocky man was contorted in the dark room. Vried hurled the broken lamp, and his crippled leg slid from under him.

Shayne ducked the lamp, moved in. Vried steadied, clutched for a heavy paperweight. Shayne hit him with a short left in the belly. Vried grunted, but there was muscle in the florid man's belly. The paperweight cracked against Shayne's cheekbone.

The big redhead staggered back. Vried came after him with the paperweight swinging. Shayne ducked the wild swing and planted a solid combination in Vried's belly and heart. Vried stumbled back, grunted and gasped.

Shayne hit one-two on the jaw and chin. Vried hit the wall, slid down, and sat there with his hands dangling limp.

Shayne leaned against the desk, breathing hard.

Vried stared at his feet. "I knew it was too good. Mort Vried doesn't have that kind of luck."

"Where's the gun, Vried?" Shayne said.

"Gun?"

"The gun—"

There was noise in the house. Men out in the living room. Will Gentry came in. The bluff Chief of Police took in the scene. The lights went on. Gentry chewed on his cigar.

"You got to make the play, Mike?"

"He was leaving," Shayne said.

Gentry nodded. "Okay. I couldn't move. Maybe you were right. On your feet, Vried."

Vried just sat. Shayne took out a cigarette and lit it.

"You got the description of the man who grappled with Kerr?" Shayne asked.

"Yeah. It was Vried," Gentry said. "Description, knowledge of the people in the case, and you've got the money. That'll do it."

Mort Vried blinked up at them all.

## XVI

THEY SAT IN Will Gentry's office with the sun just coming up outside. The Chief looked tired but satisfied.

"It adds up, Mike," Gentry said. "The Kerr woman told him about the money. He needed money desperately. He admits he tried to blackmail Kerr for it, and when that failed he took to following Kerr. He had a run-in at the Ponce De Leon, and he killed Kerr and got the money."

"How did he get Kerr to the motel?"

"He says he just followed him

there, but I don't believe that. I figure he spotted Renzo, as you said, and set up the frame by pretending to be trying to help Kerr get away. Somehow Ames found out about it all and put on pressure for at least ten thousand dollars as the price of silence."

"He doesn't admit it?"

"Not yet, but he will. When he knows it's all over he'll tell us," Gentry said.

Shayne nodded. "What's his story?"

"That he just followed Kerr. He saw Kerr go into unit 10 at the motel. He heard a shot. He ran in and found Kerr bleeding on the floor. He thought Kerr was already dead, so he saw the bag of money, grabbed it, and started out when Kerr came to life again.

"Kerr re-grabbed the money—by reflex I suppose, and staggered out to his car. Vried went after him—he says to help now—and they struggled. Kerr got away but dropped the money. Vried took it and ran. After that Vried went around nervously trying to be sure we had nothing on him. He was about to try to vanish with the money."

Shayne sighed. "Some story. How come the killer didn't get the money, if Vried didn't kill Kerr? Where was the real killer?"

"Yeah. I asked him that. He can't answer it. He thinks maybe he scared the killer off. Maybe the killer wasn't after the money."

Shayne's eyes softened and he sighed. "I guess he just saw what looked like a chance and took it. He probably didn't really mean to kill anyone. When he tells you the truth, you'll find he shot Kerr almost by accident. Then he had to kill Ames to cover."

"That's the way it often happens, Mike," Gentry said. "First a half accidental killing, and then plain ugly murder to hide the first crime. I've seen it a million times."

"Fear," Shayne said. "Simple fear."

"First greed, then fear," Gentry said.

"Yes," Shayne said.

He left, and went down in the morning sun to his car. He looked at his watch. He was tired but he wasn't sleepy.

He needed breakfast and then he had one more duty—to report to his client.

He ate in an almost empty pancake house. He was hungry. After his six eggs and four rashers of bacon, he had three cups of coffee, which wasn't bad, and then went back to his car and drove to Rowena Rowe's apartment.

It was early, and he considered calling first, but then he smiled to himself. She had gotten him up at the crack of dawn. It was his turn. He went up the stairs of the apartment house two at a time. Her name was on her door.

Shayne knocked—and then came alert. His eyes hardened to

dark grey points. The door moved and opened a few inches under the force of his knocking.

No one answered his knocking.

He touched the door and it swung in slowly like the gates of doom opening.

He stepped into a small, but pleasant living room. There was no one in the room, no sounds. An empty kitchenette was visible, and an open bathroom door. There was no one in the bathroom.

The bedroom door was closed. Shayne stepped softly to it. He listened—and heard the sound. Low, weak and very faint. But unmistakable. Moans.

Shayne opened the bedroom door with his automatic out. He stepped in. The room was dark, shades drawn. Something moved on the bed—something that lay in a dark stain.

Shayne looked quickly but carefully around the whole room. There was nowhere anyone could hide except a closet that stood open. Mike Shayne checked it. Then he raised the shades.

Rowena Rowe lay on the bed. The pool of blood all around her was dry, crusted and almost black. Shayne stood looking down, and suddenly her eyelids fluttered.

He had not imagined the moans. She wasn't dead.

He hurried to the telephone and called police emergency. Then he went back and bent over her. The blood looked like she had been



shot straight dead center in the heart. He opened her dress.

The bullet had probably missed her heart, missed an artery, by a hair. It looked like it had gone through her right lung. A sheer stroke of chance. The kind of impossible chance that traps killers. She was alive—for some reason the killer had fired only once and gone.

Who could say why? A fright? Overconfidence? Fear that someone was coming? Haste to be somewhere else, to run with \$100,000 and a new girl friend?

Shayne tried to move her to be sure there were no other wounds. She must have had sudden pain. Her eyelids opened, and she looked up at the redhead through a veil of pain.

"Is . . . is . . . he . . ."

"They got him, Rowena," Shayne said, bending low, his lips almost touching the ear of the girl who looked even younger now in her pain. "Vried won't hurt anyone else, believe me. When did this happen?"

" . . . night . . . last night, late . . . night . . . He shot . . . me . . . and . . ."

And she seemed to blink her pain-wracked eyes, to stare up into Mike Shayne's face, to be trying to think.

The redhead bent closer, his ear to her lips.

"You saw him, Rowena? Can you identify him?"



Her lips moved, Shayne could feel the breath against his ear.

"I . . . didn't . . . see . . . you say . . . Vried?"

"Yes, Rowena, we've got him."

Her eyes widened as if she knew, felt, imagined that the man was coming back. ". . . never . . . saw . . . him . . . no . . ."

Her eyes closed and she seemed to go to sleep. Her chest moved with effort, but it moved, and when the Emergency Squad arrived four minutes later, Shayne was still sitting at her side.

Gentry and his men came close behind the Emergency Squad. The Chief looked grimmer than ever.

"So he got another one?"

"It looks like it," Shayne said.

Gentry waved his medical examiner in to join the emergency squad doctor.

"This must have been where he was while you were searching his house. One last track to cover," Gentry said.

The M.E. came to them. "She'll live, I think. We'll do our best. If you want to know, I'd say she was shot around ten o'clock last night."

"What kind of gun?" Gentry said.

"Looks like a thirty-two automatic."

"When will she be able to talk clearly?" Shayne asked.

"Hard to say. First we've got to be sure she'll talk at all," the M.E. said, turning away.

After Rowena Rowe was taken away, Shayne went home. He went to bed. He did not sleep. All night he saw Rowena Rowe's pain-gripped eyes widening as she said . . . "never . . . saw . . . him . . ."

In the morning the redhead got up early, lighted a cigarette, and sat at the window watching the sun come higher, and listening to the city grow louder and louder. Twice he called the hospital and Gentry's office. No report.

At ten o'clock he was still at the window. The ashtray was littered with butts. He finally got Gentry.

"She's out of danger, Mike. She can't talk much, but she says she

didn't see who shot her. She admits talking to Vried about the money, though."

"Then she knew about the money, too?"

"That's not clear, Mike. I mean, I can't tell if she knew first, or if Vried happened to tell her, and then felt he had to silence her."

"What does Vried say?"

"The same. He didn't kill anyone. We're still searching for the gun. When we find it, we have him cold."

"Yeah," Shayne said, and hung up.

The detective sat for another ten minutes, frowning and staring out the window. Then he stood up and picked up the telephone. He called his office. Lucy Hamilton answered coolly.

"Bankers hours, Michael Shayne?"

"Working, Angel. Using the brain. Now I—"

"You never asked for a report in the work you gave me, Michael. I have all the information of Krause Stationery, and Ames Institute, and—"

"Never mind, I got it all. What I want is a seat on the first jet out to Syracuse, New York. Pronto."

He hung up and began to dress.

## XVII

IN SYRACUSE THE police were cooperative. They hauled in Jack Mingo and Agarn. Both men sub-

stantiated the stories of Renzo and Mrs. Kerr.

"Yeah," Agarn said, a tall, muscular man, "I heard about the missing money and told Mrs. Kerr."

"I sent Renzo after Kerr and the money," Mingo admitted off the record. "You can't trace it to me, so why not tell?"

"Did you tell him not to hurt Kerr?"

"That's right, I didn't want trouble."

The Syracuse police Captain looked at Shayne. The redhead leaned toward both Agarn and Mingo, his face grim.

"Forget the money. Tell me if Kerr was in any other kind of trouble. Was he acting funny before he left. Scared, maybe?"

Agarn shook his head. "No trouble I know about. Mrs. Kerr never mentioned any troubles. She couldn't figure why he'd run out. That was when I told her about the money."

"Did he need money?" Shayne asked. "I mean, do either of you know of any reason he really needed money badly enough to take it from Mingo and run?"

Agarn stared. "Well . . . no, now that you mention it. No one ever talked about that."

"He went to Miami," Shayne said. "He'd never been there. There was no woman; he met one later. I haven't heard that he was in any trouble here. Why take such a risk at all? He never stole before."

There was a silence; then Jack Mingo nodded slowly. The gambler looked at Mike Shayne.

"I thought about that. I figured he just flipped his wig. Only—"

"Yes?" Shayne snapped.

Mingo rubbed at his stubble. He had been dragged from his bed. "The night before he took off he was acting funny. Sort of nervous, worried, maybe scared. He made a couple of mistakes. He never made mistakes in money. I thought about it later."

Shayne took a breath. "Were Kerr and Vince Renzo close?"

"Hell, no," Mingo said. "Vince thought Kerr was a patsy, a nothing, a cream-puff."

"Can you tell us anything about Renzo? Personal problems, maybe?"

"Vince? No. A cool one, Vince. I never heard of him lousing up a job before," Mingo said. "You send Vince out on a job, and it gets done, period."

"Not this time," Shayne said. "He didn't get the money."

"No," Mingo said.

"Maybe the money wasn't his job," Shayne said. "No troubles of his own? None?"

Mingo shook his head. Agarn looked at the gambler. The big stickman seemed to hesitate.

"There was that girl, Mr. Mingo. Remember? Jenny Tate? I saw Vince—"

Mingo snarled, "Shut up! You—"

"What about the girl, Agarn?"

"She was going around some with Vince. I think he had trouble with her."

"Where is she now?" Shayne snapped.

Jack Mingo said, "She went away. You know those tramps."

"When did she go away?"

Mingo looked angry. "About a year ago."

"Okay. That's all," the Syracuse captain said.

The two men left. Shayne looked inquiringly at the Syracuse captain, whose name was Steve Cardella. Cardella pressed a switch on his intercom.

"Bring the Tate file in," Cardella said, and turned to Shayne. "I don't know what you figure, or how you figured, Shayne, but the Jenny Tate file is one of our open files."

"Dead?"

"Murdered a year ago. No clues, no suspects. I never heard of any connection between her and Vince Renzo. It didn't get any play in our papers, so Agarn couldn't have known. In fact we weren't even sure it was murder at all.

"She was a tramp, like Agarn said. A drifter. She hung around the bars, the joints, but we never heard of her hanging around a plush place like Mingo's. She was found in an alley near the lake. Skull fracture. Maybe an accident. Who knew? No relatives, few friends, and no mention of Vince Renzo."

The file came in. Cardella studied it. "No, we got nowhere. We roused six guys she'd been seen with, but they all cleared. There was a mention of a new man in her life, but no one knew him. We tried, maybe not too hard. You know how it is with a death like that. The Chief has to watch the budget."

Cardella seemed sad, almost bitter. "You can't work on all of them equally hard. Not enough money or men. We left it open, but filed it. Wait for a word, a break."



"I know," Shayne said.

"One thing," Cardella said. "The detective on the case was sure she was killed, or died, somewhere else, and was dumped in the alley."

"And where she was killed," Shayne said grimly, "John Kerr saw something. He saw something that maybe would convict Renzo, and so he ran. He had to run. He needed cash, so he stole the one hundred thousand dollars. It had to be something like that. He stole the money because he was scared

and had to run, not the other way around."

Cardella nodded. "It sounds solid, Shayne. Renzo has a hell of a temper. I'm surprised Agarn's alive."

"No, a connection wasn't all that Renzo feared. It has to be more. Kerr knew Renzo killed her. It has to be. The only one who knew, although something tells me Mingo had an idea."

"How do you prove it?"

"I don't think you do," Shayne said. "Not now. Kerr's dead."

"Then what do we do?"

"We prove he killed Kerr," Shayne said.

"Can you do that?"

Shayne stood up. "I hope so."

He left then to catch the jet back to Miami.

## XVIII

IN THE WHITE and silent room of the hospital, Mike Shayne sat beside the bed where Rowena Rowe lay sleeping. A nurse watched him with ill-concealed disapproval. For some time nothing else happened.

Then the door opened and Shayne stood up.

"Thanks, Will," the redhead said.

Gentry came into the room with three of his men. The three detectives were herding Vince Renzo, Mort Vried and Mrs. Kerr. Mrs. Vried came in behind them all. The

woman looked strained, worn out.

"What show are you playing, Mike?"

"Just a little epilogue," Shayne said. "One thing worried me all along in this case—that Kerr, or Gary Blake, was so cautious. He had two residences, a new name, a job of a type he had never held before, and he wasn't spending any of that one hundred thousand dollars."

"So he was careful," Gentry said.

Vincent Renzo said, "He had to figure Mingo had someone after him."

Shayne agreed. "That's what I realized. He was alert and wary. But he was also human, so he had a girl-friend, and he made that one little mistake with the watch. His wife came down. She found him. He started to run again.

"He moved quick from the Riviera Court Apartments to his Osceola Hotel rooms—rooms he had ready. It was a move he'd had planned for just such an emergency. He even had the one hundred thousand dollars hidden there. According to Renzo, Kerr even knew Renzo was on to him. A real scared man with plans all prepared to run out again if necessary."

"So, Mike?" Gentry said.

"So remember it a minute. My next worry from the start was Miss Rowe's story. It didn't ring true. She was never really under any suspicion. So what did she want?"

"What did she want?" Gentry said.

"The money, Will. She wanted me to turn up the money. I expect she's been following me pretty closely. I could never get her at home when I tried. She never contacted me. That's odd for a client, but she didn't have to. She was watching me."

They all turned as the voice spoke from the bed. Rowena Rowe lay with her eyes open and clear. Her voice was firm.

"No, that's a lie, Mr. Shayne. I just wanted Gary's—I mean Kerr's, killer found."

"The hell you did!" Shayne said. "You wanted the money. You didn't know where it was. I expect it had been promised to you, at least part of it, but the money was missing."

Gentry barked, "Promised to her? What the hell does that mean, Mike?"

Shayne looked at the girl in the bed, and then he let his gray eyes look slowly at all the others in the room.

Finally the redhead turned back to the girl.

"Kerr was scared, running, and prepared. So how did the killer get to him? How did anyone get him out there to that motel? He had the money; he was on his way. Why go to that motel? And who could have gotten him there? Not Vried. It sounded all right when all the rest seemed to fit, but I don't think

any friend could have lured him there—except one."

Shayne fixed his gray eyes on the girl. "He'd have gone if you asked him to meet you, Miss Rowe. You're the only person who could have lured Kerr out there at that moment. The one person he might have trusted."

She was silent a moment. "But I had a date with him at the Riviera Court."

"That was another reason you came to me. To establish your story. You were at the Riviera Court all right, but Kerr didn't know that. I'm sure we'll find you have a key. You sent Kerr out to unit ten of The Ponce De Leon Motel, and then covered yourself by going to The Riviera Court to wait."

Gentry swore. "Where is all this getting you, Mike? If she was at The Riviera, and she sent Kerr out to that motel, what's it all mean?"

"It means an explanation of why Kerr went out to The Ponce De Leon. She couldn't have known about unit ten being empty, and she couldn't have killed Kerr. But the killer told her what to say to Kerr, where to send him, and she sent him! She was the lure, Will—that led him to his death!"

Rowena Rowe laughed in the bed. "Why would I do that, Mr. Shayne, and how can you prove it anyway?"

"You did it for money, Miss Rowe. Just money. He was running

out. I expect you hadn't even known he was married. You saw a chance to make some money and get even. So you made a plan with the killer.

"As for proving it, I won't have to. You'll tell us all about it. Voluntarily. You'll do that because you'd rather get a light sentence as a co-operative accessory, than be the next victim of a killer."

Shayne turned sharply and faced Vincent Renzo. "Renzo promised you money you never got because Vried had grabbed the money. Renzo told you to get Kerr to The Ponce De Leon, and you did. He killed Kerr. Vried scared him off. Then both Kerr and Vried drove off before he could stop them.

"I expect he didn't see Vried, so he didn't know who had the money. He didn't really care. As a matter of fact, he wanted no part of the money because it might lead the police to him. He had a personal reason for trailing Kerr. Renzo had killed a girl in Syracuse, and Kerr knew it.

"So he let the money go, but two people knew he had killed Kerr—Ames and you. He had to kill them. Then he was safe. He got Ames, but he missed on you. You were going to tell me who shot you, because you know who shot you. But when you heard that we had the wrong man you clammed up. You were afraid of Renzo on the loose. You still are. But they can't prove anything against him in

Syracuse, and unless you tell us the truth, we'll have to let him go. Once he's on the loose, how long will you live?"

There was a silence. Vince Renzo still smiled, but his cold eyes watched Mike Shayne, and then, slowly, Rowena Rowe. The badly wounded girl lay in the bed, her face pale.

"Silence won't help you now. You could tell any time. No, you've got two choices: take an accessory charge reduced by turning states evidence, or walk scared the rest of your life with Renzo somewhere in the shadows."

Renzo laughed. "You got some imagination, peeper."

Rowena Rowe lay silent. They all waited. Renzo licked at his thin lips, a jaunty smile on his scrawny face.

"I called him. I sent him there. I know Renzo killed him," Rowena Rowe said. "I know where the gun is. He threw it into the Bay. I know where."

Renzo blinked once. "I want a lawyer."

That was all Renzo said. Will Gentry went to the telephone. His men stood around Renzo. Mort Vried sat down heavily. Mrs. Vried went to stand beside the florid faced man. Mrs. Kerr just walked out.

Mike Shayne stared at Rowena Rowe. The girl shrugged.

"What the hell," she said. "The bastard was married."

# THE UGLY PENNY MURDER

*I stared into the hostile darkness, waiting. Somewhere in that house of fear lay the key to a man who had died twice—and I had to find it to stay alive . . .*



by MICHAEL AVALLONE

THE LANDLADY puffed up the stairs ahead of me. We paused before the door marked 2A. "She came for the lieutenant and they both left in a hurry," she said. "Helen Somebody or other. But I don't know if I should let you into his room, Mister—"

"Noon." I said my name for the fifth time since I'd knocked on her door. "I'm a private investigator. Friend of the lieutenant's. It's not like him to invite me down for a

talk and then go running off with some strange woman."

"I never saw her before either," the landlady agreed, digging into a faded yellow skirt for a key. I waited patiently as she inserted a long, ridiculous excuse for a key into the door. It made scratching, funny noises as she played with it.

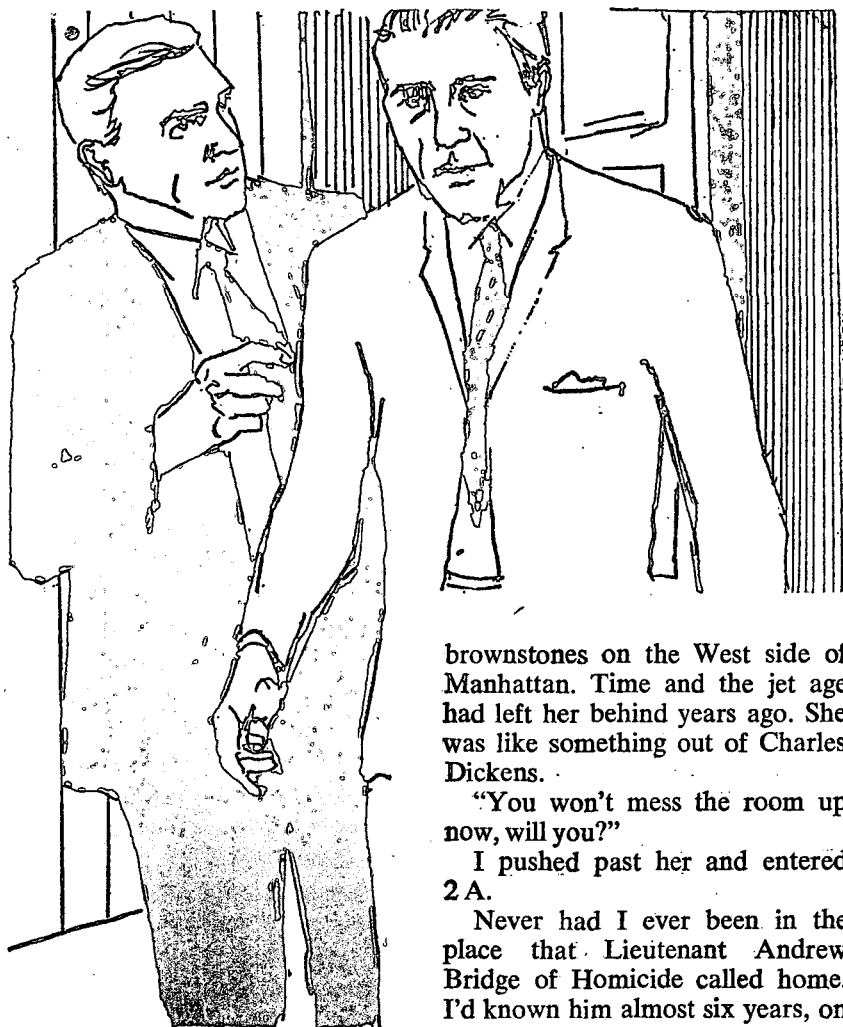
I was too busy burning mental logs to pay too much attention to a landlady like a thousand other landladies lost in the reconverted



featuring

## ED NOON

---



brownstones on the West side of Manhattan. Time and the jet age had left her behind years ago. She was like something out of Charles Dickens.

“You won’t mess the room up now, will you?”

I pushed past her and entered 2A.

Never had I ever been in the place that Lieutenant Andrew Bridge of Homicide called home. I’d known him almost six years, on

and off. He worked under my very old friend, Captain Mike Monks. He'd done me a couple of nice favors. I'd helped him once or twice. But an official cop and a private one make uneasy partners, no matter how well they get along.

"See?" the landlady crowed from the doorway. "Nobody's here. Like I told you. If you hadn't had that letter from him in his handwriting I'd never have let you in. My roomers' business is their own business. Still, what with seeing him with that woman and all and him not being that sort of man—" She let it trail off, waiting for me to say something.

I did. I thanked her for her help and gently closed the door in her face. She grumbled a little at that but finally I heard her clattering down the carpeted stairs on her crazy, laced-all-the-way-up shoes.

I looked around.

It was a big room, windows facing a rear stone courtyard, overlooked by apartment houses across the way. There was a lean-to kitchenette, a huge convertible couch, a desk, a lot of chairs and a ton of books.

Bridge was a reader, it seemed. Something he had hardly ever talked about.

I scanned some of the titles. I wasn't disappointed. The titles all had something to do with Law, Forensic Medicine, Police Procedure and stuff like that. There was even a copy of *The Boston Stran-*

*gler and Rush To Judgment*, the Lane book.

Nothing strange about the books. They would interest a lieutenant of New York's homicide department.

It took only five minutes to see that the apartment was as in order as a tidy bachelor's apartment can be. Even the ashtrays weren't cluttered with dead cigarettes. A brown necktie was slung over a doorknob. Absent-mindedly, I picked it off the knob. My hand brushed the door. A closet door. The door suddenly opened outward.

I had been thinking of Bridge's cryptic note which my secretary Melissa Mercer had handed me at five that afternoon. She had claimed that he had dropped in, asked for me and then borrowed a pencil and scrap of paper, for his message.

Some message: *Meet me my place tonight at eight. It's very important. Bridge.*

All of that rushed through my head in a flash as the closet door with the tie on the doorknob opened up. It was a large closet. Fine, roomy, big enough to accommodate a dozen suits and any number of pairs of shoes.

It was also big enough to hold a corpse.

A corpse jammed backwards against the pile of hanging suits, arms dangling, eyes bulging, tongue sticking out. The stiff's toes,

encased in black shoe leather had finally kicked the door open from a gradual slide of his weight. Either that, or the bone-handled knife sticking out of the heart area of a blue serge suit had finally counter-balanced him.

"I'm afraid I stared. I had to. Dead men and lieutenants of homicide do not keep company on private terms, either.

Bridge's letter, the girl named Helen he had rushed from the building with, his not being home after asking me to come—all that and more, froze whatever logic I had left.

The corpse's face was unknown to me. It was doughy, wore a small mustache and there was a mole near the left eye. I had never seen him before.

I closed the closet door softly, wedging the body back into an upright position again with the movement. I took out my Camels and tried to think.

I sat down in a comfortable leather chair that faced the front door of 2 A. Bridge had taken a powder with another unknown called Helen. Had he killed a man and fled in panic? Bridge? The Andy Bridge I knew? It refused to add up or make sense. But in the end I was left with that old truth, so familiar to all of us sooner or later; how well do we really know anybody?

I could have searched the corpse. I didn't feel like doing that.

I was afraid to learn anything further about Andy Bridge's personal corpse. It was far more restful, smoking and trying to think.

The next move was taken out of my hands.

There was a click of sound and the front door shoved in.

Lieutenant Andy Bridge stood framed in the entrance. Tall, slim hipped, familiar as ever; his face all screwed up and thoughtful. He only looked different to me just then because I was seeing him as a potential murderer.

"Noon," he rumbled. "Got here, eh? Sorry I'm late—"

I wasn't going to give him a chance to lie. That would have hurt somehow and I wasn't going to cat-and-mouse with a pal I liked so much.

"The guy in the closet," I said. "A roommate or did he just drop in?"

He sighed, flung me a look and shut the door, putting his back to it. He took his hands out of his coat pockets. The right one held his .38 Police Positive but he didn't point it at me.

"I thought it all over, Ed," he said sadly. "Now that you are here, you can make a citizen's arrest. I killed the man in the closet. His name's Zucker. Paul Zucker. He came at me with a knife and I lost my head and strangled him. With these two hands—"

"That's nice," I said. "What else could you do? Now sit down and

tell me all about this dame named Helen."

If I had thrown my chair at him, he couldn't have been more surprised. Which made two of us.

A man strangled to death has no business having a knife sticking out of his chest, has he?

"Helen?" he echoed stupidly.

"Yeah. Helen. The landlady told me. Tall, good-looking, well-dressed and in a hurry. With you. You hustled her out of here about an hour ago." I eyed the round faced chrome clock on one of the end tables. "That would be about seven-thirty."

"She's mistaken," Bridge said curtly, coming into the room. "She's a nosy old customer. There wasn't any woman here. Not with me."

"Sure," I agreed, holding the ace card up my sleeve. "And you have lived in this house for how many years now? And she must have mistaken you for somebody else. Come on, Andy. This is Ed. Level with me the same way you always ask me to level with you. I'm not arresting anybody, least of all you, until I get a straight story from you."

"There's no story to get," he protested, his eyes going hard. "I killed Zucker and that's it."

"Okay. Who is he and why should you have to kill him? Give me that part again."

"All right, flip guy," he growled. "I was being propositioned by Al

Torrell to go on the take. Zucker was his runner. That policy set-up in the Bedford-Stuyvesant district. I didn't go for it and told Torell I'd haul him in on any charge I could fake. He didn't listen too good. So he sent Zucker to try me again. We had words. I slugged him. He came at me and I lost my head."

I shook my head at that one. "How long have you known me? You think I'd buy a fish story like that one? Torrell even tries to talk to you you'd lock him up so fast the room would spin. Come on, Andy. One last chance. You going to give it to me straight or not?"

"To hell with you," he rumbled, turning his back on me. "Just call it in. I'm not running."

"No good, Andy."

"Why not?"

"The guy in the closet is dead, all right. But he wasn't strangled. Either that or he's been killed twice."

Bridge whirled at that, staring down at me, his face working.

"What's that you're saying?"

I studied the end of my smoking Camel.

"See for yourself and then tell me all about this Helen."

I waited while he went to the closet, pulling back the door. I listened as he let out a stream of invective the like I have never heard him use. Then he slammed the door, walked toward the huge convertible lounge and sat down heav-



ily. He studied the floor, breathing hard, muttering under his breath, clenching and unclenching his hands.

"The damn fool—"

"Helen, of course."

"Ed!" His head swung up, eyes riveted on me. "Zucker's her husband. He was giving her hell. Beating her, running around with other women, ruining her life. She came to me to tell me. He followed her here. He was hopped up, drugged to the ears. I had to deck him. I left him back here in the room to cool off while I took her down to Penn Station. They live in New Brunswick—"

I looked for an ashtray. "Whoa.

You still haven't told me who Helen is."

He swallowed, nervously. I had never seen him nervous in my life.

"My sister," he said with great pity in his voice. "My kid sister."

"You never told me you had a sister."

"You never asked."

"No, I didn't. But now I'm asking. Did she kill Zucker? Come back here somehow after you left him, found him unconscious and stuck that knife in him?"

"I never put him in any closet," he said angrily, "and she never could have lifted him in there. Unless he was in there and turned around and she let him have it. But she didn't do it! She couldn't have!"

"Maybe not," I said. "But why did you come in here insisting on protecting her? You knew he was dead. You knew *that*, Andy. You'll have to explain that one."

He shuddered. "I choked hell out of him and he fell down on the floor, hitting his head. I was sure he was dead. I didn't look too close. I wanted to get Helen out of here, away from the mess. Her life hasn't been any pink tea and champagne. He was a bad actor."

"Amen to that. Then who did kill him?"

His eyes sparkled. The old fire.

"He was her husband and he was a bum. I'll find the man. It has to be someone who knew he was coming here, knew he'd follow

Helen to me. Then he saw his chance when I left and stuck Zucker like that."

I had been thinking hard too. "Why did you leave that note for me?"

He shrugged. "I thought I could use you to scare Zucker—unofficially. I didn't want to make him part of my job. That only would have dragged Helen in all over again—" He wrung his hands. "Damn, what a mess it is now."

"The knife belong in this apartment?"

"No. I never saw it before. A steak knife, looks like."

"Who walks around with a steak knife?" I wanted to know. And then I had a small idea. "You said Zucker came at you with the knife, and that he brought it with him?"

Bridge thumbed his right eye, as if he were too tired to think any more. "That's right—in his coat pocket. I didn't stop to ask him. He rushed me, I dropped him. Helen went into hysterics. I had to get her out of here."

"Sure," I said. "So you stuck Zucker in the closet, left with Helen and came back here and now his dead body is on your hands. I'm on your side, Andy. What do we do now?"

"I didn't stick Zucker in the closet, Ed. His killer did, or else he was in there going through my clothes when he got it. Junkies always need money for a fix. He

must have thought he'd find some cash in one of my suits."

I nodded. "That would add up. Did you lock the door after you left the room?"

He shook his head angrily. "I'm damned if I can remember. I should have, but in all the excitement, I probably didn't."

"And you put Helen on the train for sure?"

He glared at me. "You want an affidavit? Sure I did. She couldn't possibly have doubled back here to do this job. No, there's somebody else. There has to be."

I got up from the chair. "Check. Come on. I've got an idea."

"No," he rumbled. "I'm staying here. I'll examine Zucker's body. There might be some clue on him—"

"Forget Zucker," I said. I moved toward the apartment door, seized the handle quickly and tugged the panel in. I got more than I had bargained for.

The ancient landlady stood tottering on the threshold, trying to catch her balance. Which was pretty hard to do, because she had been crouching at the keyhole, getting an eyeful and earful.

She straightened, her old bones creaking, her lined face all puckered and startled. She tried to catch her breath but she could only stand there, looking like she was about to cry.

Andrew Bridge cursed.

I smiled.

"Hello," I said cheerily to the landlady. "You *did* come back for a talk with Lieutenant Bridge, didn't you?"

She was shaking her old head violently, her eyes flying back and forth between me and Bridge. "I don't know what you mean. I was coming down the hall from Mrs. Jansen's—it's my rent day, you know—"

"No good, lady," I said. "You killed the man in the closet and you might as well tell us all about it."

She let out one all-stops-out scream and fainted.

I caught her before she hit the floor.

A long time later, Andy Bridge said, "Give that to me again, Ed."

The landlady, her name was Mrs. Morgan, had been given a sedative and was sleeping it off on the couch in her own apartment while a tall boy in blue stood watch over her. The men of Homicide were running all over Bridge's apartment, taking measurements, powdering for prints and shooting the official works for the files. The whole building was in an uproar. Murder turns John Q. Public out in droves, when it happens on your doorstep in a crowded neighborhood.

"Nothing much to it, Andy. Your landlady was nosy, like you said. She must have heard the racket up here, was looking when you left with your sister. Like all

landladies the whole world over, she came up here to see what she could see.

"The door must have been unlocked, like you said, but she had her keys anyway. She opened the door for me when I came up with her. But I can figure the rest of it. She walked in here, saw the steak knife on the floor where Zucker dropped it in the fight with you. She picked it up and then saw the closet. Can you picture it? That hopped-up Zucker in your closet, rifling your clothes for money. He turns in the small area between the door and the suits and your old landlady sees this blazing-eyed dopester staring her in the face.

"She had the knife. She acted instinctively. She's an old, frightened character and there's been enough violence in the papers these days to trigger her inner instincts. She stuck that knife in him and then ran out of the room. He fell back against the clothing pile. And then she went downstairs, wondering what to do. Just as I rang her bell, asking about you. She might have called the police, she might not. We'll never know.

"After all, she'd been in her rights, sort of. Killing a stranger who might have been ransacking your apartment. But these old widows are strange birds. A law unto themselves sometimes. I can't say for sure what she thought."

"But what made you think of her at all?" Bridge asked in won-

der. "She's nearly seventy and I never heard her raise her voice once."

I had the last of my Camels out and lit up.

"She was *here* on the premises. You imagining that someone was tagging Zucker and then found his chance was just wishful thinking. And widows who see bachelors like you suddenly running around with women is the curiosity that kills all cats. She had to come up here for a look. Knowing that, I knew she had to run into Zucker if you were telling the truth about how you left him. The rest all added up, using that initial premise."

"Helen," he groaned. "I have to keep Helen out of this. Though she's free at last with that bastard out of her life. He's better off dead. I'll have to square this with the department somehow."

"What's to square? You solved a homicide on your own doorstep. Zucker had no business in your room. Forget it, Andy. I have already."

"Ed, what can I do for you—" Andrew Bridge was trying to thank me and didn't know how.

"You can introduce me to Helen," I said. "I'd like to meet a tall, good-looking girl."

I got my wish. I met Helen. But that's another story.



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**In the Next Issue—Exclusively Yours—**

## AFFAIR OF DEATH

*The New MIKE SHAYNE Short Novel*

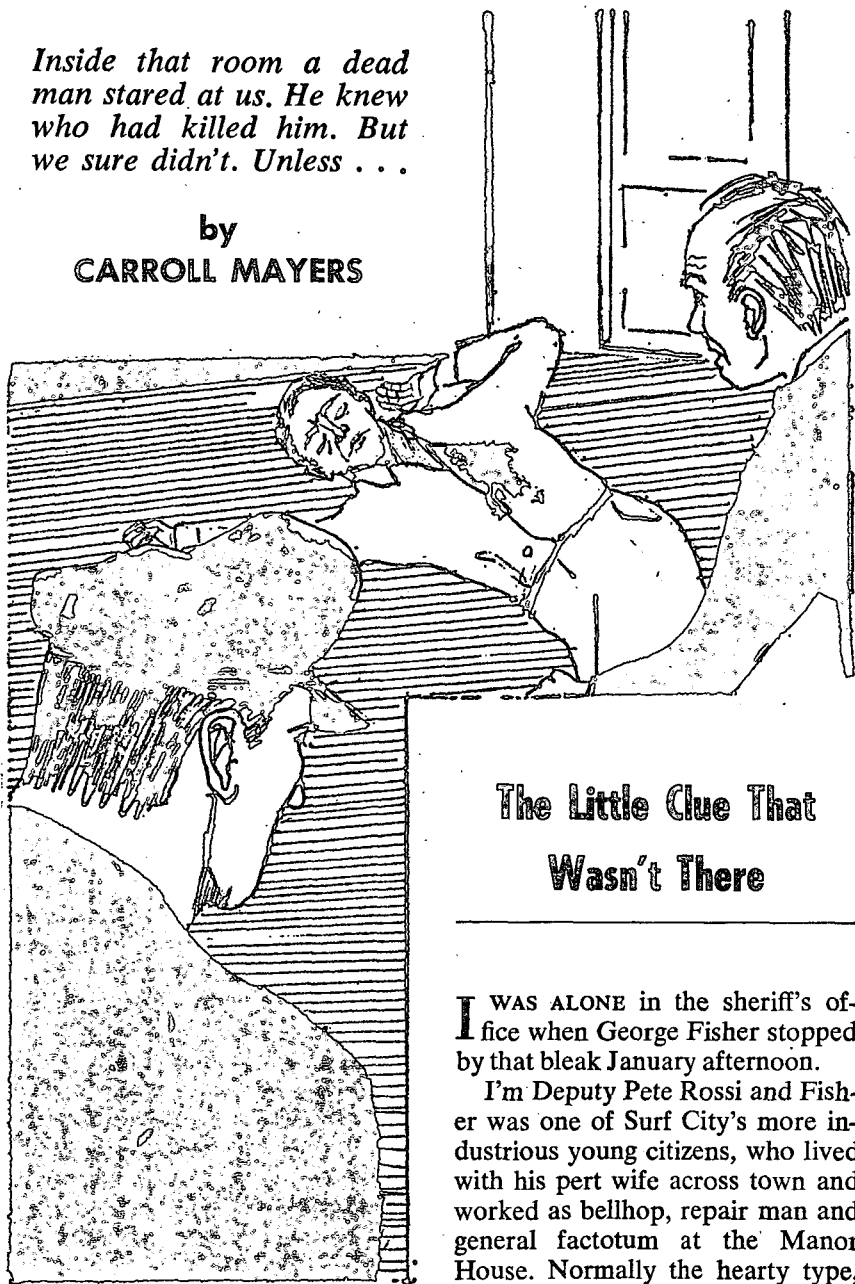
by BRETT HALLIDAY

*Somewhere out there in the night a lady-killer was planning his next tryst. He was a lady-killer, all right. Two dead women could attest to that. But who was he? And—who would be next to die? Only Mike Shayne dared guess the incredible answer . . .*



*Inside that room a dead man stared at us. He knew who had killed him. But we sure didn't. Unless . . .*

by  
**CARROLL MAYERS**



## The Little Clue That Wasn't There

---

**I** WAS ALONE in the sheriff's office when George Fisher stopped by that bleak January afternoon.

I'm Deputy Pete Rossi and Fisher was one of Surf City's more industrious young citizens, who lived with his pert wife across town and worked as bellhop, repair man and general factotum at the Manor House. Normally the hearty type,

disdainful of hat or heavy clothing, he was more conventionally attired today and his red nose and puffed, watery eyes suggested the reason.

"Hi, George," I kidded him. "Looks like you surrendered to the weather a little late."

He managed a wry grin, thumbed the new fedora free and loosened the collar of his topcoat.

"Worse cold I ever picked up," he muttered. "I just can't shake it. Beaumont told me to go on home after I'd stopped here."

Jerome Beaumont was resident manager at the hotel. I asked Fisher, "Something up?"

"He wants to talk to you. In person."

The Manor House was six blocks from the office. I'd have to walk, because Sheriff Wexler had our official car upstate at a peace officers' convention. Even a short trip afoot bucking the sleet storm which had developed since noon wasn't appealing.

"Couldn't he phone?" I queried.

Fisher shrugged. "Sure. But you know Beaumont."

That I did. The hotel manager was quite serious about his job, and devoted to an ailing wife, but he had an overactive imagination that sometimes bordered on galloping mistrust. More than once in the height of the season he'd alerted our office to suspicious transients who had subsequently proven completely innocuous.

I sighed. "You mean there's another emergency?"

"Could be."

"He tell you what it was?"

Fisher stifled a sneeze. "Some," he said. "It appears we've picked up a mystery guest."

"Be serious."

"I am; that's the message. We've only a handful of registrants now, but one of them strikes Beaumont as suspicious. He wants to talk to you about him."

With that, Fisher tightened his collar again, resettled the jaunty fedora on his head and shouldered out of the office.

I was tempted to ignore the whole thing, but finally I bundled up and trudged on down to the Manor House.

Jerome Beaumont was about forty-five, a round-shouldered man with a pair of mild blue eyes which belied their keen observancy. They were a shade less shrewd at the moment, being red-rimmed and filmed.

I gave him a sympathetic smile. "You too?"

He nodded, flourished a generous handkerchief. "It's going around, I guess. I sent George home for the rest of the day."

"I know. He stopped by."

Beaumont leaned forward earnestly. "I didn't want to phone," he said, gaze flicking to the switchboard at the end of the lobby desk. "You know how Wilma picks up everything—"

I suppose I did, but I'd always been more interested in the girl herself. Wilma Cabot was a svelte blonde, neatly packaged and well worth cultivating by a bachelor deputy. The only trouble was, she unaccountably favored a town ne'er-do-well over said lawman.

"What's with this mystery guest?" I asked.

Beaumont became even more intent. "I'm not sure," he said and then, sensing my skepticism, added hastily, "Oh, I know I've cried wolf before, but this could be different."

"How so?"

"He is a mystery man, Pete. He arrived three days ago, coat collar turned up, hat pulled down so's you couldn't see his full face—"

I grunted. Beaumont was addicted to too many TV spy thrillers.

"It's winter," I reminded him. "A man doesn't want to catch a cold."

Beaumont used his handkerchief. "It's more than that. Since he registered, he hasn't left his room. He has all his meals sent in. It's as though he was in hiding." Beaumont's watery gaze held mine. "I've been wondering, ever since I saw that news item in Harry's office yesterday."

I drew a breath; the script was becoming involved. Harry Beaumont was Jerome's younger brother, and publisher of the Surf City *Sentinel*, a not-too-flourishing weekly.

"What news item?"

"It was a press service release," Jerome said. "Harry wouldn't use it; it wasn't of any particular interest locally. But it related to a shooting in Capitol City a week ago. A collector for the Syndicaté absconded with thirty thousand dollars. The organization had been tipped about his run-out, tried to gun him down, but he escaped."

Comprehension glimmered. "And you think this mystery guest—How'd he register, incidentally?"

"Samuel Geller."

"And you think this Geller is that Syndicaté collector, holing up down here until the heat's off and he can really skip?"

Beaumont's head bobbed. "He just could be."

I grunted again. "Sure, he could," I said. "And he also could be a perfectly legitimate citizen, with a dozen legitimate reasons for preferring privacy, keeping to his room in this weather."

My informant wasn't stopped.

"He's got a gun," Beaumont said.

"Eh?"

"An automatic, it looked like. That's what made me suspicious in the first place. I took him up to his room after he'd registered—George was fixing a leaky pipe in the basement—and I spotted it under his arm when he loosened his jacket."

I regarded Beaumont without pleasure, aware he'd shrewdly built

his revelation to a neat little climax. Again, there was the question of legitimacy. Geller or whatever he was could have a totally valid reason for wearing a licensed gun—a private operative, a jewelry salesman, a bonded courier of any nature.

Under the overall circumstances, though, that validity began to appear a bit tenuous. Also, I knew Sheriff Wexler would not be overly enthusiastic about a mysterious stranger in town with lethal artillery under his armpit.

I sighed. Exactly what my approach would be wasn't clear, but I realized, for better or worse, I would have to check out registrant Geller.

"All right," I told Beaumont, "let's get it over with."

Wilma Cabot looked up from her board as I moved away from the desk. I flashed her one of my best smiles as I followed Beaumont to the elevator. Whatever the outcome of my chat with Geller, it wouldn't hurt, I decided, to check with Wilma afterward, ascertain if the man had made any questionable phone calls.

Our destination was the second floor. Beaumont stopped before room 208, rapped lightly. There was no response. Beaumont frowned, knocked harder. Still no answer.

Beaumont's frown built. "He's got to be here. He phoned for a carton of cigarettes and I brought

it up myself, right after George left."

I began to feel uneasy; A guest who never left his room, but who didn't answer the door—

"Open it," I prodded Beaumont.

He got out his pass key and we entered the room.

One glance was sufficient to see why the occupant hadn't responded to our knock, why he would never again question any caller. A sharp-featured man with sleek black hair, mystery man Geller lay sprawled alongside the bed, a crimson splotch beneath his heart and staring, sightless dark eyes imparting the grim information that he was quite dead.

Things got rather hectic after that.

There was no point in trying to contact Sheriff Wexler upstate; he was scheduled to return before evening, undoubtedly already was en route.

Pending his arrival, I checked the corpse. Dead less than an hour at a quick estimate, he had been shot at close range, attested by powder burns on his shirt. His own gun, a .38 automatic as spotted by Beaumont, was holstered in a rig lying on the bed.

The man had traveled light. Topcoat, no extra suit, only a couple of spare shirts and changes of underwear, a few toiletries. That was all. No extra socks, ties or handkerchiefs in his suitcase—and



no thirty thousand dollars if, indeed, there ever had been.

I noted nothing significant in the room. Just to play it safe, though, I slapped a seal on the door while I made a trip back to the office for a fingerprint kit, then returned and took Geller's prints. After that, I phoned Doc Ainsley, our town mortician and part-time coroner, to make his examination and transport the body.

Ainsley removed only Geller's cadaver; the rest of the room's contents I wanted intact for Wexler. I resealed the door. Then I cautioned Jerome Beaumont and Wilma Cabot to sit tight until I got back to them and the hotel's few

other registrants, journeyed to the office again and air-posted Geller's prints to Washington, requesting a wire identification if possible.

By then it was five-thirty; at five-forty, Sheriff Gus Wexler lumbered into the office, puffing and blowing like an asthmatic porpoise.

The sheriff's greeting was sour. "Blasted weather," he muttered.

I understood; Wexler's nose was only slightly less red than George Fisher's or Jerome Beaumont's, his eyes just as watery. I smiled thinly.

"I know how you feel," I said, "but you'll soon feel worse. We've got a murder on our hands."

In so speaking, I meant no disrespect. The sheriff and I had been together for some seven years, had a comfortable relationship.

Wexler snorted, threw me a sharp glance. "Huh?"

I filled him in on the afternoon, elaborating a bit on Fisher's and Beaumont's condition to maybe ease his mood with the misery-loves-company bit.

"I'm glad you're back," I finished, which was my understatement for the month.

A heavy-shouldered man with girth to match, the sheriff heard me through stolidly.

"You check out the other guests?" he wanted to know.

"No, sir," I said. "I was just going back now."

He pinched his nose, unwittingly echoed my earlier remark to Beaumont.

"Let's get it over with, then," he said.

An hour later, we'd done just that and had come up with nothing. The other hotel guests were as scant as Surf City's location and the time of year suggested. Four in number, they all seemed above suspicion. Three were men, two area salesmen and an advance agent for a folk-singing group. The fourth was a woman visiting her sister from out of state, and staying at the Manor House because the sister's small home lacked adequate accommodations.

All billeted on the same floor as Geller for convenience, they professed to have observed nothing untoward nor to have heard the shot, which was understandable because of the close proximity of bodies, as evidenced by the powder burns on Geller's shirt.

We had appropriated Jerome Beaumont's office for our interrogations, and I eyed Wexler expectantly as we wound them up.

"Now what?" I asked.

He heaved to his feet. "That's it for tonight," he said. "I want to marshal my thoughts a little. If we don't come up with anything by this time tomorrow, I'll call in the state boys."

In sober truth, the sheriff's thought marshaling could be impressive. His mind was incisive and, on occasion, geared to a speed at sharp variance to his ponderous body movements.

"Yes, sir," I said. "Better take some aspirin before you go to bed."

Wexler sniffed. "I intend to," he said. "Probably half the bottle."

The weather cleared by morning. Anticipating a full day, I had breakfast early and got to the office before eight. The sheriff, however, had preceded me; he tilted back in his heavy-duty chair, nodded pleasantly as I entered. The aspirin, it appeared, had gotten in its licks.

"Morning, Pete."

"Good morning," I said. "Not that it is. I know we couldn't hope to keep this business under wraps, but half the town's buzzing already."

Wexler managed a tight smile. "Probably Wilma or a couple of the hotel guests," he acknowledged. "We'll start buzzing ourselves shortly."

His tone suggested his thought marshaling had been fruitful. I said, "Yes, sir," and waited for him to expound.

"We should hear from Washington by afternoon," he said, "but even without specific confirmation I'm inclined to go along with Beaumont's theory. I'm sure Geller or whoever meant to call no particular attention to himself, but Beaumont's nature jinxed that angle. Whatever, the whole bit fits, somehow."

"In which case we could be holding an empty bag," I said. "Geller could have been tracked

down and shot by a Syndicate agent who recovered the money, is already long gone. With George Fisher sent home, Beaumont was short-handed. It's possible a Syndicate killer could have slipped in and out of the hotel without notice. Maybe even used the fire escape."

Wexler said, "Quite possible. For now, though, let's assume the Syndicate didn't catch up with Geller; that he was killed for the money alone. No organization retribution."

"Who would suspect he had the money?"

"Beaumont's not exactly tight-lipped," the sheriff pointed out. "And there's Wilma."

I scowled; we could be considering half the town again. Wexler caught my expression, shook his head.

"I think we can narrow it down some," he went on. "As a start, I'm wondering about George Fisher. That pretty wife of his probably keeps him scratching. Thirty thousand would buy a lot of baubles and beads. Let them get a car, for one thing."

I demurred. "Geller was alive after Beaumont sent Fisher home for the rest of the day," I said. "I probably didn't make it clear, but Geller phoned down for some cigarettes after Fisher left, and Beaumont delivered them personally."

The sheriff weighed my remark. "That still doesn't eliminate Beaumont himself," he said soberly.

"He's hard-pressed with his wife's medical bills. There again, thirty thousand would mean plenty."

"You're suggesting he made up Geller's phone call?"

"Not necessarily," Wexler said. "He'd realize we could check it out with Wilma. But he could already have determined to kill Geller, search the room for the money immediately after he'd sent Fisher to fetch you as a gambit to divert possible suspicion from himself. Geller's call to the switchboard could have been pure chance. Beaumont could have shot him *after* he'd delivered those cigarettes, then waited for you to discover the body in his presence."

I pondered the possibility. "It could be, I guess."

Wexler resumed, "And while we're indirectly considering Wilma Cabot—"

"Eh?"

"I mean Joe Lucas," the sheriff amplified. "He could have eased in and out of the Manor House the same as your theoretical Syndicate hood."

I recognized Wexler's intimation. Joe Lucas was the indolent character favored by Wilma Cabot; a chronic idler loaded only with charm and muscles. If Wilma had suspicioned Geller through Beaumont, had passed the chance of a thirty grand cache along to Lucas—

The sheriff cut in on my thoughts. "That also holds true for

Harry Beaumont," he added: "The *Sentinel's* been floundering. Thirty thousand would be a shot in the arm. Suppose Jerome had told his brother his theory about Geller?"

It was a good question. In point of fact, the sheriff had listed several suspects. Jerome Beaumont, Harry Beaumont, Joe Lucas by way of Wilma Cabot. Not to mention a possible Syndicate killer, or the Manor House registrants we'd only briefly interrogated the night before.

"Maybe we should call in the state boys right away," I suggested.

Wexler shook his head, lumbered from his desk. "I want to check out what we have first. Go back to the hotel and question Jerome some more. Then look up Harry Beaumont and Joe Lucas. I'll tackle the guests again after I've made some phone calls, verified the identifications they gave us."

"Yes, sir," I said. I wasn't too hopeful about the program because in the main we'd be retreading ground already covered. Still, I had my orders.

Jerome Beaumont yielded nothing new. He could have been lying, of course, but if so he was shrewdly consistent, telling the same basic story of suspecting his mystery guest and sending George Fisher to have me come to the hotel. Had he mentioned his theory to anyone else, perhaps to Wilma Cabot? Well, he probably *had* hinted

something to Wilma. Now, with Fisher still at home, he had a dozen things to do, so if I would excuse him—

I had trouble interviewing Wilma because my thoughts kept wandering. As I've said, Wilma was a toothsome blonde I nurtured specific ideas about. Generally those ideas were not reciprocated, but today she appeared to regard Deputy Rossi more tolerantly, possibly due to the likelihood of his highlighting her presence on the scene.

"Oh, Pete, isn't it thrilling! I mean, a real murder!"

"Murder's a nasty business, Wilma."

"I know. But here in the hotel! And right after I'd talked to Mr. Geller personally."

"He called you for cigarettes?"

"Yes. About one-thirty, it was. Mr. Beaumont took them up himself; he'd sent George home with a terrible cold—"

"I know. Had Mr. Beaumont said anything to you about his suspicion of Geller?"

"Well—some."

"Did you tell anyone else? Say, Joe Lucas?"

"Oh, no."

"You're sure, Wilma? You didn't tell Lucas?"

"Well, I did mention it to Joe yesterday. Why shouldn't I? It sounded exciting!"

Beyond verifying the sheriff's thinking of Lucas as a possible



suspect, and getting Wilma's wide-eyed assurance that she'd noted no stranger in the hotel lobby any time yesterday, that Geller had made no outside phone calls, I gleaned little else.

Joe Lucas himself obviously was my next stop, but I drew a blank there, his landlady informing me the man had gone up to Capitol City on an unspecified mission, was not due back until tomorrow. His absence at the time could be significant; I resolved upon a prompt follow-up in the morning, transferred my attention to Harry Beaumont.

The newspaper publisher was in his late thirties, brisk, personable—and patently apprised in advance of my likely visitation.

"Terrible affair, Pete," he assured me. "I'm afraid it won't do Jerome's business any good."

He then proceeded indirectly to account for every minute of his time from noon on the previous day, ending up by promising full editorial support and also casually mentioning that the *Sentinel* was now doing quite well, thanks.

A slick performance? Possibly. But I could think of no reason to challenge its validity. I decided to return to the office, talk with Wexler.

The sheriff's progress, it appeared, paralleled mine. The identifications and references of all four of the Manor House's other guests had checked out fully, and



Wexler's additional questioning had drawn a blank. The only significant development had been a wire reply from Washington earlier than we'd anticipated: the fingerprints of 'Samuel Geller' had, indeed, matched those of a known Syndicate courier named Glasco.

"Now what?" I asked after we had exchanged reports and a dead end seemed imminent. "The state boys?"

The sheriff sighed. "I guess," he said. "Before we call them, though, I'd like to look over Glasco's room myself."

"I thought you would," I said. "It's still sealed."

In all truth, I was hoping that Wexler's incisive mind might tip him to something I'd overlooked, some detail which might tie in one of our suspects. But I couldn't conceive of what it might be; I'd gone over Glasco's room pretty thoroughly.

Back there, the sheriff's own survey was just as meticulous. As

I've mentioned, Glasco's effects were few, but Wexler checked everything, fingering the pockets of the man's topcoat, rifling his suitcase, going over the entire room and adjoining bath foot by foot.

Finally, he drew a heavy breath. "There's nothing here, Pete," he admitted. "But tell Beaumont to keep the door locked anyhow until the state police take over. We'll call them from the office, give them what little we've got."

As it turned out, however, the state boys did not have to get cracking. Because as we drove back to the municipal building, Wexler suddenly swung to the curb, then hunched intently over the wheel, staring straight ahead.

Over the years, I'd come to recognize the signs.

"Something?" I ventured.

It was as though he was talking to himself.

"It just could be," he muttered. "It's only a crazy hunch, but it just could be—"

"Eh?"

The sheriff abruptly roused, got the car in motion again.

"We'll hold off a bit on that phone call," he said.

I knew better than to press under the circumstances. "Yes, sir," I said.

Our new destination was a modest bungalow across town. A pert brunette answered the sheriff's knock.

"Good morning, Agnes," Wex-

ler said simply. "I'd like to talk to George."

A slight frown pinched Agnes Fisher's smooth forehead. "He's not feeling well, Sheriff. He has a bad cold, had to stay home from the hotel—"

Wexler nodded. "I know that. I still want to see him," he said.

The girl hesitated, then stepped back. "Come in," she told us.

George Fisher was lounging on a sofa in the neat living room. He looked up sharply at our entry, his eyes, still puffed and watery, narrowing. Before he could speak, Wexler took the initiative.

"Where's the money, George?" the sheriff queried quietly.

A tic pulsed in Fisher's cheek. "What?"

"The money; the thirty thousand dollars you killed that Syndicate collector for."

Agnes Fisher's intake of breath was audible, but her husband retained his composure. His expression did not change.

"I'm afraid I don't follow you, Sheriff," Fisher countered calmly.

"I think you do." Wexler was equally mild. "You're not obliged to make any statement here, and you can demand a lawyer but it's no go, George. I'm not sure precisely why you killed the man, unless it was for money to buy yourself a car, give your wife everything she wants—"

"But I am sure you shot him. It was a neat gamble. Beaumont had



floor, then walked down to your man's room. He'd recognize your voice, admit you when you manufactured some pretext.

"Once inside, you shot him, found the money, then fled the same way you'd come. It was a nasty, sleeting day; nobody saw you on the fire escape. You were confident you'd pulled it off, were cocky enough even to stop by the office, deliver Beaumont's message to Pete."

The sheriff's summation was terse, sure. Agnes Fisher's pretty features began to fall apart, but George still hung on, although his smile waned.

"You'll never prove any of that," he said.

"The money will prove it, when we find it," Wexler said. He paused, watching Fisher steadily. "And you know we'll find it. It has to be here, somewhere. You won't be able to move it; Pete will stay right here while I get a search warrant—"

"No!"

"Yes, George. It's only a question of time."

Fisher's smile was completely gone now; the color was ebbing from his face and his mouth began to quirk. Abruptly, he cracked.

"I—I didn't mean to kill him," he blurted. "I had a gun from the Service; I took it along to force him to give me some of the money, if Beaumont was right. If he was a Syndicate hood on the run, he

told you of his suspicions. He could be right. And when he sent you home, you figured you had a perfect alibi."

A bluff, a blind stab? It could have been but, knowing Wexler, I was convinced he had something more. Fisher, though, continued unshaken, even managed a small smile. "Look, Sheriff—"

Wexler cut him short. "A perfect alibi," he repeated. "You left the hotel, circled around, climbed the rear fire escape to an upper

couldn't risk exposing himself by blowing the whistle on me."

Fisher managed to meet the sheriff's level gaze. "I didn't want all the money. Only some. Maybe half. And I didn't mean to kill him! But he jumped me, tried to take my gun away—"

The sheriff's own expression was set. "I'm sorry, George," he said tightly, taking Fisher's arm as Agnes began to weep. "Get the money and come along."

An hour later, while George Fisher was conferring in his cell with a lawyer Wexler had personally driven to the premises, the sheriff settled heavily behind his desk.

"Sorry mess all around," he remarked soberly.

I expressed agreement, said, "I'd still like to learn your thinking."

"You could call it a clue that wasn't there," Wexler said. "I told you it was a wild hunch, but when I finally realized Glasco's hat wasn't in his room, I decided to play it from there with Fisher."

I wasn't following him. "Hat?"

The sheriff nodded. "Yes. With the exception of what he'd been wearing when shot, you'd sealed up all Glasco's accessories in the room—including his topcoat. But

we didn't find any hat there, although according to Beaumont's mystery man bit, Glasco had checked in with his hat tugged well down."

I began to understand. "Then you figured Fisher, with his bad cold—?"

"Exactly," Wexler said. "Yesterday's sleet storm came up shortly after noon, before Beaumont sent George home. George already was miserable and climbing the fire escape he got a real dose of the weather. Also, he knew he had to cross town to get home, plus stopping by here. He didn't relish maybe worsening his condition, so after the shooting he appropriated Glasco's fedora on inspiration."

"As a small protection, even though he ordinarily didn't wear a hat?"

"Yes," Wexler nodded again. "I remembered you'd mentioned George was out of character along that line when he delivered Beaumont's message."

The sheriff stopped, then finished seriously, "It was all theory, but it seemed to fit, so I just went ahead with it."

I built an admiring grin.

"Elementary, Watson, sir," I told him.

And I really meant it.

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*Spawned of the depression, when hunger tore at men's bellies and hatred for bankers gnawed at men's souls, John Dillinger and his band looted and killed and mocked at lawmen. No one since Jesse James matched his blood-hunger, no one before or since can rival, in sheer deadliness—*

# JOHN DILLINGER: ROBBER, RAIDER, RENEGADE

by DAVID MAZROFF

**J**OHAN HERBERT DILLINGER was twenty-nine years old when he was released on parole from the Indiana State Prison on May 10, 1933, after serving more than nine years on two concurrent sentences of two to fourteen years and ten to twenty-one years.

His crimes were assault and battery with intent to rob and conspiracy to commit a felony. As offenses they were run of the mill, the kind which hardly get a second look from reporters covering the courts, and no more than a line of type in the day's crime news.

But that was Dillinger's intro-

duction to crime and violence, and to his dark experience with prison.

The brilliance of the sunny day as Dillinger stepped through the big gates was in sharp contrast to his dark mood. He took several steps, turned and spat venomously at the gates and the guard who stood behind them.

"Just like you, Dillinger," the guard snapped. "You'll be back in no time. You ain't cured yet!"

Dillinger's dark brown eyes were afire. "Not if I see you first," he retorted sharply, "or anybody like you, you lousy screw bastard."

# THE SAVAGE TRUE STORY of America's most Wanted Killer



The guard little knew that the man who now was walking swiftly away from him was to burn his name across the pages of the nation's newspapers in the next year by criminal exploits unmatched by any man since the days of Jesse James.

Prison had left many traces of its dark, brooding facets on Dillinger's countenance. The pallid face was inscrutable except for the eyes, where all the evil of the ages had left its mark.

Dillinger was to become an enigma, a grotesque, malicious, fearsome, admired robber, killer, Robin Hood. Peace officers dreaded the sound of his name.

When they learned that he might be in the vicinity of their city or town an immediate alert went out and all leaves were canceled. The FBI had more than two hundred men searching for him and wanted him dead or alive, preferably dead.

Paradoxically, he struck the fancy of a large segment of the public during those terrible days of the depression, when hunger tore at men's bellies and hatred for banks and money-men was prevalent. They saw something romantic in the daring forays of a bandit who gave some of the loot he had taken from robberies to poor and stricken families.

When John Dillinger walked through the gates of the prison to freedom he was determined to pick up a gun and to use it, and he

knew with an absolute certainty that he would be engaged in a death struggle with a lawful society, with the combined might and force of the country's police agencies and that he had to kill or be killed.

He knew, too, that what he was going to do would not be a search for life and all that it held but a race with death, that time was a stop-watch with only a second-hand which could stop at any given moment for him. But he didn't care. That was what made him so dangerous.

His feelings grew out of the fact that his partner in crime, a man named Ed Singleton, who had a criminal record, had received only two years for the same offenses for which Dillinger had been punished ten times more, despite the fact that he had no previous run-in with the police and was only nineteen years old at the time.

From the day he entered the Indiana State Reformatory as Number 14935 at Pendleton, Indiana, on September 16, 1924, he was a thorn in the sides of the officials. He was surly, refused to obey orders; refused to work, fought with fellow convicts and guards, was thrown into the *Hole*, solitary confinement on bread and water, on a dozen or more occasions and came out more surly than ever. Finally, on July 16, 1929, he was transferred to the State Prison at Michigan City as Number 13225.



In Michigan City, where his reputation as a hard-nosed con had preceded him, he met and became friendly with several other tough cons who were serving sentences for every crime in the books. Among them were Charles Makley, Harry Pierpont, Russell Clark, and John Hamilton. They were to become part of the Dillinger gang.

The quartet taught him all they knew, especially how to use a Thompson submachine gun. They drew outlines of the Tommy on paper, part by part, taught him how to take it apart and how to assemble it, the best way to use it.

"It's the greatest invention since hash," Pierpont told him. "First of all, the sight of it will scare a sucker out of his mind. Second, you can hold off a whole squad of cops with it. Believe me, they'll give you a lot of air when they know you're holding a Tommy in your hands."

Dillinger nodded. "I'll get one."

"Johnny," Russell Clark said, "were all doing a lot of time, and we've got only chance to get out of here straight up. You."

"What can I do?" Dillinger asked. "Just tell me and I'll do it. Anything at all."

"Send us in some heat. Four pieces and double rounds of ammo for each piece. We'll do the rest. And when we bounce outta here we'll look you up and team together."

"But how can I get the heat in here?"



JOHN DILLINGER

"Easy. Listen."

Clark outlined the plan. One of the drivers who delivered food-stuffs into the prison by truck was an ex-con whom Clark knew.

"I sounded him out. For a couple of hundred and our good will he'll tote the stuff in. I told him that after we got out we'd piece him off with another grand. You get the heat, give it to him with a couple of C's, and then let us know where you'll be. We'll meet you."

Dillinger grinned. Anything to get even with the cops or the guards was balm to his wounds. He had been scarred and they were going to pay for it. This was going to be a part of the payment.

"I'll do it." He extended his hand to Clark. "That's a promise. You can shake on it."

"Homer Van Meter wants to team up with me," Dillinger said then. "He's due to spring a couple of weeks before me. What do you guys think? Is he okay?"

"He's little but tough as blue steel, and solid," Makley said. "You can trust him."

Homer Van Meter was only five feet one inch in height and weighed no more than one-hundred-and-twenty pounds, but like Ray Hamilton, Clyde Barrow's pal for a time, he was a murderous little animal. And so the stage was set for the razor-edged, thunderous and bloody violence that was to rage across the country in a short time.

The deeds of Clyde Barrow, Bonnie Parker, Ray Hamilton, Pretty Boy Floyd, the Barker gang, were as piddling crime waves compared to the sensational attacks Dillinger single-handedly and with his gang made in the next year—a year which has never been rivaled since for startling and melodramatic criminal raids by small independent gangs outside of the Syndicate and Mafia realm.

JOHN DILLINGER was born on January 22, 1904, on a small farm in Mooresville, Indiana, a town outside of Indianapolis. When he was three years old his mother died. His sisters, whom he idolized,

took up the task of raising him but were relieved of this duty a year later when the father married again.

Unlike fabled step-mothers, the new Mrs. Dillinger was kindly and affectionate, a fine home-maker, treated the children as her own, and Johnny grew to love her as he would have loved his true mother.

He grew into a tall, slightly under six-foot young man, strong, healthy, a typical farm boy, with good features which many girls of the town considered handsome. They chased him and he was always a willing captive.

He gained his sex experience before he was fifteen. He liked women, enjoyed the pleasures they gave him. In his way, he was chivalrous, never harmed a woman in any way, which made him a little different from the run-of-the-mill hood who thought roughing up a girl friend was a required daily social chore.

Ironically, a woman was to lead Dillinger to his death. And more ironically, the FBI was to repay her for this perfidy by deporting her to her native Roumania, where she was badgered by the underworld for the stool pigeon she was till the day she died a miserable, painful death, from cancer.

When Dillinger was eighteen, he married Beryl Hovis, a pretty teen-ager two years his junior. Beryl was the typical flapper of the era, favoring the short skirt, stock-

ings rolled below the knees, no bra, French panties which opened fully at the bottom. She was sexy, blonde, blue-eyed, and she hated the farm on which she grew up as much as she hated the farm to which John, Jr. took her.

She loved to dance the Black Bottom, the Charleston, the fast Fox Trot. She wanted excitement, music, laughter, a swig from a bottle of bootleg gin.

"How much longer are we gonna stay on this lousy dirt farm?" she asked petulantly. "That ain't why I married you. I thought you was gonna take me away to the big city, to Indianapolis, to Chicago, some damn place where people live. Take me away, Johnny. I hate this damned place. It gives me the creeps."

Dillinger argued back. "But I like the farm. This where I was born and grew up. This farm'll be mine some day."

"What the hell do you need it for? You're a good machinist. You could make a lotta money in the city, where we could have fun."

The argument went on and on, and Dillinger, driven to distraction, would walk out of the house and track the fields until he calmed down. When he returned, Beryl would throw her arms around his neck, kiss him fervently and passionately, squeeze her girl-woman's body against him, whisper to him, "Make love to me, Johnny."

Later, much later, she would try

again, taking a different tack, pointing out the attractions of the big city, the many movie houses, a different movie every night, Dillinger's weakness for he loved to go to the movies, restaurants, bright lights, hundreds, thousands of stores, shops, places where you could dance.

"That's life, Johnny. You'd love it, I know. And we'd be so happy there. I'll make you happy, Johnny. I'll do anything you want me to do to make you happy."

"No money," he would say. "If we go to the city we'll need money. Where will I get money?"

"We won't need much to get started. Just a few hundred dollars. You can get it, Johnny. If you try, you can get it."

He tried. With Ed Singleton. Singleton was a would-be safe cracker, a bungling idiot, and when he tried to blast open the safe in the town grocery store he blew out the entire rear of the store. The two were nabbed. That was the beginning.

When Dillinger was paroled he went straight to his father's farm. The old man, bent, thin, in his sixties, saddened by his son's term in prison, and more saddened by his second wife's illness, greeted his only son sorrowfully.

"Where's Ma?" young Dillinger asked.

"In the bedroom, son," the senior John answered quietly. "She ain't well. I fear she's gonna die."

He shook his head dolefully. "Soon, son. Very soon."

"Where's Beryl?"

"She run off and got married after you went to prison. Got a divorce right away. Ain't heard a word from her since she left."

Dillinger went into the house, to his mother's bedroom. Tears welled into her eyes when she saw her stepson. "Johnny, Johnny, you're home!" she cried weakly and held out her arms.

Dillinger embraced her and held her hand, talked to her, tried to soothe her. He was with her for hours on end each day until she died three days later.

After the funeral, the elder Dillinger said, "Son, I'm about to lose the farm. Bank's gonna foreclose the mortgage. I'll be without a home, without anyone."

"How much do you owe?"

"Eighteen hundred dollars."

"Don't worry about it, Pop."

"Son—"

Dillinger stopped him. "I said not to worry about it," he said firmly. "No bank's gonna take your farm."

He turned from his father and walked swiftly away. He had Homer Van Meter's address. He went to find him.

In a rooming house on the South Side of Chicago, Dillinger found his prison pal, the diminutive, deadly, boyish-faced Van Meter, whose guileless blue eyes shielded a venomous and murderous man.

"I'm ready to go to work," Dillinger said. "The bank's going to foreclose on my father's farm. It would break the old man's heart."

"Yeah? Well, we can take care of that little matter. We'll just go to a bank and get the dough."

"How about heat?"

Van Meter walked to a closet, reached in and removed two bulky bundles wrapped in sheets. "Here they are, Johnny. Two beauties. Thompsons." He unwrapped one bundle, handed the machine gun to Dillinger. "Hold it."

Dillinger held the weapon as he had been instructed by Pierpont, Clark, and John Hamilton who, incidentally, was no relation to Ray Hamilton. He balanced the machine gun in his hands, held it tightly against his side, swung it in an easy arc, to and fro. He grinned.

"Beautiful. Like Pierpont said, it's the greatest thing since hash." He patted the weapon in an affectionate gesture. "I'm ready to use this baby right now."

"Yeah, okay. But there's time. Let's have a little fun first. You got yourself straight yet?"

"With a girl? No, not yet."

"Good. I'll take care of that little matter right away. I've got a gal lives in this building. She's got a friend. A looker. You two should hit it off just fine."

At this moment, a tall, lean, handsome man sat at his desk in the office of the Indiana State



HOMER VAN METER

House and studied the photographs and records of two men recently released on parole. He was Matt Leach, Captain of the Indiana State Police, which had only a few months before been created by Governor Paul V. McNutt as a unit to fight crime throughout the state. Matt Leach had served almost a decade on the Gary, Indiana, police force. He was a thoroughly trained cop who intuitively could smell trouble. He looked up from his desk and spoke to an aide.

"John Dillinger and Homer Van Meter. The report from the prison says these two were chummy, along with four other nasty char-

acters, Harry Pierpont, Charles Makley, Russell Clark, and John Hamilton. The last four are still in, but with Dillinger and Van Meter out anything can happen. Pierpont is doing twenty years for armed robbery. He's dangerous. The other three are only a little less so. If they ever get together we're going to be in a hell of a lot of trouble."

"Do you want me to check on Dillinger and Van Meter?"

"Not yet. They haven't done anything yet. Let's wait a while."

Captain Leach didn't have long to wait. In quick succession, Dillinger and Van Meter stuck up banks in Rockville and Daleville, Indiana, and got away with almost \$25,000. They had terrified the tellers, manager, and customers with machine guns. Leach got word of the heists almost immediately. He snatched up a batch of mug shots, among them Dillinger's and Van Meter's, and drove to Daleville

"There were two of them," the manager told him. "A little guy and a taller one, just under six feet, an inch or two. He had a murderous look in his eyes. I thought he was going to fire that machine gun and kill everyone in the bank, even after they got the money. I was never so scared in my life."

"Sure, sure, I know." Leach spread the mug shots out on the desk. "Any of these guys resemble the holdup men?"

The manager studied the photos and picked out Dillinger's and Van Meter's. "These two."

"You're sure?"

"Positive."

"Let me talk to your tellers. One at a time."

Each teller picked out the same photographs.

Leach was more than satisfied. He drove to Mooresville, to the elder Dillinger's farm. "When did you see your son last, John?"

"'Bout a couple weeks ago. He's a fine boy. Got a job and goin' to work at it. Steady. Told me so himself."

"Yeah, I'm sure of it," Leach snapped. "That's what I'm afraid of. You paid off your mortgage this week, John. Eighteen hundred dollars. Where'd you get the money?"

"Been saving it up. Knew the time would come when I'd have to pay it. Put away a little each time I could."

"You know what, John? You're a damned old liar! Your son gave you that money. He got it from two banks he robbed."

"No, sir. That ain't true. My boy wouldn't do no such thing."

"Then how come you didn't pay that mortgage off before, when the bank was ready to foreclose?"

"Jest didn't think of it, is all."

"Yeah, I'll bet. Well, you listen to me. That son of yours is wanted for those two bank jobs, and if he's got good sense he'll turn him-

self in. If you see him, tell him so. Tell him Matt Leach said so. Meanwhile, I'll have a look around. Any objections?"

"No, sir. You kin look all you want."

JOHN DILLINGER and Van Meter felt safe in their rooming house flat. They had a separate entrance, came and went quietly, avoided the few other residents in the house, all but the two girls, Betty Penner, who was Van Meter's girl, and Molly Leib, who was Dillinger's.

They had over twenty thousand dollars between them and itched to spend it. The first thing they did was to buy a new Ford sedan, which Dillinger souped up with a special head and gears. The car was a thing of power, capable of terrific speeds.

The two then took their girls on a shopping spree. Molly, a striking brunette, petite, with large brown eyes, was ecstatic. She had never dreamed of such generosity. Neither did Betty. The girls now exchanged rooms. Dillinger moved into Molly's room and Betty moved into Van Meter's room.

"It's time we did something about the boys in Michigan City," Dillinger said. "Let's look up this truck driver."

"We'll need the heat and ammo," Van Meter said.

"We can get it in one of the pawn shops on South State Street,"

Dillinger said. "I saw a lot of them displayed in the windows."

They got the guns and ammo, took them to the contact, put a thousand dollars in an envelope and handed it to him.

"See to it that Pierpont gets this too," Dillinger said. "And don't slip up, see, Mister?"

"Sure, sure. You can depend on me."

"We are," Van Meter said pointedly.

Several days later, on September 5, 1933, Dillinger and Van Meter walked into the State Bank in the heart of Indianapolis at one o'clock in the afternoon. They were armed with machine guns.

"Everybody move to the right!" Dillinger yelled. "This is a stickup. Move! Move!"

He waved the deadly machine gun to and fro. It was just like Pierpont had said. The sight of the weapon scared the hell out of the customers. They moved in a frantic rush.

Van Meter, meanwhile, had covered the manager and the tellers. "If anybody makes a wrong move I'll kill this bastard!" he yelled, and put the muzzle of his machine gun at the manager's temple.

"Now move to the cages," he commanded the manager, and handed him a pillow case. "Put all the big bills in there, and do it fast. Let's go. Move!"

The entire holdup took exactly one minute and fifteen seconds,

and it had been timed exactly to that degree by Dillinger. At the end of the seventy-fifth second he yelled to Van Meter.

"Let's go, Mister. Time's up!"

Van Meter snatched the pillow case from the manager and hurried out behind Dillinger as both men slipped the machine guns under their coats, walked casually to the Ford, got in and lost themselves in the traffic.

Once on the open road, Dillinger opened up the Ford straight into Chicago. It was a sensational holdup and hit the front pages of newspapers in six states.

Captain Leach knew immediately that Dillinger and Van Meter had pulled this heist, even before he got a description of the bandits. He also credited them with the bank holdups in Bluffton, Ohio, and in New Carlisle in the same state. He took a man with him and went out to look for some of his stool pigeons. He questioned a dozen of them but could get no information. Finally, he found one who could give him some information.

"You've got a burglary rap hanging over your head, pal. You knew Dillinger in Michigan City. And Van Meter too. You must have heard something about where these guys would hole up if the heat was on them."

"I don't know nothin'," the stoolie replied sullenly. "I got out three months afore Dillinger and

Van Meter. I ain't never seen either of them since."

"Okay, pal. Have it your way. Get in the car. I'm taking you in. You're a violator, and you've got a new rap. About twenty years will do the trick."

The stoolie held back. "Wait a minute. You gonna drop the rap if I tell you something? The burglary and violation?"

"Yeah, if what you tell me holds up."

"Well, once I heard them talking about Russell Clark's sister. She lives in Dayton. He could be hiding out there."

"We'll check it out. If you're right, you've got a break. If not, you'll be cake-walking back in Michigan City."

Back in his office, Leach called the prison and asked for the address of Clark's sister in Dayton. It was listed, along with her married name, on Clark's record. Leach then called the Dayton cops and gave them his information.

"Be careful taking this guy. He's got a Tommy and will use it."

A squad of cops surrounded the address given them and waited for Dillinger to appear. Several hours later he came out of the house and the cops took him without a struggle. News of his capture reached the prison at Michigan City, and Clark, Pierpont, Makley, and Hamilton decided to make their move.

On the morning of September

26, 1933, the four desperados overpowered two guards and a visiting sheriff, threatened to kill them unless the doors were opened, and made good their escape in the sheriff's car, taking him and the two guards as hostages. It was one of the most sensational escapes from prison in the midwest.

Dillinger meanwhile was booked as Number 10587 by the Dayton Police Department and lodged in a cell, charged as a fugitive. Six days later he was turned over to the Allen County authorities and lodged in the Lima, Ohio, County Jail.

On October 12, Pierpont, Makley, Hamilton, and Clark drove up to the jail in Lima. They were attired in new suits and expensive snap-brim hats and looked like detectives, since all were fairly big men. When they entered the jail they stepped up to the desk and Pierpont accosted the man behind the desk.

"Who's in charge here?"

"I'm Sheriff Jesse Barber. What can I do for you?"

"We're deputies from the penitentiary at Michigan City. We've come to take John Dillinger back to prison."

"You can have him," Sheriff Barber replied. "Let me see your credentials."

"Right here," Pierpont replied, and withdrew a gun from an inside pocket of his coat, aimed it at the sheriff and shot him dead.



It was the first murder of the Dillinger gang.

The shooting brought Mrs. Barber and a deputy on the run. The four men herded Mrs. Barber and the deputy into a cell and slammed the door. With the sheriff's key he opened the outer door leading to the cell block and called to Dillinger.

"Okay, Johnny, let's go. School's out."

The five men split up and made their way back to Chicago and Dillinger's room.

Pierpont sized up the situation of the girls.

"I don't like the girls around, Johnny. Why don't you give them some money and tell them to go home for a while and you'll get in touch with them later, after the heat cools off?"

"Okay, Harry. I think that's a good idea."

Dillinger explained things to the two girls, gave them each five hundred dollars and told them Van Meter and he would contact them later.

"Will you really, Johnny?" Molly said. "I'll miss you. I'd like to stay with you. You can trust me. You know that."

"Sure, sure, honey, but it's best you go. I don't want you to get mixed up in anything if trouble comes."

"You be careful, won't you, Johnny?"

"Sure, honey, I'll be careful."



EVELYN FRECHETTE

It was the last time the girls ever saw him.

The gang stayed holed up for weeks, during which time a frantic nation-wide search was conducted for them. Makley, Pierpont, Clark, and Hamilton were wanted for escaping prison and kidnaping, and all but Van Meter were wanted for the murder of Jesse Barber. Reading a paper, Dillinger noted that the police department of Peru, Indiana, had purchased machine guns as part of their arsenal. He read the story to the five men in the room.

"Just what we need," Dillinger said. "This should be easy." He then outlined a plan for stealing the machine guns.

Several days later the gang arrived in Peru and looked over the police station. Dillinger nodded in satisfaction. That evening, Van Meter walked into the station and spoke to the officer behind the desk.

"I'm doing a special article for a magazine about how the police in Peru are protecting the public from gangs like Dillinger's. I'd appreciate it if you'd fill me in."

"Sure thing," the officer replied, and outlined the routines of patrol, then proudly showed Van Meter the arsenal of machine guns.

"You on duty here alone?" Van Meter asked.

"Yeah, and it's monotonous. I get relieved at eleven o'clock."

Van Meter thanked him for his information and walked out. At a little after ten o'clock, Harry Pierpont strolled in.

"I'd like to know the best route to Indianapolis. Can you help me, Officer?"

The cop got up from his desk and walked around it to where Pierpont stood, and Pierpont grabbed him. Dillinger, Makley, and Hamilton rushed in, helped lock the cop in a cell, and then cleaned out the machine gun arsenal and ammunition. Again the Dillinger gang hit the front pages—this time nation-wide, because of the weapons they had taken and what they portended.

*John Dillinger!* The name suddenly became a household word.

The daring methods of his raids holding a fascination for the man in the streets. Many hoped the police would never capture him. Reporters now waited on the alert, like an army company waiting to charge an enemy, for the first word of a Dillinger raid on a bank. It wasn't long in coming.

ON THE MORNING of October 23, 1933, Dillinger and the gang drew up in front of National Savings and Trust Company in the town of Greencastle, Indiana, about forty miles southwest of Indianapolis.

Charles Makley carried a movie camera and tripod. He was wearing his cap backward, in approved motion-picture director fashion. John Hamilton was wearing a white shirt open at the throat and puttees, the same kind of attire favored by Cecil B. DeMille, famed motion director, and like DeMille he carried a small megaphone. Makley set up the camera in front of the bank, Russell Clark, acting as an assistant director, measured the distance from the camera to the bank entrance with a tape measure.

A small crowd of people began to gather around the group.

"What's going on," a by-stander asked.

"We're from Hollywood," Van Meter said. "Shooting a picture of a bank holdup."

Dillinger and Pierpont, wearing heavy makeup and armed with machine guns, went inside the

bank and came quickly back out. As they did so, Makley, megaphone to his mouth, yelled directions.

"Run up the street, not too far. Turn around. Look up and down the street. Okay, come back. That was no good. Let's try again."

Clark measured the distance from the bank entrance to the camera. By this time a small group of people had gathered around the group.

"What's going on?" a bystander asked.

"We're shooting a picture," Hamilton said. "We're from Hollywood. This is just one of the scenes in the picture. Please don't get in the way." He nodded to Dillinger and Pierpont, who were standing alongside. "Okay, fellas. Run through it."

Dillinger and Pierpont, machine guns in hand, strode into the bank, paused just inside the door and came out.

"Okay," Hamilton said, "now run up the street. Not too far. About twenty feet." As Dillinger and Pierpont ran up the street, Hamilton ground the camera. "Stop," he yelled. "No good. Let's try it another way. When you come out of the bank, run to the car, get in and drive away. Okay?"

Dillinger and Pierpont nodded. They strode into the bank again. Only this time they moved to the center of the floor and Dillinger yelled, "This is a stickup! Every-

body on the floor. Down! Down!"

Pierpont rushed over to the manager. "Get up! Tell your people not to do anything wrong or I'll kill you!"

It was all over in less than a minute. As Dillinger and Pierpont emerged from the bank they hurried to the car parked about fifteen feet away and got in. The rest of the gang gathered up the equipment and followed. They were away in seconds before the crowd realized that an actual robbery had taken place. The loot was \$75,000.

Matt Leach pounded the desk in his office. "Of all the stupid jerks in the world, that crowd in Greencastle takes the cake!" He was even more furious when he received a postcard which read:

*"I hope you read the story in the papers about the movie that was made in Greencastle. J.D."*

Dillinger now was wanted by Indiana and Ohio, and by the United States Government. He was wanted in Ohio for his caper in Lima. The government wanted him for the heists of the banks in Greencastle and Indianapolis because they were federal institutions. And Matt Leach wanted him for the jobs in Rockville, Daleville, Greencastle, and Indianapolis.

It was just the first act in the play. Leach and the government were anxious to bring the curtain down now but they were destined

to sit it out to the end, and to see a change in the cast of characters—all, that is, but the lead.

Dillinger's take in the four bank heists was a little over \$125,000. The gang moved back into Chicago, took separate apartments on the North Side, but close to each other. Dillinger liked the Windy City because it was shot through with crooked cops who would be glad to get a piece of his take and forget they saw him. Too, his was the only face familiar to the cops, since no one yet had identified any of the others except Van Meter. The little bandit walked around town with several books under his arm and looked like a high school boy.

Hamilton, Pierpont, Clark, and Makley played it cool. They dressed quietly, moved unobtrusively, never flashed money. This was on Dillinger's orders. However, Pierpont and Makley were chafing at the bit. They wanted action.

"Come on, Johnny," Pierpont begged, "let's live a little. What's the use of all our work and all this dough if we can't use it? We might as well be back in the can."

"Sure, Johnny," Hamilton chimed in, "we've been locked up a long time. I'd like to see the town. It's wide open."

"Okay," Dillinger said, "but no rough stuff. This is a good town to hide out in and I want to keep it that way."

"You going with me?" Pierpont asked.

"Sure, why not?" He turned to the others. "You guys spread out. Go where you want, but not together. And meet back here at two o'clock."

"What about the heat?" Makley asked. "Do we take a piece with us? I'd feel naked without one."

"Yeah, we better all carry one. Never know what we'll run into."

Dillinger and Pierpont took a cab to a joint on North Clark Street just off Diversey. The place was dimly lighted. There was a small band and a floor show. Pierpont ordered whisky and Dillinger, who seldom drank, ordered a glass of beer.

The night was to change much in Dillinger's life. In the floor show was a torch singer, a tall, curvaceous girl with shoulder-length black hair, black eyes, and a coppery skin. She sang in a husky voice that dripped with sex, and when she swayed to the beat of the music her curves moved in a slow bounce. Dillinger swallowed hard.

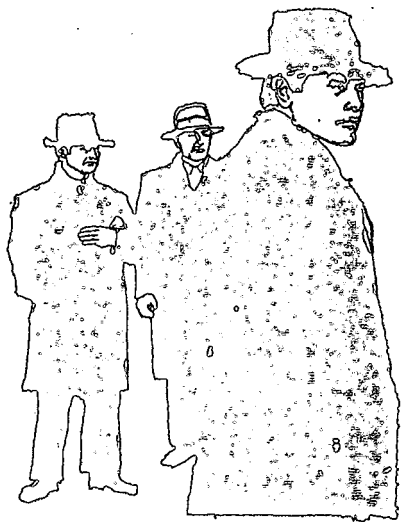
"Boy, that's really something!" he murmured to Pierpont.

"That's more than something, Johnny. That's *everything!* I'll get her over after she's through."

"You think she'll come?"

"Running. Like a cat to a bowl of milk. Watch." Pierpont motioned to a waitress.

"Honey," he said, and handed her a twenty-dollar bill which he



DILLINGER'S GANG

Makley, Hamilton &amp; Pierpont

had folded in half. "We'd like to meet that girl up there."

"Evelyn Frechette?"

"Is that her name?" Pierpont said.

"Yeah. You wanna meet her? I'll tell her." She looked down at the bill Pierpont had given her. "Gee, thanks. Sure, I'll tell her. Right after she's through."

About twenty minutes later, Evelyn Frechette came to the table. "Hi. Barbara said you wanted to meet me."

"Sit down," Pierpont invited. "Have a drink?"

"Sure thing. You get thirsty up there." She looked at Dillinger. "My name's Evelyn. What's yours?"

"Jack Lawrence. You sing nice. You look nice too."

"Thanks. You boys new in town?"

"No, we're local," Dillinger answered. "What time do you get through here?"

"Is that an invitation?"

Dillinger's breathing increased as he visualized making love to this woman who exuded passionate sex in the same way a hot-house gives off the scent of myriad flowers.

"More than that," he said. "I like your style. Everything about you."

"I got a boy-friend. Well, sort of."

"Forget him. I'm your boy-friend now. I'll wait for you."

She finished her whisky. "Can I have another drink?"

"All you want. I'll send a bottle to your dressing room, if you want."

She grinned. "A fast spender, huh? I like that. I think you're my kind of guy. No, don't send a bottle back. Take one with you. What about him?" she asked and nodded toward Pierpont. "I've got a friend. A looker. Blonde. Natural, not out of a bottle."

"I'll take her," Pierpont replied. "Bring her with you."

"What time do you get through?" Dillinger asked.

"About half past one. That okay?"

"Sure. Just right."

The blonde was a girl named Norma Ross, and she was a looker. Both girls had seen the seamier side of life and a trace of it was on their faces, but not enough to mar the basic good looks. The quartet arrived at Dillinger's apartment a little before two and were met by Makley, Hamilton, and Van Meter.

"Wow!" Van Meter exploded when he saw the girls. "Where'd you guys steal them?"

"Who's the boy?" Evelyn asked, and smiled. "Your little brother, Jack?" She patted Van Meter on the head. "Now you be a good little boy, get your glass of milk and go to bed."

Everyone laughed.

"See you boys tomorrow. About three," Dillinger said.

When everyone left, Evelyn went to Dillinger and put her arms around him. "Honey, I've been around a little. That joint I work in sees every kind of guy in the world. I like you. You're my kind of guy, but let's play it straight with each other. You're a racket guy, aren't you? And those guys who just left—you're their boss. Right?"

Dillinger smiled. "Could be. We'll talk about it tomorrow."

THE NEXT MORNING Dillinger was up at about ten. Evelyn still slept. He stared at her tall sensuous length of body, the rounded sweep of her thighs, the high rounded full

breasts. This was all woman, and she was his.

When she awoke an hour later, Dillinger went out and brought back two containers of coffee and some orange juice. She stretched her arms toward him.

"Honey, you're marvelous. Too good to be true." Her face grew serious. "Am I going to be your girl? Steady?"

"You betcha!" he replied in a positive tone.

"Come sit here," she invited, and pointed to the bed.

While she drank her juice and coffee she told him all about herself. "I'm part Indian. My father was white. I never knew the bastard. My mother was a half-breed. I was born in Oklahoma, worked in honky tonks for a while around the Indian Territory. Shall I tell you my age?"

"Why not? I wouldn't care if you were a hundred."

She laughed. "I'm twenty-seven. Too old for you?"

"No. Just right. I'm twenty-nine."

"What's your real name? You can trust me. You'll always be able to trust me. I'm your girl. Always will be."

He was silent a long time, gazed into her eyes, saw what he wanted to see.

"John Dillinger," he said in a low tone.

"My God!" she exclaimed. And then she started to laugh.

Evelyn never went back to work in the joint from which Dillinger took her, and she didn't regret it. She liked being Dillinger's girl. He was good to her, generous, attentive, and she did all she could to please him. Had she known what was in store for her she would have broken a world's record running from him.

Early in December, Dillinger and Van Meter were walking on West North Avenue and saw a bank that was, to their surprise, both open and closed. The bank had gone out of business but a sign in the window gave notice that the safe-deposit room was still open for business.

Dillinger went in. There was a middle-aged attendant on duty. He asked a few perfunctory questions and went out.

"I think the place is clean. No alarm system. This should be child's play."

On December 13, the gang moved in.

John Hamilton took the sign out of the window and replaced it with another sign which read:

*"Closed Until January 2."*

The gang bound and gagged the attendant and then went to work on the boxes. They finished in an hour, and when they left they had taken about \$100,000 in cash and another \$150,000 in negotiable bonds.

The descriptions given by the attendant told Matt Leach all he

wanted to know. He called the Chicago Detective Bureau.

"The mob that took those safe-deposit boxes were Dillinger, Van Meter, Charles Makley, Harry Pierpont, and John Hamilton. They must be holed up in your town. If you get out an APB you might nab 'em."

"OKay. Will do!"

With an APB out on the gang, and no one in the police department to front for them, every cop was on the lookout for one or all of the mob. Especially for John Dillinger.

Detective Sergeant William T. Shanley got a tip that John Hamilton had parked a car in a garage in the 5300 block of Broadway. He drove there with Patrolman Frank Hopkins, and when the two got to the garage, Hamilton and a young woman strolled in.

"I want to talk to you, Hamilton," Shanley said. "I'm a police officer."

Accosting Hamilton without a weapon in his hand was a foolish move on the part of Shanley.

Hamilton reacted instantly. He drew his gun, fired, and Shanley dropped with a slug through his heart. Patrolman Hopkins ducked behind a car, pulled his gun and fired at Hamilton but missed. Hamilton shot back, missed, and then ran from the garage, the woman after him.

Hopkins chased the two into the street but Hamilton outraced him.

Not so the young woman. Hopkins arrested her.

At the station, detectives snarled at her. "Your boy-friend killed a cop, sister! What's your name?"

"Elaine Kent." She was thoroughly frightened and shaking.

"Where does Hamilton live?"

"Two - thousand - five - hundred and thirty North Sacramento Avenue. We were living there as Mr. and Mrs. Orval Lewis. I didn't know who he was. I only met him about three weeks ago, in the coffee shop of the Stevens Hotel. I'm a waitress there."

A squad of cops sped to the address Elaine Kent gave them. They missed Hamilton by minutes. He had been there, picked up his clothes and belongings and fled. The cops believed Elaine Kent after checking her out and turned her loose.

The heat on the gang now was red hot. Even the crooked cops couldn't take this one. At Dillinger's apartment the talk was tense.

"We're too hot to stick around," Dillinger said. "Every cop in town will be hunting us. We'll have to blow Chicago." Again Dillinger's audacity and bravado came into play. "We'll blow right away. The cops won't be looking for us to leave in broad daylight. Let's go."

The eight men and women, five of the gang and Mary Kinder, Harry Pierpont's girl; Opal Long, Russell Clark's girl; and Evelyn

Frechette, Dillinger's girl, drove out of town in two cars and headed for Florida. They stopped in Atlantic City and checked in at one of the finest hotels on the Boardwalk. That was Dillinger's way, walking into danger with nonchalant arrogance.

Several hours after they checked in, Pierpont and Mary Kinder walked through the lobby and a guest recognized him from a picture he had seen in the newspapers.

Fearful of reporting the hoodlum, he waited too long. When Pierpont and Mary Kinder returned to the hotel, Dillinger said, "We're checking out. I've got a funny feeling about this place. Too respectable. Let's move! Quick!"

The guest had gone out of the hotel, to the police station, and there talked to the officer at the desk.

"You sure?" the astonished cop asked.

"I'm positive. It's Hamilton and the rest of the gang!"

A carload of cops raced to the hotel but were too late. The gang was already out of town. Dillinger's luck was holding out.

In Daytona Beach, Florida, Russell Clark and Opal Long were detailed to find a large house and rent it. They found a luxuriously furnished seventeen-room home overlooking the ocean.

For the next several weeks the gang lived the easy life of idle mil-



lionaires. They swam, lay on the beach and took sun baths, ate the best of food, and drank the finest liquors and wines.

Money was no object. The banks were filled with the stuff. Evelyn Frechette here fell in love with Dillinger, completely. He was good to her, considerate, kind, lavished gifts on her. She was to prove his ace in the hole when he most needed a trump card.

After two months, with the heat on the gang all but dead, John Dillinger decided to leave Daytona Beach. The lazy life had begun to pall on him.

"We'll split up," Dillinger said. "East Chicago. At Larry's place. You guys drive careful and don't get picked up. No funny stuff on the way."

It was the hottest place Dillinger could have chosen, for there, Matt Leach awaited them. Dillinger showed his contempt for Leach by figuratively throwing sand in his face. He had determined to rob another bank right in Leach's backyard.

On January 15, 1934, Dillinger, Hamilton, and Pierpont strolled into the First National Bank in East Chicago, Indiana. Each man had a machine gun under his coat. Once in the bank they uncovered their weapons.

"This is a stickup!" Dillinger yelled. "Everybody down on the floor! Down! Down! Down!"

The terrified customers dropped



ANN PAGE

to the floor. Hamilton leaped behind the cages and began scooping up money, while Pierpont and Dillinger kept the customers and employees of the bank at bay. One teller, however, managed to press a button connecting an alarm to the police station, a short distance away. While the trio was still in the bank a police car came roaring up, siren going full blast.

Detectives William P. O'Malley and Hobard Wilgus leaped out of the car and started for the bank. Dillinger sized up the situation with amazing swiftness.

"You!" he shouted at Walter Spencer, vice-president of the bank. "Come here!"

A dignified man, Spencer ner-

vously complied with the request. Dillinger ordered him to stand with his back to him and as close to him as he could. Spencer obeyed. Then Dillinger, holding the machine gun in one hand, stretched his arms forward and closed them about the vice-president, both hands holding the weapon. Now he had a perfect target—for someone else to shoot at. The cops wouldn't dare shoot. He, on the other hand, could blaze away freely.

Dillinger moved out of the bank first. "Start shooting, coppers, and this guy gets it first!" he yelled.

Hamilton and Pierpont followed Dillinger, one facing in each direction, machine guns at ready. A large crowd had gathered and watched with fascination as the men moved toward a car about twenty feet away, where Homer Van Meter sat behind the wheel with the motor running.

Hamilton and Pierpont leaped into the car and poked their machine guns out the windows of each side. Dillinger then shoved Spencer to one side and started to get in. As he did so, Detective O'Malley leveled his gun. Dillinger was a second ahead of him. He fired a burst from the machine gun and O'Malley crumpled to the sidewalk, blood spurting from several bullet wounds. Van Meter gunned the motor and the car shot from the curb.

It was the third cop murder for the mob.

Hotter than the inside of hell now, with every cop in the nation searching for them, the gang again split up.

"Tucson, Arizona," Dillinger said. "We'll leave now. Check in at the Congress Hotel. And come in looking neat."

FIVE DAYS LATER, the entire gang had checked in. But now a strange thing happened. Three days later, on January 22, the hotel caught fire. It was in the early hours of the morning and all the guests were asleep.

The gang and their molls, on the third floor of the hotel, had to be rescued by firemen, who were forced to take them to safety on ladders. The gang seemed to exhibit more than an ordinary interest in their baggage and two firemen, Kenneth Pender and William Benedict, risked their lives to go back and get it. They noticed that some of the bags were extremely heavy, almost as if filled with bricks.

The bags really contained machine guns and other weapons. Their curiosity was further aroused when they were tipped lavishly. In the fire house, the two firemen talked about it, and Benedict said he thought he recognized one of the men.

"Dillinger!" he cried. "One of those guys was John Dillinger!"

The firemen notified the police and a swift roundup followed. The

gang was nabbed in a house they had rented at 927 East Second Street. Charles Makley, Russell Clark, and Harry Pierpont were extradited to Ohio to face a charge of first-degree murder in the death of Sheriff Jesse Barber. Dillinger was extradited to Indiana, where he faced the electric chair for slaying Detective O'Malley in the East Chicago bank robbery.

Opal Long and Mary Kinder were arraigned in Tucson on charges of consorting with criminals. Only John Hamilton and Evelyn Frechette escaped the dragnet, and the cops of Tucson didn't even know they had been in the city.

Dillinger was taken to Indiana by plane, accompanied by Robert G. Estill, Prosecutor of Lake County, Indiana. Estill was the man who was photographed in the Crown Point, Indiana jail in that famous or infamous picture in which he had his left arm around Dillinger's shoulder, and Dillinger had his right arm around Estill's shoulder.

Sheriff Lillian Holley, the only woman sheriff in the country, stood alongside Estill and looked pleasantly toward Dillinger. It was a very cozy picture but shook up the nation's honest citizens as well as a goodly share of the police officers.

Things changed quickly, however, when rumors flew that John Hamilton was going to try to free

Dillinger. Several husky guards were hired and they paraded heavy-footedly in front of the jail day and night.

Several days later, Dillinger had a visitor, a woman with copper skin, black hair and dark, brooding eyes. She was Evelyn Frechette. She said she was Dillinger's wife, and Sheriff Holley permitted her to visit with the bandit-killer. She stayed about an hour, during which time she talked with Dillinger in very low tones.

On the morning of March 3rd, a light drizzle fell. The slow, monotonous pacing of the guards kept on in front of the jail building. The sheriff was in her living quarters, connected with the jail proper by a series of corridors.

A guard stood just inside of the main door of the cell-block, his back to the prisoners. Suddenly, he felt something being jabbed into his ribs and heard the hissing command:

"Don't move. Just stand still!"

The door at which the guard stood led to the sheriff's office, and freedom. But this guard didn't have the keys. A moment later, Ernest Blunk, another guard, walked along the murky passageway. Before he knew it, he was staring at the muzzle of a pistol and was herded into a corner with the first guard.

Presently, the turnkey, Sam Calhoun, came along. He walked into the trap, too, and the man with the

pistol forced him to open the door that led to the outer part of the jail. Calhoun nervously complied.

Dillinger called to another prisoner, a Negro named Herbert Youngblood, to "come along!" Youngblood and Dillinger walked through the door leading from the cell-block, forcing Blunk to precede them. Dillinger locked the door behind them, making prisoners of the other guards within.

Rushing into the jail arsenal, Dillinger helped himself to a machine gun, and Youngblood, a strapping monster of a man, took an automatic. Still holding Blunk as a hostage, the two convicts slipped out of a side exit, hurried along an alley into a garage in the rear of the jail.

Ed Sager, a mechanic, was tinkering with a car.

"Get your hands up, punk!" Dillinger ordered. "I want the fastest car you've got in this place! Which one is it?"

Sager turned and looked into the muzzle of a machine gun. He walked over to Sheriff Holley's car, a five-passenger sedan.

"Get behind the wheel!" Dillinger ordered.

Sager got in and Dillinger climbed in beside him. Youngblood forced Blunk into the rear seat and got in with him.

"All right," Dillinger ordered. "Step on it. Right down Main Street, and if you stop for anything, it'll be your last stop!"

Sager stepped on the starter, put the car in gear, and swung out into the alley leading to Main Street. As the car turned into the street, it was in full view of the special guards patrolling the front of the jail. Not one of them noticed it.

Near Peotone, some fifteen miles from Crown Point, the car, in making a turn in the road, slipped into a ditch. It took Sager and Blunk almost twenty minutes to put skid chains on the rear tires and extricate the vehicle. It was at this point that Dillinger and Youngblood released their two hostages and roared off alone.

The sheriff's car was equipped with a short-wave radio set to receive police signals. The radio frequently blared forth the warning to watch for a sedan bearing Indiana tags number 765449. Dillinger didn't know it at the time but he was playing in luck again. Sheriff Holley, in her excitement, had given out the wrong number. Her number was 674549.

When night fell, Dillinger and Youngblood might as well have been whisked off to another planet so far as clues to their whereabouts were concerned. Once again, the bad man had slipped right through the fingers of the police like quicksilver.

On March 6, three days after Dillinger's escape, Harry Pierpont went on trial for the murder of Sheriff Jesse Barber. Dozens of po-

lice officers, and seventy-five soldiers, commanded by Brigadier General Harold M. Bush, guarded the jail where the three men, Pierpont, Makley, and Clark were being held, and a like number guarded the courthouse.

Dillinger had sent Homer Van Meter to look over the situation, and the diminutive gunman reported back that it was hopeless.

"We haven't got a chance, Johnny. There's an army there, a whole goddam army!"

"All right," Dillinger replied, "we'll let it go for the time being. We need some money. Let's go get it."

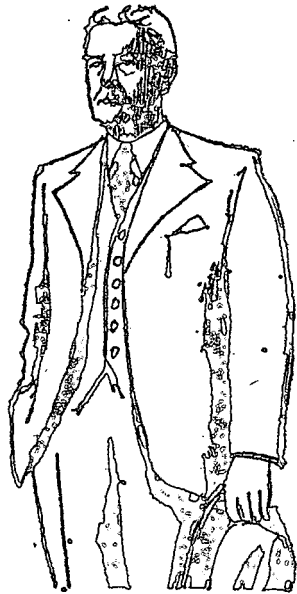
Dillinger, Hamilton, and Van Meter knocked off six banks in eight days for a total of \$110,000. They had roared through Indiana and Ohio like whirling dervishes as they stuck up bank after bank.

Governor Paul McNutt put the pressure on Matt Leach.

"Get that guy!" he ordered. "Or else!"

Dillinger's picture was pasted up in every bank teller's cage in every bank in Indiana, Ohio, and Illinois. Each time a tall, strange man walked into the bank some jittery teller pressed an alarm button. One day Indiana, Ohio, and Illinois police rushed to thirty-two banks on false alarms.

The usual reports now came into police stations in the three states. Dillinger was seen in Omaha, Detroit, St. Louis, New Orleans, To-



CAPTAIN MATT LEACH

ronto, London, Moscow, Tokyo, Newark, and points north, south, east, and west. He was actually in Chicago, in an apartment on the South Side, registered with Evelyn Frechette as Mr. and Mrs. Jack Lawrence.

One day shortly afterward, Homer Van Meter brought Alvin "Creepy" Karpis to the apartment and introduced him to Dillinger.

"I'm with the Barker boys, Johnny. We've also got Lester Gillis. That's Baby-Face Nelson. Good people, Johnny. We want you guys with us. We do things just like you do. Together we could do a lot more. How about it?"

Dillinger needed more men. With only Hamilton and Van Meter he wasn't much of a force. Furthermore, he planned to free Pierpont, Makley, and Clark. To do that he would need help. The Barker gang was the answer. He turned to Hamilton and Van Meter.

"How about it, boys? Do we join up?" Dillinger asked.

Van Meter and Hamilton nodded.

"Okay," Dillinger said, "we're in."

Matt Leach wasn't sitting still either. He went into all the underworld joints he knew looking for a stool-pigeon who would be willing to tip him to Dillinger's hideout for a price. He found one, a junky named Sugar Collins.

"For a gang, I'll tip you."

Leach handed over \$500. "The rest when I get Dillinger."

"He's in St. Paul. With the Barker-Karpis mob." He gave Leach an address.

Leach telephoned the St. Paul detective bureau and a squad of detectives raced to the address but were too late. Dillinger and Evelyn had left ten minutes before, warned by an underworld friend. The St. Paul police telephoned Leach the information that once again Dillinger had escaped arrest, and Leach was furious, swore, banged his desk, threw an ashtray across the room.

Three days later, the stoolie who

had tipped him was machine gunned to death. Pinned to his body was a note to Leach:

*"This is a present for you, copper. Get another one and I'll send you his head. J.D."*

JOHN DILLINGER and the gang decided to lay low for a while. "I saw an ad about a place in northern Wisconsin called Little Bohemis Lodge. It's at Spider Lake. Might be just the place."

The gang agreed. On Friday afternoon, April 20, two Fords pulled in at the Little Bohemia Lodge at Spider Lake, an isolated vacation spot in the primeval spruce-and-balsam country. Van Meter was sent in to check the place over. The only person there was the owner, Emil Wanatka, a pleasant faced, large man, who was behind the bar polishing glasses.

"I've got my friends with me. Outside. Do you have room for us? We want to stay a while."

Wanatka smiled. "Sure thing. This is the off-season. No one here. You got the place to yourself."

"Fine, fine," Van Meter replied. "We'll move right in."

When the gang came in, Dillinger approached Wanatka. "Who's here besides you?"

"My wife. Nobody else. No help this time of year. She does the cooking."

"Call her in here."

Wanatka called his wife, a pleasant, round-faced woman, who

came in from the kitchen wiping her hands on her apron and looking from her husband to the group that stood around the lobby.

Dillinger said flatly, "Tell her who I am. *You know* who I am.

Wanatka wiped the sudden perspiration which coated his forehead, ran his tongue over his lips, and said, "Mama, this is Mr. Dillinger."

Mrs. Wanatka shrank back.

"They won't make trouble, Mama. Don't be afraid." He turned to Dillinger. "You won't make trouble, will you, Mr. Dillinger?"

"No, I won't, if you follow orders. Don't make any telephone calls. Don't let any other customers in here. Tell them you are closed for the season. If anyone comes in for a drink, you can serve them, but that's all. Understand?"

"Yes, sir."

Dillinger turned to Van Meter. "Homer, you are the assistant manager. Stay near that phone. Carroll will relieve you from time to time." He turned to Hamilton. "John, you stay in the lobby and keep an eye on things. Evelyn, you stay with Mrs. Wanatka in the kitchen."

Dillinger, the Barker boys, Creepy Karpis, and Baby-Face Nelson checked into a suite on the second floor to talk things over. The rest of the gang took adjacent rooms, their molls accompanying them.

Eddie Green, a hard-faced gunman, turned to Tommy Carroll.

"This guy Dillinger really takes over, doesn't he?"

"Watch your tongue, Eddie. Johnny Boy is harder and tougher than the Barkers and Karpis put together. One wrong word out of you and you'll be dead."

Eddie Green grunted but said no more.

In the next two days occasional drinkers dropped into the lodge, had a few drinks and left. Hamilton eyed each customer closely, a hawk in his scrutiny as he appraised each man who came into the lodge.

Events were suddenly to move swiftly, violently, with death the main visitor, despite the watchfulness of Hamilton, Van Meter, and Evelyn Frechette.

A man named Peter Voss had recognized Dillinger and Doc Barker when the gang had stopped for gas just outside of Spider Lake.

He was sure of his recognition but waited until Sunday before he notified the local sheriff, who notified the FBI. On the same day, Karpis asked Mrs. Wanatka where he could get some shirts done quickly. She called in a woman who did laundry. While Karpis was explaining how he wanted his shirts done, Dillinger hurried into the room to talk with Hamilton, saw the woman and popped back out of view.

One look, however, was enough. Dillinger's face had become as familiar to readers of newspapers as

that of President Roosevelt. When she left she telephoned the FBI.

Fifty agents of the FBI converged on the lodge. They were in charge of Melvin Purvis. About nine o'clock the FBI Agents moved closer and closer to the lodge, shielded by the trees and the night. They waited patiently while Purvis scouted the grounds. There were three cars parked on the grounds. Two belonged to the gang. The other belonged to three neighborhood men who had dropped in for a drink.

About eleven o'clock, the three men came out, slightly drunk, and got into their car. Unable to see clearly in the dark, the G-Men believed the three men to be part of the gang.

"Halt!" Purvis yelled. "We're federal agents!"

The three men, too drunk to understand the situation, started their car and began to drive off.

"Get 'em!" Purvis ordered loudly.

The agents opened up with machine guns. One man, a Civilian Conservation Camp worker, was killed; another, a cook, was seriously wounded. The third escaped unharmed.

Inside the lodge, Dillinger gave swift orders. In the next instant, gunfire exploded from inside the building. The G-Men returned the fire, and a small-scale war ensued. Dillinger, Hamilton, Van Meter, and Baby-Face Nelson, followed

by the Barkers, Creepy Karpis, Tommy Carroll, and Eddie Green, raced out the back door, their guns smoking. The four girls, Helen Gillis, wife of Baby-Face Nelson; Jean Delaney, Marie Conforti, and Evelyn Frechette were left behind.

The gang leaped into the two cars, still firing their weapons, gunned the motors and roared to safety through heavy gun-fire. A few miles down the road, Baby-Face Nelson came across FBI agents W. Carter Baum and Jay Newman, and local Constable Carl Christensen. In the gun-battle that followed, Nelson killed Baum and seriously wounded Christensen and Newman.

Herbert Youngblood, meanwhile, who had escaped with Dillinger, was found by police officers in Port Huron, Michigan. He shot it out with the cops, killing one cop and wounding two others in the torrid gun-battle. The full complement of cops moved in on him and riddled him with lead from machine guns, shotguns, and pistols.

The Barkers and Creepy Karpis split from Eddie Green, Tommy Carroll, and Baby-Face Nelson. Dillinger, Hamilton, and Van Meter stayed together. And once more Dillinger was without a gang.

The three men made it safely to Chicago. There Dillinger, knowing he was hotter than any man had ever been before, sought out a crooked doctor through underworld contacts and had him per-



form plastic surgery in order to change his face.

While he was being treated, more than 5,000 men were mobilized to search for him in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Illinois. In Indiana, Matt Leach hunted him day and night, as much as Victor Hugo's Inspector Javert hunted Jean Valjean, relentlessly, passionately, with rancor and dreadful vengeance.

After the operation, Dillinger grew a mustache, trimmed his heavy eyebrows to narrow lines, and put on a pair of gold-rimmed eyeglasses. With his nose bobbed and the deep cleft in his chin removed, he looked little like his pictures in the newspapers.

Certain he wouldn't be recognized, Dillinger boldly walked the streets of Chicago with Hamilton and Van Meter. They visited the World's Fair, and in one of the midway joints he met a sexy blond named Pauline "Polly" Hamilton, divorced wife of an East Chicago cop.

Dillinger made a big pitch for her and she went for it. She was on the lookout for another man and Dillinger looked like what she wanted. She took him to the flat of Anna Sage, nee Ana Cumpapas, a buxom, handsome, dark-haired, dark-eyed woman, who had operated call houses in East Chicago before the cops gently eased her out. Polly Hamilton had worked for her there.

Dillinger sized up the situation and accepted it. He should have known better, because almost without exception a prostitute or madam is the most treacherous of females and would sell her own mother to protect herself. But Anna Sage was pleasant, agreeable, offered him the full use of her flat for his amorous dilly-dallying with Polly Hamilton.

Furthermore, having recognized him as John Dillinger rather than Jack Lawrence, the name he gave Polly and her, she began playing him with the skill of a virtuoso playing a violin.

Anna Sage had made up her mind to turn him in, not only for the reward but because she needed the help of a federal agency to forestall a deportation proceeding against her. She felt that turning the most wanted man in the country in to the police would win her consideration.

THE NEXT DAY Anna went to East Chicago and sought out Detective Martin Zarkovitch, who had been a close friend of Detective O'Malley, whom John Dillinger murdered in the holdup of the First National Bank and Trust Company in downtown East Chicago. He wanted Dillinger more than he wanted anything in his life.

"I'll turn Dillinger in if you'll stop the feds from deporting me to Roumania," Anna said.

"Where is he?" Zarkovitch asked eagerly.

"You didn't say you would help me."

"Anna, I didn't chase you out of East Chicago. I tried to hold the other boys back, but you had three convictions for operating houses. I did my best, but just couldn't talk the boys out of it."

"I don't give a damn about that. What I want now is for the feds to drop their deportation proceedings against me."

"I'll do what I can. Come back tomorrow. Be careful, Anna. If Dillinger finds out you're going to cross him he'll murder you in your bed. He's kill-crazy."

"I'll be careful. You do your part and I'll do mine."

The next day Anna Sage met with Zarkovitch, Captain Timothy O'Neil, Zarkovitch's superior, Samuel P. Cowley, FBI Agent in charge of the Chicago office, and Matt Leach. Leach was like a wild man, urging Cowley to promise Anna Sage anything she wanted.

"Talk to Hoover," Leach urged. "He can talk to the immigration people. What the hell is the big deal? A madam for the most wanted killer in America. For cripe's sake why don't you get on the phone and get this thing arranged?"

Cowley was as much excited over the prospect of getting Dillinger as was Leach and Zarkovitch, but he kept his emotions under con-

trol. "Mr. Leach, the federal government does things a little differently than you people. I'll talk to my superiors. I promise you I'll do everything I can, everything in my power. Call in Mrs. Sage."

Anna came into the office and faced the group of police officers.

"Do we have a deal?" she asked bluntly.

"Mrs. Sage," Cowley said, "I want you to understand that the FBI has no connection with the Immigration Department, despite the fact that the Immigration Department is a division of the Department of Justice. But I promise you that I shall do everything in my power to help you, and I know that Mr. Purvis will do the same, and I am sure that with our pleadings for you that Mr. Hoover will go along with us. Now, how do you plan on giving us Dillinger?"

"I don't know," she answered.

"Where is he?" Cowley asked.

"That I won't say."

"Can you get him to your home, your apartment? We'll do the rest. Just tell us when he'll be there."

"My God no!" she retorted quickly. "His friends would kill me."

"He has no more friends, Mrs. Sage. John Hamilton and Homer Van Meter are dead. The Barker boys and Karpis are on the run. So are the rest of the gang. And the underworld wouldn't touch Dillinger with a ten-foot pole. He's brought too much heat on them al-

ready. You've got nothing to fear."

"No. I won't do that. Some nut might decide to avenge him. It has happened before. I'll tell you what. He likes to go to movies. I'll arrange for us to go to a movie. I'll have Polly Hamilton with me. She's a blond, kinda full in the chest, you know. You'll be able to recognize her. I'll wear a red dress so your men will be able to spot me."

"How will we know which movie you'll be going to, and when?" Cowley asked.

"I'll call you. I'll manage to go out of the house for a while, for enough time to allow me to call you."

"Okay, Mrs. Sage. We'll wait for your call."

When Anna Sage left, Cowley got in touch with Melvin Purvis, who insisted on a meeting with her. Cowley arranged it when Anna Sage called him two days later to say that Dillinger had refused to go to a movie. "He said he smells something funny, that he always gets that feeling when things aren't right. Where do you want me to meet you?"

Cowley told her.

The next afternoon she met with Purvis.

"What movie house?" Purvis asked.

"Usually it's the Marboro. On the West Side. You're going to help me? Mr. Cowley told you what I wanted?"

"Yes. I promise you I'll do every-

thing I can. You have my word for it."

True to his word, Purvis did do everything he could but she was deported anyway after it was all over. Furthermore, she got only \$5,000 of the reward money. When she reached her native Roumania she was harassed beyond all endurance by the European underworld for the stool pigeon she was, and died of cancer, broken in spirit.

On the morning of July 22, a Sunday, one of the hottest days in Chicago history, Anna Sage telephoned Cowley that Polly, Dillinger, and she would attend the Biograph theatre.

Cowley immediately got in touch with Purvis, who took several men with him and went over the layout of the movie house, all the exits, the entrance, the surrounding streets. The movie house was a cheap theatre located on Lincoln Avenue. The movie being shown was a feature starring Clark Gable, William Powell, and Myrna Loy titled *Manhattan Melodrama*, a gangster picture, the kind John Dillinger liked.

Some forty FBI Agents, Detective Zarkovitch, Captain Timothy O'Neil, and Matt Leach were staked out around the theatre. Purvis warned Leach not to do anything foolhardy.

"Mr. Leach, I know all about you, your hatred of Dillinger, and your passion to get him. This is a federal show. The FBI. Get it? If

you do anything untoward to upset the apple cart I promise you I'll have your hide. You just stay on the sidelines."

"Suppose he comes my way? Don't I even get that opportunity?"

"No. He won't come your way, Mr. Leach, because you're going to stay the hell out of the way!"

Leach swore. "I'd give ten years of my life to get him."

"Mr. Leach, get the hell in your car and stay there. That's it!"

Purvis kept calling John Edgar Hoover in Washington every half hour to report the progress.

"He's still in the theatre," Purvis reported at ten o'clock. "I judge that he'll come out about 10:30 or so. We've got everything under control here."

At 10:30, Purvis called again. "I checked with the manager. He said the movie would be over in ten minutes. I'll call you when it's over. We've got him this time. There's no way out for him. None at all. The show is over."

And finally, the show was over. At 10:40 people began streaming out of the theatre. Agents began moving in from every side, mainly to cover Dillinger, and secondly, to protect any innocent bystanders who might inadvertently walk into the line of gunfire.

When about half the crowd had emerged from the theatre, Anna Sage came out. Behind her walked Polly Hamilton, and behind Polly was John Dillinger, the most want-

ed man in the United States. He was wearing a white shirt open at the throat, a white straw hat, and he looked from side to side as he walked out, scanning the faces in the crowd.

The three walked with casual indifference down the street, Anna Sage in her red dress, Polly Hamilton in a blue skirt and pale yellow blouse, ignorant of Anna Sage's perfidy.

As the trio neared the alley, Anna Sage caught Purvis' signal and hurried a few steps ahead of Dillinger. Purvis and two other agents moved in.

"Hello, Johnny," Purvis said in a low tone. "Keep your hands at your sides. The show is over."

Dillinger spun around, saw Purvis and the two other agents with guns in their hands, and started to run down the alley, while he tugged at a pocket in his trousers for a gun. There was a quick series of shots, five, ten, it was hard to say.

Dillinger continued to race down the alley, his hand still in his pocket, and suddenly he stumbled but did not fall, and he felt blood in his mouth, choked and spat it out. There were more shots, and again he stumbled, gasped desperately for air, coughed and spat out more blood.

He stopped running then and stood there with his head bent and coughed up his guts. Slowly, his body bent forward and then he dropped. The most sensational

bank robber of his time, cocky, handsome, a hero to untold thousands who saw in his depredations against the banks something romantic, daring, and a getting even for them for the losses they suffered when the banks closed in failure.

Instant pandemonium raged over the crowded street as word spread. "Dillinger! John Dillinger! They got Dillinger!"

Police and FBI agents tried to control the crowd but it was an impossible task. The mob converged over the area where Dillinger's blood had dripped from his body. They dipped their handkerchiefs in it, and some ran to where he lay and tore at his clothes for a souvenir until the cops pushed them away.

And still more came, screaming hysterically, heedless of the cops, and more after them, and Dillinger

lay there in the dirty alley, still, motionless, the blood oozing out of his wounds, heedless, unknowing, and very dead.

Matt Leach forced his way through the crowd and stared at the bloody remains of the man who had frustrated him for a solid year, and who had frustrated him through Agent Purvis to the very end.

"You sonofabitch," he swore half-aloud. Then, passionately, "You dirty sonofabitch!"

He pushed a toe against a shoulder of the dead man, turned up the face with its sightless eyes, spat down at the bloody features then, turned and walked through the crowd which stared angrily at his retreating back.

"Who the hell was that guy?" a man asked another.

"Some nut, I guess, who didn't like Dillinger!"

**Next Issue—Another Incredible TRUE CRIME Story**

## **VINCENT COLL: MAD DOG OF THE UNDERWORLD**

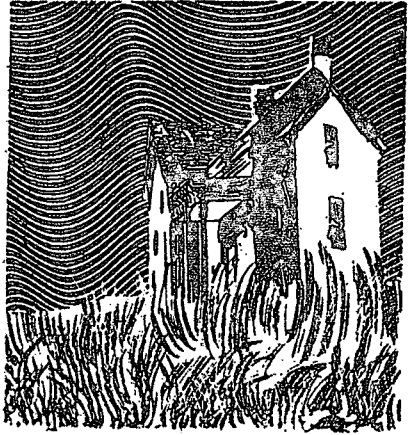
*The True Story of a Violent Hoodlum*

**by DAVID MAZROFF**

*Despoiler of women—killer of little children—some crime experts have called Mad Dog Coll the most evil criminal our century has known. Feared by police and the underworld alike, he raped and looted and killed. Until, one day, Dutch Schultz called his bluff . . .*

# THE SILENT DEATH

by  
**ARTHUR  
PORGES**



*Silently, stealthily, it roamed the valley*

*—the Thing whose touch meant death.*

**A**T THE alumni dinner, where he was the guest of honor, Judge Trimble, instead of talking about his many achievements, chose—as was characteristic of the man—to speak of his one great failure. Perhaps it was a kind of catharsis, since the case had haunted him for twenty years.

“Twelve people mysteriously dead,” Trimble told the group. “A whole family—father, mother, ten children—found in their beds. I was district attorney then, as you know, so it was my baby. We had a perfect suspect, old man—I’d bet-

ter call him ‘Sauer’; not his name, but surely his nature. He hated the Bartlett family because he couldn’t buy his way past them, and money had never failed him before.

“You see, this Sauer owned most of the valley, except for fifty acres in a choice spot. Doc Newmar had that. He was willing enough to sell—for an outrageous price—but the trouble was that the Bartletts had somehow got a crazy lease, ninety-nine years or the death of the last survivor of the twelve. Being mountain folk and stubborn, they just didn’t want to get out. All their

kids had been born and reared in Sleepy Hollow, and if the parents had any say, would die there.

"Old Sauer cajoled, nagged, and finally threatened, but the Bartletts wouldn't budge.

"Things went on like that for some years, while I was working up from attorney to police chief to D. A. Then, on a summer night, a warm, still one, the roof fell in on the Bartletts and me. A relative came by in the morning, and found all twelve dead in their beds, peacefully, with no signs of violence.

"After the hot, quiet night, there had been a brief thunderstorm, with rain and wind, so no tracks showed up except the relation's, and he was a harmless enough sort, almost half-witted, in fact. Not the kind to plan so subtle and offbeat a crime, and with nothing whatever to gain from the family's extermination. There were several heirs ahead of him, and no assets of account, anyhow.

"Well, at first I wasn't discouraged; I was young and confident. I just didn't believe anybody could kill a dozen people and get away with it clean. The more bodies, I thought—foolishly enough—the less chance of a flawless operation by the murderer. And I had a pretty good idea who he had to be in these circumstances. Only Old Man Sauer had anything against the Bartletts; and he was one of the most ruthless and domineering landowners in the county. A hard,

mean, bitter fellow, who couldn't bear to be thwarted.

"Medical work—toxicology, spectrograms, fancy chemistry—wasn't much in those days, not in our county. Still, the coroner, Doctor Murphy, did his best. All he could say for sure was that there hadn't been any force used—no wounds of any kind, no strangulation, not even with pillows over mouths and noses. And not a trace of poison. Just a kind of quiet, deadly suffocation in their sleep.

"But it had been a warm night; all the windows were wide open, and hadn't been messed with. For that matter, the old house had enough cracks and crevices to oxygenate a regiment, even with every door and window closed tight.

"Naturally, we grilled Sauer, but you might as well flog a granite boulder with a feather-duster and hope to shatter it. He was tough, defiant, and—or so I felt—gloating. We couldn't tie him to the ghastly crime, if it were a crime—at all.

"'Sickly lot!' he told us, grinning, as if the death of twelve people, ten of them only kids, was a big joke. 'Full of fever and bad food, like sowbelly, grits, pot-licker. Never heard of vitamins, that kind. Just up and died, and you come around pestering me, one of the biggest men around here. I'll have your hide for this, Trimble. That's a promise.'

"He tried, too, and almost made

it. Even the governor was a bit shy of old Sauer.

"And that's all there is to tell, actually. We worked on the case intermittently for many months, but got nowhere. I began to think, myself, that it was natural causes after all, that the Bartlett family had contracted one of those quick, deadly fevers of fifty years earlier, and being genetically alike all died of it more or less together.

"Silly? Sure, but what else was there? And right now, twenty years later, I still don't have the glimmering of a solution. Sauer got Sleepy Hollow by paying the owner's price—and Doc Newmar, I believe, didn't gouge as much as he might've. Scared maybe the Bartletts had been murdered by Sauer at that, and it wasn't smart to push the old swine.

"And now," the judge concluded, with a wry smile, "I'm ready to hear any glib solutions."

He got plenty of them immediately but none was even plausible. They ranged from the familiar "jungle poison, quite undetectable, to the application of a huge plastic sheet—not invented at the time of the mystery—to the Bartlett house in such a way as to shut off all the air.

Pleasantly, with the iron logic of his long judicial training, Judge Trimble demolished these fanciful explanations before they got airborne.

He didn't expect anything bet-

ter, when at the Law Quarterly Centenary he found himself seated alongside a small, dried-up, obscenely bald fellow by the name of Gunter.

"Heard your talk, or rather heered about it from a friend. The one at the alumni dinner. Me, I never went to no college." He gave Trimble a twinkling glance from electric-blue eyes. "What am I doing here, you wonder. Legitimate, Judge. Cross my heart. I'm ex-sheriff of Mortonville. Yep, that's the one. Forty miles northeast of Oak Ridge, where you was D. A."

"I see," Trimble said. "One of us. I suppose you remember the Bartlett case, then. Must have stirred up interest at least as far as Mortonville."

"You bet," Gunter assured him. "It took the wind out of my own sails. First big case we ever had happened at the same time but nobody was paying attention. Just as well; I didn't solve mine, either," he added, with a smile.

It was a warm, flashing one that lit up his whole crinkly face, and the judge suddenly liked Gunter.

"Well," Trimble smiled back. "We're not likely to clear the record now, eh, Sheriff?"

The little man slyly laid one finger alongside his snub nose. "Wanna bet? The two cases fit together like a glove and hand, although I never saw it until hearing about your talk."



Trimble stiffened in his chair. "What!"

"Lemme tell you, Judge. Your crime happened on July nine. Well, on July 1 the Deming Company got burglarized. One man, I figured, in a pick-up. Know what they made? Lots of special equipment for police and fire work. Axes, hoses, extinguishers. And what did the crook take? I'll tell you. Nothing but twenty big fire extinguishers. There was cash in the safe; you could open the thing with a cake-cutter, so help me; but he didn't even try. Lots of stuff more valuable for fencing than fire extinguishers with Deming name on 'em. I never did figure it—until now."

"I don't see—" Trimble began, but Gunter waved him to silence.

"Remember Sleepy Hollow? It was just that, a deep, hollow clearing in Bartlett's fifty acres; almost a pit; shady and cool.

"Well, them extinguishers was full of carbon dioxide, and when

you turned one on, the stuff came out in a big snowy cloud. I been reading up since your talk stirred my mind about the old case. I see it all plain. Sauer—you meant Luther West, of course; that was his real name—West went up on the ridge over the hollow, opening them extinguishers one after another, filling the place with carbon dioxide snow.

"It's heavier than air; it flowed down like water and into the house, too. And them Bartletts died in their sleep; no oxygen left in the hollow. Simple, hey?"

The judge gaped at him. "My God! You mean—"

"Simple, hey?" Gunter repeated. "Bet we could dig up them empty cylinders right now, twenty years later, if we'd a mind to. Somewhere on West's land. Only his kids have it now, and he's been dead fourteen years himself. So what's the good? Except that now we know. We finally know." He gave Trimble another grin. "If only we'd matched cases then, hey?"



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# THE PERFECT CRIME

*A thousand men had wished him evil. Now  
he was slain—yet by no man's hand. How?*

by **BILL PRONZINI**

SHERIFF AUBREY CANFIELD and his deputy, Luther Harmon—the entire police force of Fall City (population 2006)—were playing gin rummy when the telephone rang in the city jail, just before ten that morning.

The sheriff reached for it at the side of his desk with his left hand, his eyes studying the fan of cards held in his right.

"Sheriff Canfield speaking," he said when he had fumbled the receiver to his ear.

He listened a moment, said, "What?" in a surprised voice, waited again, and then, "Yes, ma'am, we'll be there right away." He dropped the receiver in its cradle, a frown creasing his forehead.

"Something important, Sheriff?" Luther Harmon asked.

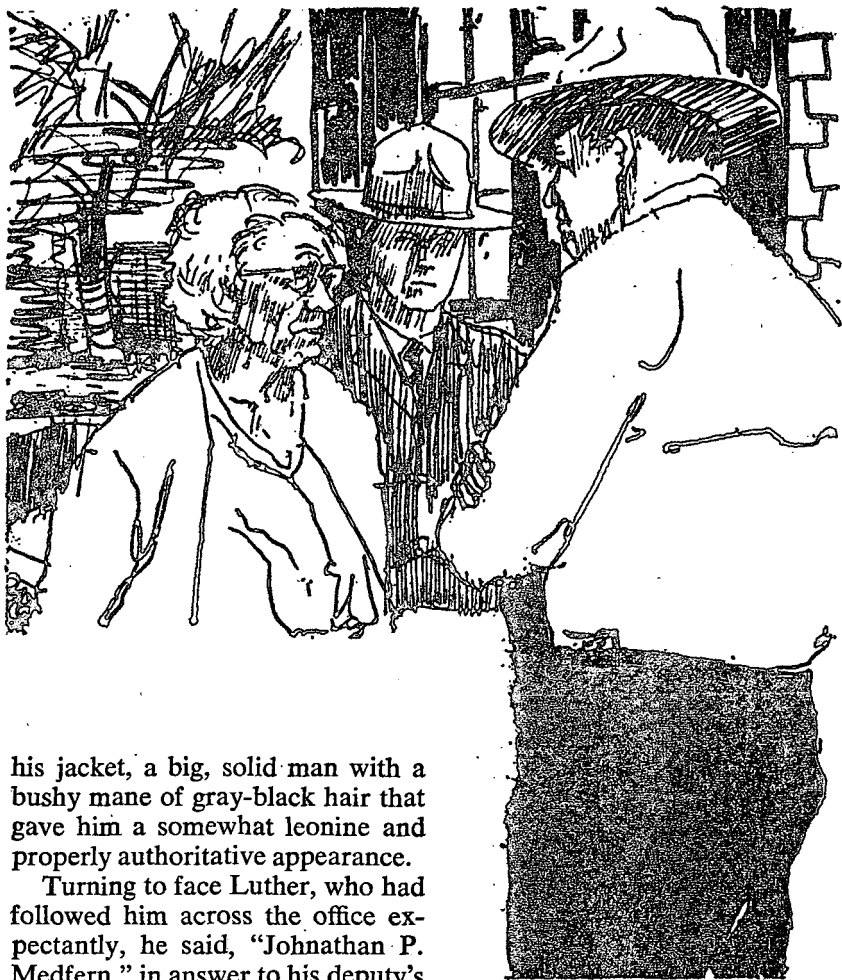
"There's been a killing, Luther," the sheriff said slowly.

"A killing?" Luther said, his watery blue eyes round. "You mean a murder?"

The sheriff was non-committal. "Could be," he said. "Won't know till we get all the details."

"A murder," Luther said, tasting the word. "No kidding?" His voice was awed. A murder in Fall City occurred about as often as an eclipse of the sun, and was received with just as much excitement. "Who was it?"

The sheriff rose from his chair and picked his hat off the rack near the door. He shrugged heavily into



his jacket, a big, solid man with a bushy mane of gray-black hair that gave him a somewhat leonine and properly authoritative appearance.

Turning to face Luther, who had followed him across the office expectantly, he said, "Johnathan P. Medfern," in answer to his deputy's question. "Found dead out at his place."

Luther's thin mouth gaped. "Old Man Medfern?" he said incredulously. "Well, I'll be dogged!" He shook his head, almost in disbelief, and rubbed the bald spot near the crown. Grinning, he added, "Reck-

on Fall City'll declare a national holiday, eh, Sheriff?"

"Now, Luther," the sheriff said quietly, "that ain't no way to talk about the recent dead."

"Sure," Luther said. "Sorry." But he was still grinning as he clamped his hat on his head.

They went out to the front of the small building that housed the jail. A battered Ford of unknown vintage that served as police car waited tiredly at the curb. Luther climbed in behind the wheel and turned over the engine. The Ford coughed phlegmatically, wheezed, and died. After making a second feeble protest, the engine finally caught and hung on thinly.

His eyes bright with excitement, Luther eased the creaking automobile away from the curb. "Who found him, Sheriff?"

"Old woman who lives in that little cottage on his property," the sheriff answered. "Amantha Bemis."

Luther grimaced. "She's a weird one, to hear folks tell it."

"Now, Luther," the sheriff said mildly.

"Way I get it," Luther went on, "she sits and talks with dead people. Spirits and things. A real looney, Sheriff."

"You shouldn't put much truck in them stories, Luther. You don't even know Miss Bemis."

"Reckon not," Luther said, unconvinced.

He coaxed the Ford a half mile north of town and turned onto Pine Mill Road, where the Medfern sanctuary sat stiffly on a bluff, its backside indifferently overlooking Fall City.

The road climbed steadily, and the Ford moved upward in low gear, belching steam from its radiator. They rounded a turn, and came on the pair of high, medieval-looking iron gates that marked the entrance to the Medfern property.

The closed gates, the only split in the crumbling brick wall that encircled the Medfern property like the Wall of China, were not locked. No one had bothered Johnathan P. Medfern when he was alive. Most of Fall City's younger generation thought the place was haunted, and there were quite a number of the elder citizenry who were inclined to agree.

Luther stopped the Ford just outside the gates, got out and swung them open. They drove through, following a winding dirt road through a copse of eucalyptus trees.

When the road emerged from the deep shadows cast by the dense growth of eucalyptus, they found themselves in a wide clearing. There reigned the Medfern mansion.

It was huge and Victorian, a sprawling jumble of gables and turrets with a steeply-rising slate roof. The steel-gray facade was abundant with ornamental tiling and horizontal brickwork whose various colors had long since faded into oblivion. The dormer windows, covered with the grime of age, gave the house a forboding and somewhat sinister appearance, even in the bright sunlight.

Luther shuddered. "Kind of gives you the willies, don't it?"

Sheriff Canfield nodded silently. The house reminded him of its owner. Johnathan P. Medfern, as forboding as his dwelling, a thin, hawk-faced old codger, president of Fall City's only bank, and a living—at least until today—embodiment of the villains in a *Perils of Pauline* serial. Mean and cantankerous, Medfern had lent large sums of money to poor farmers in the area, charging unreasonable interest rates, and when the payments could not be met he would foreclose immediately.

As a result, he owned three-quarters of the land surrounding Fall City, and from all intent and purpose had been trying to be the first man in history to own every strip of ground in Jason County.

But now the old man was dead, and, as Luther had said, he was sure the people of Fall City would greet the news with blasphemous glee. If it *were* murder, the sheriff decided, just about anyone in Fall City over the age of twenty could have done it.

Luther maneuvered the Ford along the dirt road and off onto a packed earth drive that made a complete oval in front of the house to double back upon the road. Off to the right, partially hidden by a high hedge, was the cottage Amantha Bemis occupied. When Luther circled the drive to the front porch of the Medfern mansion, he

brought the laboring Ford to a halt.

Miss Amantha Bemis, supporting her thin body on a gnarled wooden cane, stood on an overgrown brick walk that began to the right of the house, on the opposite side of the drive. The gentle morning wind ruffled her wispy white hair, and she peered myopically through thick rimless glasses as Canfield and Luther emerged from the Ford.

"Miss Bemis?" the sheriff asked as they approached.

She bobbed her head. Her eyes were bright behind the glasses. Nobody knew just how old Amantha Bemis really was.

The sheriff took off his hat. "I'm Sheriff Canfield, and this here is my deputy, Luther Harmon."

Amantha Bemis said, "Took you long enough to get here."

"We came as fast as we could, Miss Bemis," the sheriff said.

"Well, follow me." She turned abruptly and walked briskly along the brick walk, her cane making small tapping sounds. Luther looked at the sheriff, who shrugged. They followed her.

The path wound around the side of the house, bisecting an unhealthy-looking brown lawn. Near the rear, directly beneath a high jutting cupola, lay the body of a man, face down on the brown grass, a few feet from the walk. There were shards of broken glass beside the body, and several spinters glistened in the sunlight. Amantha Bemis

stopped and pointed critically with her cane.

"There he is," she announced.

Luther dropped to one knee beside the dead man and turned him gingerly. "It's Medfern, all right," he said.

Amantha Bemis sniffed. "Very observant."

The sheriff's gaze was on the cupola, approximately thirty feet above the ground. A white curtain billowed against the jagged remains of the bay window there.

Luther followed Sheriff Canfield's eyes. "Looks like he fell from up there."

"My," Amantha Bemis said, and sniffed again. "Regular Mike Shayne, ain't he?"

"Now, just—" Luther began, miffed.

"Hold on, now," the sheriff said. "Miss Bemis, how'd you happen to find the body?"

"Come over about nine-thirty to see if the old man wanted me to clean today," Amantha Bemis said. "Saw him lying there. Saw he was dead, too, so I went back to my cottage and called you."

The sheriff nodded. He bent for a closer look at Johnathan P. Medfern. "Been dead quite a while, looks like. Probably killed sometime last night."

He straightened and turned to Amantha Bemis. "Didn't happen to hear anything last night, did you, Miss Bemis?"

Amantha Bemis shook her head

emphatically. "I'm a sound sleeper, Sheriff. Couldn't wake me up if you was to set off a firecracker under my pillow." She made a cackling sound.

"Somebody ought to," Luther mumbled.

Canfield sighed. "Luther, suppose you go inside and call Doc Holloway. Have him get the ambulance and come out here right away."

"Yes, sir," Luther said. He moved away toward the front of the house.

The sheriff turned to Amantha Bemis again. "Medfern lived alone here, ain't that right, Miss Bemis?"

Amantha Bemis cackled again. "Sure wouldn't be nobody who'd want to live with him," she said. "Course there's Old Bruce."

"Old Bruce?"

"His dog," Amantha Bemis said. "The old man used to beat on him regular. Had to have somebody to take his meanness out on, I reckon. But he's real friendly, if you like dogs. Don't, myself. Always digging up my flower beds."

Luther came running around the front of the house. "Sheriff! Hey, Sheriff!"

"That was a mighty fast call," the sheriff said when Luther came up to them.

"Couldn't get inside," Luther said, out of breath. "Place is locked up tighter than a drum."

"Could have told you that,"

Amantha Bemis said. "The old coot locked every door and window before he went to bed at night."

"Do you have a key, Miss Bemis?" Sheriff Canfield asked.

"Oh, I got a key, all right," Amantha Bemis said. "But all the doors got double locks on them. You got to unlock from the inside before you can unlock from the outside."

"Suppose you check around the house," the sheriff said to Luther. "See if any windows been broken into."

"I already done that," Amantha Bemis said. "Ain't nothing been disturbed."

"Say," Luther said, eyes wide, "this here is a real mystery, ain't it? What the crime books call a locked room puzzle. Yessir, just like in one of them crime books."

"Now, Luther," the sheriff said. "Don't go running off to any conclusions. We don't hardly know what happened out here as yet."

Amantha Bemis cackled. "I can tell you what happened, Sheriff."

"How's that?" the sheriff said.

"It's plain as the nose on your face," Amantha Bemis said. "It was the ghosties that done him in."

"Ghosties?"

"The ghosties that live in the cellar."

The sheriff colored slightly. "Would you mind explaining yourself, Miss Bemis?"

"Any fool can see what I'm saying," Amantha Bemis said. "The



place is haunted. Been haunted since the first Medfern died here eighty years ago. He's one of the ghosties, you know."

"And who would the others be, ma'am?"

"Why, other Medferns, of course," Amantha Bemis said, as if surprised at his ignorance. "Most of 'em was good folks. It don't surprise me none that they done him in. I heard 'em talking about it one night, for a fact. But the thing I can't figure is why they waited this long to do it."

Luther made a circular motion with his index finger at the side of his head, and rolled his eyes.

"Luther," the sheriff said, "find a brick or a rock or something and we'll break in one of the windows so we can get inside and have a look around. We got to call Doc Holloway."

"The ghosties won't like that none," Amantha Bemis said. "Breaking up their property."

"Suppose, Miss Bemis," the sheriff said, "you let us handle this the way we see fit."

"Well, don't say I didn't warn you," Amantha Bemis said.

The sheriff and Luther, with Miss Bemis at their heels, circled the house. On the east wing they found a square window that looked into some sort of parlor. The furniture, Canfield decided, peering inside, would have fitted quite well in Wuthering Heights.

"Luther, you find that rock yet?" he said over his shoulder.

Luther came up holding a medium-sized quartz rock. "You want I should heave it through or just tap it right on the glass?"

Amantha Bemis convulsed in gails of laughter. "Lordy, Sheriff," she said. "He's a jewel, he is."

"Give me that rock!" Sheriff Canfield said. He was beginning to lose patience. Luther handed him the rock, and the sheriff smashed the window near the catch. Glass tinkled to the floor inside, and as it did a series of deep-throated bay-ing sounds came from the front of the house. The sounds increased in cadence to a banshee-like howl.

Luther pressed his face to the remains of the window. Just as he did, a huge gray form came bounding through the open door of the parlor, and skidded to a halt in front of the window. Luther backed away, losing his balance, and sat down hard in a clump of dried crys-anthemums beneath the window.

"Sheriff!" he wailed, scrambling to his feet. "Sheriff!"

The Sheriff was looking in the

window. "Luther," he said, "It ain't nothing more than a dog."

"Dog?" Luther said incredulously. "I never seen no dog like that before!"

"Just old Bruce," Amantha Bemis said. There were tears in her eyes. She wiped them away with the back of her hand. "I tell you, Sheriff," she said. "I ain't had such a laugh in a long while. He ought to be on television."

"I ought to plant one right upside her head," Luther said.

Luther withered under the steady gaze of the sheriff's gray eyes.

"All right, now," Sheriff Canfield said. "You crawl in that window there and come around and open up the front door for us."

"With that thing in there?"

"Luther—"

"He's liable to take my leg off," Luther said. "He's big as a full-grown Shetland. And them jaws. Did you see—"

The Sheriff turned to Amantha Bemis. "Is he vicious?"

"Who?"

"Now, who do you suppose, Miss Bemis?"

"Well, I figured maybe you meant the deputy here," Amantha Bemis said. "The way he's been frothing at the mouth."

The sheriff said in a chill voice, "I want some cooperation. Miss Bemis, I asked you once if Old Bruce was vicious. Unless I get a proper answer from you I'm going to throw you in jail, old lady or no,



for impeding an officer during the performance of his duty. Now, once more. Is that dog in there vicious or ain't he?"

"Old Bruce wouldn't harm a fly," Amantha Bemis said stiffly. "Besides, he don't have a tooth in his head."

"You heard what Miss Bemis said," the sheriff said to Luther. "You crawl in that window and open up the front door. Understand?"

"Yes, sir," Luther said quickly.

He went to the window and reached inside, gingerly, watching the hulking form of Old Bruce. Old Bruce wagged his tail. Luther undid the catch and hoisted the window up. He put one leg over the sill, and when the dog made no move to attack, he heaved himself inside.

Canfield and Amantha Bemis walked around to the front of the house. In a moment, Luther had the door unlocked. The sheriff looked at him.

"All that fuss," he said. His color was beginning to return to normal.

"Where would the telephone be?" Sheriff Canfield asked Amantha Bemis.

She was still ruffled, but she nevertheless managed a cackle. "Don't know why all this fuss to get in here to use the telephone," she said, "when you could of used the one in my cottage just as well, the same one I called you on."

The sheriff closed his eyes in the

face of his own stupidity. Why, he asked himself, did there have to be days like this one?

"Now that you're here," Amantha Bemis said, having salved her wounded pride, "you might as well use the phone down at the end of the hallway there."

"Luther," Canfield said wearily, "call Doc Holloway and have him get out here right away. I'm going to have a look around."

"Okay, Sheriff," Luther said.

Old Bruce came padding into the hallway. Luther made a wide path around him and went into the parlor. The sheriff, looking at Old Bruce, decided he had never seen a dog quite like the one that sat on his haunches before him. He had no discernible blood line, as far as the sheriff could see, but he must have been descended from either St. Bernard or Great Dane stock to be as huge as he was. He weighed close to a hundred and fifty pounds if he weighed anything at all.

Turning, he saw the winding circular staircase that led to the upper floors. He noticed the damp, musty smell then, seeming to permeate from the walls of the old house, and he noticed how dark it was in there, as if no sunlight had ever penetrated the interior. The cavernous rooms reminded him of the caves up near Goose Bay Pond.

Just as he started up the stairs, Luther came out from the parlor. "The doc's on his way, Sheriff."

The sheriff nodded. He pro-

ceeded up the stairs, Luther following. They found Johnathan P. Medfern's bedroom, the room from which he had fallen, halfway down the long, gloomy hallway that stretched from the front to the rear of the house.

Entering, Sheriff Canfield felt as if he had suddenly regressed fifty years to the time of his youth. He remembered that his grandmother had had a bedroom similar to this one, replete with high-canopied four-poster, long gilt mirror, chintz curtains, carved maple dresser, and a creaking rocker with a straight back that stood close to six feet high. A cedar chest reposed at the foot of the bed, and there was the odor of dust, time and moth balls.

"Lordy," Luther said in awe. "Ain't this something?"

The sheriff crossed to where the chintz curtains billowed in the broken window. Below, he could see the body of Johnathan P. Medfern lying in the shards of broken glass. He knelt and examined the floor beneath the window. There was no glass, as far as he could tell, and there seemed to be no signs of any struggle.

He made a closer inspection of the bedroom, but everything seemed to be in order. It did not look as if anyone but Johnathan P. Medfern had ever been in this room.

Canfield went to the window again and stood looking out. Behind him Luther said, "Well, Sher-

iff, what do you figure happened?"

"Don't rightly have an idea!"

"Could it have been suicide?"

"If you was going to commit suicide by jumping out a window, don't you reckon you'd open the window first?"

"Well," Luther said, "I guess I would at that."

"Wasn't suicide," the sheriff said.

"Must be that somebody pushed him, then."

"Could be," the sheriff said. "But there wasn't no signs of forcible entry. And it don't look like anybody's been in here except the old man. Besides; the house was locked up tight."

"Maybe it was the old bat downstairs," Luther said. "She could have pocketed one of Medfern's keys and then come up here last night and pushed him out the window."

"What would Miss Bemis want to kill the old man for?"

"She's a nut," Luther said. "You can't tell what them nuts will do."

The sheriff wasn't discounting the possibility, but it didn't strike him as likely. She was too old to do much pushing, let alone a sinewy old man like Medfern. But, with her talking about ghosties in the cellar . . .

The only other answer the sheriff could see at the moment was that Johnathan P. Medfern's death had been accidental. He might have tripped or stumbled on some-

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thing and gone right on through the window. But, looking around the room again, the sheriff could see nothing in close proximity to the window which could have caused Medford to lose his balance. The floor near the window was bare on both sides, and the closet thing in front of it was the cedar chest, which was a good six feet away.

The sheriff was frankly puzzled. Maybe, he thought, Doc Holloway could tell something from the body. The old man might have been drunk. No, he never used alcohol. Well, maybe he'd been sick. That might account for an accidental fall.

The sheriff and Luther went downstairs. They waited in the parlor, with Amantha Bemis, who seemed to be enjoying a secret joke.

Ten minutes passed before Doc Holloway brought Fall City's faded white ambulance to a halt in front of the Medfern mansion. Sheriff Canfield went outside to meet him, and after exchanging amenities, took him around to where the body of Johnathan P. Medfern lay.

The sheriff waited patiently while Doc Holloway examined the body. When he was finished, and they had carried the remains of the old man to the waiting ambulance, the sheriff said, "What do you figure, Doc?"

"Nothing much to figure," Doc Holloway said. "Fool cuss fell out the window and broke his neck."

"Well, I reckoned that's what it was, all right, Doc. But I mean—"



"Any fool could see that," Doc Holloway said.

With more patience than he felt at the moment, the sheriff explained to Doc Holloway the circumstances surrounding Johnathan P. Medfern's death. Finishing, he said, "Do you reckon he could have been sick, Doc? You know—heart attack or dizzy spell or some such?"

"Old fool was in fine health," Doc Holloway said. "Give him a check-up just last week. Could have lived to be a hundred."

"Well, maybe it was a seizure," the sheriff said. "Those things come on pretty sudden, don't they?"

"Could have been, but don't seem likely. Won't know for sure till I open the old fool up. But you want my opinion, weren't anything like that."

After Doc Holloway left, Canfield went back into the house. Luther and Amantha Bemis were in the parlor, scowling at one another. Old Bruce lay on the floor between them, sleeping.

"What'd the doc have to say?" Luther asked.

"Not very much," the sheriff said. "He'll know more after he does an autopsy."

"What do we do now, Sheriff?"

"Reckon we'd best have a good look around the house," the sheriff told him. "I'll check around upstairs and you look over down here."

"I already took a look around," Luther said.

"Find anything?"

"Not a thing that looked suspicious."

"You check down in the cellar?"

"Not me," Luther said.

"Why not?"

"He's afraid the ghosties will get him," Amantha Bemis said from the parlor sofa. "They don't like folks traipsing around in the cellar."

"I ain't afraid of no such thing," Luther said.

"Not much, you ain't," Amantha Bemis said. She cackled.

"Never mind that nonsense," the sheriff said. "Just take a look down there while I go upstairs."

Luther wet his lips. "You come along with me, Sheriff?"

"Luther," the sheriff said, feeling very tired, "there ain't no such things as ghosts. You know that well as I do."

"Sure," Luther said. "But this place gives me the creeps. I don't trust nothing that goes on around here."

"All right," the sheriff said with a sigh. "We'll both look around down in the cellar."

They found the cellar door in a pantry off the kitchen. Deep blackness, and a cold, dank odor that once again reminded the sheriff of the caves up at Goose Bay Pond, greeted them when they opened the door.

Canfield looked around for a light switch, but found none.

"Go out to the car and get the flashlight," he told Luther.

When Luther returned with the flashlight, the sheriff flicked it on and probed the cellar. Cobwebs seemed to cover everything in thick gray gossamer, and there was the scurrying of small feet on the cellar floor when the light came on. Luther shuddered.

They went down the creaking wooden steps. In the swinging arc of light, they saw a stack of decaying boxes, an old steamer trunk, an unidentifiable pile of mildewed junk against one wall. The sheriff moved into the middle of the cellar floor and stopped, still playing the light.

Luther, however, had been virtually hanging on to the sheriff's jacket, looking warily about, and did not see him stop. Luther bumped into the sheriff from the rear, throwing him off balance, and Canfield dropped the flashlight. It winked out as it struck the floor. The cellar was plunged into blackness again.

"Damn you, Luther!" the sher-

iff yelled, bending over to grope for the light.

"I'm getting out of here!" Luther said, plunging forward blindly and banging into the stack of boxes near the stairs, sending them clattering noisily to the floor. He stumbled, falling to his hands and knees.

As he started to push himself up, something soft and damp and furry touched one of his hands. Luther, terrified, let out a baying sound much like that of Old Bruce, jumped to his feet, and kicked another box with the heel of his shoe, which promptly skidded across the floor and banged into the sheriff's shin as he bent, looking for the flashlight.

The sheriff, quite naturally, yelled with the sudden pain, and Luther, not knowing where or who the sound had come from, emitted another baying yelp, found the stairs and clambered up them like a runaway freight.

The sheriff, cursing, pulled himself up the steps and on to the landing. Luther cowered in the pantry, his face white.

"Something touched my hand, Sheriff," Luther said in a voice that shook with terror. "Something cold and wet and clammy. The old lady was right. There's something alive down in—" He broke off, seeing the sheriff's face.

"Rats!" the sheriff yelled, advancing. "Rats, you damn fool!"

The sheriff stopped, remembering himself. "Luther," he said, "I'm

giving you just five seconds to get out of my sight. I ain't going to be responsible for what happens if you're still here after that."

Luther turned hurriedly and disappeared through the kitchen. Canfield leaned against the wall until the stinging pain in both his shins subsided, and he had recovered his composure. There was going to be a new deputy in his office come tomorrow morning, he vowed.

In the parlor he found Luther sitting on the sofa near Amantha Bemis, telling her what had happened to him in the cellar. Amantha Bemis was cackling delightedly.

"Luther," the sheriff said softly.

Luther looked up, frightened.

"We're going to have another look upstairs now," the sheriff said, smiling.

"Yes, sir," Luther said, getting up.

"You're going first," the sheriff said. "I want you where I can see you the whole time. I don't trust you even sitting here in the parlor."

"Yes, sir," Luther said in a very small voice.

They went upstairs again, Luther in the lead. There were eight rooms, four on each side of the long hallway. In each of the seven rooms, discounting Johnathan P. Medfern's bedroom, white sheets covered the furniture, and from the odor that escaped when Sheriff Canfield opened the doors, the air

inside had been stagnating for some time.

Returning to Johnathan P. Medfern's bedroom, the sheriff went over everything carefully once more. He checked the dresser and looked into the cedar chest, finding several odds and ends and a sour smell of cedar. He closed the chest quickly. At the single closet, he found two ancient double-breasted suits and a dustball in one corner. When he closed the door and turned, Luther was on his hands and knees, looking under the bed.

The sheriff closed his eyes, shaking his head slowly. "Luther, what you looking for under there? More ghosts?"

"Hey," Luther said, reaching under the bed. "I found something, Sheriff."

Probably a dirty sock, Sheriff Canfield thought sourly.

Luther retrieved whatever it was he had found and got to his feet. He stood looking at the object in his hand, a long, thin white piece of wood. "What do you suppose it is, Sheriff?"

The sheriff took it from Luther. "Willow swatch," he said. "Bark's been stripped from it."

"What's a willow swatch doing under old man Medfern's bed?"

The sheriff frowned, turning the swatch over in his hand. A germ of an idea tickled the back of his mind. It grew steadily then, and at first he was inclined to discard it as ridiculous. But the more he thought

about it, the more possible it seemed to him.

"What's the matter, Sheriff?" Luther asked, looking at him.

The sheriff glanced up. He wasn't about to tell Luther what he'd been thinking. "Nothing," he said. "Let's get back downstairs."

In the parlor once more, he turned to Luther. "Suppose you escort Miss Bemis back to her cottage," he said. "We're just about finished here."

"Don't need him to show me the way," Amantha Bemis said testily.

"Just the same," the sheriff said, "Luther'll walk you over. Won't you, Luther?"

"Do I have to?"

"Get out of here!" the sheriff yelled.

When they had gone Sheriff Canfield stood thinking for a moment, then shook his head and walked to where Old Bruce lay on the thin rug in front of the sofa. The dog lifted his head, eyeing the sheriff, and a low growl started deep in his throat.

Sheriff Canfield halted, frowning, and then realized he still carried the willow swatch. He tossed it away quickly, spreading his hands. Old Bruce put his head back down.

The sheriff knelt down beside the animal. "Good boy," he said, touching Old Bruce's head carefully. "Good old dog."

Old Bruce thumped his tail on the floor. The sheriff continued to

pat his head, ruffling the fur on his neck. The dog whimpered slightly. Sheriff Canfield saw then the ugly red welts on the animal's neck, some healing, some still fresh. As fresh as last night.

The sheriff knew then, for certain if any last vestiges of doubt had lingered, who had killed Johnathan P. Medfern.

And why.

Canfield stood.

"Couldn't take it any more, could you, old boy?" he said. "Just couldn't take the beatings any more."

He pictured in his mind the scene in Medfern's bedroom the night before. The old man, willow swatch in hand, standing in front of the window, whipping Old Bruce as he had many nights in the past. But this night the dog could take no more and, with almost human reactions, rebelled, turning on his master.

The sheriff saw him leap up on his hind paws, huge forepaws slamming like battering rams into Johnathan P. Medfern's chest. He saw Medfern reeling, the willow swatch flying from his hand and sliding under the bed. He saw the old man, driven backwards from the force of the dog's attack, crashing into

the window and through it to fall to his death below.

It was pretty damned ironic, the sheriff thought, the way justice gets done sometimes. A man like Medfern, with hundreds of enemies—and rightly so, too—and not one of them ever lifted a hand against him.

And it took a tired, aging, toothless dog to rid the world of the likes of Johnathan P. Medfern.

The sheriff knew he would never tell what he had discovered. Nobody would believe him if he did, and he would be laying himself wide open to plenty of Fall City's sometimes barbed humor. His report would read: "*Accidental Death.*"

He was a smart old cuss, that big ugly dog, the sheriff thought. A lot smarter than most people, that was for sure.

He had committed the perfect crime.

Because how in the world could you try a dog for murder?

Sheriff Aubrey Canfield could have been mistaken, of course, but as he looked down at the huge animal at his feet, lying contentedly with his head on his forepaws, he could have sworn he saw Old Bruce smiling at him.

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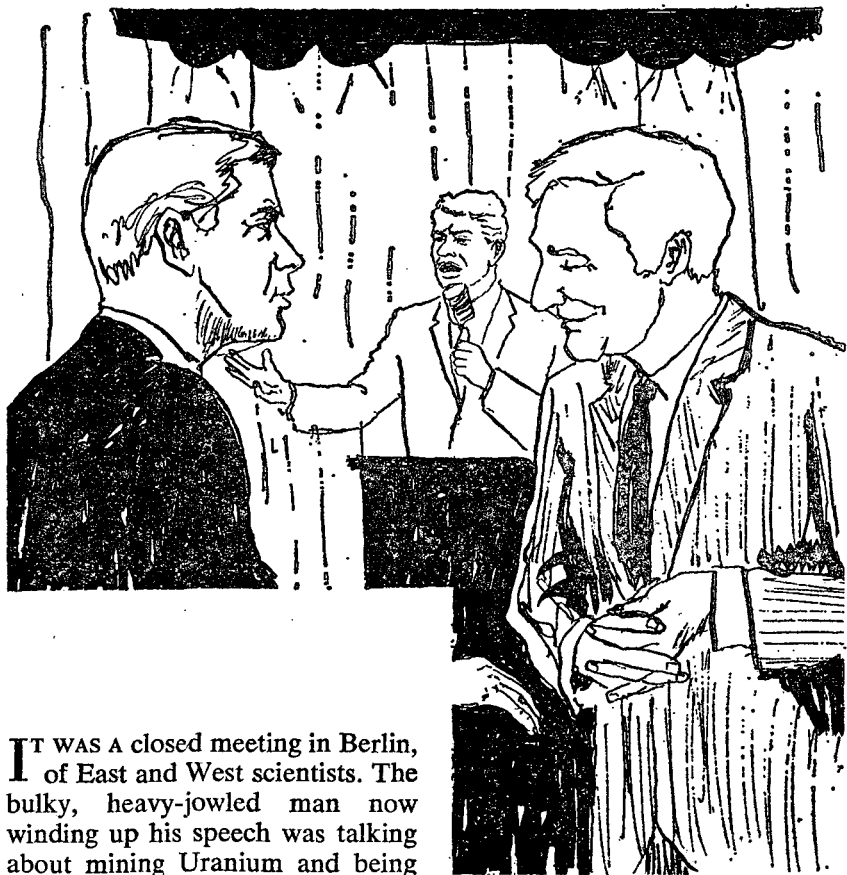


# THE DEFECTOR

new JOHN POND story

Was he a braggart, liar—or hero beyond belief? Only one man guessed the stark answer.

by DANIEL FRENCH



**I**T WAS A closed meeting in Berlin, of East and West scientists. The bulky, heavy-jowled man now winding up his speech was talking about mining Uranium and being

frank about it, as scientists will on occasion.

"... we put dissenters to work mining the ore. We use slave labor, gentlemen, for our country is too weak financially to pay high wages. We do what must be done under the circumstances—"

The high-ranking CIA official in the audience spoke to his companion.

"Well, John Pond, you've heard some of the speeches. We know one of these scientists from the other side of the Curtain wants to defect, but needs help to do so. He's unable to contact us, but if you identify him, we'll see that he's slipped away from his group. So long as the meeting is in Berlin, this man can escape, but we have to know who he is."

"Haven't you guessed?" John Pond asked with a smile.

The CIA man smiled too. "I've listened to a lot of Communist prop-wash about how science is the offspring of Communism. Not one of the Commie people have said anything constructive, just taken copious notes when someone from our side speaks."

"The big man, the one just finishing his speech now," John Pond said. "He's the one. All through his speech, he's been telling you who he is."

The CIA man shook his head. "I don't get it, John. He's only been spouting Red propaganda like all the others. How'd you know?"

John Pond grunted.

"A pretty brave guy, that one. And a very smart one also." He grinned. "No offence and all that, but I'm afraid he is a little smarter than a certain CIA man. He gave you a message and you dropped the ball."

The CIA official spread his hands.

"Sometimes, John, you can be downright unbearable. But—all right. What are you driving at?"

John Pond said, "Our friend was talking about slave labor. Surely you must know—no nation controlled by Communism uses that term. It's a dirty word to them. Forced labor is a patriotic duty to them. At least that's the way it comes out when they talk."

Pond lit a cigarette.

"No. Our man, with his life in the balance, took this subtle way of identifying himself. It's lucky I was along to get the message."

His companion scowled, then grinned suddenly. "Unbearable is the word. But damned clever at times, I must admit. We'll have our man on his way to Washington in a hour. And—thanks, damn you!"

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WATCH FOR—FRANK GRÜBER—COMING SOON

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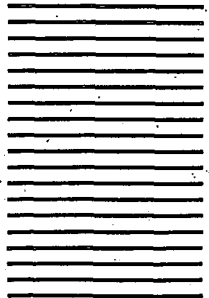
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