

JUNE

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NEW

DETECTIVE

MAGAZINE



VERY DEAD HEAT!

by **HUGH PENTECOST**

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MOST ANY
PART OF
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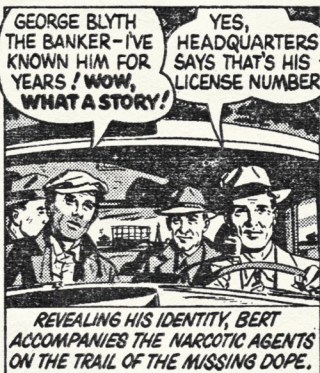
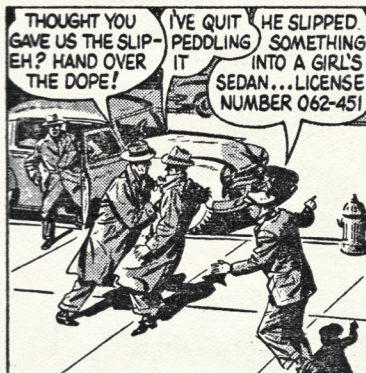
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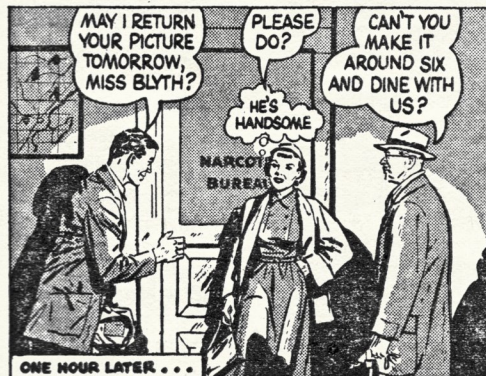
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NEW DETECTIVE

BEST IN CRIME FICTION 25c

MAGAZINE

Combined with **BLACK MASK DETECTIVE MAGAZINE**

Vol. 17

Contents for June, 1952

No. 4

TWO BIG NOVELETTES

VERY DEAD HEAT!.....Hugh Pentecost 10

If that broken-down bangtail, Sockomo, lost the race, he'd go to the cleaner's. . . . But if Sockomo won, he'd be headed for the undertaker's!

SHE CRIES MURDER!.....Larry Holden 92

It was almost as if the killer shark had been the kind of carnivore that walked on two legs!

SHORT CRIME ACTION STORIES

DEATH RUN.....Stuart Friedman 43

What waited for Al was far too real to be a nightmare of the screaming highways.

BUY A HUSH, BABY.....Fletcher Flora 52

The price Detective James must pay for silence was strictly blood-on-the-line!

NO CHARGE.....Donald Barr Chidsey 59

If a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, what Peterson knew was downright deadly!

DEADLY MISSION.....Winston Bouvé 70

They'd kill him if they caught him, and there was one special reason to keep alive!

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TROUBLE ON HIS SHOULDER.....Philip Ketchum 90

Why should he ever give the world a break, when it had never given him one!

DEPARTMENTS AND FEATURES

THE WITNESS CHAIR.....The Editors 6

STRANGE TRAILS TO MURDER.....Lee 68

HIS LAST IMPERSONATION.....Zeta Rothschild 81

SOLVING CIPHER SECRETS.....M. E. Ohaver 83

THE LIVING TARGET.....Robert W. Sneddon 86

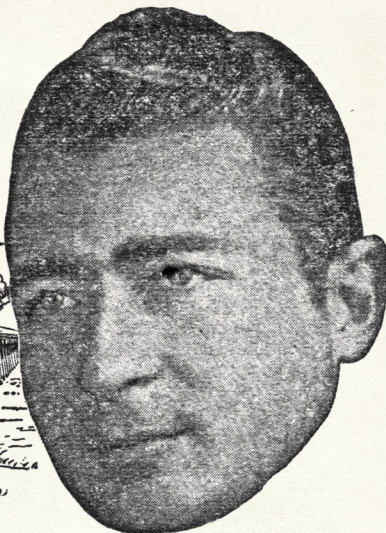
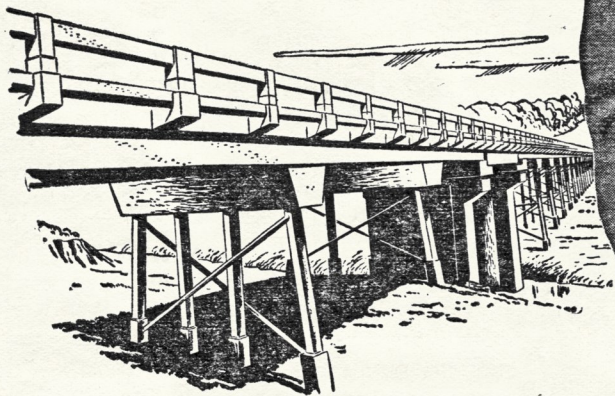
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THE WITNESS CHAIR

THE roster of people who have distinguished themselves signally in their short trip between the cradle and the coffin, includes those who did startling ill deeds, as well as those who benefited the world. And regrettable, but true, is the fact that the bad listings in the records of those grim gray ladies, the Fates, make just as glamorous telling in their own way, as the good recordings.

We have chosen two particularly weird, macabre and fascinating stories portraying the antics of the criminal mind which are outstanding enough to have been unforgettable. The protagonists are very different, but they share the same shadowy element of nightmare unreality, the same violent sense of shock when the impact of crime so alien to the everyday world strikes upon the reader's already keyed up nerves.

First in our waxworks this month is *The Murder of Little Lord Fauntleroy*, as bizarre a piece of human viciousness as you'll find in all the dark precincts of the crime world.

He was five years old. He was dressed pathetically in a white Lord Fauntleroy suit. He lay, frozen stiff, in an icy field near Albany, N. Y. Near him was a phial labeled "Carbolic Acid." The acid had burned his mouth, but in his childish hand was clutched a bag half-filled with chocolate drops.

Murdered, at five years! No one knew the boy's name that icy January morning in 1911 when a hunter found his little frozen body. And whether he was murdered for love or hate no one will ever know.

The police, absolutely without clue to this horrible crime, published the child's picture. Relatives in Schenectady identified him as George Melber. An uncle, Charles F. Smith, testified that the mother, Mrs. Edith Melber, a widow, had taken the child from his care several days before, saying that she meant to put him in an institution in Rochester.

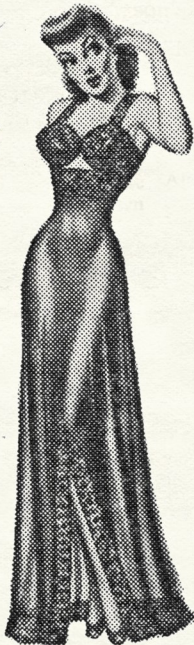
Two days later a detective in Rochester arrested a woman answering the description of Mrs. Melber when she came to the

(Continued on page 8)



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Daring
"BLACK
MAGIC"



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Address
City State

(Continued from page 6)

railroad station to claim a trunk. At first she denied her identity, but a letter in her handbag betrayed her. She told conflicting stories about little Georgie, but at last she broke down.

"Yes, I poisoned him," she said. "Because I loved him. Nobody wanted him. I was poor. Even the orphan homes wouldn't take him in.

"So I bought carbolic acid and candy! I gave Georgie the candy, and when he asked for a drink I gave him the poison."

This story created sympathy for Mrs. Melber, but at her trial the prosecution painted a picture, not of love, but of hate. A young man in Rochester admitted that he had proposed marriage to Mrs. Melber with the proviso that the child be placed in an orphanage. And the mother, failing to get any institution to take Georgie in, murdered him, declared the district attorney. Her child was in her way, so she killed him.

Mrs. Melber was found guilty of second degree murder and sentenced to twenty years. She never amplified her confession, or declared whether love or hatred inspired her awful crime. Five years later, after a quarrel with another prisoner, she hanged herself in her cell, leaving the question unanswered forever.

Grim, but colorful in its own way, is the story of the gigolo gunman of Astoria,



Long Island. Here we have a broken butterfly who played a rôle which pinned him on a police record cork forever—

"He can't live thirty days," said the surgeons. But hate was to keep John Conlin, of Astoria, Long Island, N. Y., alive for twice that time. No wonder. He had been shot and robbed to pay for his own wife's divorce.

A gunman had waylaid him in the hallway of his own home, robbed him of \$63 and a ring, and then, as Conlin turned around, fired and shattered his spine with

a bullet. By sheer will-power Conlin was keeping himself alive in order to identify his assailant.

To the police it was just another hold-up, until detectives came upon a packet of impassioned love letters in the Conlin apartment, addressed to "Dearest Amy," and signed "Sonny." Mrs. Conlin's name was Amy. An unmailed letter in her handwriting to "Sonny" which she had signed "Your Baby," indicated that she was contemplating divorce from her middle-aged husband.

She had not addressed this letter. But when she sent a telegram with a money order for \$50 payable to J. P. Brooks, she doomed her young lover. For detectives found Brooks at a New York hotel. His real name was Jimmy DePew.

He was a Broadway sheik only twenty years old!

After grilling by the police he confessed that he had held up and shot John Conlin. He admitted that he was infatuated with Mrs. Conlin, and had planned to rob her husband to get \$200 with which to finance a Reno divorce for her.

When Mrs. Conlin was shown his confession she admitted her love for "Gigolo Jimmy," but she denied any knowledge of the holdup and shooting. Soon after identifying DePew, Conlin died. The gigolo was then tried for murder. Charges against Mrs. Conlin were dismissed for lack of direct evidence, but the gigolo was accused of murder in the second degree and sentenced to Sing Sing for from thirty years to life.

And now for the next issue. . . . This is one you mustn't miss. It was a frame, but good. . . . He'd even had a gun put in his hand, just as they'd put the motive in his mind. He was a sitting duck, all right—and he was cooked!

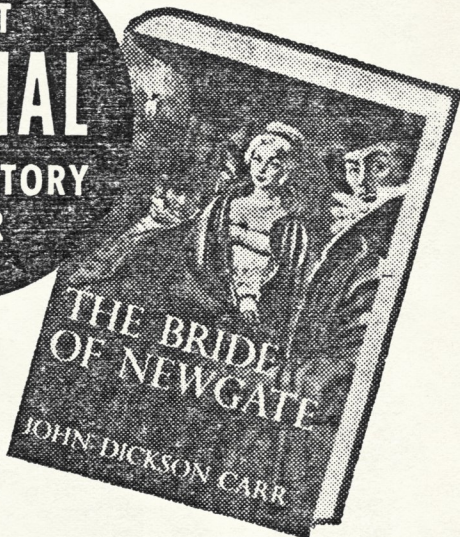
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OR

But a shot through a bathroom window, where a lovely lady sat in a tub of milk—a riot in the opera, led by champion pugilists—a pistol duel at dawn—and a mysterious coachman, whose cloak was shiny with graveyard mold changed everything! As did Napoleon Bonaparte!

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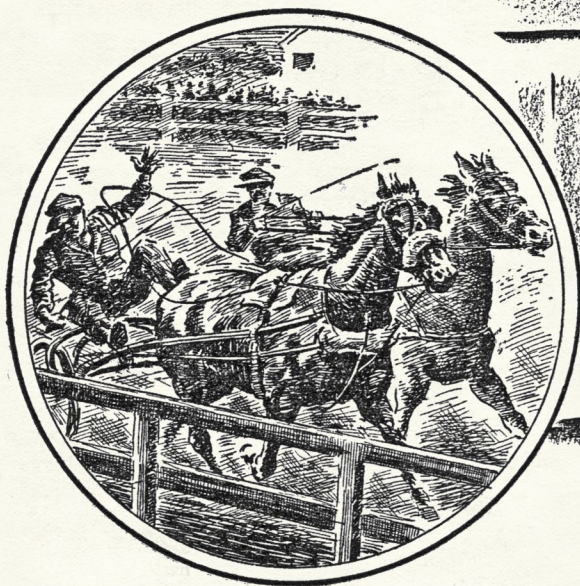
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By
Hugh
Pentecost

He expected that broken-down bangtail, Sockomo, to take him to the cleaner's. . . . What he didn't expect was for Sockomo to win, and take him to the undertaker's. . . .

VERY DEAD HEAT!

A MURDER-MYSTERY NOVELETTE

*I heard Al's warning shout
too late. . . .*



THE HORSES moved slowly, warily, with short, nervous steps toward the head of the track, where they would turn and fall in behind the mechanized starting gate. The drivers, their brilliant shirts adding a splash of color to the green of the countryside and the red clay

dust of the track, coaxed them on, each watching the other closely for the break. The silver spokes of the sulky wheels glittered in the sunlight. The crowd was still, watching for the big moment. I watched too, but I felt a little sick. I was about to lose my shirt.

I was only interested in two horses. One of them was a big bay named Redfern Hanover, driven by Old Bill Bailey, the grandpappy of trotting horse drivers, the greatest of his day and perhaps of any day. The other was a little red roan named Sockomo. Sockomo was mine. Until twenty-four hours ago, Sockomo had been a sure thing, and then the last minute entry of Redfern Hanover with Bailey driving had made him a sure thing second. That had happened too late for me to cover my bets—even if I'd had the dough to do it. I was going to wind up broke, in debt, and minus a horse, unless Redfern Hanover broke a leg. Mind you, I had nothing against the horse or Old Bill. They'd just be doing what they were trained to do. But I would cheerfully have murdered Paul Sexton, who owned the horse and had entered him at the last minute, who had tried to steal my last fifty bucks, and who had tried to beat me up in the bargain. I'm fifty-eight years old. Sexton is maybe twenty-eight. I didn't love him.

The Good Time Track at Goshen, New York, is built a little different than most. It's more like a triangle than the usual mile track, the idea being to give more straight-away, cutting down the turns from four to three. But the first turn past the grandstand is pretty sharp. It's a bad place for a jam, and if you've got a fast starting horse, it's a good place to be in the lead, free and clear.

I was standing by the rail watching the horses move cautiously down the track; watching the blue and gold of Old Bill Bailey's shirt, and the dark green with white stripes of George Murphy, my driver. Even the trotters have been modernized these days. In the old days they used to go down the track, wheel, and score for the start. If they didn't get into their proper post positions, or someone was ahead of the pole horse as they went under the starting wire, it was no go and they'd come back and try over. They might score a half

dozen times before the starter gave them the word.

Now, at most of the big tracks, they use something like the Phillips starting gate. The gate is mounted on a big yellow, open car. On the back of this car are wide nickel-plated wings, like the skeleton wings of an airplane, that spread out across the track. The horses wheel in behind the car, which is moving slowly, the wings spread out. The car gathers speed and the horses begin coming up behind it. They can't get past it, so the start is almost always even. When they go under the starting wire, the car gathers speed and pulls away from the horses, the big wings fold in, and it drives off the track. It all saves a lot of time, but for my dough some of the color of the old days is gone.

Everything worked against me that afternoon. Redfern Hanover drew the pole and Sockomo was on the outside. Somehow all you had to do was look at Old Bill and the bay horse to know they were a tough combination. I'd watched them under the stands before they went out to warm up for this first heat of the race. There are stalls there for the horses that are racing that afternoon, and I'd watched Paul Sexton talking to Old Bill. Sexton was tall and sleek looking, wearing riding pants and boots and a checkered sports jacket. I could feel my blood pressure go up as I watched him. I could hear his voice.

"I seldom hit an old man," he'd said the night before. I remembered the salty taste of blood in my mouth as he'd struck me a stinging backhanded blow that had jammed my lips back against my teeth.

As he talked to Bailey I could see the big bay head of Redfern Hanover looking out over the top of them. If I hadn't been about to lose my shirt I'd have been interested in Old Bill Bailey. He was the Babe Ruth of race drivers. It's the old boys who are good with the trotters. Bailey was flirting with seventy and he was still the best.

He had pale blue eyes, like gimlets—eyes that could see through dust and the steam from sweating flanks. He was stooped a little, and he kept flexing the gloved fingers of his hands . . . fingers that could send telegraphic signals along the reins to the horse he was driving.

Bailey kept nodding his head as Sexton talked, but I'd gotten the impression he wasn't really listening. There wasn't anything anyone could tell old Bill about driving a race. Once in a while he'd turned toward the horse, lifting his hand to the glossy neck, and the big bay had lipped and nuzzled at the purple and gold shirt. If those two hadn't been about to take me to the cleaners I'd of got a kick out of watching 'em. *Well, we who are about to die salute you*, was what I thought.

I watched them now, close. The drivers waited for old Bill to turn Redfern Hanover at the pole. Suddenly they wheeled—the big yellow car with its wings was rolling, and they came at us, eight of them, moving with the precision of Rockettes—faster, faster. Over the roar of the crowd you could hear the starter's voice through the loud speaker: "Go!" It was a horse race.

The minute the big yellow car pulled away, Redfern Hanover stuck his nose out in front. Bailey meant to get to that bad first turn ahead of the pack. They said he knew how to talk to horses, and I guess he must have, because the bay stretched out flat and the rest of them were eating his dust after twenty-five yards. Poor little Sockomo! He was in there giving it all he had, but even if you'd never seen a trotting race before you'd have known he was no match for Redfern Hanover.

It's funny, but I wasn't thinking about the certain loss of my dough and my horse, or the mountain of debts I was going to have to face as they went into that first turn. I was thinking about Bud King, and how proud he'd have been to see Sockomo going at Goshen, even if he finished last!

I remembered Bud on the cot in that hick town hospital where he'd died. He was a skeleton, with skin stretched over it, coughing out his life in blood and pieces of his lungs. He hadn't known me at first.

"It's Jeff," I'd told him. "Jeff Larigan."

His bony fingers had closed over mine. "The horse—" he'd whispered. "I'm leaving you the horse, Jeff."

"Don't be crazy," I told him. "You'll be out of here in a few days."

He just shook his head. "He'll win for you, Jeff," he said. "He's a free going horse, taking a nice hold, and understanding everything."

"Sure, sure. Only he'll win for you, Bud. You'll be out of here quick."

POOOR BUD. I'd known him around country fairs where we both operated some kind of confidence game on the midway. Bud had itchy fingers but he also had another disease. He had what the boys called "trot in his head." He was crazy for harness racing. His dream was that some day he'd own a good trotter, give up the rackets, and make his living with the taste of gravel in his mouth and the square-dance rhythm of a trotter's gait in his ears.

He used to pick up broken-down nags around the fairs, work over 'em like a specialist from the Mayo clinic, and send 'em out when he thought they were ready. At least that was what he meant to do, but he always had to send 'em too soon, because if he didn't win a purse he couldn't afford to feed 'em any longer. Then at last he'd picked up Sockomo. It wasn't the usual thing. Sockomo hadn't cracked up. Bud had won him in a dice game—after I'd showed him how to make ivory talk English. Bud was beside himself. After a few workouts he'd told me this Sockomo had it.

"Jeff, he ain't no Greyhound or Dean Hanover, but he'll win his share of races. He's dead honest."

But he never did win for Bud, because Bud's lungs caved in on him. The last

thing he said to me was, "I sure wish I could have took the Sock to Goshen this summer. I'd sure like to have drove my own horse there just once."

So I inherited a horse, complete with harness, sulky, a motheaten cooler, and a billiard cue to keep him from looking out on the turns. Sockomo was honest, like Bud had said. He didn't fuss at the start, he never broke, and he gave you every ounce of everything he had. The trouble was he didn't have too much. You could clock him at about 2:19 for the mile, and he wouldn't vary a second off it, hot or cold, wet or dry. That was Sockomo.

George Murphy, my driver, I picked up at the Danbury fair. He'd been a good driver once, but the booze got him. He was crazy for another chance, and I took him on. I'd been bit by the trotting bug myself. We played the yokel circuit, breaking a little worse than even. I should have quit. I didn't. I wanted a fling at Goshen.

A small town in the rolling hills of Orange County, New York, Goshen is really the birthplace of the trotters, from Topgallant to Greyhound, from Boston Blue to Dean Hanover.

The old-timers who knew their trotting race history would have gotten the bang of a lifetime watching Sockomo go at Goshen—no matter where he finished. That's what I was thinking as they went into the turn, with Redfern Hanover in front and certain to make the honest little Sockomo look like a candidate for the glue factory. Then the roar of the crowd lifted me up out of my shoes.

I couldn't see exactly what happened, but suddenly Redfern Hanover bolted around the turn, zigzagging across the track—and there was no one in the sulky. You could hear people screaming along the rail. Two or three of the horses had broken, and one of them had jammed into the fence and a second driver was down. I guess because I didn't have time to realize the full implication of what had happened, I felt a mo-

ment of triumph, because out of the confusion came a little red horse, trotting true and even, unflurried by the confusion. Sockomo was well in the lead, and Redfern Hanover was out of it, driverless, but good horse that he was, settling back into a trot and heading for the half mile post.

The loudspeaker warned people off the track, but no one paid much attention. I saw one driver get up and sort of shake himself to see if he was okay. But there was another one down, lying ominously still. The still one had a purple and gold shirt on. It was old Bill Bailey. I heard the clang of the ambulance bell. I was torn between wanting to help and trying to see what was happening in the race. Then I heard the loudspeaker.

"At the three-quarter pole, it's Sockomo by five lengths over Vololighter, with Pakistan third, Holy Roller fourth, Cherokee Patch is in a break, and—"

I stopped listening. Sockomo was going to save my bacon at that. I'd just about reached the crowd when the race ended, with Sockomo breezing. George Murphy scrambled out of his sulky, turned Sockomo over to a stable boy, and found me.

"He just seemed to topple over," George said, breathlessly. "There wasn't any contact. He just fell over. It must of been his heart. Was he trampled on?"

"I couldn't see. You know as much as I do, George."

"Poor old guy," George said. "But it's the way he'd of wanted to go."

"What makes you think he's dead?" I asked.

"Look at him!" George said.

Old Bill was that ghastly purple color of a heart case. His arms flopped like those of a sawdust dummy as they lifted him onto a stretcher. A young fellow in an usher's blue coat was hovering over him. I heard someone say it was old Bill's son.

Then I heard the loudspeaker again.

"The unofficial finish is: Number 8, Sockomo, was the winner; Number 3,

Pakistan was two; Number 4, Holy Roller, was three. Time for the mile, two nineteen." Good old Sockomo. Nothing could keep him from his appointed two nineteen! Then the speaker again. "There's been a protest lodged. The race is still unofficial."

"There's always a protest when someone takes a spill," George Murphy said. "We got nothing to worry about, Jeff. We weren't anywhere near Redfern Hanover. We were on the outside."

"Will Mr. Jeff Larigan come to the judge's stand, please?" the speaker blared. "Mr. Jeff Larigan—wanted at the judge's stand."

"Quite a prophet you are, George," I said.

"They just want to talk to you, Jeff. You own the winner."

He was right. They just wanted to talk to me—and how!

As I started toward the judge's stand I didn't have any doubt about who'd lodged a protest against me. It would have to be Paul Sexton. He'd probably have cooked up a cockeyed version of what had happened the night before and it might sound bad. The best thing in my favor was that Sockomo hadn't been anywhere near Old Bill when he tumbled out of the sulky.

The row with Sexton had happened like this. Like I said, I should have quit long before, but I wanted to go to Goshen for Hambletonian week. The Hambletonian is the Kentucky Derby of the trotting horse world—the big race for three-year-olds. There's three days of racing at the Good Time Track and I figured if I could find a spot for Sockomo we'd get out of the red.

George Murphy, my driver, knew the record, temperament, nickname and the dope on every trotting horse in the country. When we got to Goshen we pored over the program for the three days. Finally George picked a two thousand buck stake race to be trotted the day before the Hambletonian. It was a good purse for horses that hadn't won anything important

that season. George figured the Sock could take that one. I entered him, which took my last nickel. Then I begged, borrowed and swindled myself a half a grand to put on his nose. If the Sock won, we were in business. If he lost, we were strictly from hunger.

THE NIGHT before the race I was feeling great. There is one guy in the world I really love. His name is Alan Quist, and if I'd ever had a son, I'd have said thanks to Whoever is responsible for those things if he turned out like Alan. I met Alan a couple of years ago, after I'd quit the rackets. I used to be a card mechanic and dice man—one of the best—but my fingers began to get treacherous on me and I quit. Then Alan came into my life—easy-going, gentle mannered, looking a little like Dana Andrews, the actor, but hard as a cutting diamond under the surface when the going got rough.

He was just out of the Army when I met him, and he was trying to hunt down a guy who'd killed a buddy of his in a card game overseas. All he knew about the killer was that he was a hustler, and to find him, he had to know some of the tricks of the trade. I taught him, and stayed with him a year while he tracked the guy down and sent him to the chair. In that time he got to be one of the best card mechanics and dice men in the world, himself. He could have made a fortune at it—except he happened to be a history professor in a Vermont college, and that he liked. In the summers, we used to catch up with each other. If I was working a carnival, he'd come along for a couple weeks, just lazying around, studying people, watching and learning.

He'd come down to Goshen after I wired him. But he had had news. He had to go to New York the day the Sock was to run. Something for the college. He'd get back that night and we'd see the Hambletonian, whatever happened to the Sock. So the

night before the Sock's race, Alan and I went over to the Orange Inn, where all the boys and girls gather during race week to talk horse. I had about fifty bucks left and I figured I might as well find someone to take it. Believe it or not, I'd had difficulty getting all my dough down, because the smart boys figured Sockomo to win.

Alan and I crowded into the bar, and I introduced him to some of the old-timers I knew.

"Never mind betting," someone said. "You might as well start buying the drinks now, Jeff. You're in."

"I'll take your fifty and any more you can raise," a voice said behind me.

I elbowed my way around to look at this guy. He was tall, dark and not bad looking, except his eyes were a little too small and his lips a little too thin. There was a girl with this guy. She was pretty spectacular. I couldn't figure if she was fifteen or twenty-five at first. She turned out to be twenty. She had hair as black as a crow's wing, and blue eyes with a kind of excited sparkle in them. She was wearing a bright red velvet jacket over some sort of white dinner dress with a full skirt. Her lips, her fingernails, and the toes that peeped out of white, high-heeled sandals were the same color as the jacket. She had her eyes fixed on Alan. I turned to the guy with her.

"Glad to oblige," I said, reaching for my roll.

"You're cute," the girl said to Alan. "I shouldn't say that because I'm engaged to be married. But you're cute."

Alan grinned at her good-naturedly. "That's dangerous talk, lady, engaged or unengaged," he said.

"I always say just what I think," the girl said. "It drives Paul simply wild, but I always say if you don't say what you think when you think it you may never get the chance."

"Shut up, April," the guy with the dough said, a little sharply. "The man will think you're making a pass at him."

Her eyes widened. "But I am," she said. "I think he's lovely!"

"Suppose we let the boys complete their bet," Alan said. "And then we can start over as though you hadn't said any of this."

"Are you a friend of his?" the girl asked, nodding toward me.

"Bosom," Alan said.

She turned to her boy friend. "Then before you take his money, Paul, tell him," she said. "If he's a friend of the cute one, you'll have to tell him."

"Do shut up, April," the guy said.

"Tell me what?" I asked the girl.

This Paul had counted out fifty bucks of his own. "The bartender to hold the stakes?" he suggested.

"If you don't tell him, Paul, I will," the girl said.

"What gives here?" I said. I had a sudden cold feeling. Maybe George Murphy had busted out and was dead drunk somewhere and this guy knew it. "You know something I don't know?"

"Yes, he does," the girl said.

"April, please!" the guy said, and he sounded sore.

Alan was still leaning against the bar, looking amused.

"You're Jeff Larigan, the owner of Sockomo, aren't you?" the girl said to me.

"That's right, sister."

"This is Paul Sexton of the Sexton and Archer stables," she said.

I'd heard of the Sexton and Archer stables. They were big Kentucky breeders and I knew they had a hatful of trotters here for the meet. "So what?" I said.

"So he's made a last minute entry in the same race with Sockomo tomorrow," she said. "You can't win, Mr. Larigan." Then she looked at Alan, as much as to say, "Aren't I a good girl?"

There was a buzz of excitement around the bar. Sexton gave me a sour smile and started stuffing his dough back in his wallet. "Well, I guess that spoils that," he said.

My throat felt kind of dry inside. Half a dozen people were asking Sexton what horse he'd entered. When he told them Redfern Hanover I could tell by the faces around me that the boys weren't happy. I could see they didn't like Sexton and that they also figured Redfern Hanover was a shoo-in.

"He's got a two-o-four record," someone said. "He could win on three legs if he's right."

"Who's driving?" someone asked.

"The old man," Sexton said. "Bailey."

I guess I blew my top. I saw I was cooked, and it made me sore the smooth way Sexton had been willing to take my last buck without a word.

"If there's one thing that stinks up a joint," I said, "it's a sure thing gambler."

Sexton gave me that tight smile. "What's the matter, Larigan, can't you take it? Have you spent all your winnings before you got them?"

"Maybe," I said. "And you're the kind of cheap heel who'd take a guy's last buck for coffee and room rent, knowing he didn't have a chance. A smart swindle I go for, but I hate a thief!"

"I very seldom hit an old man," Sexton said.

That was when I tasted blood and everything went black. They tell me I swarmed all over him, screaming at him that I'd kill him for that. But it was Alan who ended it.

"Just to make certain it is so seldom it never happens again," Alan said, and knocked him cold.

Some of the guys had pulled me over to the bar, where I was bawling like a kid from sheer frustration and rage. While some of the others were carrying Sexton out of there I remember a small, cool hand resting on mine for a moment, and I looked down into April's bright eyes.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Larigan. I thought you ought to know. But oh boy, what a right cross your friend has!"

Then she was gone and I had the strange feeling she'd enjoyed the brawl.

And later Alan had said to me, "Stay out of Sexton's hair while I'm in New York, Jeff. I don't think he's the forgiving type." And he looked down at the bruises on the knuckles of his right hand. . . .

CHAPTER TWO

Murder Rap

THE JUDGE'S STAND is a little roofed-over platform on stilts built on the infield just at the finish line. I elbowed my way through the crowd that was still jammed in at the rail, staring morbidly at the spot where the accident had happened. I'd gone only a few yards when somebody took hold of my arm. I turned and found myself looking down into the face of the girl whose name was April. She had on jodhpurs, a turtleneck sweater that presented a clear picture of why men turn wolf, and her dark hair tied with a red ribbon at the base of her neck. She looked nearer twelve years old than twenty, except for the excited eyes and the bright red mouth.

"Don't go up there," she said.

"Why not, baby?" I said.

"You remember me?" she said. "April Risedale?"

"Sure I remember you," I said. "You're Sexton's gal."

"We're going to be married," she said.

"How nice for him," I said, "but can't you think of better ways to commit suicide?"

"Paul's up there," she said, raising her eyes to the judge's stand. "He lodged the protest against you."

"You amaze me," I said.

"Go away somewhere till the whole thing's cleared up," she said.

"What is there to clear up?" I said. "The old man had a heart attack and fell out of the sulky."

The pupils of her eyes were big as dark

blue poker chips. "Did he?" she asked me.

"What's your version?" I asked.

"I think someone did it to him," she said.

"Did what to him?"

"Deliberately killed him," she said.

"That's the worst of the effect of these gangster movies on impressionable young minds," I said.

"I like you, Mr. Larigan," April Rise-dale said. "I'd hate to see you in any trouble."

"I can't figure out what the trouble is, April," I said. "But I know you never get out of it by running away from it."

"Where's your cute friend?" she asked.

"New York," I said.

"If I were you, I'd get in my car and just keep driving till I read in the papers that it's all over," April told me.

"Thanks anyway," I said. At the moment the loudspeaker began droning out my name again, asking me to come to the judge's stand. "I'll be seeing you around."

"I sincerely hope so, Mr. Larigan," she said.

A funny kid, I thought, as I climbed the stairway to where the starter, the judges, and several other excited people were waiting for me. The most excited one was Paul Sexton.

The head guy was a dignified, white-haired old gent in a white linen suit and a floppy Panama hat. His name was Severied, and he was one of the top breeders and supporters of the trotting game.

"I'm Jeff Larigan," I told him.

"Ah, yes," he said, vaguely. "Tragic thing. Tragic thing." He raised his eyes to me and there was nothing vague about them. They were clean and keen. "Bailey's dead, you know."

"I'm sorry to hear it," I said. "He looked pretty bad down there on the track, but I had my fingers crossed."

"One of the half dozen greatest drivers of all time," Severied said. "An irreplaceable loss to the sport."

"I agree," I said. "I wish there was

something I could do about it, but there isn't. But I take it you wanted me for something special."

"You're damn right!" Paul Sexton exploded. He couldn't hold himself in any longer. "I should have known you'd pull something like this, Larigan. I didn't think, though, that you'd kill a man to—"

"Please, Mr. Sexton, let me handle this," Severied said, quietly. The old man raised his eyes to mine again. "We've heard some ugly rumors, Mr. Larigan. I don't mind admitting we were warned in advance to look out for some rough driving in this race."

"By this louse?" I asked, pointing at Sexton.

"Was I supposed to keep quiet about your threats?" Sexton demanded.

"Look," I said, "I may have made some wild threats, Sexton, but they were directed at you, not at Bailey or your horse."

"Gentlemen," Severied said, "we're making an inquiry into the race, not into your personal grievances."

"If that's true," I said, "then you know that my horse was on the outside as they went into that turn. He wasn't within fifty yards of Bailey and Redfern Hanover!"

"That wouldn't stop you from making a deal with one of the other drivers," Sexton said. "Or getting your strongarm friend to pull something."

I did my best to hang onto my temper. "My friend is in New York. I just finished talking to my driver," I said to Severied. "He tells me there wasn't any contact at all. He says Bailey just fell out of the sulky. It wasn't an accident at all. The old boy had a heart attack."

"Unfortunately," Severied said, "the track judge at the turn rode in the ambulance to the hospital with Bailey, and we haven't his report yet. Until we do have it, the heat isn't official, and there isn't much point in going on with this. But I would like to ask you a question or two, Mr. Larigan."

"Shoot," I said.

"Is it true that your—er—economic position is such that if you failed to win this race you would be deeply in debt—in fact, out of business?"

"It's true," I said, "except that trotting racing isn't my business. It's a hobby."

"And your business?"

"He's a professional gambler and confidence man," Sexton said.

"Is that true, Mr. Larigan?" Severied asked.

"I'm a professional gambler," I said, "but with cards and dice—not horses. And I resent the implication that I'm a crook."

"I wasn't implying it, I was stating it as a fact," Sexton said.

"Why, you—"

"Stop it, at once!" Severied said, sharply. "Mr. Larigan, had we known that you were a professional gambler we'd have refused your entry in the first place. I'm not at all sure that even though you're cleared of any complicity in this accident your horse will not be disqualified. But that's beside the point at the moment. I gather you felt your horse was a pretty certain winner in this race, and that you had bet on him extensively."

"If extensive means all you've got, that's correct," I said.

"That was before Mr. Sexton made a last minute entry of Redfern Hanover?"

"Yes."

"So when he did enter Redfern Hanover it was fairly certain you'd lose your bets?"

"Dead certain, according to the boys who know horses," I said.

"And you threatened Mr. Sexton?"

"Not for entering his horse," I said. "I threatened him for trying to steal fifty bucks from me and putting the slug on me when I accused him of it."

"He called me a thief!" Sexton shouted. "I did what anyone would have done. I—"

"That will be all, Sexton!" Severied said.

"I think we can settle the matter of the accident now. Here comes Mr. Norman, the first turn judge."

A LITTLE fat guy in a seersucker suit came waddling up the steps to where we were. He was sweating like he'd just run a mile himself, and he kept mopping at his pale, chubby face and fanning himself with a straw hat. Behind him was a guy in the uniform of a captain of the State Troopers. When Mr. Norman reached the platform, breathing hard, he looked at Severied, opened his mouth to speak, and then closed it as if the effort was too much for him. Finally he wheezed at us.

"It—it's murder," he said.

"Then there was rough driving at the turn?" Severied asked.

Norman shook his head. "He was a length in front of the field. Nobody anywhere near him. But—" He couldn't go on. He just waved at the State Trooper. "You know Captain Knox—Mr. Severied?"

Knox had a suntanned face that might have been made out of wall board. It didn't give when he spoke. There were no wrinkles to show he'd ever smiled.

"It's murder, all right," he said. "Damnedest thing. Somebody jabbed the old guy with a hypodermic needle. There was some kind of quick acting poison in it. We won't know exactly what till they've done an analysis."

"Holy Smoke!" Sexton said, in an excited voice. "When we were walking from the drivers' quarters to our place under the stands, Bailey slapped at his arm and said a bee must have stung him."

"Where was that?" Knox asked, quickly.

"The drivers' dressing room is about fifty yards from the stands," Sexton said. "We were walking through the crowd."

"Lot of people around?"

"Thousands," Sexton said.

"You didn't notice anyone in particular elbowing you?"

"No. We were talking about the race. I was telling Bailey to look out for Larigan's driver. I figured something might be up."

Knox looked at me for the first time. His eyes were a yellowish brown and the lids didn't seem to blink. "You're Larigan?" he asked.

"Yeah," I said. "J. Fall-Guy Larigan!"

"Never mind that kind of talk," Knox said. He looked back at Sexton. "You're positive you didn't notice anything?"

"There was no reason I should," Sexton said. "I wouldn't have thought about the bee sting again if you hadn't mentioned this stuff about a hypodermic."

"We'd better get this third race started," someone said to Severied.

"Yes, of course," the old man said.

"You'll have to announce that the results of the first heat of the second race will remain unofficial pending further investigation."

Knox turned back to me. "Come on," he said.

"What do you mean, come on?" I said.

"I want to talk to you," Knox said, "in private."

"What about my horse in the second heat?" I asked Severied.

"We'll come to a decision about that, Mr. Larigan," the old man said.

"Since this wise guy apparently intends to make me a guest of the state, you'll have to notify George Murphy, my driver," I said.

"You're not making me fall in love with you with that kind of talk, Larigan," Knox said.

"It's that hole in your head," I said. "It repels me."

He closed his fingers over my arm and I nearly let out a yell. Those fingers were like steel hooks.

Knox took me to where the State Troopers' car was parked back of the grandstand. We got in. He didn't start the motor. He just fiddled with the short wave radio. Some kid was lost in Newburgh and a description was being given to the squad cars in the neighborhood. Knox switched it off and turned those yellow, unblinking eyes of his on me.

"We've been checking on you since last night, Larigan," he said. "Sexton came to us and said there might be some rough stuff in this race."

"Good old Paul," I said.

"Your record isn't good, Larigan. It's far from good. Thirty-four arrests, ranging from charges of extortion to simple card sharpening."

I grinned at him. "And how many convictions?" I asked him.

"None," he said, frowning. "But where there's smoke there's fire."

He stared moodily at the radio buttons on the dash. "Beat it," he said finally.

"You mean I'm innocent?" I said.

"I mean I haven't got enough to hold you on—yet," he said. "Only don't leave town. It would make us a lot of trouble finding you and bringing you back here—but we'd do it."

"I still have to win the second heat of that race before I can leave town," I said. I opened the car door and got out. He was looking at me like a hungry dog that's just had a bone taken away from him. I started to walk away and then I turned back. "Who is April Risedale?" I asked him.

"Daughter of a guy who owns a big estate about three miles out of town," Knox said. "Hendrik Risedale. He's in the diamond business. She's engaged to your friend Sexton. Why?"

"You ought to talk to her," I said. "She's psychic."

* * *

If you go back over important events in your life you'll discover that little coincidences, little oddities, played a big part in what happened. One of those things happened to me then. I reached in my pocket for a cigarette and found I had only one left. I lit it, balled up the empty pack and threw it away. I had to get me a fresh pack. It always burns me up to pay an extra dime for cigarettes from one of those pirates that operate at tracks or baseball parks or night clubs. I remembered I had a full carton in

my room at the boarding house where I was staying, and that was only about the equivalent of two city blocks from the track. I decided to walk over to my room for cigarettes.

It was an ordinary frame house, painted white, and lived in by an old couple who just rented out a spare room during race week. Everybody in Goshen is a hotel keeper or restaurant operator for that week. The old lady had given me a key and I let myself into the house and went up to the second floor to my room.

There were twin beds, a Grand Rapids bureau, and an old-fashioned commode with a washbasin and pitcher in the room. The bathroom was down the hall. I went over to the bureau and opened the top drawer where I'd put my handkerchiefs and then yanked my hand away as though I'd found a snake in the drawer.

It was worse than a snake. Lying on top of my handkerchiefs was a hypodermic needle and a small bottle, without a label, and filled with a colorless liquid. . . .

CHAPTER THREE

Who's Guilty?

IT WASN'T the first time in my life that somebody'd thought I'd look good in a frame. My mouth tasted of cotton and I could feel the cold sweat break out on my forehead. I knew the next move in this game. Somebody was already trying to tip Knox off to the fact that if he looked here he'd find the evidence against me that he wanted. I wasn't supposed to have found it.

I remember I stood there, half listening for the expected sound of a police siren and wishing Alan would get back in a hurry. I was supposed to be at the track. Somebody would get in touch with Knox, and he was supposed to come hightailing over here, find this stuff, and my name would be fried chicken!

I reached in the drawer, wrapped the top

handkerchief around the needle and the bottle, and lifted them out carefully. I couldn't afford to touch them. My life might depend on there being no fingerprints. Once I had them in my hand I tore out of there, but fast, slamming the door behind me.

I'd only just hit the sidewalk when I heard the siren. I ran across the street, across somebody's lawn, and around the corner of a house. I saw the State Troopers' car pull up at my boarding house and Knox and one of his boys got out and went up to the door. They pounded on it for a while but nobody answered. I guess the old couple, like everyone else in Goshen, were at the track and the spring lock had caught when I slammed it shut. The troopers stood talking a minute, and then they walked around to the back of the house.

I did some fast thinking. I couldn't afford to be caught with this stuff, and I couldn't afford just to dump it. Found on me, the needle might hang me, but in the long run it might lead to the real murderer. Then I figured to myself there was one good place to hide it, and I took a chance. I came out from behind the house and started running toward the troopers' car. I got to it, opened the door, and pulled the back seat forward a little. Then I took the handkerchief by one end and let the needle and the bottle roll in behind the seat. I shoved the seat back into place and stepped clear of the car. My heart was slugging against my ribs.

Then I took a deep breath and walked toward the door of my boarding house. I was just going up the front steps when Knox and his pal came around from the back.

"Hey!" Knox said.

"What's the matter now?" I said.

"We wanted to look your room over," Knox said.

I unlocked the front door for them and we went up to my room.

"Mind if I get me a package of cigarettes before you start tearing the joint apart?" I asked.

"Where are they?" Knox asked.

"Top bureau drawer."

He went over, opened the drawer, and after looking inside he took a package of cigarettes from the carton and tossed it to me. I went over and sat down on the window sill. Knox and his boy went to work on the room and they did everything but peel off the wall paper.

"Maybe if you'd tell me what you're looking for, I could help," I said.

Knox just glared at me and went on hunting. Finally they had to give up. They'd been over everything twice. Knox stood in the center of the room, staring at me as if he hoped he could read my mind.

Finally he kicked at the rug with the toe of his boot.

"I'm placing you under arrest," he said.

"On what charge?"

"Material witness. Protective custody. Anything you like."

"You can't get away with it," I said.

"That remains to be seen," he said.

"Come on."

I wasn't born yesterday. I knew he could get away with it for a while. Old Bill Bailey was a famous guy, a much loved guy. Knox could claim it wouldn't be safe for me to wander around loose while I was under suspicion.

They took me to the trooper barracks in their car. I had a hard time to keep from bursting out laughing when I thought that Knox and I were sitting right on top of the needle and bottle he'd been looking for.

They had three cells in the back of the barracks. They shoved me into one of them and left me there to twiddle my thumbs. I figured they'd hold me a couple of hours, or until Alan could get back to spring me. I was wrong. It was four o'clock when they stuck me in there after filling the usual forms about my age, place of birth, etc. At six a trooper came in with a tray of food. He wouldn't talk. I asked about Alan—no dice.

It got to be night. I'd finished my pack

of cigarettes and I couldn't raise anyone to get me a fresh one. By ten o'clock I was fit to be tied. At midnight, when Knox finally came back, I don't mind admitting I was feeling a little hysterical.

"I got news for you," he said, as he was unlocking the cell door. "They let your horse stay in the race. He took the second heat and the money. You're rich—except that they're holding up the purse till I tell them to pay it over to you."

"I'll always tell everybody I owe everything to you," I said. "You jerk!"

His yellow eyes glittered, but he wouldn't rise to the bait.

"What happens now?" I asked him.

"I don't mind telling you that I tried to keep it a secret you were under arrest," Knox said, "but your friend found out and got you sprung. You're free—only don't leave town."

I walked out of the barracks and looked around for Alan's blue convertible. It wasn't there, but there was a local taxi parked beyond the entrance with the back door open. I walked over to it.

"Get in, Mr. Larigan," April Risedale said.

She was sitting alone in the back seat. She gave it a pat, inviting me to join her.

"Where's Alan?" I asked.

"That's a long story," she said. "Get in."

"You're the one who sprung me?" I asked, puzzled.

"Yes, and please don't leave town because I can't afford to lose the thousand dollar bail," she said.

I REALLY didn't get it. I sat down beside her and she told the driver to take us to the Orange Inn.

"I don't know why you stuck out your neck for me, April," I said, "but I'm grateful. If you happen to have a cigarette I might even propose marriage."

She had a gold cigarette case with her initials in diamonds. She also had a gold lighter that worked. In the light from the

flame I saw that the pants and sweater were gone. This was "buttons and bows and peek-a-boo clothes" time. Also the perfume. She was cute and slick as a deck of marked cards.

"Have you seen Alan?" I asked her.

"Yes," she said. "He's back at the Orange Inn, playing the piano."

"That's thoughtful of him," I said.

"Oh, I drive a hard bargain," she said. "He was trying to find you, but everybody seemed to think you'd skipped town. I told him I'd locate you if he'd promise to keep on playing the piano. He's divine!"

"How did you know where I was?" I asked.

"My spies told me," she said.

"Who are your spies?"

"Me," she said, and laughed.

Even at that time of night the little village square was jammed with cars, and the Orange Inn was lit up from top to bottom. Tomorrow was the Hambletonian, the big race of the year. These characters would be sitting around in the taproom talking horse until the management threw them out. As we got out of the car I heard the piano. Alan plays classical, but somehow everybody listens to it.

"Isn't he terrific?" April whispered as we walked up the path.

"Don't forget," I said, "Paul Sexton is your Prince Charming."

"How could I forget?" she said, wryly.

I had no time for puzzling out April's private life. I walked into the taproom and elbowed my way through the crowd at the piano. When Alan saw me, he quit playing.

"You promised!" April said. "You promised if I produced Mr. Larigan you wouldn't stop."

Alan looked at her, half amused, half angry. "That was blackmail, young lady," he said. "Where have you been, Jeff?"

"Jail," I said.

"But Captain Knox told me—"

"Captain Knox is just a plain sweet-heart," I said.

April tugged at Alan's sleeve. "You promised, Alan," she said.

"Look, honey, Jeff's in a jam," Alan said. "When he's out of it I'll play you into a coma."

At that moment Paul Sexton chose to stick his nose into the situation. He appeared from somewhere with a kind of a nasty smile on his lips.

"Haven't you done enough slumming for one evening, April?" he asked.

Alan turned his head and gave Sexton one of his mild deceptive looks. "Go away," he said.

"You keep out of this," Sexton said. "This is between April and me."

"Now!" Alan said, so sharply that Sexton let go of April and took an instinctive step backwards.

"Please!" April said. "Please don't quarrel. Just play the piano some more, Alan."

"Even if I had the time, your friend has put me out of the mood," Alan said.

"Oh dear, nothing ever works out the way I want it," April said. She reached out and touched Alan's arm. "Don't ever go away permanently," she said. She turned to Sexton, took his hand, and led him away toward the bar.

Alan watched her go, his eyes narrowed against the smoke from his cigarette. "Just how do you figure her, Jeff?" he asked.

"You got me," I said. "She put up a hard, cold grand to bail me out. Maybe she has an underdog complex."

"Maybe," Alan said, thoughtfully. "Maybe." Then he seemed to snap out of it. "I've got a lot of catching up to do on your trouble. Where can we talk?"

"Those guys are just leaving that table over there in the corner," I said.

Alan gave me a funny look. "You know, Jeff, being your friend makes for a strong disinclination for staying in crowds."

"Come again," I said.

"Whoever murdered Bailey must know that we're going to try to turn the spotlight on him. And our murderer works in crowds,

Jeff. A tiny scratch from a needle—no more painful than the prick of a forgotten cleaner's tag—and curtains! Thank you, I think I prefer the open spaces."

I felt the small hairs rising on the back of my neck. "Let's get out of here," I said.

WE WOUND UP driving around the countryside in Alan's convertible while I brought him up to date. When I'd finished, he didn't say anything for a long time. Finally he asked me a question which for the moment seemed off the beam.

"Was Bailey scheduled to drive a horse in the Hambletonian today, Jeff?"

"No," I said. "The truth is he wasn't expected to drive this week at all. He had a spill at Lexington this spring and broke a collarbone. There was a long piece in the paper about the fact this was going to be the first Hambletonian he'd missed driving in for twenty years."

"Then how come he drove Redfern Hanover today?" Alan asked.

"He's under contract to Sexton and Archer," I said. "They probably figured there wasn't going to be much to this, and the horse needed handling. He hadn't been out for a couple of months."

"His driving was a last minute decision coupled with the entry of the horse?"

"So far as I know," I said.

"You see, Jeff, there's something odd about this," Alan said. "We have a bulge on Knox. We know you didn't kill Bailey. Therefore the motive isn't clear. If someone else wanted to be sure of winning the race, killing Bailey wouldn't accomplish that."

"It put Redfern Hanover out of it," I said.

"But not Sockomo," Alan said. "Sockomo was the favorite after Sexton's horse. What I'm getting at is, if winning the race was the motive, it wasn't enough to get rid of Bailey. They'd have to have taken care of George Murphy and Sockomo too."

It was an angle I hadn't thought of before. "But then—"

"There was another reason for killing Bailey that had nothing to do with the race," Alan said. "You said he had a son working at the track. He'd know whether the old man had any enemies. How can we find him?"

"It's pretty late to go calling, Alan," I said, "especially on a kid whose father's just been knocked off."

"Look," Alan said, "you're the perfect pigeon in this case, Jeff. You have a reputation as a sharper. You had a row with Sexton. It was important to you to win, and the only way you could win was to get Redfern Hanover out of the race. They've tried to frame you once, and they'll probably try it again as long as Knox hasn't any other leads. I don't think we can afford to stand on ceremony."

One of the night watchmen at the stables directed us to the house where Bill Bailey and his son, Eddie, had been staying during race week. The watchman told us Eddie had been learning to drive under his father's supervision, but that he had a job at the track checkroom during the afternoons.

We located the house about half a mile from the track. There were lights on behind drawn shades in one of the lower rooms. We parked the convertible and walked up the front steps to the door. Alan knocked. After a minute or two a nice looking kid opened up. His eyes were red and swollen from bawling.

"You're Eddie Bailey, aren't you?" Alan asked.

"Yes, sir."

"I'm Alan Quist, and this is my friend Jeff Larigan."

The boy turned to look at me and his face puckered up as though he was going to start crying again. "Larigan!" he said in a whisper. "You're the one who—"

"Jeff had nothing to do with your father's death, Eddie. But he's in trouble and we've come to you for help."

For a minute I thought the kid was going to slam the door in our faces. He turned back to Alan as if he was going to protest, but I think he saw sympathy and understanding there and it broke him.

"I—I'm sitting up with—with my father," he said. "They—they brought him here a little while ago. I understood that Mr. Larigan—"

"Can we come in, Eddie?" Alan asked. "Is there some other room where we can talk?"

"Yes, sir. Just across the hall here."

He took us into the dining room of the house. There was a walnut table and sideboard, and a what-not loaded down with Victorian chinaware. We pulled three straight chairs up to the table and sat down. The kid kept looking at me as though I were some kind of monster.

"Eddie, Jeff was arrested on purely circumstantial evidence," Alan said. "He didn't know your father. He didn't have anything against him. He didn't do anything to him. But they're trying to pin it on him."

"But I thought, sir, that—"

"But somebody did have a reason for killing your father, Eddie, and we've got to find out who. That's why we came to see you. We thought you might be able to tell us if your father had enemies and who they were."

"Everybody loved him, Mr. Quist," the kid said. "You can ask around. They'll all tell you the same thing."

"But somebody killed him," Alan said.

"It just doesn't make sense, Mr. Quist. I suppose there were guys who have been sore at him some time or other because they got beat in a race, but that kind of thing doesn't last. You don't kill a man for that."

"Now don't be angry at this, Eddie, but what about women?"

Eddie actually laughed. "He was seventy years old, Mr. Quist. He was married twice. My mother was his second wife and she died when I was born. My father was fifty-

one then. He brought me up. I've been with him every day and night of his life. He was schooling me to drive. I don't think he ever looked at a woman after my mother died."

Alan took a cigarette from his case and lit it. "There has to be some place to get hold of this, Eddie."

"That's why I thought—I mean, they told me Mr. Larigan here had to win the race—I thought—" He let it lie there.

"Kid, I wanted to win that race," I said. "Everybody wants to win a race his horse is in. This one I needed—I needed the dough. But not bad enough to kill for it."

Tears welled up into the kid's eyes. "This was the hardest day of my life," he said. "First father and then the trouble at the checkroom."

ALAN HAD the lost look on his face he gets when he's thinking. He wasn't listening to the kid, it seemed. Just to keep the ball rolling I asked Eddie what had happened at the checkroom.

"I ran out and left the place when the accident happened," Eddie said. "Don Juzwick, the fellow who works with me, took over. A man came and handed in a check for a briefcase—only it wasn't there. Don hunted high and low for it, but he couldn't find it. The man said it was checked during the first race, which was when I was on duty. The checkroom's under the stands. I work there and Don works out in one of the runways and brings stuff down people want to check. Don didn't remember the guy, so it must have been checked with me. But I don't remember him either."

"What was in the case?"

"He wouldn't say, but it must have been very valuable, the way he acted."

I noticed Alan was looking at the kid. Suddenly he spoke up. "Did the man check the case himself?"

"Why—I suppose he did, Mr. Quist. He didn't say otherwise."

"Could this briefcase have been mixed in

with someone else's stuff?" Alan asked him.

"No, sir. How it got lost or handed out I don't know. But it just wasn't there."

"So what did the man do, Eddie?"

"He was burned up," Eddie said. "He said his name was Jones."

"Unique name," Alan said. "Where is he staying?"

"He wouldn't give an address, sir. When it was all over and we couldn't find his briefcase, he just said he'd be back!"

"And he wouldn't describe what was in the case?"

"No, sir."

"How about the case itself? Did he describe that?"

"Just a brown leather briefcase with no initials," Eddie said.

"Look, Alan," I said, "I'm sorry Eddie has this extra trouble, but we're wasting time talking about this briefcase."

"Are we?" Alan said, and there was a kind of excitement in his voice. "Tell me, Eddie, this other boy who worked with you—Don is his name? You say he worked up in the stands and brought stuff down from there to be checked?"

"Yes, sir."

"I imagine he managed to be up there to see the races, didn't he?"

"Yes, sir. Unless somebody sent him down for something, he'd watch. He'd come down after each heat and tell me about it."

"Did he come down to tell you that your father'd been hurt?"

"No, sir. I heard the crowd—and then the loudspeaker—and then I heard people shouting that it was—was him."

"And you tore out of there?"

"Yes, sir."

"Leaving the checkroom deserted?"

"Yes, sir. I didn't stop to think about anything when I heard it was my father."

"That's natural, Eddie. How long was the checkroom deserted?"

"I don't know, sir. It could have been five or ten minutes. Don stayed up in the stands, watching. The head usher came to

find him when people began asking for stuff in the checkroom and there wasn't anyone there."

Alan lit a fresh cigarette and dragged the smoke deep down into his lungs. I couldn't figure out what his interest was in this business about the briefcase, but he kept at it.

"Can you give me an exact description of this Mr. Jones, Eddie?"

"Well, he's very tall, sir," the kid said. "In his middle forties, I'd say. He's thin, and a little stooped, but wiry and strong looking. He has heavy black eyebrows and he scowls all the time, but of course he was angry when he was talking to me."

"Anything else about him, Eddie?"

"Well, sir, the most noticeable thing about him was he was wearing a loose fitting raincoat. You know it was a hot, sunny day. He had a gray snapbrim hat with a little feather in the band. And he wore gloves all the time—kind of dirty chamois gloves."

"That's a pretty detailed description, Eddie, yet you don't remember his checking the briefcase and neither does Don."

"The other kid must have checked it," I said.

"Does Don remember who did check a briefcase with him?"

"It was some man up in the stands. Don gave him his check and tied the other half of it to the case and brought it downstairs to me. I remember putting it away."

"Brown leather?" Alan asked.

The kid shrugged. "Just like any briefcase. I didn't pay much attention."

"And Don doesn't remember who the man was who did check a briefcase?"

"Well, it couldn't have been anyone he knew, sir, or he'd have mentioned it. We kept telling Mr. Jones there'd only been one briefcase we remembered and it wasn't his."

"Does Don remember that man coming in for his briefcase?"

Again the kid shrugged it off. "He wouldn't be likely to, sir. You see, after the races are over everyone comes at once. He

didn't think to mention him, at any rate."

"Can you get hold of Don tomorrow, Eddie, and ask him if he remembers this man?"

"I guess I could if it's important, sir. I kind of thought—"

"I know it's going to be a rough day for you, Eddie," Alan said, "but you do want to have your father's murderer caught, don't you?"

"I want him caught," the kid said, his face very white, "and then I'd like to be left alone with him somewhere—all alone with him!"

"The law will take care of him when we catch up with him, Eddie. But it may be very important for Don to remember what he can about the man who *did* check a case."

"I'll find out from him the first thing in the morning," Eddie said.

"That's very nice of Eddie," I said, kind of exasperated, "but I'm darned if I see how this merry-go-round about the briefcase is going to help catch the murderer."

"Don't you, Jeff?" Alan said. He laughed. "There's an old saying a fellow named Larigan taught me to the effect that there's no bigger sucker for the magician's trick than another magician." He turned back to the kid. "You have no idea where Mr. Jones is staying, Eddie?"

"No, sir. Like I told you, he just said he'd be back."

"When does the checkroom at the track open tomorrow?"

"At eleven in the morning," Eddie said. "You know, people come and sort of camp out for the day."

Alan pushed back his chair and stood up. "Thanks, Eddie. We're going to do our best for you. And we're counting on you to ask Don about the man who checked the briefcase."

"How will I find you again?" Eddie asked.

"Just explain to Don about us," Alan said. "We'll catch up with him at the track.

Good night—and we're terribly sorry about your father."

We walked out of the house. Somewhere in the distance I heard a town clock striking two. I was bushed.

"So I'm a sucker," I said. "I've fallen for some kind of trick. But smart old you has figured out that a mysterious Mr. Jones is the murderer. Suppose you give, my friend."

"You really have missed the boat, Jeff," Alan said. "Don't you see, Mr. Jones is the one person who couldn't be the murderer? Once you understand why Bailey was killed, it's obvious that Jones didn't kill him."

"I'm glad you understand everything," I told him. "Suppose you give it to me in words of one syllable and then I'll—"

I never did finish that sentence, because suddenly a man appeared on the path directly in front of us. He stepped out from behind a big elm tree, blocking our way. He was a big burly guy with arms like a gorilla.

"Which one of you guys is Larigan?" he asked. He had the husky voice of an ex-pug.

"I am," I said. "What's it to you?"

"Mr. Risedale wants to see you," the gorilla said.

"Tell him thank you very much, but I need sleep and I'll see him tomorrow," I drawled.

"He wants to see you now," the gorilla said. "He said no matter how late it was when I found you, I was to bring you out to the house."

"How did you find us?" Alan asked.

"Someone saw you leaving the inn in a blue convertible. I just cruised around till I saw it parked here. Let's get going right away."

"Not tonight," I said.

"Don't make me get tough," the gorilla said.

"I don't feel tough, either, Jeff," Alan said. "Let's go with him."

CHAPTER FOUR

The \$64 Question

WE GOT INTO a big limousine and the gorilla drove us. I was sore. I didn't know why Bailey had been killed; I didn't know why the mysterious Mr. Jones couldn't have done it; I had no interest in talking to April's old man. I don't like being pushed around.

I couldn't talk to Alan in front of the gorilla. I could see the outlines of his face each time he drew on his cigarette. I knew him well enough to know that he was feeling "hot." He thought he had hold of something. It was exasperating not to be able to pry it out of him.

We'd driven a couple of miles when I saw a big house set up on a rise of ground back from the main road which was lit up like a honkytonk. The limousine swung in through a pair of stone gates and up a gravel drive to a portico that extended out from the front door of the house. The gorilla opened the car door for us. In the light from the windows I got a good look at his face. It was all scar tissue around the eyes and mouth. He was an ex-leather pusher all right. He went to the front door, which was oak, bound with iron braces and with old-time iron hinges. It wasn't locked.

We went into an entrance hall that looked like the Hollywood movie set for an English castle. The hall was bigger than most houses. There was a winding staircase with a graceful white balustrade going up to the second floor. Almost the minute we were inside a guy started coming down from the second floor.

He was short and pudgy, this guy on the stair, but he walked with a kind of smooth elegance. He was bald as an egg, and he was wearing a gray Chinese silk dressing gown with a bright red sash tied around his tummy. At a distance I thought there was something wrong with one of his eyes. Then he got closer and the light struck the

eyeglass he was wearing and reflected back at me. I'd never seen a guy wearing a monocle except in the movies. It propped the eye a little wider open than the other, which seemed to be set in a hunk of doughy flesh, like a raisin in a bun.

He walked up to us, looking first at Alan and then at me. He was smoking a cigarette in a long jade holder. Finally the raisin eye focused on Alan.

"You will be good enough to tell me, Mr. Larigan, how and why you have bewitched my daughter," he said. He had a thick accent. It was Dutch, I guess.

Alan grinned at him. "I'm not Larigan," he said. "I just came along for the ride."

Risedale turned his head and the good eye fixed on me in beady surprise. "You're Larigan?" he said.

"Yes, and I don't like command performances, Risedale," I said.

"But you're old enough to be her father!" he said.

"But I'm not her father," I said. "You're her father. Now, if that's got you straightened out, suppose you have your slug-nutty chauffeur drive us back to our car."

"You will be good enough to come into my study with me," Risedale said. He didn't wait for us to say yes or no. He stalked off toward a door at the right side of the hall. I would have left him flat, but Alan followed him.

I'm no art connoisseur, but I guessed that it had cost a small fortune to furnish the room we entered. I sank down in the rug up to my ankles. Parts of the walls were lined with books and the rest were covered by tapestries and paintings. I don't know anything about furniture either, but this was out of some antique period, solid, massive. There was a big stone fireplace, and since it was coldish there was a fire burning. In front of the fireplace was a table and on the table was a silver tray, loaded down with cutglass decanters. There were liqueur glasses and highball glasses the like of which I'd never seen.

"Will you gentlemen drink?" Risedale asked. "The brandy is rather special."

"I guess we deserve something for our trouble," I said, still suffering from a slow burn.

He poured from one of the decanters. That's when I noticed his hands. They were delicate as a woman's—they'd have been beautiful on a woman. He handed each of us a liqueur glass half-filled with brandy. I tasted mine. It was smooth as oil, and with a flavor I'd never tasted before. I still dream about it.

"I confess to confusion," Risedale said. "My daughter, April, has lived an extremely sheltered life until quite recently." The corner of his mouth twitched. "When it was reported to me that she seemed to have taken a fancy to a Mr. Larigan, and had actually put up a thousand dollars to go bail for him, I decided it was some sort of infatuation and I felt I should take a hand."

"Baloney," I said. "You can't be so damned concerned with your daughter if you let her get tangled up with a guy like Paul Sexton."

"An entirely just criticism," he said. "That situation has gotten out of hand, but I expect confidently it will be remedied before anything so disastrous as a marriage takes place."

"You don't like Sexton?" Alan asked.

"He is a swine," Risedale said, without emotion. He was just stating a fact.

"Sexton is your funeral," I said. "Now what is it you want of me?"

Risedale sipped his brandy, looking at me over the rim of his glass. "I intended to warn you to stay away from April," he said. "I had a misconception of the situation."

"Well, if that's all, we'll be going," I said.

"A touch more brandy," he suggested.

"By all means," Alan said, before I could say no. "This is a really magnificent room, Mr. Risedale. That's a Vermeer on that wall, isn't it?"

"You have an eye for painting, Mr.—I don't think I got your name."

"Quist. Alan Quist."

"I am Dutch," Risedale said. "Everything you see in this room came from my homeland—before it was despoiled by the Nazis."

"I understand you are in the diamond business," Alan said.

"I made a large fortune in the diamond importing business in Amsterdam before the war," Risedale said. "Since coming to this country I took up diamond cutting as a hobby. I have become probably the best and most famous diamond cutter in the business." Again he was stating a fact. Modesty wasn't part of his make-up. "Since money is not an objective, I take only the most valuable and complicated stones to cut. Thus my fame."

"Of course you don't do any work here," Alan said.

"On the contrary. I do a great deal of work here," Risedale said. "Cutting a really valuable stone—and of course I only handle the most valuable—requires study—days, weeks, sometimes months of study. You must be right before you begin because you have no second chance. This is an ideal place to relax and study. I have the most modern of safes and a burglar-proof workroom. A stone in my care here is as secure as if it were in the vaults of the Bank of England."

"It must have been fascinating work," Alan said.

"Fascinating, extremely delicate, and if I say so myself, requiring nerves of iron. One slip—one false move—and hundreds of thousands of dollars may be lost."

I MURMURED, "And so, as the sun rises over the rolling hills of Goshen we take our leave of Risedale Hall and go somewhere where, for the good Lord's sake, we can get some sleep!"

"I owe you an apology, Mr. Larigan," Risedale said. "And in the face of that I

still have the temerity to ask you a favor."

"What favor?" I said.

"April is much taken with you," he said. "I believe you have helped to make her see just what sort of a swine Paul Sexton is. If you could continue to point that out to her, I would be forever in your debt."

"It doesn't need an awful lot of pointing out," I said.

"It is her first romance. I made the mistake of ordering her to drop the association," Risedale said. He sighed. "For the first time in her life she rebelled against my wishes. I had to reform my campaign. I decided to throw them together. I invited Sexton to stay here during race week. I thought that perhaps constant being together would reveal to her what he really is. You have unwittingly aided me. I'm grateful. I apologize for having suspected that you were another fortune hunter with whom I had to deal severely."

"You should have turned her loose long ago," I said. "She's dying for excitement."

"You know, Mr. Risedale," Alan said, "I'm interested in April and her future, but I'm much more interested to know what you're going to do about the robbery."

The glass Risedale dropped on the stone hearth splintered into a thousand pieces. He looked down at it. "How stupid of me," he said. "Those brandy glasses were made in Holland in eighteen hundred seven." He raised his eyes to Alan's face. "You spoke about a robbery, Mr. Quist? What robbery?"

"Yeah, what robbery?" I said, sounding like Charley McCarthy.

Alan looked at Risedale, smiling. "You sent for us on the pretext of investigating our fitness to be April's friends. You know that Jeff has been involved in a particularly senseless and brutal murder, yet you haven't asked one question about it. I noticed the man who brought us here was carrying a gun. You would have used force to get us here, if necessary."

"What has all of this to do with robbery?" Risedale asked. "There has been no robbery."

"Look, Risedale, sometimes it's necessary to show part of your hand in order to show you aren't bluffing. Today at the track a man was murdered, apparently senselessly. It couldn't win a race for anyone. You see, I know Jeff is innocent and his horse was a favorite after Redfern Hanover. So I can only conclude Bailey wasn't killed in order to win a race. He isn't scheduled to drive in the Hambletonian. Personal enemies, then? He had none. Then why was he murdered? What could it gain anyone?"

"Murder is always senseless," Risedale said.

"On a philosophical level, perhaps," Alan said. "Practically, something was accomplished by Bailey's murder."

"What?" Risedale and I asked him in chorus.

"The checkroom at the track was left deserted for from five to ten minutes," Alan said. "Bailey's son was in charge. Obviously he would leave the place when he heard his father was hurt."

"Alan!" I said. "Are you crazy? You're saying Bailey was murdered simply to draw that kid out of the checkroom."

"That's right, Jeff. He was drawn away and somebody stole Mr. Jones' briefcase."

"Good Lord, to kill a man just to distract attention!" I said. "That briefcase must have been solid gold!"

"Or perhaps it contained an uncut diamond worth several hundred thousand dollars," Alan said.

"Nonsense!" Risedale said. "Sheer fantasy, Mr. Quist."

"Let me continue the fantasy," Alan said. "If you had been robbed, Risedale, only someone in your household could have gotten around your safes, your burglar alarms and other protective devices. It could have been a servant. It could have been Sexton, your house guest. It could

have been April. I think you don't want to call in the police until you're certain it's not April."

"But I tell you there's been no robbery," Risedale said. But his hand shook as he held a lighter to his cigarette.

"I think the thief took the stolen stone to the race track in a briefcase and checked it," Alan said. "He couldn't risk being seen passing it to the receiver—a certain Mr. Jones. But he passed the claim check to Mr. Jones in the crowd. But when Mr. Jones went to get the briefcase, it was gone—stolen during the excitement of Old Bill Bailey's murder."

"And who has this mythical stone now?" Risedale asked.

"Why, the murderer," Alan said. "You see why I said it couldn't have been Jones who did the killing, Jeff. Jones lost by having the checkroom deserted."

"But there has been no robbery!" Risedale insisted.

"So you keep saying," Alan said, cheerfully. "Yet it's interesting that Paul Sexton, your daughter's fiancé, persuaded Bailey to drive at the last minute. Paul Sexton also is living under your roof. He is the only one who could have initiated all the details so that they would be timed perfectly. I suggest he could have stolen a valuable diamond from you—at the instigation of Jones, the receiver.

"He was probably to get a flat price for his treachery, or a commission on the eventual sales price. He could arrange the exact time for the theft; he could arrange for Bailey to drive; he would be close to Bailey just before the race without arousing suspicion; he could easily have inflicted the mortal scratch with the hypodermic. And after passing the checkroom check to Mr. Jones, he could have stolen back the briefcase and later had all the profits for himself." Alan smiled sweetly at Risedale. "How do you like it?"

"I would pay a great deal for it if you could prove it," Risedale said grimly.

"I know," Alan said. "There's just one catch in it. Was April helping him? He'd yell to high heaven if he was caught, and you don't want April involved. Dilemma: report the theft and have the insurance dicks and the state police bearing down on the case and perhaps naming April as an accomplice, or withhold information about the robbery, try to recover the diamond yourself—or frame some innocent person. Like Jeff, for instance."

THE LIGHT reflected against Risedale's eyeglass and I saw that it was trembling. Alan was somewhere very close to the bull's-eye on the target.

"You had us brought here," Alan went on, "because you knew April was showing unusual interest in Jeff. You weren't concerned about him as a romantic threat. You wanted to find out if he was part of the conspiracy, or if he could be used. Well, now you know we're not to be had quite so easily. Mr. Risedale."

Risedale drew a deep breath. "Just what is it you want of me?"

"It was you who sent for us. What do you want of us?"

"I want you to keep out of this," Risedale said. It was an amazing admission of how close to correct Alan was.

"Jeff is in a spot. We've got to clear him of murder," Alan said.

"I am a rich man," Risedale said, in an unsteady voice. He gestured with his cigarette holder at the room. "You don't need proof of that. I promise you Mr. Larigan won't be convicted of murder. I will put all my resources at his disposal; get him the best lawyers. Only get out of this and stay out of it, Mr. Quist."

"The best lawyers might not be good enough," Alan said. "What we have to have is the murderer."

"Let the police handle it," Risedale said.

"The police think Jeff is guilty. All they're going to do is cement their case against him. They're not looking for any-

one else, and they won't unless we point the way, Mr. Risedale!"

"You're in over your head, Mr. Quist," Risedale said. "The stakes are too big. Unless you promise to say nothing, to lie low—"

"We're wasting time," Alan said. "Will you send for your man to drive us back to the village, or do we walk?"

Risedale spread his delicate hands in a gesture of helplessness. "You leave me no choice, Mr. Quist. I can't let you go! I can't let you wreck things until—until it is safe. I dislike force, but—" He stopped abruptly. We all heard the sound of the closing front door, the sound of April's laughter and Sexton's sullen voice.

"You can choose, Risedale," Alan said quickly. "Send us back to town or we discuss the whole thing here and now with April and Paul Sexton."

"No!" Risedale said, sharply. "No!" he sighed. "I will send you back to town," he said. "But Lord help you. Lord help all of us!"

Then April came barging into the room with Sexton at her heels. She stopped at the sight of us, and for a moment I couldn't tell if she was delighted or scared stiff. But she recovered from her surprise quickly.

"But this is wonderful!" she cried. "Jeff and Alan! What are you doing here?"

"Mr. Quist is an art connoisseur," Risedale said, smoothly. "He came to see some of the paintings."

"At three o'clock in the morning?" Sexton asked, sourly.

"My dear Paul. Being a guest in this house doesn't give you the privilege of questioning my word," Risedale said.

"But Alan!" April said. "You must come into the music room. You must play for me and keep on playing. I've been looking all over town for you. Paul's very unhappy about it."

"April, act your age!" Sexton said.

I looked at Risedale. I thought I'd never seen such fury as was blazing in his eyes.

But his voice was oil. "I've just rung for Gus to drive our friends back to town, April," he said. "I'm sure Mr. Quist will play for you some other time."

"But I want him to play now!" April said.

"I'm sorry, April, but Jeff and I are both exhausted," Alan said. "You know what he's been through. And tomorrow's a big day for you too, isn't it? Doesn't Mr. Sexton have a horse going in the Hambletonian?"

"A wonderful horse!" April said, with real enthusiasm. "The Maestro! Bet your shirt on him, Alan—and we'll have a party here after the race to celebrate. We can, can't we, Father?"

"If you like," Risedale said. I thought he really wasn't listening.

Then Gus, the gorilla, appeared in the doorway and we said good-by.

"We have box seventy-one A," April said. "Come and see the race from there."

"If I'm not in jail," I said.

We couldn't talk on the drive back to town on account of Gus. He took us to where we'd left the convertible. I saw the lights still burning in the downstairs room of the boarding house where Eddie Bailey sat with his father. The rest of the town had folded up.

Alan climbed in behind the wheel of the convertible, lit a cigarette and leaned back against the seat with a sigh. I guess he was as bushed as I was.

"Brother, you really pulled one out of the hat," I said. "It was sheer bluff, and you forced him to admit at least part of it was true."

"It wasn't bluff, Jeff," he said. "Don't you see, once I was convinced of the reason for Bailey's murder—the old magician's trick of distracting the eye from what the hand is doing—it had to be Sexton. Sexton put Bailey into the race. Bailey wasn't supposed to be ready to drive. There was nothing accidental about any part of this. Sexton must have planned the robbery, car-

ried it out and then figured this particularly vicious way to keep all the chips for himself."

"Can we prove it?"

"Only if we can prove the robbery."

"How? Risedale won't admit it publicly."

"Maybe through Mr. Jones," Alan said, "if we can find him. Mr. Jones must be burning up by now. He knows or thinks he was doublecrossed."

"Well, what are we waiting for?" I said. "It'll be a pleasure to see Sexton fry, and for my dough you can wipe off the idea April's involved. She's a good kid. She's been helping me from the start."

"That, Jeff, is the sixty-four dollar question," Alan said. "I mean—was it help?"

"What do you mean, was it help? She bailed me out of jail!"

"Jeff, the game isn't played out," Alan said. "Somebody's crossed up somebody else, but good. If there's another killing in the cards, you couldn't be had for it if you were in jail. When you stop to think of it, Jeff, it was April who really instigated your row with Sexton. It was April who advised you to leave town—which would certainly have incriminated you. Maybe she was helping, Jeff. Maybe she was just trying to wrap you up and give you to Knox for Christmas."

CHAPTER FIVE

Blackout Time

I WOKE UP the next morning with the sun shining brightly in my eyes. My watch on the bedside table showed me it was ten o'clock. The other twin bed was empty. Alan was already up and gone somewhere. I swore to myself, got up, and tried shaving in cold water from the pitcher on the washstand. I had only cut myself twice when I heard Alan coming up the stairs, whistling. He looked cheerful when he came into the room.

"A fruitful morning," he said. "I dug up one important piece of information, and I got me a job."

"All right, all right, never mind the mystery," I said. "Give!"

He sat down on the edge of the bed and lit a cigarette. "The information is this. The Sexton of the racing stable of Sexton and Archer is not our friend Paul. It was his father, who died about a year ago. Archer owns the horses. He's an old gent who never leaves his breeding farm in Kentucky. Friend Paul is on salary as a sort of manager. He hasn't two half dollars to rub together. He owes right and left. Which tightens the motive, Jeff."

"He wants to marry the gal and rob her old man at the same time," I said. "A real sweet-smelling gent."

"If he cashed in on the robbery, I suspect the marriage would fly out the window," Alan said. "We're going to find out about that, which is where the job comes in. I've become a checkroom attendant."

"What?"

"I'm taking over Eddie Bailey's job at eleven o'clock, so step on it."

"What's the idea?"

"I've got a hunch Mr. Jones will come back to make further inquiries about his briefcase. I want to talk to him. I want you hidden away so that if he takes fright you can tail him. Step on it."

At eleven o'clock, Alan, in an usher's blue coat, was standing behind the counter in the checkroom at the Good Time Track. Racing didn't start till two, but as Eddie had told us, people began drifting in early. They'd come to the checkroom, if they'd anything to leave, and then start wandering around the grounds.

There was a lot to see. Horses looked out of the half doors of their stalls. Others were being walked around after workouts on the track. Stablemen shined and polished sulkies and harness. People brought basket lunches and picnicked wherever they could find a patch of grass. There's still

an element of country fair on Hambletonian day. They talked about the entries in the big race, about the drivers, about Old Bill Bailey, who would be missing the Hambletonian for the first time since it was started in 1926.

Nothing much happened at the checkroom. Alan stationed me in the back of the place and we waited. He said he didn't really expect Jones to appear before the first race started at two, but we couldn't take chances on that. It seems he'd arranged this deal with the head usher. Don Juzwick, the boy who worked with Eddie, came down from the stands occasionally with stuff to check. Alan had asked him one question.

"Do you know Mr. Paul Sexton by sight?"

"No, sir."

"One of us will point him out to you later," Alan said. "I want you to see if he isn't the man who checked a briefcase with you. You'd remember him if he was?"

"Yes, sir. I would."

It was funny, hidden away there in the checkroom. Every once in a while you could hear the thunder of hoofs on the track as horses worked out. The square, steady rhythm of it seemed to shake the ground under your feet.

Twelve o'clock came and went, and no Mr. Jones. One o'clock. At two o'clock the loudspeaker began announcing the names and numbers of the horses for the first race. They were out on the track, and they kept thundering by in practice starts.

We were deserted now. Everybody had moved up into the stands. And then Mr. Jones appeared, just as Eddie Bailey had described him—tall and stoop-shouldered, wearing a loose raincoat and a gray snap-brim hat with a feather in the band. His hands were in the pockets of the raincoat. I couldn't see his face from where I was hiding, hidden as it was under the hat-brim.

He walked up to the counter and looked

at Alan. "You're not the one who was in charge here yesterday," he said.

"No," Alan said.

"My name is Jones. I came to inquire about a briefcase that was lost here yesterday."

"I was expecting you, Mr. Jones," Alan said, blandly.

"You've found the case?"

"We've found *a* case," Alan said. "If you'll describe yours, Mr. Jones, it may be the one we have."

"It was plain brown leather—with no initials."

"I'm afraid that won't do," Alan said. "The contents of the case we found is extremely valuable. We would have to have a description of the contents before we could pass it over to you."

"Just show me the case. I can identify it," Jones said.

I remember moving to get a better look at him. There was something familiar about his voice.

"I'm sorry," Alan said, "but you'll have to describe the contents, Mr. Jones."

Mr. Jones was in a rough spot, if Alan was right about him. He couldn't say there was a diamond in the case without mixing himself up with a robbery and possibly a murder. That didn't bother Mr. Jones. He lowered his voice.

"This bulge in my pocket is a gun," he said. "Hand over that briefcase unless you want a couple of slugs in your stomach."

It was then I recognized him and pulled a boner, I was so surprised. His name was no more Jones than mine was. He was Max Lazar, a jewel thief I'd encountered once on a cruise boat. He was one of the big leaguers in the jewel racket. I walked out into the clear.

"Hello, Max," I said. "Fancy seeing you here."

His eyes switched to me for just a second and then back to Alan. "Hand over the briefcase," he said.

I walked slowly toward him. "This is

Max Lazar," I told Alan. "I know him from way back. He fits into your picture all right. Jewels are his racket." I reached the counter. "Better give up the idea of gunplay, Max. You can't get away with it."

I guess I am losing my grip, because I got half a step too close to him. I heard Alan's warning shout—too late. Lazar's hand came out of his pocket. I don't know whether it was a gun barrel or a sap but he struck me over the left temple with it. There was an explosion inside my head—and blackout.

WHEN I opened my eyes I looked into a blinding whiteness. I tried to move and every bone in my body ached—particularly my head. Just as I was managing to get into a sitting position somebody grabbed me and tried to push me back, but gently.

"Just take it easy, mister," a woman's voice said.

It suited me. I lay back again, but I turned my head to one side and things began to come slowly into a kind of whirling focus. I was in some kind of a whitewashed room, lying on a white iron-frame bed.

"Where am I?" I said.

"You're all right," the woman said. "You just need to take it easy."

I managed to spot her in the haze. She was wearing a nurse's uniform. "Am I still at the Good Time Track?" I asked her. "Is this some kind of first-aid place?"

"Now you just take it easy," she said.

"Don't treat me like a ten-year-old child," I said. "I was at the checkroom under the stands. Somebody slugged me. How did I get here?"

"One of the checkroom boys found you," the nurse said. "You were under the counter."

"What happened to the fellow who was running the checkroom?"

"I don't know," she said. "Nobody seems to know. He just disappeared."

I groaned and tried sitting up again. "What time is it?"

"A little after three," she said. "Now you just—"

"I got to get out of here!" I said. Max Lazar had taken Alan out of there at the point of a gun. Lazar wasn't someone to fool with.

"Now you just take it easy," the nurse said. She sounded like a stuck gramophone record. "This is one Hambletonian you're not going to see!"

I got my feet down on the floor and I thought the top of my head was going to come off. The whole place started going round. I thought I was going to be sick. I kept telling myself over and over that I had to move. Alan was in bad trouble. I had to move. The nurse kept telling me to take it easy and she sounded as though she was talking from the bottom of a well.

I must have got out of there, because I found myself staggering along between the stables, headed for the grandstand, the smell of straw and leather coming to me in waves. I was thinking in pieces, like a drunk trying to remember what had happened the night before. Lazar and Paul Sexton were in cahoots—if I could find Sexton he might be made to take me to where Lazar was—that was the one idea I kept having—Sexton to Lazar to Alan—Tinkers to Evers to Chance—Box 71 A, April had said. . . .

Somebody in blue loomed up in front of me. "Box seventy-one A," I muttered.

"Two gates over, sir."

I staggered against an automobile—a hundred automobiles in a row. I was trying to force my eyes to focus. They felt like hot, aching marbles in my head. New York State, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Virginia—what the hell was this, the World's Fair? There was a foghorn voice in the distance. For a minute I thought it was that crazy nurse following me, then it came clear again. This was the Good Time Track at Goshen—the Hambletonian

—Sexton to Lazar to Alan—the voice was the track loudspeaker and he was giving the starting horses for the classic. Box 71 A. I had to get to Box 71 A. “Let me through, please—I got to get through, please—”

“Stop shoving!”

“It’s a little late to be coming through here, wise guy!”

“I must get through—Box Seventy-one A. It’s a matter of life and death!” People jammed in the aisles, angry, giving ground grudgingly. Then I saw the great triangle of the track, people crowded at the rail. To the left, a yellow monster with chromium wings spread out across the reddish clay. Slowly, with mincing steps, horses and drivers were heading down the track—red, green, purple and gold, red—a disjointed rainbow—and the glitter of silver wire spokes in the wheels of sulkies, spinning like my head.

“Please let me through! It’s urgent—an emergency—I’m sorry, but I got to get through.” Box 71 A.

The pounding of hoofs on dry clay drowned out the sound of my voice. They were coming now, behind the wings of the yellow monster, like a team of eight.

“Go!”

The sharp clatter of hoofs turned into a muffled drumming as they passed the stands.

Box 71 A! I had to find it.

The horses were at the far turn. They seemed to be moving slowly, like flies on a windowpane, and the silver wheels of the sulkies, seen through the fence rails, gave the illusion of turning backward. I lifted my hands to my eyes, too groggy to realize that everyone was seeing it just as I saw it.

At last I spotted her—April. She and Sexton were in a box only a few yards away. She was jumping up and down and screaming as the horses reached the three-quarter pole and blazed into the last stretch.

“Watch ’em, people! Here they come! Watch ’em!”

Sick and half out of my head as I was, I

froze as they came into the stretch in the brush for home. They looked like the flying colored tail of a kite at first, and then they came, whips flashing forked lightning over heads and along steaming flanks. They came storming toward the finish, but always in that square, disciplined trot—precise, beautifully organized. I could hear the hoot of a driver as he shouted at a tiring but willing horse. They passed under the wire in a thunder of hoofs and human voices cheering hoarsely.

I saw April sink back into her seat, sitting very still. I guess The Maestro, Sexton’s horse, hadn’t done it. People moved, and I was able to fight my way to the box. I stumbled into it almost falling—grabbing Sexton’s coat lapels to keep from going down.

“Thief and murderer!” I heard someone shouting. It was me! “Where’s Alan? What have you and Lazar done with Alan?”

I saw his face, blurred, but white as the lather on the winning horse that was parading back before the crowd. Sexton was trying to get away from me but in the confines of the box no one could move. Then someone had hold of me, someone much too strong, and was pulling me off Sexton. It was Captain Knox.

“What’s going on here?” he asked, reasonably enough.

“Sexton’s your man,” I blubbered. “He stole a diamond from Hendrik Risedale! He murdered Bailey. His partner has kidnapped Alan!”

“The man’s crazy!” Sexton said, in a shaking voice. “I haven’t stolen anything! I haven’t killed anyone. The man’s crazy! He’s having a fit or something.”

“Okay,” Knox said, “just keep it quiet or you’ll start a riot. Come on, all of you, with me.”

“We don’t have to go with you,” Sexton said. “Just lock this lunatic up. I’ve had enough trouble with him already.”

“He’s made charges against you,” Knox

said. "Let's straighten them out once and for all. Come on."

I remember I looked at April. Her face was deathly, her eyes two blue holes in a white mask. I must have started to pass out again, because I felt Knox's arm go around me, holding me up.

"Don't let Sexton go, whatever you do," I murmured. "Alan's got a case against him. When we find Alan—"

"Just take it easy," Knox said. I remember wondering if that was all anybody knew how to say in Goshen.

CHAPTER SIX

A Frame to Die In

I HEARD Sexton say, "Where are you taking us?"

We were riding in the troopers' car. Sexton and April and I were in the back seat. Knox was in front with the driver.

"We're going to see Mr. Risedale," Knox said. "If there's been a theft, we'll soon find out. If there hasn't, we'll get this guy out of your hair once and for all, Mr. Sexton."

"I don't know why you listen to him," Sexton said.

Frankly, I didn't either. We turned up the driveway to Risedale's house. It was even more impressive in the daytime than it had been the night before—stone with great white pillars holding up the portico, and acres of rolling lawns flanking the driveway in a series of rising terraces.

A flunky in uniform opened the front door to us, and after a minute took us into the study. Risedale was there. He was wearing gray flannel slacks, a gaudy sport coat and a white ascot scarf. There was even less life in his putty-like face in daylight. He looked from one to the other of us in surprise, the eyeglass glittering in his eye.

"My dear April, what's wrong?" he asked.

April opened her mouth to say something, and then changed her mind. Her dark blue eyes seemed to be searching her father's face for some kind of unspoken message.

"I'll put it to you straight, Mr. Risedale," Knox said. "Sexton and this man Larigan have been leveling a series of charges and counter-charges at each other. This time Larigan has made a public accusation to the effect that Sexton has stolen a diamond from you."

"But how absurd!" Risedale said, in a toneless voice.

"Now look here, Risedale—" I began.

"Now you shut up," Knox said, "or you'll get hurt worse than you have already."

"I can't understand why you'd take Larigan's word," Risedale said. "He's suspected of murder. But for my daughter's mistaken enthusiasm for underdog causes, he would still be in jail."

"Nothing has been stolen from you?" Knox said.

"Certainly not!"

"You're positive?"

"My dear Captain Knox, of course I'm positive."

I saw Knox's mouth tighten. "I guess that's all I need to know, Mr. Risedale," he said. He turned toward me.

"Do you always give up so easily, Captain?" a voice said behind us. It was Alan!

I spun around. He was standing in the doorway, looking none the worse for wear, and with him was a dapper gray-haired guy I'd never seen before.

"Van Zandt!" Risedale said. "This is a surprise!"

The gray-haired guy came past Alan and over to shake hands with Risedale. He looked both worried and angry. "I know this is a lot of nonsense, Hendrik," he said. "But this young man—Quist, his name is—phoned our offices in New York and told us the diamond you are studying to cleave for us had been stolen and that you had

failed to report it. It so happened I was here in Goshen for the race. I was dragged away just as it was about to begin, and ordered by my associates to come here and see you."

"My dear fellow, I'm delighted to see you," Risedale said. "I don't quite know why your associates would take fright at such a ridiculous accusation from someone they don't know like Quist, but since they have—"

"It seems Roger Mervin does know Quist," Van Zandt said. "He swears by him."

"Would it reassure you," Risedale asked, smoothly, "if I showed you the stone of yours that I have here?"

"That would settle it, of course," Van Zandt said. "You know that I don't believe this tale for an instant, Hendrik, but—" He shrugged.

I glanced at Sexton. He looked twenty years older. I thought he was going to decompose right in front of us.

"Pardon me for a few moments," Risedale said. He started out of the room.

"I suggest you go with him, Captain Knox," Alan said. "It would be a pity if he didn't come back."

Risedale stopped and turned. There was a grim smile on his lips. "I insist you come with me, Captain," he said.

"Please, Hendrik," Van Zandt said, unhappily, "you know how I feel about this. But I—"

"I quite understand," Risedale said. "This way, Captain."

There was an uncomfortable silence in the room when they'd gone. Alan came over to me. "Are you all right, Jeff?"

"A little woozy but all right," I said.

"Lazar took it on the run after he slugged you," Alan said. "By the time I'd gotten out from behind the counter he'd managed to lose himself. I sent one of the ushers to look out for you."

"Look," I said, "if you can't prove there's been a robbery, Knox is going to clamp

down on me but good. He's running out of patience. What happens if Risedale produces the diamond and satisfies Van Zandt?"

"Then we play our next card," Alan said, quietly.

"Yes, but if Risedale can prove no robbery he holds the trump ace. How did you tie up with Van Zandt and who is he?"

"I have a friend in the diamond importing business in New York," Alan said. "Roger Mervin. I got him on the phone and asked him how we could find out who Risedale was working for at the moment. When I told him why I wanted to know, he nearly hit the ceiling. It seems Risedale is working for Roger and a group of associates. Van Zandt is one of them and it turned out he was right here in Goshen to see the Hambletonian. It was a double coincidence and a lucky one."

"Not if Risedale holds that trump ace," I said.

"We have to play them as they fall," Alan said. He smiled faintly. "Looking at Sexton, I kind of like what's in my hand."

It was as if Sexton sensed we were discussing him. He suddenly jerked himself up out of his chair. "I'm getting out of here," he said.

"Sorry," Alan said, moving quickly.

"This whole thing is cockeyed," Sexton said. "You two crooks can't keep me here!"

"We can try," Alan said.

Sexton's moment was lost because Risedale came back into the room with Knox at his heels. He was carrying what looked like a piece of black flannel in his hands. He didn't say anything. From inside the flannel bag he produced a package wrapped in white paper. He put the bag down flat on the center table and began unwrapping the package. All the while he kept his eyes fixed on Alan.

"You're quite sure you know what you're doing, Risedale?" Alan asked. He sounded, suddenly, very grave.

"Quite sure," Risedale said. He shook

something out of the package onto the black flannel square. It looked like a large, dirty ice cube. "There you are, Van Zandt," he said.

VAN ZANDT walked over to the table. He took a jeweler's loup out of his vest pocket and fitted it into his eye. He picked up the ice cube and examined it for a full minute. Nobody spoke or moved. Finally he put the cube down and removed the loup from his eye.

"Hendrik, I owe you a humble apology," he said. "I've examined this stone a dozen times before. There's no question about it."

"Thank you," Risedale said, stiffly.

Knox turned to Alan and me. "Well?" he said.

"I guess it is my turn again," Alan said. "I have another friend with me, waiting in the hall." He called out, "Come in here, Don."

A freckle-faced young fellow in a blue usher's coat came in from the hall. He stood in the doorway looking around the room. Suddenly he saw Sexton and he kept staring at him.

"Do you see the man here who checked a briefcase with you yesterday?" Alan asked.

"Yes, sir," Don said. "Him!" And he pointed at Sexton.

Sexton bounced up out of his chair. "What is this? What are you trying to pull now?" It was a terrible bluff. I could almost smell the fear oozing out of him.

"Yes, what is this?" Knox demanded.

Alan ignored him. He was watching Risedale, who was folding the stone back in the white diamond paper. "Your play, Mr. Risedale," Alan said.

Risedale slid the stone into the black flannel bag. He ignored Alan. "In view of the suspicion you and your associates have had of me," he said to Van Zandt, "I must, of course, refuse to consider continuing with this job."

"Nonsense, my dear fellow," Van Zandt

said. "Only that Mervin had some sort of faith in this man Quist we wouldn't—"

"I'm sorry," Risedale said. "I wash my hands of it." He held out the black bag to Van Zandt.

"But good Lord, man, I can't just carry it away in my pocket!" Van Zandt protested. "It's worth nearly half a million."

"I'm sure Captain Knox will give you protection until you can get it to a safe place," Risedale said. "I refuse to keep it in my possession a second longer."

"Okay," Knox said, grimly, "I'll come back for you, Mr. Van Zandt, after I've put these two phonies in jail."

Risedale was regarding Alan through his eyeglass, sardonically. "You can do me a favor, Captain Knox," he said. "Quist and Larigan have caused me a great deal of trouble and embarrassment. There are one or two things I'd like to straighten out with them before you take them away. Suppose you convoy Mr. Van Zandt and the diamond to a place of safety and then come back. I guarantee your prisoners will still be here when you return."

"I also guarantee it, if you care," Alan said to Knox.

There's one thing about Alan. He has a tendency to overplay his hand. I knew he was doing it then. We'd lost. We couldn't prove the robbery. Without that we couldn't implicate any of Risedale's household.

Knox hesitated.

"As you know, Captain, my chauffeur and I both have permits to carry guns," Risedale said. "They were issued to us due to the nature of my business. Your prisoners will be here, I promise you."

"Yes," I said, "but dead or alive? I'm for a nice quiet cell somewhere if you don't mind."

It was the wrong thing to have said. It made Knox mad. He felt we'd made a sucker of him and he wanted to do Risedale a favor. "I'll leave them in your custody," he said to Risedale. "Come on, Mr. Van Zandt."

So they went, and the moment Alan and I found ourselves alone with Risedale, April and Sexton, Risedale produced a small, snub-nosed gun from his pocket. He handled it delicately, tentatively. I looked around behind me. Gus, the gorilla, was lolling in the doorway.

"Now it's your play, Mr. Quist," Risedale said.

"I admire your nerve," Alan said. "But the trouble is that each time you play a card you weaken your position. Producing the diamond was a master stroke, but you and I know what it proves, Risedale."

"But only you and I know," Risedale said. "And you are never going to get the chance to prove it."

"Shot while attempting to escape," Alan said grimly. "Is that the way the script reads?"

"Something like that," Risedale said.

"Father!" It was a hoarse little cry from April, the first sound she'd uttered since we'd come back from the track.

"I haven't any choice," Risedale told her.

Suddenly April was out of her chair and she crossed to Alan and stood looking up at him. "Why are you doing this?" she demanded. "If you wouldn't keep forcing and forcing, Alan, you and Jeff would be safe. Father promised you, didn't he? What do you care about Bailey or whether or not a diamond was stolen?"

"My dear unprincipled infant," Alan said, gently. "I have to shave every morning! I have to look at myself in the mirror. Bailey's murder was the most coldly calculated piece of villainy I've ever encountered. I couldn't live with it as a secret!"

April took a step back from him. "All right, so you know!" she said. "You know that I killed Bailey. That Paul and I had to have that diamond and sell it if we were going to have any money to live on. Will it make you happy to see us hang?"

"No," Alan said. "And you won't hang, April."

"Only because you can't prove it," April said.

"My dear child," Alan said, "that is the strangest thing about this whole business. I *can* prove that you killed Bailey."

"What's that?" Risedale's voice cracked like a gunshot.

"The last card in my hand," Alan said. "I can prove that April killed Bailey—which is rather ironic, since I know she didn't."

The gun in Risedale's hand was aimed directly between Alan's eyes. I felt a sudden nudge in the small of my back. Gus had moved in on me.

"The reason," Alan said, "that you will deliver us safe and sound to Knox is that if you don't, the evidence that will convict April will come into Knox's hand."

"But if she didn't do it," I blurted out, "how can you—"

"I told you, Jeff, that whether or not April was helping you was the sixty-four dollar joker. You see, April wasn't! She was protecting the man she loves. She was trying to keep you in the open to play the rôle of clay pigeon. And she tried to frame you by putting that needle and the bottle of poison in your bureau drawer."

I saw by the stricken look on April's face that he was right.

"Fortunately, Jeff," and he gave me a long, steady look, "you handled those objects with great care. April isn't a very accomplished criminal. I suspect she left her fingerprints all over the needle and the bottle. If she didn't, Risedale wins. If she did, then when they come into Knox's hands that will be that."

THAT LOOK had warned me to keep my trap shut, and I did. I did, but I watched April, holding my breath. Suppose she had been careful of fingerprints?

"April!" Risedale said. "What is this? What is he talking about?"

She turned. "Father!" she said, and sud-

denly the tears were streaming down her face and I knew she'd fumbled it. "I tried so hard. I tried so very hard to keep them from turning our way. It doesn't matter what happens to me. Really—really it doesn't."

I realized then that what Alan had meant when he said "the man she loves" was not Sexton, but Hendrik Risedale, her father.

Risedale's gun hand was steady, but his face was working. He took his left hand out of his coat pocket and slipped it around April's shoulders. "Darling," he said, gently. "Darling."

"I couldn't play this game with you without the winning card, Risedale," Alan said. "That needle and the bottle will convict April, even though she's innocent."

"And your price for keeping them out of Knox's hands?" Risedale said.

"I've only had one price from the beginning," Alan said. "The murderer."

Slowly Risedale lowered his gun and slipped it back into his pocket. "All right, Gus," he said. "You may go. It seems I have lost."

I felt the pressure go out of the small of my back. I had the same tight, breathless feeling that I used to get in a blackjack game when a big gambler called for one card too many.

April had buried her face on her father's shoulder and her quiet sobbing was the only sound in the room for a moment.

"Appearances are sometimes deceiving," Risedale said, in a low voice. "Actually I have been in financial difficulties for some time. When I got that diamond of Van Zandt's to cut I realized I had a half million dollars' worth of goods in my hands. But obviously I could do nothing about it. I couldn't just 'lose' it. The scheme had to be invented to clear me of all suspicion. I—I had to arrange to be robbed, and I had to be able to hand over the thief.

"This greedy swine," and he turned his eyes for a moment to Sexton's twitching face, "was just what I needed. I contacted

Max Lazar, a well known jewel thief. We arranged a slick plan. Lazar approached Sexton, offering him a large sum to steal the stone. I was to make the robbery possible." He laughed, grimly. "Sexton fell for it. So it was arranged. Sexton was waiting for his opportunity. I waited to provide him with it, but all the time, Mr. Quist, I was trying to devise a way to keep all of the profits for myself. Sexton then played directly into my hands. He decided at the last moment to enter Redfern Hanover in yesterday's second race with Bailey driving."

I heard Alan draw in his breath. I knew what he was thinking. That's where he'd gone off the track in the beginning. He'd figured Sexton had arranged that deliberately.

"We play the cards that are dealt us," Risedale said. "I saw a chance then. I knew that Bailey's son operated the checkroom. I knew Sexton had planned to check the diamond in a briefcase and pass the check to Lazar in the crowd. If I could have five minutes alone in that checkroom. . . . But how to manage that? Well, I reasoned that an accident to Bailey would get his boy out of there." He looked at Alan with a curious urgency as if he needed to be understood. "I had to play it alone, Quist. I had nothing against the old man. I didn't want to kill him. But it was the only means at hand. He was old. He'd lived his life."

Risedale hesitated, moistened his lips. His face was a deathly white. "April and I were in Holland ten years ago when the Nazi invasion came. We were caught there, hidden underground. I was on their list for liquidation. Believe me, death was preferable to capture, and we were prepared. Through a chemist friend of mine, also in the underground, I acquired some poison—a scratch, a slight injection into the bloodstream, and you would be dead in twenty minutes. We never had to use it, April and I. But as you soldiers kept souvenir weapons of the war, we kept our bottles of

poison as mementoes of the days when death was only minutes away.

"So I had the ways and means, Mr. Quist. Late the night of your quarrel with Sexton I invited him into my work room on the pretext of talking to him about his relationship with April. The stone lay on the desk. I could see his greedy eyes popping out of his head. I picked it up and put it in the safe, but I didn't lock the safe. Then I made an excuse for leaving the room. When I came back, one look at Sexton told me he'd fallen for the bait. I locked the safe.

"The next day I saw him start for the track, carrying the briefcase as prearranged. I went out there myself. In the crowd I managed to jab Bailey in the arm. Sexton didn't see me. He was much too concerned with looking for Lazar so that he could pass him the check." He sighed. "From there on it must be clear to you. In a day or two I would have 'discovered' the robbery and accused Sexton. My reputation is above reproach and he would have gotten what he deserved. He had no idea of my involvement. But you forced my hand, Quist, by bringing Van Zandt here. If I didn't produce the diamond, your robbery theory would be proved and you'd have involved us all. If I did produce it, Lazar would know I'd doublecrossed him. I still thought—"

"You thought you could still get off the hook," Alan said, "by blaming Sexton to Lazar."

"Yes. I didn't know that all the time April—"

"You knew, didn't you, April, the minute

you saw Bailey die?" Alan said. "You had seen men die that way in Holland."

"Father," April cried, "you didn't need money. We could have lived on whatever you had. Like the old days—anything but this!"

"I thought it was perfect," Risedale said. His lips twisted. "I had studied the situation as I study a stone. I thought I knew how to cleave it. But, when I struck the blow, it—it shattered."

April looked up at him. "Father!" she cried. Then she turned to Alan. "He's done it to himself! Alan, help him!"

"It's in his left hand coat pocket," Alan said, without moving. "I'm afraid it's too late, April."

It was too late. Risedale suddenly raised his hand to his throat. His face turned a strange, choked, blue color and he pitched forward on his face. His eyeglass rolled like a toy hoop across the flat stone hearth.

I'll never forget April turning on Alan like a wild animal, clawing at him with her red fingernails. "You made him do it!" she cried. "You made him do it!"

Then, as quickly as the rage had come it dissolved, and she was suddenly in his arms, crying as if her heart would break.

"You could have saved him!" I heard, her saying to him.

"For a murder trial and an execution," Alan said, gently. "Would it have been better that way, April? For you, I mean?"

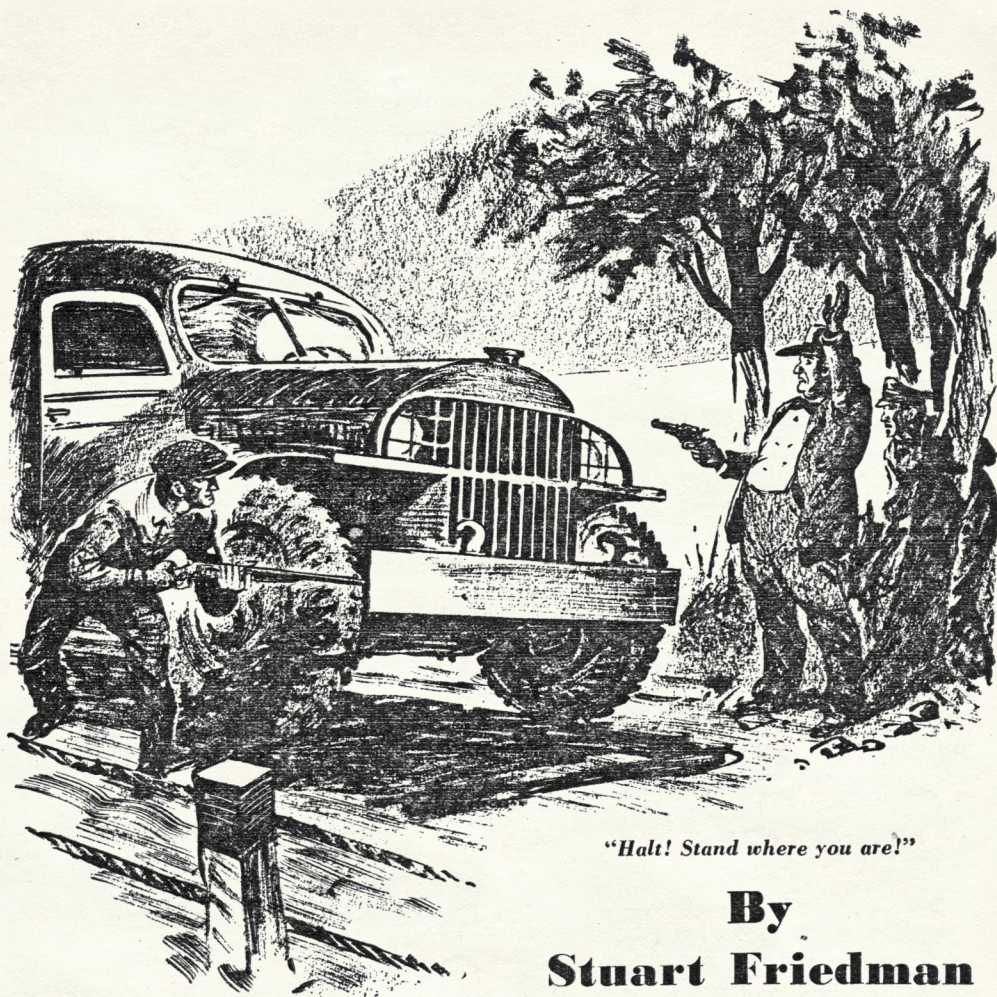
Poor, sad little girl, I thought. No father. No man worth the name. Well, she'd have to face the thing all of us hate—the business of growing up!

■ ■ ■

SPECIAL CASE

The person who committed an odd theft recently has not been apprehended. But police detectives are pretty certain of the reason why the lawbreaker in question illegally entered a dress shop in Newport, R. I. He left the cash box untouched. He passed by the racks containing expensive evening clothing. Instead, all that the thief took was five cheap dresses. Further investigation proved that they all were maternity garments.

—Bess Ritter



"Halt! Stand where you are!"

**By
Stuart Friedman**

DEATH RUN

It was like a bad dream. One minute Al hoped his inept trailer-truck partner would drop dead. . . . The next minute came a crash and his wish was grimly true. But what waited for Al was far too real to be a nightmare. . . .

AL BRIAN didn't let anybody down when he hired on. So, when Central Speed Freighters asked him to team up in getting a rush load of merchandise to a preferential customer, he had agreed. But he was never again going to break his rule. Two men in a rig was one too many.

They'd been on the road forty-one hours, non-stop except for quick meals, fuel, and safety checks, and they had another dozen

to get through. They needed a stretch of deep, quiet sleep and a long, long absence from each other. They were on a dangerous mountain road and Al slept with one eye, one ear, and all his nerves open.

His body, cramped in the bunk behind the seat, felt a steady slack in the rolling rig's momentum. He heard the lowering pitch of the diesel's scream. He propped himself on one elbow and watched Johnny kicking down to creeper gear.

"Why you stopping?" Al asked.

Johnny didn't answer. He hadn't been pushing the big ones long enough to manipulate two gear levers, the wheel, and his tongue all at once. He angled off the highway onto flat ground and put on the air, bringing their thirty tons to a stop with too much jolt.

"Fifty-mile safety check," he said exasperatedly, dimming the lights. "I wish you'd sleep when I'm handling her."

"I wish I could," Al said acidly.

Johnny's grumble was lost under the noise of the idling engine as he unbracketed the clipboard. He made time and mileage entries, then climbed out with a flashlight and jackhandle to check tires, lights and airlines. Al checked his watch by the tachograph clock, 3:05, and waited.

"Okay?" he asked when Johnny climbed aboard.

"Yep. Want to see the checks on the safety chart?"

"No. You say you checked; I take your word. Now I've got more advice which you don't want and you're going to get anyway. Watch yourself on the descent. The downgrades have got a sweet, smooth and easy feel. Something in you will make you want to make up the lost time and take revenge on the other side of the mountain for making us claw our way up at five miles an hour in spots. It tricks you."

"I'll remember. It's good advice. That all, gramps?"

"You learn that much and it'll be your best year."

"Grumble, growl, snarl, snap. Man, you really love me, don't you?"

"I'd hate the guts of the best driver in the world . . . which, Johnny, you ain't . . . locked up with him on a run like this," Al said. He sighed, pushed the back of Johnny's head playfully. "Nothing personal. Happens to lots of drivers. It's temporary. Just nerves."

Johnny laughed. "You mean the time will come when I don't think you're the lousiest slob in the world?"

"Five minutes after we shove this rig into the terminal we'll either knock each other's teeth out or be buddies . . . so wire your dentist and let's roll. I'm sleeping."

Johnny released the air, roared the engine and geared in. Al felt the tractor's drive wheels dig in and in a moment the inertia broke. He eased off as they made the pavement and built up speed. Johnny's touch seemed better; he seemed to be more relaxed after the talk. Al let himself drop into sleep.

It was a minute or an hour later when he was yanked awake by the loud, hoarse sound of the buzzer. It meant the air pressure had zeroed in the brakes. They were on a straight downgrade, hitting fifty. Johnny hauled on the handbrake and it burned out under the force of their rolling mass. He tried to get geared down and hold the load back, and he fouled the sticks. The sound of clashing gears joined the hell-roar of the engine and the deadly caw of the buzzer. There was a sharp turn a quarter mile ahead.

"Hold the wheel," Al shouted, "and scoot across the seat. Let me get at the gears."

"I can't gear down. It's not me. They're pushing us. . . ."

"Who?" Al vaulted into the right side of the seat. The turn was coming fast; they weren't losing speed. Straight ahead was a void, with nothing but a line of steel guard posts between them and the canyon. Like toothpicks in front of a bulldozer.

There wasn't a chance in hell of making the turn.

"Jump!" Al bellowed. They both unlatched their doors, and hurtled out.

There was an indescribable chaos of doomlike noise, and for a split second Al knew terror, knew the certainty of death. Then brief, sharp pain and oblivion.

His head ached and there was a deathly pallor on his face. His cap was gone and the sleeve of his gray uniform was in shreds. Blood seeped from a raw, dirt-embedded area on his arm. He was aware of a man's mumble, his hands trying to help him to his feet. Al made a gesture of violent protest. Then he was motionless again. He just wanted to sit where he was, holding onto the safe, solid ground. His eyes stared in dull horror at the awesome gap in the line of steel guard posts on the canyon rim a dozen feet ahead.

Somewhere behind him he heard the slowing moan of a siren, a car stopping and the double slam of car doors.

"Get these cars moving," a leathery voice ordered. "You people can't park on this turn. Break it up! Break it up!"

Al became aware of the small crowd, moving like drugged moths, their glances turning back toward the fireglow from the canyon. The quick, harsh light of a red blinker beat over them like a weird pulse and their clothing tossed in the wind which blew icily against the rough, dark flank of the mountain. The women, their hair whipping like flame, seemed primitive. They stared back repeatedly at him as though he wasn't human, but a thing apart, with the shadow of death still on him. A chill shook his body and his teeth began to chatter.

A STATE trooper came and sat on his heels in front of Al; unclipped a pen, opened a notebook on his knee, and began writing.

"Hurt bad?" Road cops, stooging for the railroads, out to stick truckers with

overload fines, were natural enemies. But the young trooper's voice was sympathetic and Al felt a confused and curious sort of gratitude.

"Not bad."

"Remember what happened?"

"Yeah. Somebody tried to kill us."

"Who?" The trooper frowned. "Did you say to 'us'?" He looked across his shoulder at the area between pavement and canyon rim, then back at Al. "There was somebody else? What's your name?"

"Al Brian, B-r-i-a-n," he said, staring fixedly at the arcs of gouged earth which told starkly how the loaded trailer had whipped around to the left until the rig crashed through the guard posts, broadside. "I drive for Central Speed Freighters, interstate carrier out of Illinois. My relief man was John Amherst. He was driving." His voice sounded false in his ears; a detached calm which was no part of him. He got his legs under him cautiously, then tried to get upright in a sudden lurch. He would have fallen except for the trooper steadying him. "He jumped too," Al said. His eyes were suddenly frantic, searching. "Flash your light around. Look for him!" His voice rose, sharp and urgent. "He jumped too. He must be up here."

"What's the trouble, Jim?"

"He says there's another man, Sergeant. Claims somebody tried to kill them."

Al watched the crisscrossing play of their flashlights over every square inch. Johnny wasn't there.

"He jumped from the left side," Al said. His voice was so low that the sergeant bent toward him. "He jumped out the left door." He pointed shakily at the pattern gouged out by the tires. "It swung around on his side. . . . But maybe he jumped out beyond. Maybe the rig didn't fall on him." He looked from the sergeant to the trooper. "How far down?"

The trooper said quietly, "Three or four hundred feet."

"Get the blankets, Jim," the sergeant

said. "He's freezing; we'd better get him down to the dispensary."

"I'm all right. See about Johnny. He could've landed on a ledge or in a tree . . . hurt bad . . . forget me."

"Here comes the emergency crew right now . . . that's their work. And an ambulance and another crew are already on the road down into the canyon. Nothing we can do. Let's get into the car before you catch pneumonia."

He felt a blanket being spread across his shoulders and clutched it around him, shivering. He got in the back seat of the patrol car with Jim. He slumped in the corner on the fast ride to the state police barracks, holding his eyes shut, unable to watch the curves and downgrades without nausea.

There was a bandage over the superficial injury to his arm and he had some hot coffee in him when they went in the office. Al sat at one end of a bare desk; the trooper, Jim, waited with a shorthand notebook at the other end while the sergeant consulted with a county deputy sheriff out in the assembly room. The sergeant came in and sat behind the desk. The deputy sheriff, a pudgy politician, stood beside the sergeant and eyed Al, a non-voter, unfavorably.

"Your watch," the sergeant said, "broke and stopped at three twenty-two." He glanced to see that Jim was getting it. "You said you made a safety check stop at three five . . . go on from there. . . ."

"By three ten we were moving again. I got back to sleep. Then the buzzer woke me. The air pressure had dropped suddenly from the brakes."

"How do you know it was sudden," the deputy sheriff said, "if you were asleep? Maybe it leaked down below the safe point."

"There was no leak when Johnny made the safety check. He knew the roads were dangerous and if he had seen the pressure leaking after the safety check, he'd have stopped."

"You were how near the turn when you woke?" the sergeant asked.

"I would say about a quarter mile. Johnny couldn't get geared down. He said somebody was pushing us. We were hitting near fifty. Too much happened too quick, but it spreads out clear in my mind now. We had more than the loaded box on our back. It wasn't just a roll, but a push."

"But you did not see another vehicle?"

"No. Before I jumped, it was behind us. When I jumped I didn't see, hear, or know anything. I just thought *This is it . . . this is it!*" His voice was low and intense. He stopped, and lighted a cigarette, trying to hold onto his emotions. He felt the impact of his words on the others' waiting silence. "I've been rolling them since I was seventeen. A million and a half miles in every kind of rig with every kind of cargo in every state in the Union. I know trucks. I can feel my load, my power, the grade of a road like parts of me, and I know we were being pushed. Deliberately, so we couldn't make the turn."

The sergeant frowned vaguely, shook his head. "That straightaway was a mile and a half long. At fifty m.p.h. it would take less than two minutes to run it. If the push was deliberate, so was the severing of your air line. In two minutes this other truck . . . it would have had to be something big and powerful . . . had to come alongside and pace you very close at high speed, cut the airline somehow, drop back, make contact with the rear of your semi-trailer, exert precisely controlled pushing force."

"It could have been done," Al said. "I've been among the top ten drivers in different state roadeos for the past three years and I know what can be done. A second man in the cab could have used a sharp hook on a pole to get at the airlines, or he could've used a shotgun, or he could have put a rifle bullet through the air tank itself."

"The investigators will find out from the wreckage . . . if the fire wasn't too intense."

But you must admit, Brian, the thing sounds improbable. Almost impossible. The risk involved in such a scheme, don't you see? And here's another point. If you had succeeded . . . I mean if your driver had succeeded in getting into a lower gear and slowing up below the speed of the pusher, it would have crushed his radiator. And I'm not so sure that it wouldn't have been crushed anyhow. . . ."

"Listen. That rig must have had special steel uprights attached to the bumper. . . ."

"Oh, wait, fellow, let's not be fantastic. This was all on a public highway. Such a contraption would have been conspicuous."

"Conspicuous for a few minutes. The roads were almost empty. The special uprights could be removed immediately afterward. Listen to me. A truck's my home. I think, eat and sleep my job. The roads are my world. A thing like this knocks me crazy. It scares the hell out of me to think such a thing can happen. But it did happen, damn it. I tell you, there's a killer loose!"

"But you can't give us a single clue to its identity. . . . Of course, if we find a bullet or buckshot in your airline or tank, that'll be different."

Al dragged furiously at his cigarette, his eyes bright. "I can give you a lead. I can, at that. I remember. At about two ayem we were on the climb toward Crest City. Johnny woke me up cussing. We were fighting to make twenty m.p.h. and a rig, another Central Speed Freighters rig, went highballing past us. Hauling postholes. Empty, I mean. Now that I think about it, what was it doing bouncing around without a load when the cargo is piled to hell and gone on our docks? Phone the home dispatcher. There can't be many CSF rigs out here. He can line us up on just who is out here. . . ."

"Maybe you've got something. A call is already being put through to your company."

THE deputy sheriff walked around the desk in a complete circuit, his face pinched with the pain of thought. He stopped abruptly in front of Al and pushed a dead cigar at his face.

"Killer on the road, you say. How do you know your buddy is dead?" he asked triumphantly. "He hasn't been found."

"I don't know," Al said. "I hope he isn't. But there's still a killer on the road, whether he was successful or not."

"A killer you say, now. Before, you were saying there were two in that ghost truck that you claim you felt but didn't see."

"I mean a killer truck on the road," Al said nervously.

"Why didn't it come back and kill you?"

"I . . . I don't know. Other cars on the road, maybe. Maybe they didn't realize I got out." He looked at the sergeant, who met his gaze impersonally. He looked toward Jim, who lowered his eyes to his shorthand notes. Al sensed the weakness of his story; none of them were with him. But he wasn't prepared for the deputy sheriff's sudden accusation.

"I think there was one truck and you were in it and you were driving it and there was bad blood between you and your buddy and *he* was the one sleeping . . . or dead . . . when you crashed the truck into the canyon."

"I barely escaped, myself!" Al cried.

"You say you were going fifty. Maybe you weren't going any faster than twenty. . . ."

The sergeant interposed. "The rig was traveling fast; it left tire marks where it whipped around. He wouldn't take a chance like that . . . providing he was in it."

"Providing! He could've got out up the road and sent it speeding toward the turn. . . ."

The phone rang. The sergeant caught it up, clipped, "I'll take the call out there." He stood up. "Your dispatcher," he told Al. "I'm leaving you in charge, Jim, while the deputy and I take the call."

Al watched them leave, his mouth and eyes bitter.

He looked down at Jim. "You don't go along with that guy, do you?"

It seemed very foolish, very childish, but somehow he had to get a word of assurance somewhere, and Jim had been an all right guy. Jim just looked at him and said:

"Take it easy."

Al looked away, feeling suddenly very weak, very lonely.

It was several long minutes before the two returned from the phone call. Al got to his feet, looked anxiously toward them as they entered. Their faces were grave. The hostility seemed to have gone out of the pudgy deputy sheriff. He looked at him almost sadly, as if it had been bluff before, a game to be relished, but now it was real.

"They found your relief driver," the sergeant said tonelessly. "He was dead, of course. He was fifty feet from the truck, so that part of your story about his jumping, checks."

"But. . . ." Al cried. He was shaking all over.

The deputy said, as if he were sorry, "I'm going to have to take you in to the county jail and hold you on suspicion of murder."

"I've told you the truth. So help me God!" Al said. "What changed . . . I mean they told you something at my home terminal. What? Jenkins talked to you, didn't he? He's the nastiest dispatcher I ever worked under. He hates my guts. What'd he say. . . ."

"Let's go, Brian. Don't make me cuff you. Come quiet."

The sergeant said, "I would advise handcuffs, Mr. Clausen."

"I don't think there'll be any call for handcuffs," Clausen said.

"Then I'll detail a man to go with you," the sergeant said officiously.

"When the county needs your help, Sergeant, we'll call for it!"

"The state," the sergeant said wittingly, "will be glad to lend you a pair of cuffs if you've lost yours again."

Clausen glared, opened his mouth, shut it angrily. He looked at Al, jerked his head toward the door. "We'll go."

Al went along with a sense of weary futility. Clausen marched through the hall, puffed with indignation, muttering. They went outside and walked past a line of cars to a dark sedan which looked unofficial except for a small star on the left door. Clausen opened it.

"You get in and get across the seat. I don't believe in handcuffing a man like an animal unless I have to. But I've got a gun."

Al got in, wordless. Clausen said nothing more until they were on the highway. "Well, Al, it looks bad. Very bad," he said. "Especially with those state cops in on it. It's too bad they know he was a private detective, but I guess the insurance snoops would have spilled the beans on that anyhow. Now, of course, the county's going to take charge of the investigation. So we can arrange something."

Al shifted uneasily, peered at Clausen's profile. The deputy felt his scrutiny, glanced at him. The face was obscured, there in the dim light from the dash, but the wink was clear. Slow and deliberate.

Al sat up straighter. "What is this?" he said, huskily. "Arrange what? Who was a private detective?"

"We haven't got time to spar around, Al. The Crest City papers are going to be on my neck, and the political opposition is going to be sniffing around for campaign fodder. It'll cost you ten grand. Me, I won't clear a grand. Right off, the chief cuts in for half . . . then, of course I'm not the only deputy. How soon can you get it?"

"Ten grand. Where would I get money like that? Listen, I'm innocent; and I won't be shaken down!"

Clausen shrugged. "Okay. Maybe you'll

beat it. Who knows? Meanwhile you'll be cooling in jail for months, and spending I don't know how many thousand on lawyers and the like. But, it's your life."

CLAUSEN concentrated on driving, and puffing on a fresh, strong cigar. Al stared blindly at the climbing road unwinding under their headlights. "You mean Johnny Amherst was a detective?"

"Sure. Your dispatcher, Jenkins, spilled it. Oh, we've got you where it hurts. Since you've been with that company of yours this past year, they have had four full truckloads of stuff stolen. They never had any losses like that until you came along, and they know that each haul was made when you had a few off-duty days. They calculate that you and your partners cleared no less than a couple of hundred grand from a fence. Oh, the case is going to be cut and dried, Al; you can see that for yourself. Amherst revealed to you who he was, had the goods on you. Then, your accomplice, who was following you with that empty trailer, and you, tried to take over the cargo. Amherst had to be killed."

"No. I tell you, no. I didn't know he was a detective. I didn't even know there had been any thefts," Al said loudly. "What did Jenkins say about that empty rig?"

"Wasn't authorized to be in this area. Naturally. You meant to transfer the load you were carrying to it."

"Why, it doesn't make sense!" Al cried. "Don't you see, Clausen? If I were going to steal a load, and if I were going to be damn fool enough to use a rig from my own company. . . ."

"You used what you could get. . . ."

"But I wouldn't go to all that trouble of unloading and reloading. I'd just unhook the trailer and pick it up with another tractor."

"Sure, Al, sure," Clausen said mockingly. "But a tractor without anything hooked

onto it doesn't look as ordinary on the open highways as if it had an innocent looking trailer on it."

"You said it! And that killer that trailed us cross-country for just the time and place to strike, was hauling a box for just that reason. To look innocent. There wasn't any theft blamed, can't you see there wasn't? If I had an accomplice, and if we could kill Amherst, why did we crash the load instead of stealing the stuff? What stopped us?"

"I dunno, Al! Looks like cold feet. Knew he was a detective, knew he had been onto you and you'd be under suspicion. Maybe you figured they were waiting to nab you at whatever crooked warehouse you'd been selling the loads to."

"I tell you, that rig was sent to kill us both. If Johnny was a detective. . . ."

"He was."

". . . he was bound to get to the real thief. He was stopped. And I was supposed to be dead, too. And it would have looked open-and-shut. That dirty dispatcher, Jenkins! I'll bet he hired me with the idea of using me for a fall guy while he was masterminding the thefts. Planned them for times when I was off duty and couldn't prove where I was, probably. No big thefts till I came to work there. And maybe no more after I'm out. Maybe he got all he dared, and he was closing out the chapter."

"That's your line of defense?" Clausen laughed. "No, Al. It's not worth it. You'll buy a murder rap with that kind of a line. But for ten grand you can walk out of my jail the day after I've fixed the evidence at the wreck so it will corroborate your story. The coroner will render a verdict of accident. He's our man. You're getting off cheap. You can sure as hell afford it. How soon can you get the dough?"

"I can't! Listen to me, man. Listen. I'm innocent!"

"Blown the dough in, huh? Well, I'll take whatever you can raise. Even a couple

hundred bucks. You can sign a note for the balance and pay off the next time you make a haul. Is that treating you square, or is it?"

Al gritted his teeth and clenched his fists in impotent rage and desperation. They were approaching the site of the wreck. Al looked into the depth of the dark canyon where he could see broken beads of hard light from the official cars around the wreck. His face was feverish and he cranked the window down and let the cold air blast him. His eyes stung, and he blinked. He felt like crying and fighting. The truck down there was no longer burning, but there was an acrid smoke smell in the air. A chill spasm ran over his body and he shut the window.

There were flares at the turn below the crash point and at the turn itself, and Clausen drove slowly, his set pudgy features shifting with shadow and light from the waving orange flame. They left the crash scene and started up the long straightaway where it had happened. Al sat rigidly, barely breathing, his mouth and throat dry, his head aching. His eyes flicked involuntarily right and left, from the shoulder on the canyon side of the road to the scrub growth at the base of the mountain slope. Somehow he thought he might find something, some residue of the crime, some sudden miraculous clue which would establish the truth and trap the killers. He didn't see anything.

A cop cruising the stretch on a cycle came toward them, passed on. They approached the flares at the turn above the wreck, and turned. Clausen accelerated. Their lights stretched away into darkness. They were alone. Al let his glance slide covertly toward Clausen.

"Don't even consider it, Al," Clausen said. It was as if the man had read his thoughts and scented the desperation in him. "You won't have to jump me. I believe you." He pointed at the upholstery overhead. "There's a mike up there. All

our talk has been recorded. I think the record will help you at the hearing. But that dispatcher, Jenkins, is flying out here, and he's going to fight to get you indicted."

"You're on *my* side?" Al asked, incredulous.

"I am. You impressed me when you told your story at the state barracks. But I guard against first impressions. I'm a politician, after all, and they've pulled some dingers on me. . . . I've pulled a few myself. But I think you're all right. I tried to trap you . . . made it easy for you. You'd have been a fool not to take me up," Clausen told him decisively. "You're all right."

"Maybe," Al said. "But I could've smelled the trap. I wish you hadn't refused when he offered to send another man. Armed."

"We had to be alone for me to put the bribe proposition to you. If you think that killer truck is on the roads now, you're foolish. There's a six-state alarm out on it."

"Yeah. Sure. I guess I'm panicky . . . right over there is where we made that last safety-check stop," Al said, staring at the area. They passed it. "When we pulled out, that rig picked us up. Came in for the kill. . . ."

Then he glimpsed it. He wasn't sure at first, because the edge of their lights raked it for only a moment and it was a hundred yards back off the highway concealed by foliage. It was a mile above where they had made the safety-check stop. Al's hand moved to Clausen's arm, gripped it urgently. He had a sense of stealth, as if he must make no sound. He felt the hair crawl on the back of his neck, and his heart was suddenly hammering.

"Did you see it?" he whispered.

"No. What?" Clausen caught his mood, and spoke in a hushed tone. He took his foot from the accelerator.

"I'm sure I saw the rig . . . the trailer, anyhow. We just passed it."

CLAUSEN turned onto the canyon-side shoulder so quickly that Al caught his breath, recoiled, thinking they were going over. But the car cut around in a U turn, headed back. Clausen cut lights and engine, parked off the highway. Then he sat, as if regretting the impulse. He threw his cigar out.

"We could walk back there. Should." He coughed, began to squirm and paw into the door pocket. He got out a .38, fumbled a little opening the cylinder. He snapped it shut. "It's loaded, all right," he said, wheezing slightly with nervous tension. "Nobody will be there anyway, of course. Want to risk a look?"

"Yes," Al said. They got out. Then it came. The familiar roar of a diesel. The night, an hour before dawn, was very dark, and empty, and the sound cut through the high thin air in a solid, growing wedge. It came from the direction of Crest City, highballing downgrade. Too fast. It might have been any rig, but they both knew, somehow, that it wasn't a full rig but only a tractor; a deadly power unit . . . one particularly deadly power unit. Al and Clausen moved into the cover of trees as they heard it rounding the turn just above.

Then its headlights spread through the trees, catching up their shadows, enlarging them. The engine sound stuttered and the tractor cut sharply off the highway and came to a jolting stop. A passenger car was right behind it. A man leaped from the cab of the tractor, and another got out of the sedan. They had seen the deputy's car. Clausen blurted a high shrill "*Halt. . . . Stand where you are. This is the law. . . .*"

An electric torch beam leaped like a pin to a magnet, found them. A rifle cracked. Clausen made a sound like released air-brakes, spun half around and pitched to the ground. Al ducked, flattened. The rifle cracked again, and then a third time before he could find Clausen's dropped gun. Then it was in his hand and he aimed at the hard disk of the torchlight, and fired.

The torch beam leaped high and side-ward, raking through the trees, and then it was out. Al moved forward in a running crouch, damning the noise he made. He fired blindly, and he could hear the dull *thunk* of his bullet entering a body, and there was a sound like tearing metal, but it came from a man's throat. Then the sedan whined and backed onto the highway.

(Continued on page 108)

"A short life and a gay one" was luscious Nancy's motto. And in no time at all she'd left her husband—

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*He smashed me back
into the desk. . . .*

**By
Fletcher
Flora**

*Silence, Detective James knew,
was golden. But the price he
had to pay for it was strictly
blood-on-the-line!*

THERE was a litter of chairs and tables around a microscopic dance floor. One of those places where a rhumba is just a rub. It was called The Palms. At the far end of the joint was a small stage with a piano and the music stands of the combo still in place. A guy sitting at the piano on the stage was playing

popular tunes very softly and didn't see me when I worked my way toward him through the tables.

I stood down on the floor at the edge of the low stage and listened. He was pretty good. He was playing sentimental stuff, and he squeezed a lot of tears out of the ivory.

When he finished playing *What'll I Do* and let his right hand make some runs up and down the keys, I said, "Berlin's always sharp. Do you know *I'm Playing With Fire*? You ought to know that one."

He didn't turn his head or even stop playing. His left hand joined his right, and together they broke into the tune.

"I know them all," he said to the piano. "Who the hell are you?"

I put my right foot up on the stage and dragged my left one after it. Then I leaned on the piano for a rest.

"Just call me a fan," I said. "I think you're better than Duchin."

"Thanks. But Duchin doesn't. Neither do I. Why should I know *Playing With Fire*?"

"Because you are, aren't you? Or is that just one of those things that get around?"

"Don't be slippery, brother. Already I'm getting tired of this game."

"Maybe you're tired of your job, too. If you want a change, here's one you might pick up."

I took a torn sheet of newspaper out of my pocket and put it on the piano in front of him. It was a piece of the Want Ads section of the *Standard*. With a red pencil I keep for my budget, I'd drawn a circle around one ad. His fingers didn't stop while he leaned forward to read: *Collector. Good opportunity. Collections average \$1,000 monthly. Write X 478, Standard.*

"Thanks again," he said. "I'd rather play the piano for peanuts."

I put the paper back in my pocket.

"Peanuts are all right," I said, "if you've got a supplementary income. You know what I mean. A few bucks from something

you can do in your spare time. Something like blackmail."

He stopped playing, then, and turned to give me a front view. He had a thin face with dark eyes sunk in hollows that were too deep. They were the eyes of a guy who was tired and wasn't anticipating any rest. His mouth was the same. A thin slice with lines of weariness around it.

"Let's get straight, mister. My name's Dickson Ferry. I play the piano for a living, and I don't have any hidden talents. I don't like myself much, but I like you less. Let's hear who the hell you are and what you've got on your mind."

That suited me. I began to cooperate.

"I'm Hugo James. Private detective. I've got some questions I want to ask. You can answer them or not, whichever way you want it. Better for you if you do."

"I may answer them. You can ask and see."

"Okay. You know an eye-ful named Elise Leslie?"

His dark eyes seemed to sink farther into the shadows of their sockets, and the bitter lines deepened around his mouth.

"I used to know her. Not now. She's big time now. Which means no time for Dickson Ferry."

"How long since you've seen her?"

"Not since she quit singing with the combo here. Just before she married Byron Leslie. Almost a year."

"So you haven't seen her. That doesn't mean you couldn't have been in touch with her."

"I haven't seen her. I haven't been in touch with her. She's dead, brother. To me, she's dead."

"Yes? You were pretty close once, weren't you? I hear you spent a lot of time together. Just you and her."

His right hand darted out like a snake's head, and the fingers closed around my wrist. He wasn't a big guy, and he looked like he'd spent too many years doing all the wrong things, but miles of running up and

down the keys of a piano had put steel in his fingers. The bones in my wrist began to snap, crackle and pop.

"Where did you hear that? Come clean, brother."

I didn't answer. I just stood still and looked down at the fingers wrapped around my wrist. After a minute, he got the point, and the fingers relaxed and dropped away.

"That's better, Mozart. And don't try it again. Next time I'll give you a knuckle shower. As for you and Elise Leslie, she told me herself. She's my client, and my clients confide in me. Professional confidence."

"You mean Elise is being blackmailed over me?"

"As if you didn't know."

"That isn't possible," he said finally.

"No? She says she is, and she's a thousand bucks a month poorer to prove it."

No one else knew about us."

"She thinks someone might have found out."

"No. No one else knows."

"You know where that leaves you? It leaves you holding the bag. The money bag. It collects a grand a month."

The fingers of his hands spread like claws, and I thought for a minute he was going to grab me again. I doubled my horny hook and waved it around close enough for him to count the knobs on it, but in a few seconds I saw that he hadn't even heard me. Behind his eyes, his brain was racing like the horse I never bet on. Very fast.

"No one except. . . ."

Suddenly he spun around on his stool and began to tickle the keys again. Lightly. I could see that he was lost. I waited around for him to come back from wherever he'd gone, but he never returned. He just sat there playing the piano, dreamily, as if I were a thousand miles away. After a while, I gave him up and left.

Two bits bought back my Ford from a parking lot, and I drove across town to a more ambitious section. I found an empty

space at the curb in front of a fancy gin mill dressed up in chrome and neons and glass brick. One neon tube spelled out *The Blue Peacock*. Another tube twisted itself into something like the bird. I got out of the Ford and went into the place and back to a booth at the rear where it was about one shade darker than down by the River Styx.

SHE was already there, keeping company with a martini, though it was still five minutes before our appointment. I slipped into the booth across from her and looked at my wrist.

"Not only on time," I said. "Early, even. For a woman, you're different."

Her mouth curved in a slight smile. Even in the shadowed booth I could see it. A face like hers carries its own light.

"In a lot of ways, I'm standard construction. You'd better order a drink."

I did. While waiting for the waiter to bring it, I watched her fiddle with her martini. Idle business, maybe, but worthwhile from an aesthetic point of view. Her hair was spun honey, and she had sense enough to keep it simple. From under lashes you could have braided, she looked at me with eyes that were about the color of an old fruit cake soaked in brandy. Her cheeks had Dietrich excavations, and her generous mouth made me think of the red hots I used to buy when I was a kid.

All this nice stuff was slightly ravaged, however. Not by time, but by care. Dark shadows shaded down onto her cheek bones. She was tired. Nerves ragged. She looked as if she hadn't done much sleeping nights recently.

"Did you see him?" she asked.

"I saw him."

"Well?"

"Not guilty, he says. He says he hasn't got any talent for blackmail. He says no one else knows about your little affair, except. . . ."

"What does that mean?"

"It means," I said slowly, "that one other person must be in the know. But it's a person that Dickson Ferry considers unlikely as a blackmailer."

She looked at me across the table, gnawing her lush lower lip. Elise Leslie. Mrs. Byron Leslie on a spot. The spot being blackmail, it was a very lucrative one for some enterprising and unprincipled citizen. Byron Leslie didn't have all the money in the world, but he had a lot more than his share. Ordinarily a solid character, he'd seen the beautiful Elise at The Palms during a rare tour of the minor spots. With the habitual celerity with which he grabbed everything he wanted, he'd grabbed Elise. She was probably the first thing that wasn't negotiable that he'd ever really wanted. His first and probably final straying from the upper social strata. He'd kept himself and his lovely under wraps ever since. The type of guy, that is, who wouldn't tolerate the slightest dereliction on the part of a woman he'd introduced to his lawyers.

"What do you think?" she asked finally.

"I think, baby, that this whole thing has a phony look and a slight odor."


"I don't understand."

"No? Just listen and see how it sounds when I read it back. You're married to a guy with a pile of rocks. He's a guy with a blue nose and a tight purse. He gives you a grand a month for fun money, but to him that's chicken feed. You've been a good girl since marrying him, but unfortunately there were prenuptial indiscretions with this piano player. Byron's blue nose couldn't stand a stink like that. If the information were made public, he'd discard you faster than a deuce kicker. So you're being blackmailed. By a strange coincidence, this joker taps you for the exact amount of your allowance. One grand per month."

"Is this supposed to be funny?"

"Not funny, baby. Just peculiar. Listen a little more. Usually a blackmailer approaches his victim directly. Each party knows the other's identity. Profit and fear

keep their business confidential. Does this artist work that way? No. He inserts a blind ad in the *Standard* the first day of each month. You recognize it, because it



If Acid Indigestion comes
And tries to rock the boat
Settle it with Alka-Seltzer
Before it gets your goat

First Aid For ACID INDIGESTION


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BEST BET**
Is a Glass of Sparkling,
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always mentions the exact amount of one thousand bucks. You put that amount in an envelope and mail it to the box number indicated.

"The *Standard* has no information as to the identity of the advertiser. He pays cash and gives no name. Probably sends a messenger in with the ad. The police could find out, but naturally you won't go to the police. There's no way to check on who picks up the responses to the ad. Not that it matters, anyhow. The blackmailer would stay under cover. It's a fancy setup. It's too fancy. It's so damn fancy, it must be simple."

"You think Dick was telling the truth?"

"He sounded straight, but I've been fooled before."

"Who could the third person be?"

That, baby, is the sixty-four dollar question. I was hoping you could give me a hint."

She shook her head. "Not unless it's someone around The Palms. Someone Dick and I both knew."

"That's a big help," I said. "That narrows the thing down to about twenty people."

She consulted a cluster of small stones on her wrist and slipped out of the booth.

"I'm sorry. If the job's too big for you, you can drop it. Don't come out with me. No use taking chances. Give me a ring if it gets hot."

I ogled the exit of legs plenty well qualified to carry the rest of her around, and after five minutes, I followed her trail to the sidewalk. No farther. By that time, she'd been swallowed by a Cad, and I wandered off in search of a place where you could buy a Salisbury steak without paying a tax for atmosphere. The steak consumed, I went up to the eighty-one square feet of floor space I call an office and tried to work up an idea.

A long time later I was still at work, standing by a window that looked out over an alley that was just like my thinking—

short and dead end. Looking down into the dismal little brick passage, I stuck my left hand into my left pants pocket and pulled out a handful of nickels and dimes. I jingled them in my left hand for a while, then shifted them over to my right and jingled some more. Pretty soon I dropped them from my right hand into my right pants pocket. After a minute or two, I fished them out and did the same thing over again. But in reverse. Right to left. It's my way of doodling. I guess everyone fiddles around in one way or another when he's agitating the cerebrum. I'm a shifter from pocket to pocket.

And all of a sudden I was thinking of Dickson Ferry's third person. I stood there, looking down at my left hand on its way to my right hand, and I thought that Dickson Ferry was no fool. Undoubtedly he had suspected immediately the blackmailer's identity. That being so, what would he do? A modicum of decency had prohibited his blackmailing Elise himself, but that decency wouldn't function if it came to blackmailing a blackmailer. I decided that it would be a good idea to see Dickson Ferry again.

Outside, the city had its lights on. I drove through them to The Palms and went into the bar.

The barkeep looked at me with a discouraging eye.

"You're the guy. You heckled the thumper this afternoon. You ain't welcome here. I've got orders to throw you out."

"Look," I said, "I've got five that says you won't until you've answered a couple of questions."

"I don't see any five."

I produced it.

"Okay. What questions?"

"Is Dickson Ferry here?"

"Nix. It's too early for Dick."

"Where does he live?"

"That's easy. Around the corner on Seventh. East about five blocks. The number's nine-o-seven. Room two-o-three upstairs. The place is a dump."

I LEFT the fin and the bar, and a few minutes later I was pounding up the shabby stairs of 907 Seventh to the second floor hall. I found the door to 203 and banged. Nothing doing. Taking hold of the knob, I turned and pushed.

I didn't go in. Standing in the doorway, I reached a switch and looked down at Dickson Ferry. Cheap pianist in a shoddy joint. The guy who hadn't liked what he was. Well, now he was something else. Or nothing. It depended on how you looked at it. Dead, either way. Strangled. After a minute, I closed the door and went back down the shabby stairs. Quietly.

At a pay booth, I called the cops. I didn't give my name. Later they'd learn about me from the barkeep and come hunting. I'd have to do my own hunting in the meantime. Hunting for a blackmailer turned murderer. I left the pay booth and got back into the Ford.

The next place I landed was no dump. I drove up a long gravel drive and stopped in front of a stack of white-painted brick. I found a bronze knocker on a door massive enough for a cathedral and hammered with it in a way that must have sounded imperative. Anyhow, it was only a minute before the door was opened by a tall guy with white tie, tails, and a corporation. He asked me what I wanted, and I told him I wanted to see Mrs. Byron Leslie. He let me into the front hall and went off to see if Mrs. Leslie was feeling democratic.

Mrs. Leslie was. Not that she was very happy about it. She was, in fact, a little sore. I could see it in the clipped decisiveness of her walk as she came down the hall to me.

"What are you doing here?"

"Earning a fee," I said. "Looking for a blackmailer."

"Are you crazy? If Byron finds out who you are, there'll be hell to pay."

"There's already hell to pay, baby. And Byron's going to pay it."

"What do you mean?"

"Sorry. I haven't got time to explain. Is Byron home?"

"No. He may get here any time."

"That's a chance we'll take. Does he have a private study? A place where he'd be likely to keep personal things?"

"Yes. It's just down the hall. Why?"

"I'm just nosey. I'd like to look around a little."

I'll say one thing for her. She was a dame who could make a decision and stick by it. She looked at me for a few seconds with those brandied eyes, making up her mind, and then, with a gesture to follow, she turned and walked down the hall in front of me.

Byron Leslie's study was just barely big enough for a three kid family. Across the room, sitting between two enormous windows, was a desk approximately the size of a pool table. I found the drawers locked, but a few minutes' work with a couple of small gadgets familiar to unsavory characters like me brought the top drawer out. It was filled with stationery, ink, and other writing supplies. Nothing to interest me.

The second drawer looked more promising. There were some old receipts, bank statements, and a large black account book issued by the City National Bank. I saw that it was Byron's personal checking account. I thumbed through the book until the dates got right, and then I checked carefully. What I found was good enough for me, but I checked the entries in the book against some of the old statements, just to get the pretty picture complete. Bending over the desk with the whole thing spread out before me, I marveled at the weirdest blackmail setup a poor private detective ever stumbled into.

I picked up the black account book and waved it at Elise.

"Here it is. A sweet little story of blackmail. Your story and Byron's. All in the family."

"Don't be a fool. Byron's got more money than the mint. Besides, why would

he blackmail me for money he gave me?"

"Sounds silly, doesn't it? The answer is character, baby. You're married to a sadist. As cute a sadist as you could want. Byron learned about you and Dickson Ferry, and he wanted to make you suffer. A poor little rich gal who lay awake nights in fear that her brand new setup would explode in her face. A poor little rich gal who still had to chisel on the grocery bill for nickels and dimes. He wouldn't divorce you. Not Byron. He wouldn't ever acknowledge that he'd made a mistake in marrying you. But he had a hell of a good time watching the fear grow inside you."

I tossed the book to her.

"Have a look. Byron's checking account shows a thousand dollar withdrawal the first of each month. Your allowance. The book shows a thousand dollar deposit just a few days later each month. Your blackmail payment."

"Very ingenious, clever man. Congratulations."

I stared at her, wondering what the hell had happened to her voice. It had skidded down the scale to a purring baritone. Then I realized that it wasn't her voice at all. Wheeling, I saw him in an open doorway to my right. Byron Leslie. He was a big guy, broad in the shoulders.

"Now you know, what do you think you can do about it?" he asked.

"The blackmail? Nothing. We'll settle for the murder."

"Murder!" Elise whispered.

"Sure," I said. "Murder. Remember Dickson Ferry? He's dead. Dickson knew that Byron was the only other person who knew about you and him. Byron knew because Dickson told him. You can't really blame the poor guy. Probably he was drunk. Drunk and a little wild because you'd thrown him over. He was nuts about you, you know. Probably it did his pride some good to let Byron the millionaire know that Dickson couldn't see any reason why a man should blackmail his own wife.

It was too crazy. But he must have come around to something near the truth. And he decided to cut himself in. I'm guessing that he phoned Byron and told him to show up for a showdown, or else. So Dickson's dead. Strangled. Byron's got hands that could strangle a man."

I began right away to wish that I hadn't made that last remark. No use suggesting things to a murderer. Byron was coming at me across the room. Slowly. I moved about a foot farther from the desk, and at that moment he leaped. I clawed at the .38 I wear in a shoulder holster, but it was too late.

A fist that felt like it weighed about twenty pounds caught me on the side of the head and sent me smashing back into the desk. Then he was swarming all over me, and I felt his hard fingers at my throat. Everything started going black with a great rushing of wind. Desperately, I reached up and got a thumb in an eye. A sharp gouge and a twist, and he staggered back with a whimper of pain. He was right back at me, but by that time I'd clawed out the .38, and I let him have the barrel right over his blind eye. He slumped into a limp pile of slumbering murderer.

Elise Leslie stepped up and looked down at him. She reached out a dainty foot and prodded him with the toe.

"The rotten heel," he said.

"You can say that again, baby. A fine specimen."

She lifted sardonic eyes to mine.

"I don't suppose he'll leave me anything when he fries," she said.

"It doesn't seem likely."

She looked down at the body. Not Byron's. Hers. Taking inventory of marketable assets.

"Oh, well. Back to work."

"How'd you be as a secretary?" I asked.

"Yours?"

I nodded by head, and she shook hers.

No?" I sighed. "Well, let's call the cops for Byron."



*"What are you going to do?"
Peterson asked.*

NO CHARGE

By Donald Barr Chidsey

*A little knowledge, they say, is a dangerous thing. But what
Peterson knew was downright deadly!*

SVEN PETERSEN was fair, but by no means forty, and he was far from fat. Grave, erect, with ice-blue eyes, he kept himself in beautiful condition, though his job was indoors and nobody had ever seen him play any kind of game. He did walk to work every day, rain or shine.

The youngest officer in years, in mien he was the oldest. Nobody at headquarters called him anything but "Captain." Some of the more determinedly affable had tried "Sven" and even "Pete," but they soon dropped these. Not that Petersen ever showed resentment. It was just that the names didn't seem to apply.

He could go fast without hurrying, and nobody had ever heard him raise his voice.

Even when he sprang the Ricci trap, he was precise, quick, utterly clear. He didn't smoke a cigarette in the thirty-eight minutes that memorable chase lasted—he didn't get a chance to. He scarcely had time to swallow. Yet each cop involved got every syllable of that all-important voice, and there was no sheen of sweat on Petersen's forehead when the business was finished. Headquarters men will tell you that there was more excitement everywhere else in the building—at Records, at Identification, at Special Services, in the commissioner's office—than there was in the Communications Bureau room, in the center of which sat the serene Petersen.

The crime itself was commonplace. Three youths, the oldest, Joe Ricci, flourishing a revolver, churned into Old Man Honneger's delicatessen in Hanover Avenue, talked tough, punched the proprietor in the mouth, and snatched from the till the princely sum of \$43.16. They were about to pull away from the curb when Old Man Honneger came running out of the store, his mouth all blood, yelling for a cop. He had no weapon, but the boys were twitchy, and Joe Ricci let fly, and Honneger went down with a broken hip.

Two minutes later a couple of prowling cops came, and their call-box report was put on the teletype. This teletype message reached not only every precinct station house and most of the municipal police headquarters elsewhere in the state and in neighboring states, but also the State Police building, where it was handed to Captain Petersen. At that very instant a two-ten report started to come in from a highway patrolman.

"Two-Ten, this is a Two-Ten!"

That always cleared everything. Petersen himself put on earphones. He was reaching for the teletype message. His deputy, Sergeant Jarvis, a serious lad, earnest, intelligent, all eyes, literally ran across the

room to the captain's desk, where other assistants and clerks were beginning to converge. A two-ten automatically called all hands.

"F-Two-T calling, F-Two-T. Route 19 just north of the intersection of Collision Pike. Proceeding north in pursuit of a gray Pontiac sedan containing three men. I am driving seventy miles an hour."

Petersen reached for his map drawers. He was reading the teletype message, and at the same time he was answering F2T, whose name happened to be McLaughlin.

"F-Two-T. F-Two-T. You are doing absolutely right. Keep after them. Do not overtake. Do not overtake. This is Petersen."

McLaughlin had used his head. The kids in the Pontiac might be just out for a joyride; or they might have pulled a job, and be trigger-happy. In either case he could have overtaken them. His department Ford was not "souped-up," but it was in perfect condition, and McLaughlin knew every inch of this road. That could make all the difference. But to cut them off might be risky. McLaughlin was sure of himself, but there was not "souped-up," but it was in perfect condition. Meanwhile they were driving on an almost deserted highway more than thirty miles from the nearest state line, over which line he could pursue them anyway if need be. He easily kept them in sight driving with one hand, while he radioed headquarters for advice.

McLaughlin was following orders. Again and again the commissioner had said don't take unnecessary chances. "There's plenty of danger in this business anyway. No need to go around acting like a cowboy in the movies. What good's a hero to us, if he's dead?"

By the time McLaughlin made his second report, two and a quarter minutes later, Captain Peterson had called three other Ford-sedan troopers, who were making for Route 19. He kept in touch with each of them, knew exactly where each was, through

all that followed. By this time, too, he had scribbled a teletype message to be sent to all police stations north along Route 19, clear through the next state.

With his left hand he had drawn out a large-scale sectional map, stiff in its collodion case, and was studying this. He had set clerks to telephoning constables and deputy sheriffs who lived along that part of Route 19, and also some of the principal service stations. This was to warn drivers not to use the highway for the next few minutes. The constables, deputies and service station men were also requested to call back reports of the pursuit when it had passed them. They were not asked to join it. They weren't needed.

By the time McLaughlin had made his third report, two minutes after the second, Petersen, without moving, had requested and been granted two state police cars from the state to the north, to proceed south to the line, and he had ordered out a helicopter. He was writing telephone and teletype messages all the time. He could have told you almost to the foot where the gray Pontiac was. They didn't have a chance, those kids.

It took some time for them to learn this. They tried hard. They did not at first worry about McLaughlin, supposing him to be no more than a driver who was getting a thrill out of keeping them in sight. It did not seem possible to them that a cop wouldn't try to head them off. It was not until they spotted the police car coming from their left on Route 12 that they realized they were being headed off. This was F8T, a trooper named Blake, who was reporting regularly to Captain Petersen. The kids gave the Pontiac everything it had, and beat Blake to the intersection by feet.

Blake should have been at that intersection half a minute earlier. The fault was his, not Petersen's. Blake was a rookie who still got a kick out of sounding his siren, and he yanked it when the road was all but blocked by a woman driver. That woman,

who had never even dreamed of glancing into her rear-view mirror, was so startled that she swung her car almost sideways across the road and then proceeded to stall the motor. Blake got past her, but he had to crawl past.

The kids had some idea that if they crossed the state line they would be able to thumb their noses at cops. They were never to get to that line, but they did see two state police cars from that state coming to meet them. They swerved into a country lane. McLaughlin went right after them, and so did Blake.

It was about this time that the helicopter appeared.

The fugitives came to another highway, Route 34. They turned north, planning to drive to Winslow's Five Corners. Petersen, more than twenty miles away, had decided several minutes before that this was just what they would decide, and he'd called in various cars.

The gunmen had supposed that at least one of the four ways would be open. But every one was blocked near the Corners itself by a state police car drawn across it; and behind each car a trooper waited with cocked pistol.

The kids braked screechingly. They swirled around—and McLaughlin and Blake were coming to a stop, sideways across the road.

Blake and McLaughlin got out, drawing their guns. Like the other troopers, they began to close in, walking warily, in a crouch.

It was too much for the bungling amateurs. Two of them threw themselves flat on the floor of the Pontiac. Later they had to be hauled out—only Joe Ricci came of his own accord, and he came with his hands high.

THIS was exactly thirty-eight minutes after the first alarm, forty minutes from the time Old Man Honneger had been shot.

"He acted just like he did that same thing every day," a civilian who had watched the scene from the safety of the Communications Bureau room, later said of Captain Petersen.

As a matter of fact, Petersen did do that sort of thing every day. Not on that scale, to be sure, but he was always ready for it. The Ricci chase caught the public imagination. The papers played it up, and when Petersen protested to reporters that he hadn't invented anything but had simply made the best of the material on hand, the papers played it up even bigger, creating a hero.

"Don't you ever feel sorry for those fugitives you trap so relentlessly?" he was asked.

His answer was thoughtful.

"Well, yes, I do," he said, "*after I've caught them!*"

In the Kandy Kitchen, this was understood, or at least sensed. Petersen—who never did loiter over lunch—not infrequently sat at the counter. He was at the counter one day, and just dumping ketchup on his hamburger, when Salvatore Ricci walked in.

It was obvious that Ricci had not come to eat.

This was a brother of the lad who'd tried banditry. Salvatore was a good bit older than Joe, and a responsible citizen, a contractor, nearing forty, portly, with sound political connections. Everybody knew how he felt about his brother. Everybody knew that he was backing the boy to the limit, and that their lawyer's argument, the only possible one, was that Joe Ricci, though concededly a bit wild, was not an habitual criminal or even likely to become one. The lawyers would contend that Joe had just been carried away by the yearning for a thrill.

This logic might escape Old Man Honneger; but Old Man Honneger was to be taken care of. It was an argument that rested only on emotion, but emotion can

sometimes mean a lot in a criminal case. Anyway, it was the best they were going to be able to do.

Salvatore Ricci was a large, loose, reddish man, ordinarily as sunny as the sun, with a good word for everybody. Today, he was not like that. He crawled onto a stool next to Petersen.

"Hiyah, Captain."

"Hello, Sal. Nice to see you."

There was a great deal of silence. Men came in quietly, rolling their eyes sideways. Everybody tried to appear not to be looking at Petersen and Ricci. Herb, the proprietor, grew furiously busy with something unimportant. Sade, the waitress, ordinarily a veritable fountain of persiflage and wisecrackery, moved back and forth sideways, handling plates as though they were made of eggshell china.

Of course it was incredible that Sal Ricci meant to get rough. He had a violent temper, but after all, the place was full of troopers.

Still, it was strange that Sal had taken that stool. He had a big behind and was a man who liked to put it on a broad place. He was fond of Sade, too, whom he habitually overtipped. But though there were empty booths, Sal Ricci took a stool. He turned a glass of water around and around.

"Captain," softly, "the boy's sure to get a stretch."

"I'm afraid so, Sal."

"I—I was talking to him a little while ago. They've been mighty nice over there, I'll say that for them. We've got no mother, you know, Joe and me. Or father, either. Joe can't even remember them."

Petersen said nothing. He went on eating, but he ate slowly.

"Joe told me just now, he said he knows what he done was wrong and he's ready to face a stretch. But he says he never will get over the way he was caught. He says that'll haunt him to his dying day. That cat-and-mouse act."

Petersen waited until he'd swallowed what he had in his mouth, and then replied with care, "That wasn't a cat-and-mouse act, Sal. It was straight police work. If we'd closed in on those kids right away, somebody might have started to go bang-bang. And Joe might be on a slab right now. Or else facing the prospect of the chair."

"He says it was torture. I was talking to him just now. He says he's never going to forget it as long as he lives."

"Your brother, Sal, is overexcited. He believes everything he reads in the papers. And he's dramatizing himself. That's understandable, in the circumstances."

Ricci made a few more linked rings of wetness, then slid off the stool. He was not looking at Petersen.

"Joe says all he wishes is that some day that would happen to you. He says he'd go to the Big House happy if he knew it had."

With that he went out.

PETERSEN finished his hamburger, and his milk. He paid, and then he went out, too.

Naturally, there was a great deal of talk about it at headquarters, though nobody said anything to Petersen—nobody, that is, until the commissioner himself dropped in at Communications. They talked of routine matters for a while, and even when the commissioner brought up the subject of Salvatore Ricci, he was casual, at first; yet there was a note of underlying seriousness.

"He's the best-hearted slob in the world. I'm very fond of Sal Ricci. But he does get carried away, sometimes, especially when it's anything concerning that kid brother of his. He's likely to do something foolish, and I wouldn't want to have anything happen to him."

Petersen inclined his head, and the commissioner went on.

"I wouldn't want to have anything hap-

pen to you, either. You know that, don't you? I understand you don't usually carry a gun when you're off duty? It might be better if you did. Anyway, until Sal's had a chance to cool off."

"Is that an order, sir?"

"No, it's not an order. I haven't any right to give you orders about what to do when you're off duty. No, it's only a suggestion. But it's a suggestion you might do well to take, Captain."

The next caller at Petersen's desk was his deputy, Jarvis. He liked Jarvis. They were rather more military in their treatment of one another than was customary in the department, and both seemed to prefer it that way. Sergeant Jarvis was an apt pupil. He had Communications well in hand. And he worshiped his chief.

"You busy, sir?"

"Not particularly."

"It's about the commissioner. It's none of my business, but I wondered if he warned you about Ricci."

Petersen nodded noncommittally.

"Are you going to do anything about it, sir?"

"I don't just see what I could be expected to do." Petersen spoke snappishly, now, which was unusual. "I'm certainly not going to let them give me a bodyguard. That'd look ridiculous. And it'd just be asking for trouble, anyway."

Then he spoke in a much more friendly tone.

"Look, we did a good job on that Ricci thing, so what have we got to worry about?"

He was not being smug. He truly felt that way. If he had fouled up some part of the proceedings, then he would understand a fuss.

But Jarvis shook his head.

"It isn't just a matter of a good job, Captain. It's the human part of it. You're almost too good. Now and then somebody wants to see a criminal escape, maybe."

"I'm sure I don't see why."

"Neither do I. But they do. It's human to."

NEVERTHELESS, it was with a start that Petersen found himself confronted by Salvatore Ricci three mornings later. Petersen had a mind that promptly and dispassionately shook off all manner of histrionics. To him any show of emotion was playacting, and playacting, not being real, need not be taken seriously. For those who liked it, he supposed, it was all right. He himself just didn't have time for it. Yet though Salvatore Ricci was all emotion when he accosted Petersen on his way to work, there was something about the man that sent a chill warning to Petersen's brain.

Not that there was anything dramatic about Ricci's appearance. He lurched away from a curbed car in Middlesex Street between South Hart and Wainright, a warehouse block. This was a little before nine o'clock in the morning. None of the warehouses was open and there were no shops, nor, as it happened, were there any other pedestrians.

"Lo, Captain."

"Good morning, Sal."

Petersen would have gone on—he timed his walks to the State Police building each morning and did not look with favor on any break in the routine—but Ricci got in front of him.

Ricci was drunk. He swayed. His eyes were bloodshot, his breath strong.

Now when a man is drunk at that hour, it usually means one of two things. Either he's been at it all night, or else, after a heavy session, he has taken too many pickups and is lit all over again. In either case he is likely to be loggy.

With Ricci it was different. It was instantly apparent to Petersen that Ricci had got drunk in a hurry, to steel himself against something, because he was frightened. An ordinary drunken man is loose, sloppy. Ricci was tense.

"Let's go for a little automobile ride, Captain."

"No," said Petersen.

"Yes," said Ricci.

He came closer, and Petersen saw that he held an automatic pistol at his hip. Petersen gasped. After all, the man was half mad with liquor and with grief, and there was no telling how he might act.

"You can't do that, Sal!"

"Well, I am doing it. Get in the car."

There was a man in the driver's seat, and he kept his head turned away as Petersen climbed in. His hands were squeezed on the wheel, white at the knuckles. He said suddenly, with almost a sob, "I—I'm not going to do it, Sal. It's too risky."

"All right. Get out, then." Ricci was in the back seat now. "I can do it alone. Go on, fella. Get out."

The man sidled out, with his head turned away from Petersen, who studied him coldly. Petersen never saw his face, but he thought he'd remember his ear, his neck, and his hair.

"Switch on the radio," commanded Sal Ricci.

There was nothing furtive about them. At Market Street, on command, Petersen turned south. Hundreds of persons, hurrying to work, might have seen them.

Sal Ricci did not seem to care who saw them. Even while they were turning into Market Street, Sal was leaning forward, patting Petersen's pockets. He didn't need to look far. He found the revolver, and the badge.

Petersen was not in uniform; it was not required of those of his rank every day. However, he had to carry pistol and badge while on duty. It was queer to have them taken from him right in the middle of Market Street in broad daylight—and to the accompaniment of Sergeant Jarvis' voice: "Calling F-Four-Y, calling F-Four-Y."

"Convenient, to know what the cops are doing," muttered Ricci. "There's no law

against having a set that will pick it up."

"None," agreed Petersen. "But there is a law against making use of any information so obtained."

"Drive slower. And over nearer the curb."

"What are you going to do?"

"You'll find out."

It sounded as if he were getting to his knees back there. Then there was a burst of gunfire.

Petersen's nerves were in excellent condition, but even he jumped. The shooting seemed to be right in his ear. He didn't count the shots. He couldn't. They streamed out in one clattery burst. Somebody must have tinkered with that gun and fixed it for full automatic action, which was against the law.

The shooting was immediately followed by a crash of glass.

"Now—*step on it!*"

The car was a Buick, old but in good condition. They were doing sixty by the time they crossed the Coosalatchi. There was no cop on the bridge. Half a minute later they were in Hillsboro, a suburb, where there was very little traffic. They were making seventy-five by that time.

Then came open country, state police territory. Legally the troopers could make arrests and direct traffic anywhere, but in order to avoid snarls with the various city police departments, for the most part they stuck to the countryside and the smaller towns.

"Two-Ten! Two-Ten! A red Buick sedan with at least two men in it is proceeding south on Wellsley Boulevard. These men are armed!"

"One of them is, anyway," Salvatore Ricci chuckled. "This is your own gun I've got against the back of your neck, Captain. You ought to know whether it works or not."

"It works," Petersen assured him.

The Buick had plenty of speed, but the engine was a noisy one and they had to

shout to hear each other. At the same time, Petersen was listening to Jarvis organize the chase. Petersen shook his head, clucked his tongue. There was a slight quaver in Jarvis' voice.

"We're turning right at this little road up here."

It was a good move. Though drunk, Ricci clearly was going according to a preconceived plan. They had been making ninety on the boulevard, and at that speed no department car could overtake them. But one would be close behind. F2R, it should be; a trooper named Schwarz. Half a mile ahead was the intersection of Route 34, an important spot. Three troopers either were there or were on their way there, and the helicopter, too, would head for that crossing. Even if the Buick had managed to make it before the arrival of any of the troopers, the proprietor of a large service station there, a friend of the state police, who would undoubtedly have been alerted by telephone, would report their passage.

But nobody saw them turn into the side road.

"Go slow, now. Good and slow."

Yes, this business had been well thought out. To go fast here would be to raise a cloud of dust, an eye-catcher.

IN THE mirror, Petersen saw Schwarz speed past, back on the boulevard. Schwarz would check at the service station, and learn that the Buick had not passed, and then he'd double back and try this road. Jarvis should so direct him. Jarvis had the map of this district right in front of him, or should have. They'd been over this territory more than once, Petersen and Jarvis, flying low in the department helicopter, making notes. This road ought to pop right into Jarvis's memory instantly, just like that.

But would it?

Seconds counted now. They were headed for Route 26. The trooper regularly

there, F2T, McLaughlin, the same who had headed up the Ricci chase, had been ordered to the intersection of Route 34 and the boulevard. He was probably there right now. If the red Buick was spotted, or if the proper deduction was made, McLaughlin could get back to Route 26 in time to make contact with F2P, who was coming north on that same highway, and throw up a block. F2P was a corporal named Lance. Two cars would make an effective block on Route 26, which was not wide.

"Shut that damn thing off," commanded Ricci. "I can't make any sense out of all those code numbers anyway."

Petersen reluctantly shut the radio off.

"So now, what do you think of it, Captain?"

Petersen shrugged. Until a moment ago he had been driving too fast and listening too carefully to feel any fear. Now he was uneasy. What was Ricci getting at? What was his plan? If he holed up somewhere here between Route 26 and the boulevard, hiding the car, they'd be sure to get him, though it might take a little time. It was rollypoly countryside and there weren't many farmhouses.

"Speed it up a little now."

Something cold pressed his neck. Ricci was smart about staying in the back seat. Petersen had seldom glimpsed him in the mirror, and his voice came from different places different times.

Had Ricci been in front, especially now that they were not going fast, Petersen might have found a chance to grab that gun. Not that he would have done anything impulsive. He never did.

They came out on Route 26.

"Left," said Ricci. "And fast again."

He sounded nervous now, back there. He must have been leaning forward—Petersen could feel his breath.

They crested Cooke Hill—and came in sight of a road block.

There were five cars, and they could be

seen from a considerable distance. Two shiny state police cars were parked across the road diagonally, in such a way that any car passing would have to go between them. Two troopers stood checking the other cars, civilian cars, as they filed through the narrow place. They would be Lance and McLaughlin.

"Drive right through," Ricci ordered. "Don't stop."

Petersen shrugged, feeling the muzzle of the pistol, his own gun, against his neck. He slowed down a little, to perhaps fifty. He got far over on the right side of the road. The passage between the two police cars was clear—but of course sideways. Only a few yards from the car on the right Petersen braked violently, at the same time twisting the wheel. The Buick swung half around, its tires shrieking. It was pointed east now. Petersen stepped on the accelerator again. With only inches to spare, if that, they shot between the two cars; they turned; and they were off again, faster and faster.

Ricci's "Phew!" was audible over the thunder of the engine.

A moment later Ricci said, "Slow down, here. Turn to the left."

Now they were on a dirt road, nothing but a lane, really, a twisty way leading through a small wood. They were out of sight of Route 26 almost immediately. They would be out of sight of the helicopter, too, except for an intensive search, because of the trees.

The lane was bumpy. After a few hundred feet Ricci said, "Stop."

When he shut off the ignition, Petersen could hear McLaughlin and Lance go past on Route 26.

They couldn't have gone any farther in the Buick, anyway. There was a turn-around—Petersen guessed that some farmer had built this lane for hauling timber—and completely blocking the entrance to this was the back of a truck.

It was one of Ricci's own trucks. It was

all enclosed, and about the size of a small moving van. The back was down, forming a ramp. The truck was empty. It would just about hold the Buick.

SALVATORE RICCI had opened a door, and he started to back out.

"I'm going to leave you now. I guess you'll manage to thumb a ride back to town, eventually. But first I'll get you to drive this crate inside, without me to weight it."

The plan was clear now. He, Ricci, would plod unnoticed back to the city, leaving the celebrated Captain Petersen caught in his own trap. What a fool the hero would be then! Trudging home, footsore and weary, his pistol taken from him, his badge too! You couldn't keep a thing like that secret. Petersen was not popular in the department, where his reserve was resented. The thing would play hob with discipline in Communications.

What did Salvatore Ricci care if he got into a little trouble about it? He had enough pull to extricate himself from anything like that. The laugh would be worth it anyway.

Ricci was half out of the car, moving backward, the pistol held before him. Petersen stepped on the starter.

The ignition switch was off, but the car was in gear—second. It jerked forward. Ricci yipped, tumbling. Petersen sprang out.

When Petersen raced around the back of the Buick, Ricci, who had been caught off balance, was lying on his back. The pistol was held high above him. He must have just landed, that instant.

Petersen made a flying tackle for that arm. He didn't even touch the revolver itself, but he struck the arm so hard that the weapon was knocked out of Ricci's hand and skidded some distance.

They both got up. Panting, they faced one another. The gun was equidistant from them, but neither thought of it now.

"So you'd like to go back with a few marks on you, huh? Well, Captain, that just makes it all the nicer."

Bearlike, he shuffled forward. But he was clumsy, still dizzy too. He was also fast. And he knew the tricks. Salvatore Ricci's fame as a fighter, as a barroom brawler, was long-standing.

He was a good deal bigger than Sven Petersen, who backed away.

"Stand up and fight!"

Ricci cursed with concentrated fury, calling him names that almost brought tears to his eyes. Nevertheless Petersen backed away.

They went past the truck like that—Ricci advancing, Petersen backing, with never a blow—and around the turn-around.

This winded Ricci, who after all was near forty—and overweight. He roared in rage. And at last he did just what Petersen had been waiting for him to do. He charged, swinging.

Petersen stepped inside the wild hook and hit once, right to the point of the chin. His heels had been on the ground as he did it; he'd given it everything he had.

Ricci's arms went limp. He swayed. His eyes were glassy, his mouth was open. There was no expression whatever on his face, and surely he didn't know what was happening, when Sven Petersen hit him again—in the same place.

It was like axing an ox. Ricci fell full-length.

Twenty-five minutes later Captain Petersen, his pistol in its holster, his badge in his pocket, drove the truck, together with the hidden Buick, into the Ricci Contracting Company garage. Nobody seemed to be there, so he walked away. He walked to the State Police building.

Petersen was celebrated for his punctuality. Yet this day he offered no explanation. He was unruffled, as always, when he took over. He listened to Jarvis's re-

(Continued on page 109)

STRANGE TRAILS -

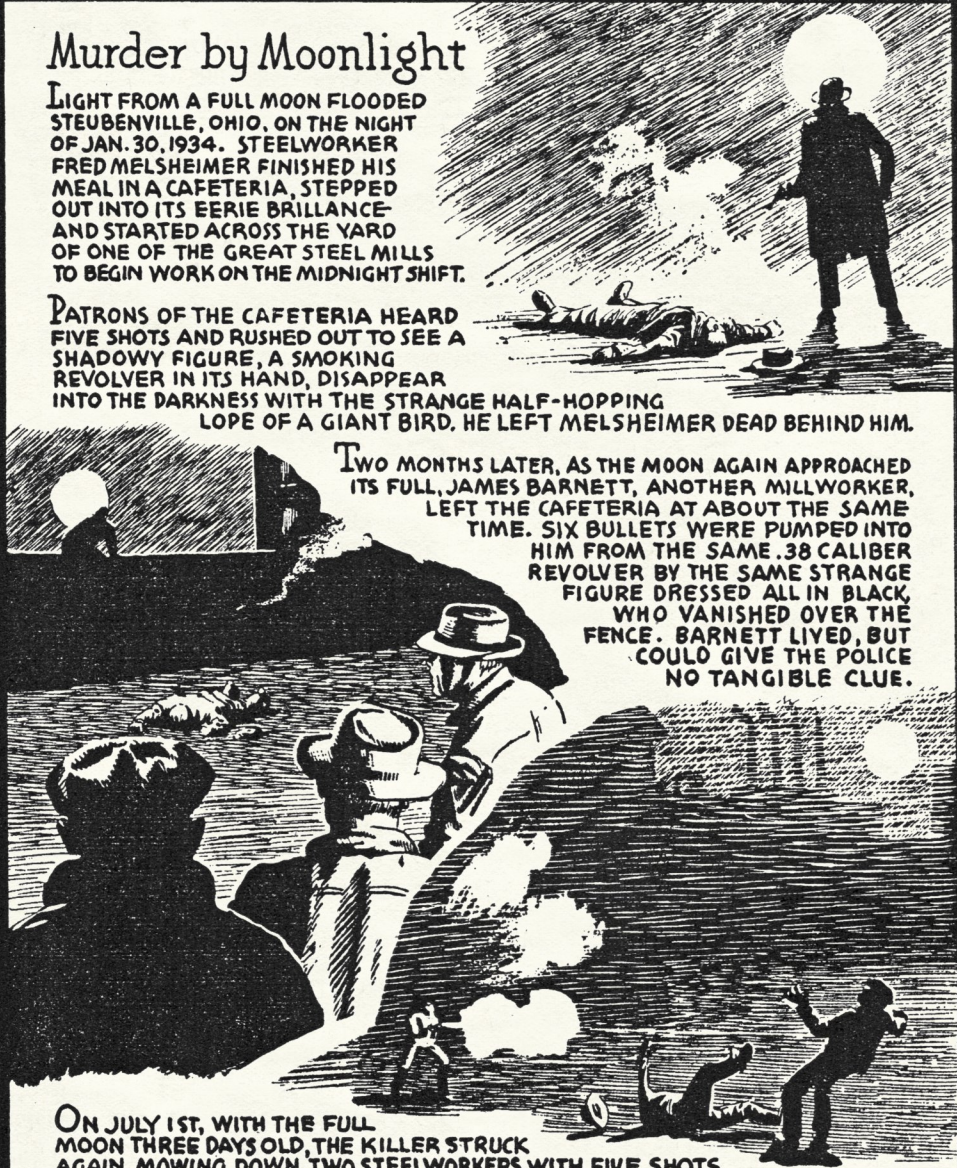
Murder by Moonlight

LIGHT FROM A FULL MOON FLOODED STEUBENVILLE, OHIO, ON THE NIGHT OF JAN. 30, 1934. STEELWORKER FRED MELSHEIMER FINISHED HIS MEAL IN A CAFETERIA, STEPPED OUT INTO ITS EERIE BRILLIANCE AND STARTED ACROSS THE YARD OF ONE OF THE GREAT STEEL MILLS TO BEGIN WORK ON THE MIDNIGHT SHIFT.

PATRONS OF THE CAFETERIA HEARD FIVE SHOTS AND RUSHED OUT TO SEE A SHADOWY FIGURE, A SMOKING REVOLVER IN ITS HAND, DISAPPEAR INTO THE DARKNESS WITH THE STRANGE HALF-HOPPING LOPE OF A GIANT BIRD. HE LEFT MELSHEIMER DEAD BEHIND HIM.

TWO MONTHS LATER, AS THE MOON AGAIN APPROACHED ITS FULL, JAMES BARNETT, ANOTHER MILLWORKER, LEFT THE CAFETERIA AT ABOUT THE SAME TIME. SIX BULLETS WERE PUMPED INTO HIM FROM THE SAME .38 CALIBER REVOLVER BY THE SAME STRANGE FIGURE DRESSED ALL IN BLACK, WHO VANISHED OVER THE FENCE. BARNETT LIVED, BUT COULD GIVE THE POLICE NO TANGIBLE CLUE.

ON JULY 1ST, WITH THE FULL MOON THREE DAYS OLD, THE KILLER STRUCK AGAIN, MOWING DOWN TWO STEELWORKERS WITH FIVE SHOTS AS THEY LEFT THE CAFETERIA, HOLDING OFF PURSUERS WITH HIS GUN AND ESCAPING.



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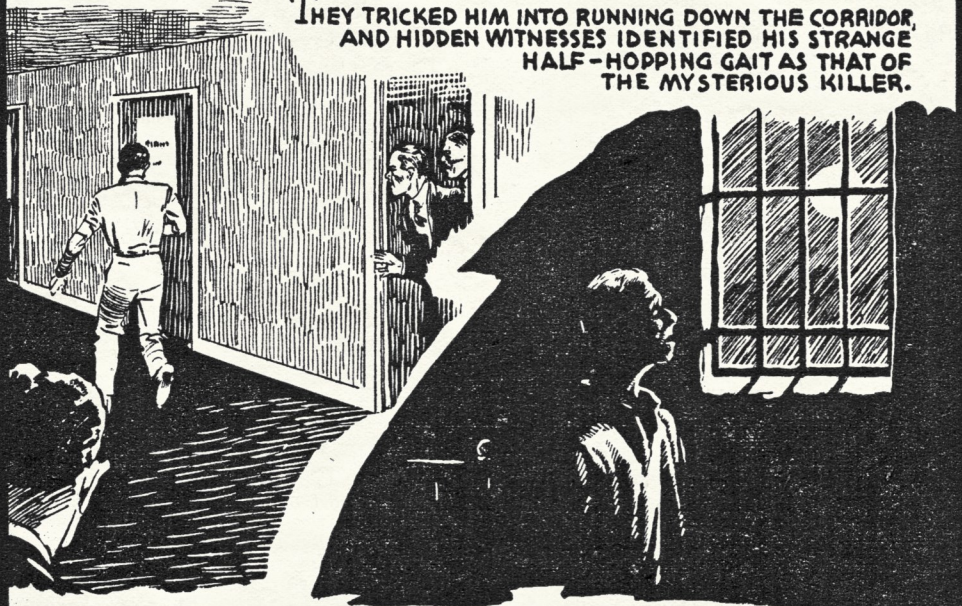
... to MURDER ^{by} LEE

TERRIFIED BY THIS WEIRD KILLER WHO STRUCK WITHOUT REASON WHEN THE MOON WAS FULL, PATRONS OF THE CAFETERIA REPORTED THE NAMES OF EVERYONE THEY COULD REMEMBER HAVING SEEN HANGING ABOUT OR PEERING CASUALLY THROUGH THE WINDOW. POLICE ELIMINATED ALL BUT ONE, DAVID D'ASCANIO, A MILLWORKER WITH A FINE WAR RECORD, A BLAMELESS REPUTATION AND NOT A SINGLE BAD HABIT.



NEVERTHELESS, JUST ON AN OFF CHANCE, THEY SEARCHED HIS ROOM. THERE THEY FOUND NEWSPAPER CLIPPINGS COVERING THE SHOOTINGS, TOGETHER WITH THOSE OF OTHER ASSASSINATIONS. WITH ONLY THAT TO GO ON, THEY TOOK D'ASCANIO IN FOR QUESTIONING. AND FORTUNATELY, FOR IN HIS POCKETS THEY FOUND A BLACK MASK -- AND THE REVOLVER THAT HAD FIRED THE LETHAL BULLETS.

THEY TRICKED HIM INTO RUNNING DOWN THE CORRIDOR, AND HIDDEN WITNESSES IDENTIFIED HIS STRANGE HALF-HOPPING GAIT AS THAT OF THE MYSTERIOUS KILLER.



D'ASCANIO WAS CONVICTED AND SENTENCED TO LIFE IMPRISONMENT. HE NEVER EXPLAINED, NOR WERE POLICE ABLE TO DISCOVER WHY THE FULL MOON SENT HIM OUT ON HIS TERRIBLE ONE-MAN MURDER RAMPAGE.



*He and his pals had
mortally wounded a
cop on the beat. . . .*

**By
Winston
Bouvé**

DEADLY MISSION

*They'd kill him if they ever caught
up with him. And there was one
very special reason why he had to
live!*

IT WAS three a.m. The city slept. Presently great produce trucks would begin to rumble northward; early traffic would start the ebb and flow of commerce. But now only an occasional taxi, a lone drunk weaving sleepily out of the subway kiosk at Thirty-third Street, gave the long stretch of Seventh Avenue any semblance of life.

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"Dynamite and Stone".

Young Pete Crowley, rounding out his first year as police reporter for the Metropolitan News Bureau, had just left the precinct station house on West Thirty-eighth Street. He'd phoned in for the last time at one; he had given his routine report to the city desk and had been sitting, for the moment free from care, in the detectives' room, chinning with some of the boys. But right now he wasn't headed for the uptown flat where he lived with his brother. In a few minutes the Pittsburgh flyer was due in, and he meant to stick around the Thirty-third Street entrance of the station until the big black police sedan, waiting over there by the ramp, picked up Detective Larry Crowley and his sullen, shackled prisoner, Nick Chandos.

Pete was plenty proud of his brother's exploit in tracking the big-time killer and bank robber to his hide-out in the Poconos. It was a slick piece of work, even for Larry. The cops of two states had been hot after Chandos for two months now—ever since he and two of his pals had taken the Merchants' and Dealers' downtown branch for forty thousand, blasting a special officer, mortally wounding the cop on the beat, and then making a clean getaway. And in doing so, according to underworld grapevine, he had neatly two-timed his pals on that job—Slick Durkin and Killer Krafft, who were still among the wanted.

Screwy business on Chandos' part, Pete Crowley reflected, if he'd actually blown town with all that jack. But Pete, listening to his brother talk about the case, didn't think he had. Larry's hunch was that Chandos had stacked away the cash back here in New York, where even he couldn't get at it now.

Pete Crowley glanced at the station clock, ducked across the street to pick up a pack of smokes. He felt pretty hot, just being Larry's kid brother. Maybe Larry'd fix it so that he could ride down to headquarters with them. If Donnie—big Lieutenant Donovan—was there, everything'd be jake.

For a moment there, young Pete Crowley felt a pang of regret that he had not followed his brother and his dead father, in getting "on the cops." He shook the feeling off with a brusque straightening of his shoulders. Pound a beat for five years, pass examinations, work like hell, risk your life, get promoted—and then the administration changes. So do you—back in harness! Three times he'd cursed in helpless rage while his father, with a tight-lipped, wry smile, had gone down and bought again the blue uniform and trappings a few months after a new mayor and commissioner of police had stepped into the City Hall. Busted! Poorer pay and tougher work.

It's a racket, Pete had decided, and because of his acquaintance at certain police stations, because his brother was a smart young detective, he'd been assigned as leg-man on that police precinct.

He stepped from the curb. Half a block west, clearly seen under an arc light, the door of the big police sedan opened, let out a couple of dicks. The Greek's capture and return was being kept plenty dark, but even so, they weren't taking any chances. Chandos was a slick baby.

Pete hurried. The block was empty, except for a parked car or two. And just then a huge news truck, plastered gaudily with *Evening Sphere* advertising, rumbled past him, turned into Thirty-third. It cut off his view of the ramp just as Larry and the slim, slouching killer handcuffed to him came up the concrete slope.

Pete Crowley's brain clicked an ominous warning even before the big news truck veered sharply to the right, ramming the police sedan against the curb. And then it happened so quickly he couldn't recall the exact sequence of events for an hour afterward.

News truck? It was an arsenal! From its newsprint camouflage, twin machine guns belched a chattering barrage of death at police sedan and armed guards before their own guns could stammer back. Pete,

running, saw Nick Chandos flatten himself on the concrete, to drag Larry down with him. But it was mobster bullets that actually brought Larry down, to lie for a moment across the Greek, a senseless bleeding shield. . . .

In that breath-catching space of time Pete saw the machine-gunner in the police sedan slump sickeningly over his own weapon; saw the big lieutenant backing toward Larry and the Greek, crumple at the knees with the roar of a bull. He dropped his gun and clutched his riddled stomach as two of the gangsters surged across the red-spattered pavement.

ALREADY one of the killers was jerking Chandos to his feet, so that between them they could drag Larry across the concrete like a sack of meal. And as red-hot agony tore through Pete's left shoulder—agony that slowed his running to a painful stagger—he recognized that flabby, twitching profile. It belonged to Slick Durkin.

Pete, somehow, was now up to where Larry and Chandos had fallen. His eyes lighted as he threw himself down on that glittering object on the sidewalk that was Larry's Police Positive. Pete's fingers closed on the butt; he crawled to his knees, jerked the trigger. And his yell of rage brought the slim guy in the Melton overcoat about, a snarl contorting his sallow face. But either the shock of sudden recognition or the red mist blurred his vision, for he missed. And Killer Krafft, the second of the murdering mob, ran on toward the truck. Killer Krafft—and Durkin! Risking their lives to win freedom for the man who had double-crossed them—gypped them out of their cut in the big bank job.

Again Pete shot, and this time it was Nick Chandos who got the bullet meant for that rapidly disappearing form in the gray overcoat. It was Chandos who screamed and pitched forward onto the runningboard of the truck, his fingers clawing empty air.

They were getting away with it. The dirty, murdering rats were heaving Chandos, and the inert bundle shackled to him that was Larry, into the already moving truck. Pete lifted his gun again, cursing, sobbing with impotence. The hammer clicked on an empty chamber as he reeled to his feet, jammed the useless gun into his pocket.

And then the roar of the fake news truck, slithering south on Eighth Avenue on two wheels, was lost in the blare of police sirens as two radio cars scorched rubber to a brief stop.

Within an hour, the city was bottled up. Tunnels, bridges, every north-bound exit was cordoned off. Radio cruisers patrolled every route Chandos' former mob might have taken. But the killers and their camouflaged truck might have been swallowed up in space. And with them was Detective Crowley, living or dead.

Pete Crowley, having phoned in the story and gotten his shoulder patched up, heard the reports come in at headquarters in that gray dawn. It wasn't the throb of his wound that sickened him and beaded his upper lip with sweat. It was the thought of Larry, maybe dumped out by now in some dark alley like so much carrion; the thought of big Donnie, the genial, blustering lieutenant, slumping to his knees, torn nearly in two by that blast of machine gun bullets as he tried to shield Larry. And those other two guys—good, gallant cops, both of them—the machine-gunner and the chauffeur.

The machine-gunner had lived until they got him into the emergency ward. The driver of the police sedan, a nice young cop named Noonan, newly married, might last until morning.

"And guys like that get burned down so Nick Chandos' cooked-up rats can deliver him!" Pete said. "Listen, Cap, I can't hang around here. Lemme go out with the next cruiser!"

"For the ride?" Captain Hanlon snarled

around the pulpy stub of his unlit cigar. His face might have been hacked out of red Vermont granite; but he had served with Pete's father in the old days; had been gruffer than usual when Pete himself had decided to try reporting instead of the force. Now, he understood. "Listen, son—we'll get something any minute now. From up in the Bronx, most likely. They can't get clear." He spat out the cigar stub, hamlike fists clenched on his battered desk. "But if it was Durkin and the Killer, why didn't they turn the heat on the Greek? And where the hell did they ditch that truck?"

Pete had no answer for the first question yet. But he was trying to figure out the second like Larry would have.

"Within a couple o' blocks of the station," he said bleakly. "They had to, Cap. They had only split seconds after they turned down Eighth; the chase was already on. They had to have another car ready and waiting. They knew they couldn't get very far, even so . . . maybe they didn't even try!"

A hunch was taking shape in his head. A hunch at which Cap Hanlon would snort, believing as he did that Durkin's and Killer Krafft's aim was to get Chandos through the police cordon, and out of Manhattan proper.

In the domed radio room, lights flashed on the vast board that was the intricate network of the city. On and off. . . . On and off. The announcer's metallic drone of "Calling all cars. Calling all cars. . . ." intoned upon the dynamo of code reports flashed back and forth.

Cap Hanlon grabbed his phone almost before it spoke, snarled into it. "Yeah—yeah." He swore. "In an alley west of Ninth? You passed it a couple of times?"

Peter Crowley reached for his cap. "They found the truck?" His haggard eyes asked more than that.

"Yep, they found the truck. They found Larry, too, son. Come on. We're moving now!"

IT DIDN'T take long to get to the cobbled alley that ran, beneath a shed-like extension, alongside a gloomy, squat storage warehouse within three blocks of the massacre. And it was easy to see why the murder truck had not been spotted earlier. A radio patrolman explained that there usually was a tarpaulin-covered moving van parked there.

The killers had simply run the van deeper into the pitchy gloom of the alley, and left their own murder truck in plain view, but shrouded by the heavy tarpaulin bearing the storage company's name.

The tarred canvas lay on the cobbles now, and a searchlight played on the dimmed interior of the fake news truck. Beneath its tattered camouflage of newsprint showed the glint of steel. It was an armored job, with apertures in the steel casing big enough to accommodate a machine gun's snout. But Pete gave it only a glance. A police surgeon was squatting over a dark huddle on the cobblestones. He gave place to Pete with a single gruff word.

Detective Larry Crowley had pulled off his last job. Or rather, he hadn't pulled it off. His horror-stricken, glazed blue eyes seemed to be telling Pete that as the young reporter bent over him. He'd been a dead man, Pete realized numbly, when Durkin and Killer Krafft and the other hood had slung him, shackled to the living Chandos, into the truck.

They hadn't wasted any time in freeing the Greek. Both handcuffs dangled emptily now from Larry's stiffening left wrist.

Pete straightened slowly. "I saw him take it," he said dully. "Maybe if I'd shot straighter. . . ."

When they'd taken Larry away on a stretcher, Cap Hanlon wiped his own face. He didn't say much, but Pete knew what he was thinking. The cop-killers would be lucky if they cashed in during a gun battle once the law had closed in on them. Heaven help 'em if they were brought in alive and unscathed!

Pete watched the dead-wagon slide away from the curb. Then, as he was turning back to the murder truck, he felt a hand on his shoulder; turned to see the gray, lined face of Cap Hanlon. "Here, son. I guess Larry'd want you to have this."

Pete nodded dumbly. Mighty nice of old Cap to give him Larry's badge. He smiled his thanks, because his voice wouldn't work right just then, and slipped the numbered shield into his inside pocket. He turned again to the camouflaged truck. Its rear end, he saw, had formed a steel-floored runway. A couple of homicide dicks were pointing, and he nodded. "Yeah—tire marks. They had their getaway car inside the truck, primed and ready. All they had to do was to let down the back and—zowie! Only, how far did they go?"

He wasn't Larry's brother now, grieving for the man who'd been mother and father to him since he'd been a kid, nor yet was he a reporter. There was too much of the stuff in him that had made Larry a good cop. Too much of his grizzled old father, who'd stuck by the Force even when it looked as if the Force hadn't stuck by him.

"We've got 'em bottled up, son," Cap Hanlon said grimly. "They can't slide out of town; not after this night's work! Not through the dragnet that's out now. I'm telling you. . . ."

"Those guys aren't going to be picked up in Harlem or the Bronx," Pete said. "They've holed up already. Listen, Cap—there isn't anything they could do, except make straight for cover. They knew that, when they planned to crash Chandos out. They had a place all picked and ready, maybe right in this precinct. A rat hole to climb into right under our noses. They had to have—"

"You're crazy," Hanlon said gruffly. "Go home and get some sleep, kid, like the doc told you. You got it all figured out for yourself, but hoods don't think that way."

"Rats do!" Pete muttered under his breath.

But he was only a punk reporter, and it wasn't his case to break. So he couldn't very well tell the best dicks in the department where they got off, even if Larry was his brother. He called up the city room, and felt a surge of happiness. He'd forgotten this was his day off. But he did not stick around the dingy station house, to wait for a dozen false leads to start coming in.

Nor did he go home, to the empty, up-town flat.

In another half hour a sunless, murky daylight would trail its ghostly breath across the city. It seemed a thousand years to Pete since he'd started on his self-appointed beat. Maybe his whole hunch was just silly. Maybe—even if it was sound—this wasn't the way to follow it down.

But Pete didn't know any better way, and as his footsteps echoed hollowly through the bedraggled, forlorn far West Twenties, he stuck doggedly to his determination, a slight, bedraggled figure, wearing a hat of shapeless, colorless felt. Somewhere, right in this vicinity, Nick Chandos' mob had ditched the car they'd never meant to use for more than a few blocks. Somewhere in this grim district of dingy tenements and dark warehouses and blind alleys, Chandos and his killers had scuttled to cover.

Tenth Avenue stretched dark and deserted before him. Just beyond a row of battened-down, condemned tenements that reared in bleak desolation against the night sky, a corner lot used as an open air parking space stood, filled with the wrecks of second-hand cars.

Pete crossed over to it. Now, if he'd had to ditch a car as easily, as inconspicuously as possible. . . . He forgot the feverish throb of his left shoulder as he left the pavement for the muddy gravel of the parking space.

Something more than the salty, river smells of the Hudson, only a block away, made his nostrils flare. He slid between the old ramshackle ruin of a Buick with \$50.00

chalked across its windshield, and a forlorn roadster of a little later vintage. And then a deadly cold elation stirred within him. That small, decently kept coupé with good tires and gleaming chromium had no business in this graveyard of relics. It had no price chalked up on it, either.

He jerked open the door, shot his flashlight inside, and something like a snarl escaped his twisted lips. Blood smeared the upholstery darkly; a pool of it glistened on the floor. And then the searching beam discovered something else—the small, dark gleam of a machine gun bullet, lodged in a tuft of the upholstery.

His hunch was good, all right. This was the car Chandos' mob had fled in after they'd ditched the armored truck. And if his hunch was good so far, it was worth following through all the way.

Chandos and his deliverers were holed up within a stone's throw of this parking space. They had to be, for, from the amount of blood in the car, Chandos had sustained no light wound. And Slick Durkin and Killer Krafft wouldn't have imperiled their own safety by burdening themselves with a badly wounded man for any great distance. Not those babies. And not the swarthy leader, whom they had every reason, but one, to burn down.

Pete smiled grimly. Chandos' delivery—by the very pals he'd double-crossed—was beginning to make sense.

The trick now was to track them to their rat hole, and trap them in it. He took his bearings. On his right, that block of condemned, boarded-up tenements would have offered a possible hide-out—if he hadn't already prowled every doorway, to find each sealed by the dust and grime of months. The far end of the parking space was flanked by the squat, dark bulk of a reputable brewery, going in full blast.

But what lay on the other side of the board fence that ambled along the rear of this vacant lot? A maze of tenement alleys, he knew, and beyond the brewery, the giant

grave of an excavation, where, six months from now, a warehouse would tower. And what else?

Pete was about to pierce that no-man's-land of darkness and desolation with his flash when a dim blob of white caught his eye a few feet farther along. He pounced upon it, and his lips curled back.

He was getting the breaks now, thick and fast. That wad of blood-soaked newspaper, caught on a fence splinter, told him plenty. Durkin and Killer Krafft had hoisted the wounded Greek over the fence right here, in their mad scramble to cover. But their very caution had overshot its mark. In panic lest they leave a crimson trail behind them, they'd tried to staunch the blood-flow with anything at hand. And in hauling him over the fence top. . . .

Pete Crowley snapped off his flash. The Lord only knew how close he was to his quarry. Or how many paces, beyond that flimsy barrier, lurked sudden, volleying death.

There were two things he could do. He could leave this hot trail, run to that all-night lunch wagon a couple of blocks away and call Cap Hanlon—and maybe lose all chance of trapping these murdering rats—or follow the scent alone. His shoulder hurt like the devil. His palms were clammy as he gripped the splintered fence top. Who was he to think of the odds? Larry never did; his father never did, either, when that battle-scarred sergeant was given an inspector's funeral. And wasn't Larry—hadn't he been—the smartest, bravest dick that ever exchanged blue and brass for plainclothes and a detective's shield?

Blue and brass. The words rang in his head like a grim refrain. Every minute counted now. But he had to leave some clue to the trail he'd stumbled upon—a clue that couldn't be missed. He dropped back into the old car graveyard, squeezed through the relics to the ancient Buick, his battered felt hat and Larry's badge in his hand.

It wouldn't be long before another radio

car would whine up or down Tenth Avenue, past the parking space. And its searchlights couldn't help but pick out that wreck of a hat, with the shield gleaming on it, perched on the Buick's battered top.

The boys could figure out the rest. It Cap Hanlon had hinted to headquarters that Pete might be on the loose.... Yeah, he could leave 'em a trail all right, and maybe save himself from being picked off by ambush before he ever ran those hoods to earth. He looked down at his bloodstained coat, which no cleanser could ever really clean, with a wry grin, reached into his rear pants pocket, and his fingers closed over the butt of Larry's gun.

TWO minutes later he landed on the other side of the board fence, squatted there a moment, a shadow among shadows, then crept forward.

It was in truth a no-man's-land, that grim area of débris and dump-piles and rotting lumber. On his left, on the edge of the yawning excavation, twin red lamps glowed malevolently. Red eyes of danger, Pete thought to himself. His flash, arcing down into that immense pit, found nothing but darkness and mud and blasted stone and the exposed, curved side of one of the great sewer conduits emptying out into the Hudson. Across the excavation a tin-roofed watchman's shack huddled. They were blasting, and dynamite was stored in a shed alongside it. Pete scowled at that shed. And then something exploded in his brain like sheet-lightning.

Two days ago, a report had come into the precinct station house of the theft of one box of dynamite—a dozen sticks. He'd reported it—and then forgotten the incident. The watchman laid it to some of the tough neighborhood kids, and the cops who'd investigated thought so, too. Yeah? Well, now Pete didn't think so!

He ducked to his right, stooping every now and then to leave one of those well chewed pencil stubs that had bulged his

pockets to mark his course, and hugged the shadows again. And then, just beyond the last of the condemned tenements, he dropped, motionless, behind a pile of lumber.

Fifty yards ahead of him, the dark outlines of a frame house, with dormer windows and a crazily tilting chimney, showed itself. It was one of the last remaining landmarks of a forgotten era, lost now in this maze of unused back alleys and condemned buildings.

It was dark as a tomb. The paneless windows yawned blackly to the elements. Was he overconfident, after all? And yet, for for a brief moment, he'd spotted a ghostly flicker of light. So briefly that it might have been imagination or eyestrain. As he wormed his way forward on his hands and knees, he was ready to believe it was imagination. For it hadn't flickered from door or window. It had come from beneath the house, at the rear of the tumble-down ruin. As if a firefly had sparked briefly in the rubbish littering the crumbling foundations.

He inched forward, his brother's gun newly loaded, and cocked in one sweating palm. There was no further gleam. He listened, holding his breath. Distantly, the muted rumble of the traffic reached him. But it wasn't that light which brought him to a sudden stop; it was a faint, timed tremor beneath his feet, coming up from the bowels of the earth.

He jerked about, hackles rising. Something scuttled and squeaked within three feet of him. His flash showed him a huge gray wharf rat, emerging from some unseen crevice in the foundations. It vanished into the darkness, but not before it dropped what it had held in predatory, whiskered jaws.

Pete retrieved that bit of booty unsteadily. No, he hadn't been overconfident! For this crust of bread—fresh bread, and mustard-smeared—was proof that the old frame house was no deserted shell.

He thought, as he crept stealthily to the front, that he knew just why Nick Chandos and his former pals had chosen this refuge;

just how they planned slipping through the network of the police to ultimate safety, unless he, Pete Crowley, cub police reporter, blocked them. The breeze was stronger, as, his shoes hanging about his neck, he silently mounted the lopsided porch steps.

The door held fast and firmly. Too firmly, considering how loose the rusty lock hung. But that gaping mouth of a broken window offered entry. He swung one leg silently over the shaky porch rail, pulled himself up.

Death lurked within that ruin of a house, and he knew it. But he wasn't conscious of fear's brassy taste in his mouth, of the sweat that gathered on his throbbing temples. He was driven by only one urge—the bitter determination to trap those rats in their underground hole, at any cost.

He was inside. A board protested under his stockinged feet, and he held his breath, ready for a hail of bullets that didn't come. There was no lookout posted on this, the parlor floor, then. He felt his cautious way on toward the rear, step by step, through the darkness and silence, not daring to use his flash.

And then beneath the rusted ruin of a kitchen stove, a betraying gleam beckoned from the cellar below. He padded across the floor, crouched like a terrier at a rat hole, listening.

HE COULD see nothing, but after an interminable minute a hoarse whisper reached his ear, sending exultant prickles down his spine: "... Nick's hearing things that ain't there, Slick . . . get on with that shovel. We ain't got all night."

"You're telling me?" It was Durkin's shriller voice, pitched to a squeak, that answered. Whatever else he said was muffled by a long-drawn-out groan. That would be Chandos. Durkin spoke again, viciously. "Not feeling so good, huh, Chandos? Well, quit stalling, an' come clean on where you buried that dough, or you'll be

feeling a whole lot worse, you double-crossing rat!"

Pete took his bearings in the darkness above them, a mirthless grin creasing his face. The tension, the conflict in the cellar, might give him a Chinaman's chance in his surprise attack, outnumbered, outgunned though he was. He'd already placed the door that must lead down to the cellar. How heavily was it barricaded?

"Rub him out before he talks?" It was Killer Krafft's derisive whine of protest. "Hell, Slick—you're nuts! Nick's a good guy—he just ain't taking any chances too soon. He knows we gotta make our get-away fast."

Pete Crowley, catfooting across to the cellar door, thought that if he were Chandos, he'd trust Killer Krafft's proffered friendliness even less than Durkin's threat. He felt for and found the door, turned the knob. To his unending amazement, it swung inward. Invisible against the pitchy gloom, he peered below. He could only sense the steep flight that gave down into that underground chamber, faintly illuminated at the far end by a shielded electric lantern.

He could see Chandos, waxen pale, lying propped against a pile of old lumber. He could see the gigantic shadow of Killer Krafft looming monstrous on one mildewed wall. The machine gun that had blasted out so many lives lay beside a circular, squat, stone-walled cistern, from which a rusty, ancient pump protruded. Durkin wasn't visible.

"You're showing some sense, Killer—for a dumb guy!" Chandos said faintly. "Bump me off, and then what? You could hunt for a week, and not find that forty grand—but you ain't got a week! That packet sails at dawn, boys. . . ." He coughed, and a red trickle threaded his sneering underlip. "Throw me that gat, Slick, an' I'll feel more like we was buddies. Fast, if you want to see that dough. . . . Living or dead, I'm still top guy. . . ."

Pete eased the door wider as Durkin's

back came into view, braced himself, feeling for the top step. And then his unbelievably good luck suddenly ran out. A rotted timber splintered beneath his tread, and he caught himself just in time. But he no longer had his priceless advantage. Chandos snarled an oath. Slick Durkin wheeled, automatic lifted.

"Hold it!" Pete yelled. "Hands up, all of you—you're covered. I'm top guy now, you mugs!"

Slowly, Slick Durkin raised his hands. His automatic thudded on the dirt floor of the cellar. His snicker should have warned Pete, but it didn't.

"Okay, mister—come and get us. . . ." And then Pete heard, "The dirty copper!"

"I'm coming!" Pete said. "Up against the wall—you too, Kraft. . . ."

But his flash played upon the wooden stairs a second too late, for they gave beneath him, horribly, completely. And as he hurtled down, crashing through that hacked shell of a staircase, he cursed himself. His gun thundered in his ears—and that was the last thing he heard or knew.

Pete came back to life with a smothered groan. That agonizing lump on his skull had been caused by something more than his twelve-foot drop through the cunningly demolished staircase. A gun-butt, he guessed groggily.

He tried to move, and found he was trussed up like a fowl for slaughter. His wrists were made fast behind his back by stout rope that bit into the flesh. The same length of rope fettered his ankles, drawing his legs up under him torturously. The drag on his bullet-shattered shoulder was pretty bad, but the suffocating feel and smell of damp earth in his nostrils was worse.

Then his head cleared, and he realized he was lying against a mound of sour earth, on the cellar floor. He managed to roll over on his back, look through slitted eyes toward the voices penetrating his returning consciousness.

The buzzing in his ears blurred the

words, but Slick Durkin was standing menacingly over Chandos, who looked yellow and spent in the ghastly light, one hand pressed to his punctured chest.

But where was Krafft, nicknamed the Killer? Not, Pete admitted grimly, that it made much difference to him. Hog-tied, disarmed as he was, he was as good as dead already—thanks to his own lack of foresight! But all the same, he didn't intend to miss the millionth chance of a break that might or might not come.

". . . sure I'm coming clean," Chandos whined weakly. "But gimme a drink first. That damned dope who busted downstairs plugged me. . . ." A fit of coughing stopped him.

Durkin swore, tossed down a flask. Chandos raised it to his lips.

And just then Killer Krafft, without warning, materialized from the shadows just beyond the pile of earth, bending over grotesquely, carrying a small, boxlike contraption gingerly. And Pete, straining his neck to see, knew finally where he had come from, what he carried so carefully, before he spoke.

KILLER grunted, setting down his burden. "Everything's jake now," he said. "I planted the sticks twenty feet inside the tunnel. All we gotta do now is get the dough and fade. An' once we hit the sewer—bingo!" He jerked his head toward the box he had just set down. "We pull the hole in after us, with fireworks, jes' like Nick figured. He ain't so dumb!"

Pete, still feigning unconsciousness, saw through the whole scheme. Krafft and Durkin had been digging for days in the cellar of the derelict house. Digging their way to freedom, and to that tramp boat that sailed at dawn. They hadn't overlooked a bet, once they'd learned of the ancient sewer that could be got at through this cellar, in which, two months earlier, Chandos had cunningly stashed away the forty grand from the bank robbery.

But they hadn't yet found the loot, so they'd been forced to deliver Chandos at any cost, and bring him here to wrest its hiding place out of him.

So far, the plan had worked without a hitch.

It looked to Pete as if it might work all the way. That dynamite they'd swiped from the watchman's shanty, so close to their hide-out—they weren't going to blast their way to freedom with it, because they didn't need to. They were going to set it off after they'd squeezed, single file, into the abandoned sewer, to hold off any possible pursuit. That box Krafft had emerged with, from the black hole they'd dug beneath the foundations—Pete could just see it—was a portable battery box. Clumsy but efficient, with its long coil of wire, its T-shaped plunger handle.

"An' this comic dick that dropped in on us?" Slick Durkin chuckled. "He's just playing dead, now." Pete saw the snub-nosed automatic aim straight at him. He ground his teeth. How much time had elapsed since he left his hat and the badge on top of that battered Buick? Hadn't a prowler car passed the parking space since, or hadn't the boys spotted it?

"No shooting, you dope!" the Killer snarled. "Dynamite's tricky stuff. Do you want to blow us all to cat-meat?" He laughed uneasily, came to stand over Pete, wiping the sewer slime from his fat hands.

"Playing dead, huh? Hell, he looks enough like Crowley to be his brother! Well, call it a dress rehearsal! You won't have to worry about your act once we dump you in the tunnel, close to that dynamite inside there. Not after we have set off the works."

Pete swallowed hard. To go down fighting, pumping lead yourself, was a decent death. A death that any man—any cop—might draw, at any time. But to lie, bound and helpless, waiting to be blown to bits in a human rat hole, while the rats scuttled to safety.

"Don't be too sure, Krafft!" he said. "You've had a lot of luck tonight. It's due to run out on you, sudden."

"Yeah?" the big red-hot jeered, and as Pete squirmed against his bonds, Krafft kicked him hard.

That sickening blow gave Pete his break. His wrists were already raw where he had rubbed them against the outcroppings of rock that edged up through the dirt floor of the basement, to no avail. But as he fell back groaning, he heard a faint tinkle, felt a warm spurt of blood trickle down his hand. And he forgot the heavy odds against him.

His wrist watch! They'd overlooked that, and now the shattered crystal lay beneath him.

Killer Krafft moved toward Durkin and Chandos. Pete squirmed, teeth clenched, to contact his bonds with that bit of broken glass.

If his fingers weren't so numb and swollen.... He couldn't make it.... He had made it! A splintering edge of crystal was gnawing at those stout strands now. If he could just free himself in time, without their suspecting what he was doing.

"Okay, boys," Nick Chandos' voice was stronger. The drink must have done him good. "Slick, you'll have to get the dough. Lift the cover off the cistern there."

Pete, working desperately to free himself, was thankful for the greed that made both hoods oblivious to him for the moment. Thankful when Slick Durkin snapped to Chandos, "Still stalling, huh? Why, you double-crossing rat, that's the first place we looked, plumbed the bottom of that hole for half a day."

But he had already lifted the cover to one side.

"You didn't get the dough, though," Chandos reminded him. "Don't be a sap all your life." He pulled himself up, painfully, dragged himself to the side of the well. "It's there, all right. See that big streamer of moss that reaches down to the water?"

Count four of them big bricks down from the surface. You'll find a loose one. You ought to be able to pry it out with your fingers. The money's behind it, done up in oiled silk."

Durkin was bending over the well, thrusting a greedy, exploring arm into its dank depths. A grunt of satisfaction reached Pete's ears. Killer Krafft's pale, fat face oozed satisfaction as Durkin tossed up a long, slimy package, reached down again. Three times he thrust his dripping arm down, brought up the packaged spoils. He was intent on one thing, and his automatic hung loosely in his right hand, unguarded.

And Pete, as he sawed through his last bond on that sharp bit of crystal, wriggled his feet free, saw what gleamed in Chandos' opaque black eyes. "Nice work, Slick. There's one more down there . . . make it snappy, kid!"

CHANDOS was edging closer, imperceptibly. Durkin leaned over the mouth of the well for the last time. The Greek jerked the gun from his hand as he uttered a muffled yell—a yell that he never finished. The automatic spoke, and Slick Durkin sagged forward over the edge of the cistern, a bullet in his brain.

Krafft, kneeling over the reprieved packets of loot, stared aghast.

"So what?" Nick Chandos said coolly. "Any objection to a two-way split, Killer? That was what Slick was figuring on, wasn't it?"

Krafft wet his thick lips. "I guess not, Nick."

Now, thought Pete. He'd been wriggling sideways, until he could reach out and touch the battery box with the plunger that Krafft was to make use of once he and Chandos had fled through the tunnel to the sewer below.

He'd considered every chance, knew the hopelessness of them all. But these rats weren't going to escape. Not after tonight's job. Not if he had to die with them.

"Look out!" the Killer yelled. "That damn fool's loose!"

Pete sent the lantern crashing to the floor with a piece of slag he'd loosened with raw, bleeding fingers, ducked as it sputtered out, leaving the cellar in darkness. Either Chandos or Krafft blundered toward him, cursing. Or toward the dark hole that led to the sewer, and safety.

Pete Crowley grappled with a soft, fat body, jerked his head aside just in time to miss the full force of a blow that would have brained him. He was no match for the Killer.

There was only one thing to do now—before those strangling hands at his throat squeezed the life out of him. Was that the whine of a police siren, the beat of running feet, or just the beat of blood roaring in his ears?

With his last atom of strength, he rolled over against the battery box, pushed the plunger. And then the world caved in on him.

Captain Hanlon's red granite face was the first thing he was conscious of, in the ambulance. He was squatting beside the stretcher on which Pete lay, arguing with the doc, who was doing plenty to young Pete Crowley.

"Feeling okay, son?" Cap asked gruffly. "You sure got yourself bunged up, from the look of you. But nothin's busted that won't mend."

Pete grinned mirthlessly under the gauze bandages.

"What I want to know is, how did those other guys look?"

"Chandos will be able to walk to the chair," Hanlon told him. "Killer Krafft—well, there wasn't much left of him. All that saved you was his lying on top of you, when the charge went off, I guess. You did a slick job, Pete, all the way through. Smart thinking, leaving that trick hat of yours on the Buick, and that trail of lead pencils . . . the boys got to you right in time, at that,

(Continued on page 110)

HIS LAST IMPERSONATION

By Zeta Rothschild

One of the most ingenious insurance swindles on record, in which the criminal was both "deceased" and beneficiary!

THE simply dressed, gentle-faced, middle-aged lady who came to the office of a Berlin insurance company that October morning made a good impression.

Her husband wanted to take out a policy, she said. Would the company please send one of its examining physicians to see him?

Three days later, Dr. Johann Feldman handed in his report. Herr Sigmund Kumpf was in good condition, considering his age, which was sixty. There was no reason why he should not be permitted to take out a policy.

The first and second premiums were paid promptly and the insurance company saw no reason to regret its decision. Then late one December afternoon, Frau Kumpf dropped in again. Her husband was ailing. Just a bad cough, she added. But she wanted a doctor to see him. And since their Dr. Feldman had made such a good impression on her husband, she'd like him to come to see him.

Dr. Feldman's report was satisfactory—Herr Kumpf had a light cold. He had left a prescription. There were no complications.

But a week later a weeping Frau Kumpf appeared at the insurance office. Her husband had died. He had become so ill the night of Dr. Feldman's visit, she had had

to call in a neighboring physician for him.

The latter had returned early the next morning. But just one hour before he came, Herr Kumpf had died.

And she handed the insurance agent a death certificate.

The death certificate, giving the cause of death as pneumonia, was signed by a reputable physician. A call on him brought the same story. Herr Kumpf's death had been sudden—but that was so often the way with pneumonia and men in their sixties.

The insurance company could not renege on its policy, though only two premiums had been paid. And it sent its check for forty thousand marks to Frau Kumpf, its beneficiary.

But that wasn't the end of the affair Kumpf. In one of those rare coincidences that do occasionally happen in real life, a distant cousin by marriage of the agent's wife came for afternoon coffee. As a matter of course, she regaled her hostess with gossip, first about their relatives and their mutual friends, then about people the agent's wife barely knew by name.

"That Kumpf, he's been out of work for almost a year," the visiting cousin gossiped. "But suddenly he begins spending money like a drunken sailor. No one knows how he got it. It's very mysterious."

Kumpf . . . the name sounded familiar to

the agent's wife. But she couldn't remember where she had heard it.

Later, after dinner, with her husband settled in slippers and with a pipe, she began relaying the afternoon's gossip to him.

He listened in that absent-minded fashion peculiar to husbands until he heard the name "Kumpf".

The next morning the investigation began. There might be more than one Kumpf but it might be worth while to do a little checking.

One extremely strange coincidence came quickly to light. Herr Kumpf had been alone in the house when Dr. Feldman, the company physician, went to examine him.

Dr. Gassner, who had signed the death certificate, had been called late at night by a frantic woman. But when he got to the house and knocked on the door, a faint voice from within had called out to him to enter.

To his surprise, Frau Kumpf had not appeared in the sickroom during his visit.

The next day, the widow had come to tell him her husband was dead. He had gone to see the corpse. This time, he found the door open.

Later, he had made out the certificate as a matter of course.

This physician was in his seventies and almost blind. But he was honest, undoubtedly.

What struck the insurance investigator as odd was that no one had seen Herr and Frau Kumpf together. Just what that meant, he did not yet realize. But suspicion grew when it was learned from the death records that no one by the name of Kumpf had died in Berlin the last December! Nor had anyone by that name been buried, for that matter.

A search of Kumpf's room cleared up the mystery. In a closet was a black dress and coat such as "Frau Kumpf" had worn on her visits to the insurance office. In a box was a bonnet, plus veil and a gray wig.

Kumpf, whose occupation had been given as an actor, had not explained that he had once been well-known in one special field.

For thirty years, Sigmund Kumpf had been a female impersonator.

Desperate, he had plotted to use his art to make money by way of the insurance companies.

Dressed as an elderly woman, as Frau Kumpf, he had made the preliminary arrangements with the insurance companies.

Back again in men's garb, he had undergone that first physical examination by the company's Dr. Feldman.

Again dressed as a woman, he had asked the insurance company to send its Dr. Feldman to see him.

Dressed once more in the black dress, coat and bonnet, "Frau Kumpf" had called in the second physician, Dr. Gassner, the night her "husband" was supposed to have died.

One more visit of the weeping widow to the insurance company to report the death of her husband and the farce was over.

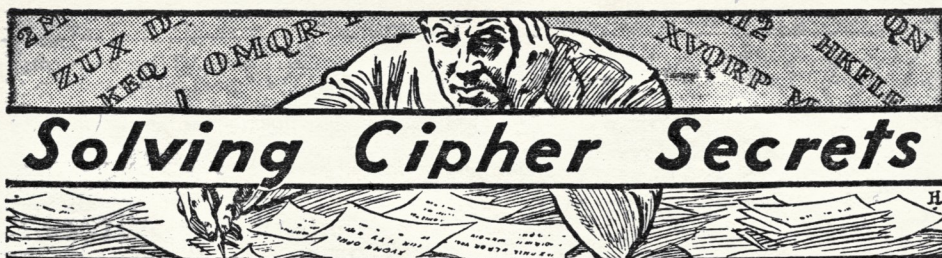
And Herr Kumpf had settled down to enjoy the returns of his most successful engagement.

But in January, 1931, Sigmund Kumpf was convicted of fraud and given a sentence of eight years.

It was such frauds—and many others in Europe and this country, that led the insurance companies to make much stricter regulations.

Today a death certificate alone is not enough to convince them of the passing of a client. Other documents must back up the claim.

And it would be impossible today for the most talented female impersonator to duplicate the act put over by Sigmund Kumpf. Or even go so far as to take out insurance without an investigation that would prevent any such deception. ■ ■ ■



Founded in 1924

Article No. 861

M. E. Ohaver

A CIPHER is a secret writing. The way to solve ciphers is to experiment with substitute letters until real words begin to appear. In solving, notice the frequency of certain letters. For instance, the letters e, t, a, o, n, i, are the most used in our language. So if the puzzle maker has used X to represent e, X will probably appear very frequently. Combinations of letters will also give you clues. Thus, the affixes -ing, -ion, -ally are frequent. Helpful hints appear in this department each month. Study them carefully.

CRYPTOGRAMS

No. 5451—Five Score and More. By †Mrs. I. M. Watts. New beginners, try PTD and PR as “the” and “to,” then KDGD (-e-e) and DODGE (e-e-) as “were” and “every”; etc.

V BC PTGVAADJ PR TBOD CBJD PTD *TNYJGDJ *FANS
BYJ PR TBOD PTD JBHHDG BPPBFTDJ PR CE YBCD. V JR
KVUT *YDK *JDPDFPVD KDGD ZNSAVUTDJ DODGE CRYPT!

No. 5452—Sleepers Who Kill. By A. W. B. Note SLO and LO, ST and STT, for a starter. Follow up with SLEW and LEA; LUA, BLURO, and BURR; and so on.

YTGO SLEW TWO ATYWEYFIRUAS LEA KTWO YIGKOG
BLURO LO AROMS. THSOWSUYOA, STT, SLO AROOMBERDOG
BURR HEUR ST GOYOYFOG LUA ZGUYO SLO WOPS KEN.

No. 5453—Bright Spots. By Vulcan. Compare END and EA, SBZ and SE, in connection with ENGDD and EODBET-ENGDD. Then substitute in ABD NCBZGDZ and fill in.

UAHE AY END HESGH SFFDSG EA NSKD PDDB QGDSEDZ
SPACE ENGDD PXVVXAB TDSGH SLA. SBZ END BCUPDG
AY XBZXKXZCSV HESGH XH DHEXUSEDZ SE ABD NCBZGDZ
HDREXVVXABH,—ABD YAVVAODZ PT EODBET-ENGDD JDGAH!

No. 5454—Seamans Ditty. By †Aralc. Twice-used VKS will unlock HKADHKZS. You will thus have all but one letter in VAAHSZKX. Continue with XZDDN and NZVTVK.

TGNHAVDDU HKADHKZS NZVTVK XZDDN AVCXVHK EJ
VAAHSZKX OU NEKY: “NPEGDS EDS AETCVKHEKN OZ
JEFYEX, VKS KZRZF OFEGYPX XE THKS? XPZ ODEETHK’
AEEI JZDD ERZFOEVFS VKS HN XBZKXU THDZN OZPHKS!”

No. 5455—Doubly Domesticated. By Susannah Tillman. Affixes AT- and -ATD provide entry to ATACAOR, which in turn gives all but one letter in NONNOR. Next, first word.

ANODATOCABS WEBSTARS, YEUATD ATACAOR JZZ BAPAC,
YSPFUAISY KEDS SRSHKOTC CKEP: "EPSMER NONNOR
KOBATD BOFEEN-FRSOTSU MUZTC, UED-ISOCSU USOU."

No. 5456—Palatable Importations. By °Sc. D. Try for short words TIN, IT, and TUNKS. Follow up with JMANA, SMAZ, and ENA. Thuis to KEOKEWAK, HUSUAK, etc.

LEDZ KEOKEWAK RIDW OKAY TIN SUSURRESID IT
*ELANUHED BERESAĀ ENA DELAY TIN *AONIBAED HUSUAK
JMANA SMAZ TUNKS WEUDAY BIBORENUSZ: *TNEDGTINS,
TNEDGTONSAN; *FIRIWDE; *QUADDE (*JUAD), JUADAN.

No. 5457—Sound Facts. By °Prof Xenon. Unlock LAXVULLE by trying various common endings for -ULLE. You will thus have all but one letter in VAXVLYU.

VOICE DRAWLY HCKACUL SVRELUAW MCDLY, VAXVLYU
YRSHCERY SHRKOWAEX REL-ZRRU PLEXUVY, KLLSLYU
FCYYR SHRZOEKRY HLCWVAEX LAXVULLE-ZRRU PAIAU.

No. 5458—Just in Jest. By *Sara. Look to affixes VX- and -VXHU for an opening. Follow up with OVXHU and DVXHBO XGVAU, checking with BGO; etc.

BCBOSYEPS PEEPABU! PEEPAB PBCEKBBU UNOVYYAB EX
RGRBO, NTBZ RBXNVAU, VXURBNK DVXHBO XGVAU, KFOX
OVXHU, NEFXK YFKKEXU, RFAA BGO-AEYBU, TEVUK
HVOPABU, DAVR UFURBXPBOU. TEZ PE SEF PEEPAB?

No. 5459—Trouble Looms. By °Eve Eden. Identify UOLOUBM through its reversible pattern. Then attack NKMYOUL, using LKMN as check word.

FADYUUBM-GAEHM PBAD XBARYBJ, UOLOUBM LKMN NLKQ,
VBKQ, BEKH DKSL, YXXN, ZUD. HYTV SANY PAEB GKVN
RFUHX Y MAOH NKMYOUL XBUVKHX. GUM GBYULN!

No. 5460—Looting Galoot! By °Waltraven. An unusual example of trigraphic alliteration, with OND occurring in every cipher group! Asterisks in crypts indicate capitalization.

*POND *FROND KONDY DUONDY CATNHOND, GJONDY
FEEZFRONDY NRONDAUC PONDY, HOUYONDY DUOKYOND,
YONDY CHAKYONDY, JA-PONDY POND-KEZ. FONDJOUM,
FRONDCLOHM ZJGONDY FRONDY, FOND-ZHONDY. OROND!

HERE'S the 1951 list of NDM cipher solvers, promised for this issue, presenting names of all cryptofans who qualified for special solvers' groups last year by reaching totals of 100, 500, or 1,000 solutions to our ciphers! Ten new members have won their daggers and †*Hundred Club* membership, by sending in answers to 100 ciphers. Our **Five Hundred Club* has acquired two new entrants, *Anidem and *Miss Tick, whose names henceforth will carry the star, symbol of 500 correct solutions. And two fans have made the coveted °*Inner Circle* degree, having submitted the 1,000 solutions required for °ICC membership.

CIPHER SOLVERS' CLUB NEW MEMBERS, February-December, 1951

°Inner Circle Club			
No. 301.	°James H. Williams	.....Feb.	1006
No. 302.	°Attempt	.....Oct.	1011
*Five Hundred Club			
No. 495.	*Anidem	.....Apr.	508
No. 496.	*Miss Tick	.....Dec.	503
†Hundred Club			
No. 1221.	†Mouseie	.....Feb.	108
No. 1222.	†Arale	.....Feb.	100
No. 1223.	†Mr. E.	.....Jun.	110
No. 1224.	†A. E. Cusick	.....Jun.	109
No. 1225.	†Carl Ardra	.....Jun.	108
No. 1226.	†A. D. Walters	.....Aug.	106
No. 1227.	†Les Noyse	.....Oct.	107
No. 1228.	†Jaybar	.....Dec.	104
No. 1229.	†H. R. Derr	.....Dec.	100
No. 1230.	†Geraldine Taber	.....Dec.	100

Concerning our new °ICC'ers, °James H. Williams has followed the department since Nov., 1934! And °Attempt began his trek in July, 1936, incidentally also becoming our °Mystery Member No. 12, having scored his full thousand without once revealing his name or identity! Roster numbers, names or cryptonyms, entrance dates, and qualifying scores are given herewith. This is a wonderful showing, cryptofans! And to these new members your cipher editor extends his heartiest congratulations! Any reader may submit answers and contribute ciphers for publication, and cumulative scores of all solvers appear regularly in the magazine. And already things look good for a big Club in 1952!

No. X-5462. Magic Triangle. By °Floyd E. Coss.

	R	C	L	U	E
° ° ° ° °	1	2	3	4	5
° ° ° °	N	C	I	I	B
° ° °	6	7	8	9	10
° °	L	R	C	N	E
°	11	12	13	14	15

°Floyd E. Coss contributes a timely No. X-5462, combining anagramming and mathematics in its solution. Place the fifteen letters in the triangle, one letter in each space, to form three words when lines are read from left to right, top to bottom. Then substitute numbers for letters as given in the key. If your answer is correct, the sum of the five numbers in each side of the outer triangle will be 35, and the three numbers will also add up to 35 in the inside triangle! Full explanation in next issue.

No. X-5450, transposition-null cipher by Lieut. James C. Devine, last issue, revealed this message: *Ruthless Red rulers reap riches raping remnant republics.* Result: *woeful whirlwind weapons wal-*

lop world. In enciphering, plain-text was inscribed into a 10x15 rectangle, one word to each line, lines being completed with nulls, Z, A, B, C, etc., as needed, the cipher then being taken out by descending verticals, left to right, and grouped by fives. Answers to current puzzles will appear in next issue!

No. 5461—Cryptic Division. By *S. A. L. Noting sequence shown by left-hand symbols in 1st subtraction, identify M in $S - M = C$, for a starter. The key runs: 0123 456789.

R U E) C L O S O (E M
S D A M
R U C O
C R S D
R L A

ANSWERS FOR LAST ISSUE

5439—Although I have been solving the cryptograms appearing in your magazine for a number of years, I have never taken opportunity to send in the solutions until now. Let's keep 'em coming!

5440—Some boys from Lake Winnepesaukee,

Expert at the pastime called hockey,

Ran up a score

Of a hundred and four,

Then skipped off the ice very cocky!

5441—The Lost Triangle, between southern China and northern India, strange land little-known to explorers, is the home of many rare animals.

5442—Many years ago, destructive distillation of deer antlers was used to make household ammonia, then, as now, an important detergent. Hence the old name "spirits of hartshorn."

5443—The suffix "-cede" is not uncommon in English: accede, recede, precede, secede, etc. But ending "-sede" occurs only in one word; super-sede.

5444—"Another fine topcoat just lost!" delinquent student mourned. "But where'd you leave it?" asked sympathetic friend. "Nowhere!" exploded loser. "An old pal of mine recognized it!"

5445—Hunter, returning home, caught injured thrush, put feathered songster atop game. Bird, nursed diligently, rewarded humanity with daily song.

5446—Bibulous barber, besting bubbling beverage, basked beside babbling brook. Beholding bear beneath, bibber bestraddled barbed barrier. Bruin, bewildered, backed behind briery bush.

5447—Cheerful matador sips sherry, enters arena, boldly thwarts charging steer. Crowd applauds. Graceful bow proves fatal. Beast gores senior.

5448—Tyro submits scenario. Movie producer swears, tears hair. Frightened author hastily returns home; unusual nightmare ensues. Writes dream. Producer reads script, smiles, offers contract.

5449—Key:

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
W E I R D G H O S T

All answers to current ciphers will be duly credited in our Cipher Solvers' Club. Address: M. E. Ohaver, *New Detective Magazine*, Popular Publications, Inc., 205 E. 42nd St., New York 17, N. Y.



THE LIVING TARGET

By Robert W. Sneddon

Was it murder or a mistake, when the Grim Reaper joined

Prince Wassili's death-defying act?

ONE morning in May, 1934, the citizens of Salonika, that city which marks the meeting place of two civilizations, awakened to find the advertising stations plastered with the brilliant colored posters of the famous Europa Circus.

Featured on many of the posters was a star act calculated to appeal to the polyglot population.

It was that of Wassili, Caucasian sharpshooter, and his beautiful, glamorous partner, Princess Nadia Baranikoff.

Everywhere crowds stood gazing at the picture. The master marksman was apparently firing point blank at the girl who stood facing him with a fearless smile.

She was billed on the program as "The Living Target."

When the circus opened, the great amphitheater was packed. The bazaars and markets were thinned of their usual crowds, and for a time the universal passion for gambling was forgotten.

The program started. The bareback riders, the trapeze artists, the clowns and animal acts all received their share of ap-

plause, but everyone was waiting for the shooting act when for a moment or two the woman would hear the rustle of the wings of death above the hiss of the speeding bullets.

The moment came. The ringmaster, in a staccato bellow, proclaimed the entry of the marksman. The band swung into the waltz, the red curtains parted, and superb in his tight-fitting scarlet uniform, Wassili stepped out to bow his acknowledgments. Behind him two men in livery carried a table covered with rifles.

One of them tossed a copper coin into the air. Quick as a flash, the marksman snatched up a rifle and fired. The coin was pierced. Other objects thrown up were as accurately riddled. An apple placed on a clown's head was split in two.

There was a fanfare of silver trumpets and all eyes turned to the entrance of the ring. The curtains parted slowly and a girl in her early twenties, graceful in form and lovely to look at, stepped out. Her white, powdered shoulders rose out of a knee-length black velvet dress. She curtsied

with a charming grace and there was a babble of admiring exclamation.

As she came forward, the ringmaster, trim in white breeches, high boots and blue tail coat, met her, bowed and led her into the center of the ring.

The ringmaster swelled his chest and in several languages made his brief announcement of the act supreme—Prince Wassili the Caucasian master shooter, the world's marksman and his lovely living target, Princess Nadia Baranikoff, in the challenge to death.

Several ring attendants wheeled in a platform. On it was a canvas background with an iron backing. Wassili directed its placing with the utmost care. He stepped back, then paced the distance between the table with his rifles, motioned the grooms to set the table back a foot, paced the distance once more, then nodded his head. By now all eyes were glued to him. He was an expert in showmanship.

He nodded to Nadia and with a bow she mounted the platform, placed her back against the canvas, adjusted her dress and stiffened rigidly as though carved from marble.

The drums began to roll with that vibration of taut sheepskin which has such an exciting effect on the pulse of those who hear it.

Wassili raised his rifle. At once the drums ceased. He took aim and without a moment's hesitation pulled the trigger. The shots followed each other in rapid succession with scarcely a moment's interval.

Gradually a line of bullet holes appeared on the canvas following the outline of the living target. Not once did the bullets vary by the fraction of an inch, so unerring was the aim of the shooter.

Erect and dauntless, the princess faced the shower of death, never betraying by so much as a flicker of her lashes any knowledge of the danger in which she stood should something go wrong with her partner or his weapons.

The fusillade ceased. Wassili, with a smile, laid down his last rifle, stepped forward, kissed Nadia's hand and assisted her to the ground. Then and then only, released from the spell of tension, did the audience go frantic. They whistled, yelled and shouted.

Wassili nodded carelessly. He was used to enthusiasm. He was looking past his partner to the entrance to the ring. A group of girls in dancing costume were waiting for the signal. One of them smiled to him, then looked sharply away as the Princess passed her, head erect.

THE three days' stay of the circus was prolonged to a week. After that came Athens, and then a tour of South America. For the farewell night the big amphitheater was again packed to capacity.

The performers as well as the audience were keyed up to a high pitch. The artists were to have a supper and a dance after the show. There were several new acts. Excitement gathered as the show went on until with the appearance of the star act the tremendous welcome of applause was succeeded by a strange quiet.

Twice before in his lifetime of circus experience, the ringmaster had known such a strange silence, and each time there had been an accident. He looked superstitiously at Wassili. He was reassured by the marksman's poise and nerve. He was going through his routine with the utmost confidence. Now he was bowing. The ringmaster's heart resumed its natural beat. Here was the applause. Nothing had happened. And here, advancing with her little set smile, was Nadia.

He met her and led her to Wassili. She laid her hand on his scarlet arm and patted it as though to say, "Good arm. Never a miss." Then, leaving her partner, she stepped up and faced him. She smiled, stiffened to attention as the drums rolled, then ceased.

Wassili saluted his audience, picked up the first rifle, and set it to his shoulder. He fired four shots in rapid succession and then with a strange incredulous look on his face, took his finger from the trigger. Swaying slightly, the slim figure in black velvet suddenly slid to the level of the platform.

For an instant Wassili stood, then throwing down the rifle, he darted forward. The ringmaster was equally prompt. He took one look at the crimson welling over the edge of the gown, straightened up and emitted a bellow which rose above the hubbub, "Is there a doctor present? A doctor. A doctor!"

A man came stumbling down the aisle of seats. "Here, gentlemen." He examined the girl and shook his head. "She's gone. The bullet went through her heart."

"It is impossible, impossible, I tell you—" stammered Wassili.

"I knew something was going to happen," said the ringmaster dismally. "This is the third time."

"I can't believe she is dead—it's some trick she's playing."

"It's no trick—she's dead. Go easy, Wassili, here come the police. Watch what you say."

"It was an accident!"

"Well, you tell them that."

The police were polite, but they insisted on taking the sharpshooter and the body of the dead girl to headquarters. He went with them as if in a dream.

There, questioned by a magistrate, he said he could not account for what had gone wrong. He swore his aim had been as steady and sure as ever. There was nothing wrong with his rifles—he was willing to have them tested. He had never had an accident in the twelve years of his experience, and in the four years Nadia had been his target she had never moved even the merest trifle. This time she must have moved as he fired. It was an accident—pure and simple.

He disclosed the fact that his passport bore his real name—Leo Gavorin, no prince from the Caucasus, but a tradesman's son born in Esthonia, and that the dead girl was a farmer's daughter from the same town, with the plain name of Lydia Luidner.

The manager of the circus stated that Lydia had told him that after the South American tour she and Leo were going to retire and buy a farm in Esthonia. He was positive the death was accidental.

The magistrate had a different idea and held to it obstinately. For some reason or other, Wassili had killed Lydia or Nadia in a crime of passion, and he held him charged with her murder. The trial—so that the circus witnesses might be available—was set for the last week in June, extraordinarily hasty procedure for continental Europe.

Testimony was taken by the magistrate. It appeared to him that Wassili could not help but be found guilty of murder. However, like a bolt from the blue, just a week before the trial, there came a cable from Ceylon addressed to the prisoner. The magistrate took it and read its message:

ANSWER IMMEDIATELY. ANYTHING HAPPENED LYDIA? LOOK OUT FOR SUICIDE SOME WAY OR OTHER. REPLY COLLECT, PAUL LUIDNER.

Wassili was brought from his prison cell and shown the cable.

"What do you know about this?"

"Nothing, except that Paul is Lydia's brother. He is on a tea plantation in Ceylon."

"Why should he send this cable?"

"I don't know," said Wassili sullenly. "I never met Paul."

The magistrate at once cabled an inquiry to Ceylon but no reply had come by the day of the opening of the trial.

IT WAS at once apparent that the prisoner stood in the shadow of the gallows, and that what he termed an accident was

open to the most sinister interpretation.

The state called witnesses to prove Lydia Luidner's death was one contrived with the utmost deliberation. The murder bullet had been sped with but one purpose, to get rid of an intolerable obstacle, a burden.

The Europa's leading circus clown, Toto, testified that he occupied the room in the Modest National Hotel right next to the couple.

He had heard them quarreling and fighting for days, and on the forenoon of the fatal day the quarreling had been so violent, punctuated with blows and screams, that the hotel proprietor came up and made a protest.

He could not help hearing what was being said.

The walls were as thin as paper, and the two were all but shouting at each other. Wassili finally said he was sick of Lydia and that after the South American tour he was through with her. He would get another partner and she could get on the best she could without him. He did not love her any longer.

"I admit all that," said Wassili. "It is quite true I threatened to leave her—but as for killing her, no, no. That is another matter."

Toto continued. He heard the door slam and Wassili rush along the corridor and downstairs. He waited a little, hearing the sobs next door, then when they ceased and there was silence, he became alarmed. He felt very sympathetic toward the girl. In fact had things been different—had she been less devoted to Wassili—he would have gladly assisted her. Her death was a great blow to him. She was very brave—she knew that Wassili was being very attentive to one of her friends, a Greek dancing girl whose name was Hermione Precupolous.

Other testimony indicating that matters had come to a head between the couple clinched the guilt of the prisoner. The

motive for killing had been a strong one. The dead girl had stood in the way of Wassili's happiness with another girl. It was the easiest thing in the world to despatch a bullet just a trifle off the mark and then claim it was an accident.

The blood receded from Wassili's face as he listened to the merciless last speech of the prosecution. In an hour or less his fate would be deliberated on. An end to life, to the applause of the public, to the soft clinging arms of the girl who sat staring at him with distended eyes and convulsive straining of her fingers. What would become of Hermione? To what man's arms would she go after he had dangled at the rope's end?

He scarcely knew that the prosecutor had stopped speaking, that there appeared to be some disturbance in court, that a police officer was handing something to the judges and that they were putting their heads together, that his lawyer was making his way up to the bench, that suddenly, as if by a miracle, the wheels of justice had ceased to grind.

He did not know that by airplane mail there had come from Ceylon the delayed reply to the magistrate's inquiry. In the hands of the magistrate was now a letter, certified by her brother to be in the handwriting of Lydia Luidner. From the post mark on the envelope it was plain to see the letter had been mailed in Salonika about noon of May 24, the day of the girl's unhappy death.

It read:

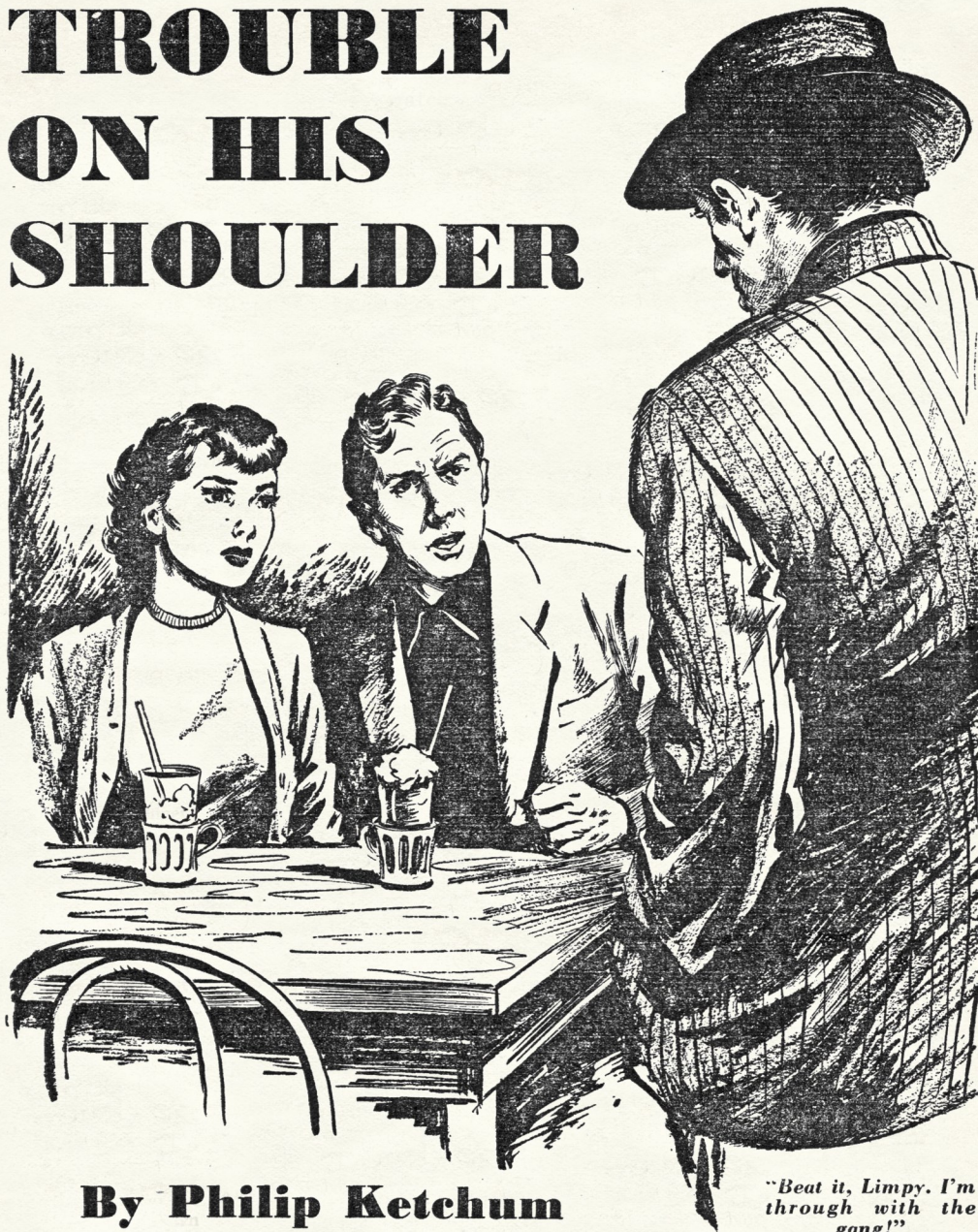
Dear Paul,

I can stand it no longer. Life is worth nothing to me without Leo and he has ceased to love me, and I adore him, adore him. Oh what can I do! He is mad about my friend Hermione. She is younger than I, sweet and lovely. She will make him happy. I have no right to hold him if he wants to go. So I must set him free.

I have courage enough to do that, but not to go on living and seeing him with another. Will you ever forgive the pain and the sorrow I am going to bring you? I can't help myself. All my fine dreams are gone. I know

(Continued on page 111)

TROUBLE ON HIS SHOULDER



By Philip Ketchum

*"Beat it, Limpy. I'm
through with the
gang!"*

*Why should he ever give the world
a break? It had never given him
one, and that was for sure!*

HE'LL BE here pretty soon," I said to the fat guy. "This is sort of a headquarters for most of the kids in the neighborhood. You look him over when he comes in. If he's the one you saw stripping the car, let me know. I'll pick him up when he leaves."

The fat guy moistened his lips. "You think there'll be any trouble?"

I didn't like the fat guy. He was getting too much of a kick out of this. I would have liked to have told him there would be plenty of trouble, but I knew there wouldn't be.

"What's this Chuck Miller like?" asked the fat guy.

We were seated at a table in a back corner of the malt shop. The place was still pretty empty. I lit a cigarette and scowled at it.

"Chuck Miller's just a kid," I said. "A kid who has trouble sitting on his shoulder. His father was a lush. His mother died when he was born. By the time Chuck was six his old man had taught him to steal bottled milk from doorsteps for breakfast. When the old man died, Chuck was slapped into an orphanage. It was tough, so he ran away. At fourteen he was arrested for looting a car and got a hitch in reform school. When that was over he went to work for a man named Dugan, and he went straight for a while. But Dugan had a daughter—Margie—and the kid fell for her. Dugan didn't like that. He had better ideas for her, so he got rid of Chuck Miller. That was a year ago."

"And since then, what?" asked the fat guy.

"Since then, the kid's been hanging around Dave Hennessy, who is as smart a crook as this town ever supported."

"Doesn't Chuck have any relatives who might have helped him?"

I shook my head. "Not one."

The fat guy mopped a hand over his perspiring face. "A man can go straight if he really wants to," he mumbled. "It takes a lot of courage, maybe, but a man can do it."

Several young people had come in while we had been talking and now the door opened again and Chuck Miller and Margie Dugan entered the shop. I was surprised to see Margie with the kid for I thought their

affair had been completely busted up. It was easy to see, however, that I was wrong. Margie was hanging to the kid's arm as though she owned him. There was a dreamy look on her face.

The fat guy touched me on the shoulder and whispered, "That's him. That's the fellow I saw stripping the car."

I nodded. From the fat guy's description I had been pretty sure he would identify Chuck Miller.

"Who's the girl with him?" asked the fat guy.

I said, "Margie Dugan. I mentioned her awhile ago."

CHUCK and Margie came back to one of the tables close to ours and as they sat down the kid happened to glance at me. He stiffened and for a moment a scowl showed in his face. Then Margie said something to him and the stiffness went out of his body and he grinned.

They ordered their malts and were served.

They were sitting very close together on the same side of the table, facing us, shoulders and arms touching. I would have sworn they were holding hands under the table's edge. And they didn't seem aware of anyone else in the place.

"The girl's rather attractive, isn't she?" said the fat guy.

She really wasn't. What the fat guy had noticed was the way Margie was looking at the kid. Her whole heart was in her eyes.

I turned my head away and thought of what I was going to have to do after a while, and didn't like any part of it. I had known Margie Dugan since her pig-tail days, and I liked her. And I'd always liked the kid. Most people liked Chuck Miller.

I was slouching back in my chair, getting more disgusted every minute, when Limpy

(Continued on page 112)

SHE



CRIES MURDER!

The deputy screamed as the heavy slug smashed into his shoulder.



**By
Larry
Holden**

There was something peculiar about the photograph of the corpse. . . . Almost as if the killer shark had been the kind of carnivore that walked on two legs!

CHAPTER ONE

Roughneck McGuire

LLOYD was at the Cypress City airport with the station wagon when McGuire hopped off the Sao Paulo plane from Brazil. Lloyd waved. Mc-

Guire grimaced but waved back. He had never liked Lloyd, but for his sister's sake, he tried to be fair. He had really nothing against Lloyd. It was just an instinctive antipathy. Lloyd was pink, peevish and plump.

And the first thing Lloyd said, when McGuire strode up to the car, was, "You look like a roughneck. You might have had the respect to put on some decent clothes."

McGuire said shortly, "This was the way I was dressed when I got your telegram. Why wasn't I notified sooner?"

"Blame me, that's right. Blame me," said Lloyd petulantly. "I had nothing to do but make all the funeral arrangements, take care of Margaret, and act as chief cook and bottle washer."

"Forget it, will you? Just forget I mentioned it. How's Peg now?"

Lloyd pursed his lips primly and slid behind the wheel of the car. "Not herself. Did you expect her to be? It was a shock, a very great shock." His tone indicated that it was primarily McGuire's fault.

McGuire flushed, but let it ride by without swinging at it. He didn't like Lloyd, and Lloyd didn't like him, and so what?

Anyway, now it came to the question McGuire had been dreading, had never wanted to ask, that touched again the raw spot of grief in his heart. "What . . . did happen to Johnny?" he asked with difficulty.

"He went fishing. I warned him. It was too rough. They found his boat overturned in Otter Pass, and when they found John in the bay, the sharks had been at him. If I told him once to stay out of Otter Pass, I told him a dozen times. It's no place, I said to him, for a ten foot boat and a two-horse outboard. I warned him—"

McGuire turned fiercely and knotted his wiry fingers in Lloyd's shirtfront, then, controlling himself, growled and shoved Lloyd away from him against the door. Lloyd cried out shrilly.

McGuire said heavily, "And I'm warning you—shut up!"

Lloyd gave him a malevolent glance, but shut up.

The house was on Pelican Key, and McGuire had to admit Lloyd was a good provider. It was a ranch style house, airy and cool, of red cypress. Peg had designed it, but Lloyd paid for it. Lloyd gave Peg everything she wanted.

Peg was standing on the beach, staring out into the gulf, when the station wagon turned sedately into the shell driveway. She saw them, waved wearily, and plodded through the soft sand toward the house. McGuire ran to meet her, but his grin died as he saw her rigid, white face. She held up her cheek, and it was cold as he kissed it.

She said, "Did you have a good trip, Mick?" Then, bitterly, "We missed you at the funeral."

"Honest, Peg, I only got your telegram yesterday."

"Oh." Then vaguely, "Lloyd's been so busy. . . ." She turned and stared moodily out into the gulf again. The water was restless, and the white-tipped chop looked like teeth.

She took his arm, and her fingers dug into the muscle. "Come into the house." Her voice was shaking a little. "There's something I want to show you!"

She led him into the rumpus room in the south wing. There was a ping pong table, a darts target on the wall, a fifteen-foot shuffleboard, a radio-gramophone combination in blond wood, and a matching blond bar. Lloyd was standing at the bar, mixing a shaker of daiquiris. He had taken off his seersucker jacket, and his shirt was plastered pinkly against his wide, perspiring back. He did not turn as they walked into the room, but he broke the rhythm of his shaking and it sounded louder and became irritating.

Peg went to the locker under the window seat and came back with a long, thin ob-

ject, wrapped in brown paper. Her lips tight, she laid it on the ping pong table and unrolled it.

It was a cheap bamboo fishing rod with a cheap plastic reel. McGuire looked questioningly at Peg.

"That," she said, "is what they found in Johnny's boat."

"So?"

"That's not Johnny's rod. He wouldn't use a rod like that. He had that beautiful glass rod you gave him for Christmas!"

Lloyd set down the cocktail shaker with an exasperated bump. "The boys who found the boat probably stole it," he said peevishly. "I wouldn't put it past them..."

McGuire growled to Peg, "Tell him to go peddle his fish."

Lloyd's face congested. He owned the Gulf Shores Wholesale Fish Company, and he couldn't take a joke about it, or a sneer, especially from McGuire.

Peg saw his purpling cheeks and said quickly, "Please, Lloyd. I want to talk to Mick."

Lloyd's jaw dropped, then he turned and stamped out of the room. The moment the door closed behind him, Peg turned angrily on McGuire.

"I won't have you needling him, Mick! He's worried enough about business. The fishermen haven't been able to make a decent catch for months, and Lloyd's losing money hand over fist. Why don't you like Lloyd, Mick?"

"It's not that I don't like him, it's that I can't stand him, that's all. But this rod here. Maybe the kids did steal Johnny's. It was a good one. . . ."

"But why replace it with that piece of junk, then?" she interrupted fiercely. "It would have been much simpler for them to say there wasn't any rod in the boat at all!"

McGuire scowled. He poked the heavily varnished cane rod with his forefinger. "Well," he said finally, "what's on your mind, Peg?"

Peg's full, generous . . . th was suddenly thin and flinty. "This," she said harshly. "Somebody is trying to make it look as if Johnny was fishing and overturned in Otter Pass. That's not his rod. Somebody put it in the boat for a reason. And Johnny had better sense than to take that little boat out into Otter Pass on a bad day. *I think Johnny was murdered!*"

McGUIRE went first to the sheriff's office. Peg had been there three times before, and she gave McGuire the impression that the police were too indolent to care and too stupid to understand. She was wrong. The sheriff was a stocky, hard-faced man, but he was neither stupid nor indolent.

"Your sister's bitter, McGuire," he said. "I can understand that, but in a case like this I don't trust women. Their emotions blow up like a plugged gun. . . ."

"I'm asking about my kid brother, not my sister."

The sheriff looked at him. "Tough McGuire," he said reflectively. "I've heard about the hell you used to raise around these parts. Deep sea diver, ain't you?"

"And my old man was a game warden, and my brother-in-law's in the fish business. Does that cover it? Can we get down to business?"

"Right." The friendliness went out of the sheriff's face and his voice turned businesslike. "We looked into your brother's death and if, as your sister seems to think, he was murdered, somebody's found a way to train sharks, because that's what killed him."

He opened a drawer in his desk, rummaged in it for a moment, then tossed a glossy eight-by-ten photograph in front of McGuire. McGuire looked at it, and he turned sick. It was the police photo of Johnny. He forced himself to look at it again, and the second time it wasn't so bad, not as bad as most shark victims he had seen. Johnny's face hadn't been

touched. It looked the way it had always looked, as if he were about to burst out into a heart-warming grin. McGuire felt a sting of tears in his eyes, and he covered Johnny's face with his hand so he could look at the rest of the photograph more impersonally. The body hadn't been savaged, but the right arm was gone. His stare hardened and narrowed. He looked up at the sheriff.

"A shark never did that," he said flatly. "I've seen enough of their work to know. A shark tears. That looks as if it were taken off with a cleaver."

"I've seen some pretty clean amputations made by sharks."

"Through the bone, maybe, but not the flesh. They don't have just one row of teeth to make a clean cut. They've got a mouthful of teeth. They tear!"

"So they tear," said the sheriff, losing patience. "But Doc Lorier says it was a shark, and that's good enough for me."

They glowered for a moment, both angry, then McGuire jumped up, knocking over his chair, and strode for the door.

The sheriff yelled, "Come back here. I want to talk to you!"

McGuire slammed the door. It was opened almost immediately, and a deputy looked in questioningly at the red-faced sheriff.

"Want me to bring him back?" asked the deputy hopefully.

The sheriff growled, "Don't be so damn anxious," and grabbed up the phone book. He called the Gulf Shores Wholesale Fish Company.

"Lloyd?" he said, hunching over the phone. "This is Webb down at the sheriff's office. That brother-in-law of yours was just in here."

"What'd he want?"

"He wanted to make trouble, that's what he wanted. Look, Lloyd, we've been all over this before. If there was any doubt that your wife's kid brother was killed accidentally, I'd tear this county apart to get

to the bottom of it. I don't like the implication that this office is inefficient or dumb."

"Did I make that implication? Did I ever say anything like that?" Lloyd's voice rose shrilly. "Are you blaming me?"

"Shush now, Lloyd, shush. I'm not blaming you. I just want a little cooperation from you, that's all."

"I always cooperated, not that I get any credit for it. I work my head off and everybody tries to push me around. What kind of cooperation do you want? And don't forget that I have a business to take care of down here."

The sheriff rolled his eyes, and the deputy grinned.

"Now, Lloyd," said the sheriff soothingly, "all I want you to do is reason with McGuire a little. . . ."

"Have you tried reasoning with him?" Lloyd broke in peevishly.

"Well, I didn't get much chance."

"That's all the chance anybody ever gets. You don't want cooperation; you want a miracle!"

The sheriff's face hardened and he shook the phone as if it were something he was holding by the neck. "You listen to me for a minute, Lloyd. That McGuire is out to make trouble, and he's going to get in trouble himself. You're a Florida cracker, the same as I am, and you know how we feel when some outlander tries to get tough with us. McGuire's got the idea his kid brother was deliberately knocked off and, being the kind of guy he is, he's not going to care whose toes he steps on. He's going to get tough with the wrong man, and he's going to end up with a knife in him. Now, talk to him, Lloyd." Then shrewdly, he added, "For your wife's sake. He's still her brother."

There was a moment of silence, then Lloyd said sullenly, "I'll talk to him, but it'll just go in one ear and out the other."

"Thanks a lot. I appreciate that. How's business, by the way?"

Lloyd heaved a gusty sigh. "If you mean business in general," he said lugubriously, "it's wonderful. Everybody's making money. But if you mean the fish business, ask the fish. If you can find them. I haven't seen one for months. I don't know, I work and slave and. . ."

The sheriff said, "Be seeing you, Lloyd," and gently replaced the phone in its cradle. He looked up at the grinning deputy. "I suppose," he said, "you're just aching to go out and bring McGuire in."

"I'd be doing him a favor. The boys ain't gonna stand for no damyank—I mean, one of our Northern friends—getting tough with them."

"Throwing him in the can won't do any good. He'll only be worse when he gets out. Maybe you'd better keep an eye on him, and don't let him start anything we'd all be sorry for. *And* don't depend too much on your badge. McGuire is tougher than anything you've ever met before!"

CHAPTER TWO

Murder Tip

IT HAD grown quite dark. It was one of those Florida nights that the travel folders call romantic, enchanted, magic. There was a full moon, and the tall, straight royal palms tossed their tousled heads in the gentle breeze that blew in from the Gulf. It was a soft night, a night for soft things, like making love or listening to music.

McGuire's hands clenched around the wheel, and the station wagon whizzed down the Tamiami Trail with the speedometer needle hovering over the figure seventy. His left cheek was puffed and ugly, and the knuckles of his right hand were scraped raw.

That was a memento.

He had been questioning the boys who had found Johnny's boat overturned in

Otter Pass. He had scared them, but he did not realize this. He was burning inside with smoldering fury. He had tried for three hours to find the boys, but no one would tell him where they were.

It was the same everywhere he went, with all the questions he asked about Johnny, too. He was turned away with flat, hostile eyes and a shrug. He had finally found the boys, Morse and Shay, fishing off the end of the old jetty on Tollmans Key. One of them ran away—Morse. But McGuire collared the other.

"Take it easy," he growled, giving the kid a little shake. "I won't bite. I just want to ask about that boat you found in the pass the other night." He took a breath. "That was my kid brother who was lost out of that boat."

Shay whimpered and shrank away from him. McGuire's face was dark and hard, and there was savagery in his eyes. McGuire in a savage mood was never a reassuring sight, and Shay was only a boy.

He struggled futilely to squirm out of McGuire's steely grasp, and he cried, "Mama! Mama!"

McGuire knelt down in front of him, holding him by both arms. "Look, kid," he said quietly. "I'm not going to hurt you. I just want to ask you about the boat. I just want to make sure about something. It's very important, kid. I need your help."

The boy stopped struggling and choked back his frightened sobs. He looked timidly at McGuire, but was ready to break again.

"Now before I ask you any questions, kid," said McGuire, "I want to tell you something. My brother had a fishing rod, one of those fiber glass jobs, and if either you or that other boy has that rod, you're welcome to it, see? You can keep it. As a reward for finding the boat."

The boy looked at him with complete bewilderment. "You mean," he said hesitantly, "you're gonna give us a glass fishing rod?"

McGuire looked sharply into the boy's face, but there was no guile there, no sly evasion. Which meant that Johnny's expensive glass rod had not been in the boat when the boys found it.

"Yes," he said heavily. "That's what I'm going to do, give each of you a glass fishing rod. As a reward."

"Gosh! My pa says we ought to of got something for finding that boat, but that other man just came and took the boat and didn't say thanks or nothing. He even tried to say we stole the motor."

Lloyd, thought McGuire bitterly. You could depend on Lloyd to be paltry, even with Johnny so newly dead. He remembered Lloyd crying out when he took the station wagon.

"Don't you go using all my gas. It's thirty cents a gallon, and I'm not made of money!"

Lloyd couldn't bear the thought of losing or giving away anything that cost money. How he must have hated to let Johnny use his outboard. McGuire was sure Lloyd had felt worse about losing the motor than about Johnny being lost.

McGuire was just straightening up when a heavy hand caught his shoulder and spun him around and a bulky, red-faced man shouted furiously:

"Get your hands off my kid!"

He swung wildly and his fist caught McGuire on the left cheekbone, knocking him down.

The Shay boy cried, "Pa! Pa! He didn't do nothing. He's gonna give me a glass fishing rod for finding the boat!"

The man gave the boy a rough shove and jumped at McGuire, kicking clumsily at his belly. McGuire rolled and lithely leaped to his feet.

"Now wait a minute, friend," he started.

The man drove at him, swearing, flailing with both fists. McGuire stepped back and he was at the end of the jetty. For a moment he had all he could do to keep his head from being knocked off. The man

was big and he was powerful. McGuire grimaced, slipped a roundhouse left and hooked up to the bony jaw with his own right. The man's eyes glazed and he fell into McGuire, pawing feebly. McGuire eased him down. He rubbed his split knuckles and looked at the boy.

"Sorry I had to do that, kid," he said, and strode down the jetty toward the station wagon.

The boy followed his lean, lithe figure with round, awe-stricken eyes.

And the rest of the day had been hardly any better. Dead end after dead end. The bait-man at the Tollmans Key fishing pier had seen Johnny go chugging by with a couple of twenty-pound grouper in the boat, and he had waved, he said. Johnny was heading north, past Big Turtle Key, past the Inlet. Otter Pass was a good five miles beyond that. Nobody with any sense, he hinted, would have tried to fish Otter Pass in a small boat in the outgoing tide.

Not exactly a dead end, but it didn't lead anywhere.

The lights were on in the house when he drifted into the driveway, and through the big picture window he could see Lloyd sitting in the lounge chair, holding a glass and talking to someone in the chair that had its back to the window.

McGuire was in no mood to listen to Lloyd's whining voice, and instead of going into the house, he walked down to the beach, his footsteps squeaking in the powdery sand. He lit a cigarette and Peg called out:

"Is that you, Mick?"

He said, "Yeah," and plodded toward her. She was sitting, hunched, on a heavy log of driftwood. "What're you doing out here by yourself, baby?"

"Watching the turtles," she said dully.

She pointed. In the brilliant moonlight against the white sand, McGuire could plainly see the huge shapes lumbering on the beach.

"Green turtle," he said. "Best eating there is. Bet that one there runs fifteen hundred pounds. That'd be a thousand pounds of meat, dressed out. Restaurants in Miami Beach charge you five bucks for turtle steak. Want me to flip one over, sis? Have turtle for dinner tomorrow?"

"They're out of season," she said apathetically. "I don't want you to go poaching. Anyway, they've come up to lay eggs. Leave them alone. Well," her voice roughened, "what did you find out?"

HE DID not answer immediately. He stared down the beach where the tremendous turtles were ponderously making nests for their eggs. You wouldn't think a turtle could grow to that size. Heads like footballs, sharp, cruel beaks, and eyes so old they looked weary of wisdom, weary of love. McGuire felt as worn out as they looked.

"Tell me something," he said finally. "Was Johnny in any kind of trouble?"

"You know better than that!"

"Sure. But he was an awful nosy kid. I mean, he might have butted in on something that wasn't any of his business and gotten into a fight, or something. Hell, you know what I mean."

"Johnny wasn't nosy." Her voice was withering. "He wanted to learn things. He wanted to be somebody."

McGuire swore under his breath. He had been through this before. Peg had idolized Johnny.

"Okay, okay," he said. "So he wanted to be something better than a tramp of a deep sea diver, like his big brother, but suppose we forget that part of it and get back to the subject. And for God sake," his voice rose, "let's be calm about it!"

"You're shouting," she said coldly.

"I'm sorry, sis." He was. Sorry, ashamed and apologetic. "I'm all wound up. I loved the kid as much as . . . Anyway, was the kid in any kind of, well, girl trouble? I mean . . ."

"Will you stop saying that? I know what you mean."

"Well, was he?"

"Not that I know of."

"You don't sound so sure."

"How can I be sure?" she demanded angrily. "Is that something he'd be likely to tell *me*?"

"Then he did have a girl."

"Don't most boys his age? Was it a crime?"

"Will you please relax, sis? What're you fighting me for? Who was this girl?"

"I don't know. I never met her. Just some girl from Anasco."

She heard him suck in his breath and he said incredulously, "One of those fisherman's kids from Anasco!"

Peg had no children, nor would she ever be able to have any, and that blind maternal urge had turned toward Johnny. That was the reason for her antagonism to McGuire, who had suggested that Johnny had been, perhaps, less than perfect.

But the ferocity in his voice withered the antagonism in her, and she said uneasily, "What's wrong with a fisherman's girl? I always trusted Johnny's taste. . . ."

"Johnny's taste! What's Johnny's taste got to do with it? Listen, Peg. Listen to me. That bunch of fishermen over in Anasco is just about the most primitive type of cracker that you'll find in all Florida. They hate us. They hate us because we're damyanks. I wouldn't play around with one of their women any more than I'd fry eggs with dynamite!"

Her hand flew to her mouth and her fingers trembled at her lips. McGuire turned and sprinted toward the house.

"Mick!" she cried out after him. "Where are you going, Mick?"

"Anasco!" he said grimly.

Lloyd half rose from his chair as McGuire burst into the living room. He started and his drink sloshed out of his glass when he saw that McGuire was carrying his shotgun, snapping a shell into

the breach. His jaw dropped and he flapped his hands inarticulately at the man in the other chair.

McGuire started urgently, "Lloyd, I need the keys to your cruiser. . . ."

The man rose from the other chair. It was the deputy from the sheriff's office. "You're under arrest for assault and battery, McGuire," he said, grinning. "The complaint was made by Shay, the guy you beat up this afternoon out on the jetty, so. . . ."

He had his own gun in his hand, but his words trailed off, aghast, as the twin muzzles of the shotgun lifted and yawned at his belly. His mouth worked but nothing came out. McGuire stood with his legs apart, his head outthrust, his mouth ugly. His thumb flickered and snicked back the hammers of the shotgun. It was the only sound in the room, and a thunderclap couldn't have been louder.

The deputy stared at the shotgun with horror and disbelief. His own gun was dangling from his hand at his side. He had thought that all he would have to do was wave it. His face was suddenly bathed in sweat and he found he couldn't even lift his gun a quarter of an inch. McGuire stepped lithely toward him, his forefinger curled around both triggers. Lloyd had fallen back into his chair, squeezing himself into the corner of it, his face ashen.

The deputy stood as if hypnotized until McGuire was almost upon him, then he convulsed and jerked up his gun, crying out hoarsely. McGuire leaped to one side and slashed him across the side of the head with the barrel of the shotgun. The deputy stumbled, went to his hands and knees, then straightened out limply on his face. McGuire bent quickly, plucked up the revolver and thrust it into his shirt.

"Come on now," he snapped at Lloyd. "Give me the keys to your launch. I want to get to Anasco fast."

Lloyd shrank deeper into his chair. "You can't have them," he bleated. "The

police'll be after you. They'll sink my boat. They'll arrest me as an accessory. You can't have it!"

McGuire forced himself to speak calmly. "Look, Lloyd, when I finish what I'm going to do in Anasco, I'll give myself up. In the meantime, I'll tie this bird so he can't get to a phone. There won't be any cops after me, and nothing'll happen to your boat. Give me the keys."

Lloyd was shaking in an ecstasy of abject fear, but he clung stubbornly to the stand he had taken.

"No, no, no, you can't have my boat," he cried shrilly. "You'll just get me in trouble. You can't have it."

"It's thirty miles by car around the end of the key. It's fifteen minutes across the bay by boat. . . ."

"Then take the outboard. I won't let you use my boat. I won't, I won't, I won't. . . ."

McGuire cursed him and ran out of the room, down the back path to the boathouse. Lloyd's gleaming, speedy thirty-foot cruiser rocked gently on the black water. McGuire swore at it and lifted the small two-horse outboard from the edge of the oil drum and trotted outside to the dock, where Johnny's little ten-foot boat lay tied. Muttering, McGuire thumb-screwed it into place. He whipped the rope around the starter, spun it savagely and putt-putted out into the dark water of the bay. He did not hear the roll of thunder, nor did he notice that the moon was blanketed by clouds. His eyes were fastened on the yellow pinpoints of lights across the bay. That was the fishing village of Anasco.

ONCE out there alone on the placid bay, his high fury turned to sodden anger. He had it all taped now, he had it all straight in his mind. When the bait-man on the Tollmans Key fishing pier had seen Johnny chugging past Big Turtle Key, Johnny had not been aiming for Otter Pass. He had been aiming for the inlet,

for the inlet opened to the channel that led straight to the Anasco docks. Johnny had been going to see his girl. He had caught two big grouper and maybe he was going to show off a little. McGuire could almost see him walking cockily up the dock with his big fish. Yeah, showing off. He was only a kid. But those commercial fishermen weren't kids, and they were sullen and mean-tempered because they hadn't gotten a fair catch for months. It would take only a spark like that to turn resentment into violence. The fish was the spark, the girl was the resentment.

McGuire heard the roar of a power boat, and he lit the feeble kerosene lantern Johnny had used as a running light. He didn't want to be rammed, in the darkness. Then, impatiently, he reached down and fiddled with the gas adjustment on the carburetor, trying to wrest just another ounce of speed out of the little motor. As his fingers touched the greasy screw, his grim face galvanized, and he stared at the motor as if it had come alive under his hand. The motor, the outboard motor. . . .

The half formed thought had but a moment to grow in his mind, an ugly moment, for a blinding shaft of light slashed through the darkness and pinned him crouching over the motor. The roar of the engines in the big boat heightened in pitch as someone opened the throttle full. McGuire leaped to his feet, cried out and waved his arms wildly.

The speeding boat swerved and swooped down on him, and he had barely time to go over the side before the sharp cutwater crashed through his light boat, like a cleaver through a box of matches. He came up, sputtering and yelling furiously. The big boat slowed and turned, the powerful beam of its light fingering the water. It touched him, moved on, then jerked back. A shot rang out and the water geysered a foot from his face. The second shot was wide. He filled his lungs and dived. He heard the propeller churn over him as the

big boat slowly circled. It had happened so quickly and so violently that his mind was a chaos. He came silently to the surface.

His first coherent thought was, the police. He had left the deputy unconscious, but untied. But the police wouldn't ram a man in a boat. They wouldn't ruthlessly butcher him while he struggled, helpless, in the water.

He saw the boat about a hundred yards down the bay from him, its probing finger of light nervously brushing the surface of the water.

Somebody said, "I think I got him with the second one." It was the deputy's voice!

Another man must have said something, for the deputy answered, "Whattaya mean, float! How can he float with a bullet in him? He won't float till tomorrow or maybe the day after when the gasses fill him up."

McGuire strained to hear the second voice, but at that distance, it was not even a mumble.

The deputy's voice came again, disgustedly. "So he's found with a bullet in him, so what? Who cares? He was out looking for trouble, wasn't he? He beat up Shay this afternoon, didn't he? Nobody's going to connect it with the sheriff's office, and who'd raise hell if they did—the taxpayers? Forget it. A week from now, somebody'll find him tangled up in the mangrove, and everybody'll say he asked for it, and that'll be that. Okay, okay, we'll keep looking, but I'm telling you, we're just wasting our time. . . ."

McGuire did not wait to hear any more. He sucked in as much air as he could hold, and dived again. He knew where he was. To the south of him, to the southwest, was Big Turtle Key. He had recognized that from the stiff silhouette of Morgan's castle, against the sky. It wasn't really a castle. It was one of those Moorish horrors that had been built during the '20's. It was deserted now, and the forty foot boathouse, that

faced the gulf, had been slowly crumbling for years.

McGuire swam under water as long as he could, came up for a quick breath, a quick glance at the castle, and knifed down under the water again before the light beam could find him.

His hands touched the firm sand bottom first. He crawled into the shallow water, lay prone in it and scanned the bay. He could hear the throbbing motors of the big boat receding from him. He could no longer spot it in the inky darkness, for they had turned off even the running lights, and it was impossible to find the silhouette against the blackness of the shore.

He rose and splashed wearily to the shore. He dropped down on the fine white sand and, panting, rested his head in the crook of one arm draped across his knee.

The thunder, like most Florida thunder, had just been a rumble like the rumble of a passing train. It had passed over to the north, dragging the clouds after it, and moonlight flooded the island with its millions of furtive shadows.

A mosquito droned at McGuire's ear. He flapped weakly at it. Another buzzed at his eyes, and suddenly the air was swarming with them, and McGuire no longer had enough hands to keep them off him. He slapped futilely and violently, but they drove him to his feet and, despite his sodden muscles, sent him up the beach at a plunging run, flapping the air with his hands as he ran. They drove him into the water and he had to swim out a good twenty yards, most of it under water, before they left him alone.

The muscles of his arms were leaden and they rebelled when he forced himself to swim, but he had seen pictures of some poor devils who had been caught in a mangrove swamp at night. They had been killed by the mosquitoes, bitten out of all recognition. And the mangroves had taken over practically all of Big Turtle Key, except for this strip at the southern tip, and the two

mile stretch of beach on the gulf side. The wind was coming in more strongly from the gulf, and it would keep the insects in the mangroves, but first he had to reach the gulf beach.

He swam slowly and heavily, reaching out with a side stroke that would, eventually, rest him. He swam doggedly. The tide was going out, and that helped him. He slowly gathered his strength, for he was going to need it for the dash to the point. For if he missed the point, he would be swept out into the gulf.

Twice he thought he heard voices and saw lights, but when he stopped and listened, there were no voices, and when he looked, there were no lights. It was like that eerie something you can *almost* see from the ends of your eyes, but when you turn, it had either gone or it had never been there at all.

The latter was probably the case, McGuire decided grimly, for no one even picnicked on Big Turtle Key any more. The island had been gradually taken over by the mangroves and the water moccasins, to say nothing of the gnats and mosquitos and every other form of insect life that could bite, bore or sting. Maybe, McGuire thought bitterly, he was going just a little nuts.

But in a moment, he had no time to think about anything at all, for the speed of the water increased and he knew he was in the inlet. A hundred yards beyond was the open gulf. He turned and swam for the point with every ounce of mustered strength that he had. He could feel the current tugging strongly at him, but he dared not look up for fear of seeing the point sweep by, dared not stop swimming. He hit the shelly shallows with such force that it tore the skin from his fingers. Laughing and sobbing for breath, he staggered up to the dry sand. He had made it. Hell, he had made it with a good twenty-four inches to spare! He fell full length on his back in the sand and wished desperately for a cigarette,

or a shot of rye, or even just a cup of coffee.

The sound of a boat brought him to his feet, but he ducked down again almost immediately behind a dune, for he recognized the gray lines of a police boat coming swiftly up the gulf from Tollmans Key.

CHAPTER THREE

"Start Running!"

THE BOAT swept by the point, cutting speed. There was another boat a few hundred yards up the shore, with a brilliant gasoline lantern on the stern, and a man stood on the hatch cover, leaning on a twelve-foot gig pole. The police boat slowed, drifted alongside and stopped. McGuire could hear the sound of their voices and, though he could not distinguish the words, he knew they were talking about the six huge green turtles that lumbered in the moonlight on the white beach, ponderously searching the sand for a depository for their eggs. The men on the police boat pointed, and somebody laughed. A few minutes later, the police boat roared up the gulf toward Otter Pass and the string of keys that stretched up the coast as far as Palmetto.

A flashlight blinked several times from the anchored boat, and four men ran out to the beach from the mangroves. They swarmed around one of the turtles, a smaller one of about a thousand pounds, attached a rope with a hook to the side of the shell and stepped back. There was the muffled sound of a small power winch. The rope stretched across the beach to the crumbling old boathouse, tightened, and the big turtle was flipped over on its shell, helpless now.

One of the men stepped in quickly, threw a couple half-hitches around the heavily waving flipper, then stood up and waved his hand. The power winch muttered again and slowly the huge turtle was dragged across the sand and disappeared into the

boathouse. One of the men trotted alongside, came running back with the rope, and the four of them fell upon a second turtle.

McGuire sucked in his breath. Poachers! The season was closed on green turtles from May through August, the period when they came to the beaches by the hundreds to lay their eggs. With turtle meat retailing at a dollar and a half a pound, a gang as efficient as this could make themselves sixty or seventy thousand dollars in four months easily.

McGuire raised his head over the top of the dune to see if he could recognize any of the men, and a voice said casually:

"Getting an eyeful, Nosy?"

McGuire froze. It was the deputy's voice.

"What happened to your popgun?" the deputy went on mockingly. "You know, you don't look half as tough without a gun. Let's take a walk up the beach, Nosy. The boys are always glad to have company. There must be something wrong with you McGuires. You're always sticking your necks out."

McGuire said hoarsely, "You killed Johnny!"

"Uh-uh. Not personally, Nosy, not personally. The guy that wanted that done had to do it himself. We're not taking the rap for anybody on a killing."

McGuire whirled. The deputy had a rifle, but he leaped back warily. "I'll give it to you in the legs," he warned.

McGuire turned and sprinted up the beach. The deputy laughed and called out loudly:

"On your toes, boys. Here comes a visitor."

The four men looked up, saw McGuire running toward them, and, grinning, they snatched out the knives they were wearing at their belts.

His heart hammering, McGuire was desperately gambling that the deputy would not shoot—with the police boat still close in the nearby waters. He slid his hand inside his shirt and pulled out the gun he had

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taken from the deputy back in the house. He went down into the sand as if he had stumbled. He pushed out the cylinder of the gun, blew the drops of water from the barrel, then carefully sighted on the deputy, who was walking slowly toward him, still laughing. McGuire squeezed the trigger. The deputy screamed as the heavy slug smashed into his shoulder, spinning him around. He recovered his balance and, holding his shoulder, and groaning, pelted up the beach away from McGuire. McGuire put a bullet through his leg, then dashed forward and snatched up the rifle which the deputy had dropped.

The four men behind him stopped, huddled panic-stricken, then broke and fled for the boat anchored in the gulf. McGuire threw up the rifle and sent a bullet into the water ahead of them. He threw a second shot at the boat and heard it smack into the wood of the cabin.

"Nobody moves!" he shouted.

The man on the boat dived for the controls, then went headlong into the side of the cabin as McGuire's third shot smashed into his thigh. The four men stood in the knee-deep water, their hands over their heads, as McGuire came up with the rifle.

He said grimly, "End of the line, boys," then raised the revolver and emptied it slowly into the air.

The police boat, its powerful twin engines roaring wide open, was back on the spot in fifteen minutes. Two armed men leaped over the side into the shallows and splashed ashore.

McGuire said shortly, "Poachers. Knocking off green turtle. You'll find a pal from the sheriff's office up the beach with a couple slugs in him."

The policemen whistled. The two of them went into the crumbling boathouse, and when they returned, they were shaking their heads.

"Six turtles in there," they told McGuire, "and the fine is five hundred bucks

She Cries Murder!

each per man. This bunch'll be in the caboose for the rest of their lives."

One of the poachers said jeeringly, "We'll be out tomorrow."

"Just like that?"

"Yeah. Just like that. Fines paid and free as a bird."

"I hope so," said one of the policemen. "There's six of you at three thousand bucks fine apiece. The county could sure use an extra eighteen thousand. Okay, you guys. Into the boat. Can we give you a lift, mister?"

McGuire shook his head. "I got a boat around the bay side," he lied.

HE WATCHED THEM load the wounded deputy into the boat and then, with the fishing boat in tow, they moved slowly up the gulf toward the inlet. McGuire waited until they were out of sight, then he plodded across the beach to the old boathouse. The winch was still there, smashed now, but the turtles had been freed. A feeble kerosene lantern flickered behind the winch. McGuire looked into the cavernous interior, then slowly raised his eyes to the rafters overhead.

"Okay, Lloyd," he said wearily. "You can come down now. The cops have gone."

There was no answer, but listening sharply, McGuire could hear the sound of heavy breathing in the darkness.

"Come on down, Lloyd," he said mockingly. "The boys are depending on you to pay their eighteen thousand buck fine tomorrow. You've got eighteen thousand, Lloyd. You can sell your boat and mortgage your house. And you'd better pay that fine, Lloyd. They're expecting you to. If you don't, they're going to blab—*about what you did to Johnny!*"

This time, the gasp overhead was loudly audible.

McGuire went on grimly. "Johnny was too nosy, wasn't he? He found your boys poaching turtles. . . ."

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Lloyd's voice came screeching hysterically out of the darkness, "I didn't want to hurt him, but he wouldn't keep quiet. I didn't want to kill him. I just gave him a little push and . . . and . . . he fell in the water with the turtles."

"I didn't think it was a shark. Sharks tear." McGuire was fighting to control his blazing fury. "You'd better come down."

Lloyd hesitated, then dropped clumsily from the rafter.

"Cigarette?" McGuire asked.

"Thanks!"

Lloyd grabbed the cigarette with hands that were shaking so badly that McGuire had to hold the light for him.

"How . . . how did you know it was me up there?" he stammered.

"Kind of figured it out. Those dumb fishermen might poach one turtle when things got tough, but poaching on a big scale needed someone with an outlet, like you and your wholesale contacts. You could dress out the meat and sell it up North for sixty or seventy cents a pound wholesale. That's about six or seven hundred bucks per turtle. Too bad it's all over now."

Lloyd's confidence was returning by leaps and bounds, and his voice was almost normally peevish when he said, "And it needn't have been over if it hadn't been for Johnny. . . ."

McGuire's face was impassive.

Lloyd asked, "How did you connect me with Johnny, anyway?"

"Oh, the outboard, for one thing. Everybody thought it had fallen off Johnny's boat and was at the bottom of the pass. Yet I found it in your boathouse."

"And Johnny's fishing rod, that expensive glass rod, you've got that, too?"

"In the water under the pier," said Lloyd reluctantly.

McGuire looked at him, unable any longer to conceal his loathing. "You're really a penny-pinching stinker, aren't you? A grave-robbing louse!"

She Cries Murder!

Lloyd shrank back.

McGuire took a last drag at his cigarette and snapped it into the water. "Finished yours yet, Lloyd?" he asked.

Lloyd nodded and McGuire stepped back and raised the rifle.

"Start running!" he snarled.

Lloyd stared at the gun with horror. He turned and floundered up the beach. Sweating a little, McGuire put a bullet into the sand beside him, turning him toward the mangroves. Lloyd, crying out with terror, swerved, then broke for the open beach again. McGuire grimly turned him toward the mangroves with another bullet in the sand. Lloyd stopped at the tangled, snake-ridden growth and ran frantically up and down before it, not daring to enter it. McGuire threw a third bullet at his heels. Lloyd screeched and dived into the protection of the weedy trees. McGuire sent two bullets in after him, then listened as he heard Lloyd crashing and splashing deeper into the swamp. McGuire's own hands were shaking, and he felt a little sick to his stomach. The swamp was alive with deadly water moccasins.

Lloyd screamed, his voice skirling up to the highest note of unbearable terror.

Then he shrieked, "I'm bitten."

He screamed again as a second snake struck.

McGuire turned and plodded heavily down the beach toward the inlet. There were always night fishermen there. Someone would give him a lift back to the mainland. Tomorrow he would arrange to pay the fines of the luckless poachers. Peg would know that her husband had been killing turtles. In her grief at Lloyd's death, for she did love him, she would forgive him that.

But the other thing need never poison her life, she need never know, need never embitter her memories. . . . McGuire looked up. The inlet was brilliant with the lights of the bobbing boats. ■ ■ ■

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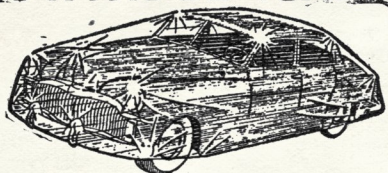
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New Detective Magazine

(Continued from page 51)

The car must not get away. The story would tell itself. Clausen shot. Another man shot . . . and he wouldn't be able to prove the fellow had not been his accomplice. Al fired at the silhouette of the sedan until the gun clicked on empty chambers. He heard the bullets clang into the car, but it didn't stop. Frenzied, he ran to the abandoned tractor, climbed aboard.

Al roared the power back to life, geared in and swept around in a full circle onto the highway. The sedan had vanished around the curve above. Al reached up and pulled the cord to set the air-whistle screaming, and he turned on the powerful fog lights, hoping to rattle the other driver. He picked him up, and barreled after him. He gained time at the next turn, because the sedan took it too fast and came almost to a dead stop. It had to get into low gear to get moving again. And Al was in high.

He caught him on the next short up-grade stretch. The blaze of light from the tractor and the shriek of the air-whistle and the deadly power growl of the engine seemed to frazzle the sedan driver's nerves completely. He made the same mistake he had at the last turn, and killed his power. Al piled into him.

He had never seen him before. And he never saw him again. Because he died an hour later. He'd known it was curtains and he had confessed, implicating his dead partner, and Jenkins, the dispatcher. They'd used a rifle to shoot the air tank. The bullet was recovered from the wreckage, and it matched the one they dug out of Clausen. Clausen himself lived to testify.

Al was part of the delegation at the airport to meet Jenkins. Jenkins started to yap like a dispatcher. He thought he was still running things. They let him yap. Al had a lot of things he wanted to say. But it was never any damn use to argue with a dispatcher. Especially one who'd scheduled himself for hell. ■ ■ ■

No Charge

(Continued from page 67)

port on the red Buick and the two men who had shot up the Harris Jewelry Shoppe, and he nodded approval of arrangements.

"A good job, Sergeant."

"But we haven't got 'em! It looks as if they might get away!"

Something that was almost a smile touched Petersen's mouth as he turned toward the mike on his desk and put on earphones.

"Well, maybe it doesn't do any harm if one escapes now and then," he said. "F-Two-T and F-Two-P, calling F-Two-T and F-Two-P."

Lance and McLaughlin he lectured on how to establish a road block. *Never* park the cars in such a way that a driver coming up on the far right could slip sideways and get through without shifting a gear. The cars should be so spaced that a driver would *have* to come to a full stop, no matter how desperate he was, or how clever. They ought to know that by this time.

They protested that they'd had their cars that way.

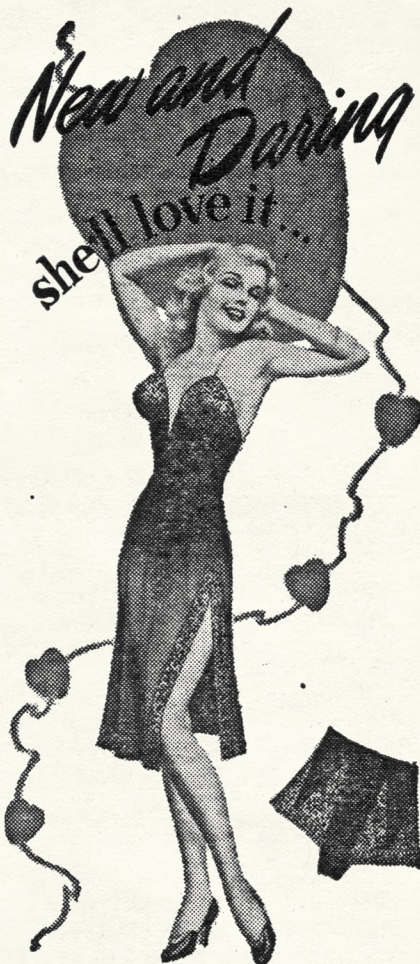
"Please don't contradict," Petersen said coldly.

"If that damn pilot— But he wasn't over us till later!"

"Now I have another assignment for one of you. You, Lance. I want you to drive south to a point about three or four miles from Cooke Hill. There's a lane leads off on the right, through some woods. You have to look sharp for it. Well, proceed up that lane a few hundred feet and you should find a man asleep. He's drunk. Take him— Well, take him to the town jail in Abbeville and have Ham Curtis let him sleep it off there. That's a nice clean place. I'll phone Curtis, so's he'll be expecting you. This is Petersen talking."

"What's the charge, Captain?"

"No charge," said Petersen. ■ ■ ■



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New Detective Magazine

(Continued from page 80)

after I suspicioned you'd gone off on a still-hunt by yourself."

The dope the doc had shot into him was making him sleepy. Pete fought against it. "Yeah. . . . Well, it was worth it, Cap. Trapping those rats in their hole. . . . Larry'd be glad, I guess! Hey, what the—" Pete glared at the police surgeon who was cutting his tattered trouser leg. "Have a heart, Doc! That suit set me back forty bucks!"

But the doc went about his business.

"Nuts!" snapped Cap Hanlon. He was a good guy, even if he was an old mossback. He understood how a fellow felt about his brother, and he showed it in his own way. "I'm thinkin' you won't be needin' that suit for so long, Pete Crowley."

"Huh!" Pete snorted, tried to lift himself and then fell back, breathing hard. "Hell, Cap, I can take it—a little dynamite. . . ." He paused because everything was spinning and that damn ambulance was tearing things wide open.

Cap Hanlon looked pretty vicious when he was shoving his handkerchief into his back pocket. "Not a damn thing in it, Pete, boy. Blisters on your feet; rookie school; examinations that'll get you mebber a raise in pay when you pass 'em, and then when the new boss comes in you'll be a harness bull, just like when you started out. . . not a damn thing in it. A man would be a fool. . . ."

"Oh, hell!" muttered Pete. "There's always been a Detective Crowley in the bureau, hasn't there? When are those next preliminary examinations coming up, anyway, Cap?"

"Next Thursday, ten a. m.; at headquarters, kid," said Captain Hanlon. "And mind you be there prompt." He was grinning and wiping his eyes at the same time, but Pete Crowley didn't see it, nor did he bother to explain away the lump in his throat. Pete Crowley was asleep.



The Living Target

(Continued from page 89)

now they were just the primroses of the Devil.

Tonight I mean to move in the act and I hope that his bullet kills me at once without pain. It won't be his fault—he can never blame himself, and when the first shock is over he will soon forget me. And for you, forget and forgive me, Paul, and good-by.

Farewell

LYDIA

Someone was forcing Wassili to his feet. The presiding judge was addressing him—something about a voice from the dead—a letter. And gradually his senses returned to their normal acuteness. There was a letter written by Lydia in which she had set down her plan to deliberately seek death at his innocent hand.

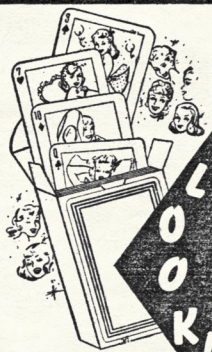
"You have had a narrow escape, Leo Gavorin," said the voice of justice, "and in view of this testimony the court can do nothing now but dismiss the case. You may leave the city. Also the woman, Hermione."

Wassili came down the court steps, out of the shadow of death, into the brilliant sunshine. He felt a cold hand glide into his and someone got into step with him without a word. He walked with Hermione silently, as though still in a prison yard where jailers listened for each revealing word. And then abruptly, as the warmth penetrated, as passers-by jostled and vendors plucked at them to look at their wares, he knew he was free—free to go back to the old life, the flattering feel of his tight uniform, the touch of sawdust and matting under his feet, the music of the band, sounds of stable and menagerie, the volleys of excited applause and the strange, still silence he could command.

And suddenly he stopped, smiled down at the girl.

"Tomorrow we rehearse," he said. "I must arrange for new billing. See Wassili's New Lovely Living Target. Come—what are you standing still for? We must celebrate!" ■ ■ ■

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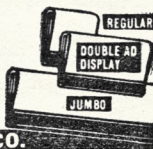
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New Detective Magazine

(Continued from page 91)

Conners came in. Limpy had a pretty bad record. He was a petty thief. A dip. I don't think there was an honest impulse in his make-up. He was small, stooped, and couldn't look anyone straight in the eye. He talked out of the corner of his mouth in a half whine.

Limpy glanced around the room, then came over toward the table where Margie and the kid were sitting. He didn't notice me. I was pretty well hidden by the fat guy.

The kid looked up and scowled. He said, "Beat it, Limpy. I'm busy."

"Dave wants to see you," said Limpy. "Right away."

Chuck Miller shook his head. "Tell him I can't make it."

"He's got a job for you," said Limpy, stubbornly.

The kid stood up. He said, "Beat it, Limpy. I'm through with Dave Hennessy, and he knows it. I've got a job with my uncle."

"Dave said to tell you—"

The kid started around the table and I imagine Limpy didn't care for the look on his face.

At any rate, Limpy backed off now and headed for the door, muttering under his breath.

Margie reached up and pulled the kid back into his seat.

The fat guy was mopping his face again. "I thought you told me Chuck Miller didn't have any relatives," he whispered.

"He doesn't," I said, frowning.

"Then who's this uncle who's given him a job?"

I couldn't answer that one. I didn't think it important, anyhow. What had impressed me was the fact that the kid had ignored an order from Hennessy. It took courage to do that. Once Dave Hennessy got a man under his thumb, the man usually stayed there.

Trouble on His Shoulder

A crowd of young people entered the malt shop and lined up at the counter, and in a minute someone recognized Chuck and Margie and called a greeting. The kid and Margie both waved.

"How you feeling, Chuck?" shouted a voice.

"Just fine," the kid answered.

"Look at him," said someone else. "I don't believe he minds it at all. I'll bet he even likes it."

"Likes what?" asked one of the girls at the counter.

"The draft board reached out and tapped him. He passed his exams. Tomorrow morning at eight o'clock, he'll be in the Army."

There was a grin on the kid's face. His eyes were shining. He said, "Yep, that's right. I'm going to work for Uncle Sam tomorrow morning." He paused a moment as though considering what lay ahead, then nodded gravely, and added, "We'll get along good. Me and my uncle."

After a little more talk, Chuck and Margie got up and started for the door, and I couldn't help but notice how square the kid was holding his shoulders. There was real pride in the way he walked. And Margie, still clinging to his arm, seemed proud, too.

I got to my feet and looked down at the fat guy.

I said, "Well, come on along. We'll pick him up outside."

The fat guy mopped his face once more. He didn't move from his chair. He said, "Pick who up? What are you talking about? I never saw that kid before in my life."

I felt like shouting, but I didn't. "Remember?" I said. "You saw a fellow stripping a car the other night. You said—"

"I saw no such thing," said the fat guy. "You're crazy. What you need is a drink. Let's go buy one." ■ ■ ■



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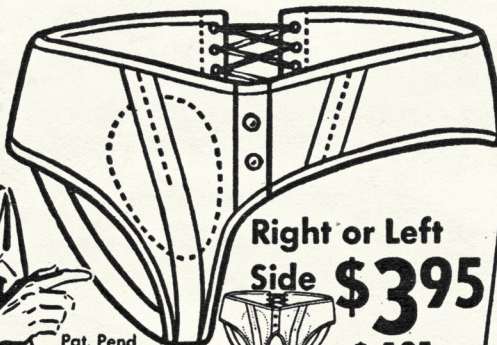
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Now, for the FIRST TIME—You can have the BRAND NEW ALL-TIME HITS and POPULAR RECORDINGS—18 NEWEST All-Time Hits, favorites in all—for the AMAZING, unbelievable LOW PRICE of only \$2.98. That's right, 18 TOP SELECTIONS that if bought separately would cost up to \$16.02 in stores, on separate records—YOURS by mail for only \$2.98! YES, you can now get 18 HIT PARADE songs—the LATEST, the NEWEST nation-wide POPULAR TUNES—or 18 of the most POPULAR HILL BILLY tunes—some of these tunes are not yet sold by stores—or you can get almost a whole complete album of your most wanted HYMNS. These are tunes you have always wanted. They will give you hours of pleasure. You can choose from THREE DIFFERENT GROUPS—on newest, most sensational BREAK-RESISTANT records! These amazing records are 6-IN-1 records—6 songs to a record! They are brand new and play three times as many songs as regular records, and they play on regular 78 R.P.M. speed and fit all Type 78 R.P.M. standard phonograph and record players. These are all perfect, BREAK-RESISTANT, Vinylite records free from defects, RUSH YOUR ORDER for your favorite group NOW! ORDER ALL THREE GROUPS and SAVE even MORE MONEY, only \$2.98 per group.

SUPPLY LIMITED. That's why we urge you to fill in and mail coupon now! Play these 18 selections ordered, use the NEW GIFT surface saving needle, for 10 days at home. If you are not delighted, if you don't feel these are the BEST SOUNDING records for the price, return within 10 days for FULL REFUND. Don't delay, send \$2.98 in check or money order, or put three one dollar bills in the mail with this coupon and SAVE POSTAGE—DON'T DELAY, MAIL COUPON TODAY!

FREE!

If you RUSH YOUR ORDER NOW you get at NO EXTRA COST whatsoever a **SURFACE SAVING NEEDLE!** ORDER 18 Hit Parade Tunes or 18 Hill Billy Hits or 18 Most Loved Hymns or ORDER ALL THREE SETS for only \$7.95. But, SUPPLY IS LIMITED; so order at once. SEND COUPON TODAY. Order now on Money - Back Guarantee.

Brand New Discovery — 6-IN-1 Vinylite **BREAK-Resistant** Records — Play Up To 10 Full Minutes



18 HIT PARADE TUNES

Domino
Undecided
Cold, Cold Heart
Because Of You
It's No Sin
Down Yonder
I Got Ideas
Slow Poke
Cry
Just One More
Chance



Tell Me Why
Turn Back The
Hands Of Time
The Little White
Cloud That Cried
Charmaine
Anytime
Jealousy
Shrimp Boats
Be My Life's
Companion

18 HILL BILLY HITS

It Is No Secret
May The Good Lord
Bless and Keep
You
Mr. Moon
Give Me More,
More, More
Mus-c Makin' Mama
From Memphis
Baby We're Really
In Love
I Wanna Play House
With You
Hey, Good Lookin'



Alabama Jubilee
Let's Live a Little
Always Late
Cryin' Heart Blues
Cold, Cold Heart
Somebody's Been
Bustin' My Time
Slow Poke
Let Old Mother Nature
Have Her
Way
Crazy Heart
Mom And Dad's
Waltz

18 MOST LOVED HYMNS

The Lord's Prayer
Onward, Christian
Soldiers
What a Friend We
Have In Jesus
Church In The
Wildwood
In The Garden
Faith Of Our
Fathers
There Is Power In
The Blood
Leaning On The
Everlasting Arm
Since Jesus Came
Into My Heart



Trust On Me
Jesus Keep Me Near
The Cross
Softly And Tenderly
Dear Lord And Father
Of Mankind
A Mighty Fortress
Sun Of My Soul
Just A Closer Walk
With Thee
It Is No Secret
What God Can Do
May The Good Lord
Bless And Keep
You

IMPORTANT NOTICE!

These tunes are CONSTANTLY kept up to date—only the newest tunes are kept on the list.

MAIL COUPON NOW—10-DAY TRIAL OFFER

HIT TUNES COMPANY, Dept. 55
318 Market Street, Newark, New Jersey

Gentlemen: Please RUSH the 18 Top Selections along with the GIFT SURFACE SAVING NEEDLE on your NO-RISK 10 Day Money Back Guarantee. I enclose \$2.98 for each group of 18 selections with the understanding that if I am not completely satisfied you will return my money.

- ☐ 18 Hit Parade Tunes \$2.98
☐ 18 Hymns \$2.98
☐ 18 Hill Billy Hits \$2.98
☐ All Three Groups, 54 SONGS \$7.95

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If you get sick or have an accident, you may go to any recognized Hospital (Rest Homes, Sanitariums, Government Hospitals excluded). Your NORTH AMERICAN Policy will pay for Hospital Room, Board and General Nursing Care at the rate of \$150.00 PER MONTH. What's more, you can stay as long as necessary. There's NO TIME LIMIT. Now, in case you need SURGERY, due to sickness, accident or disease . . . the Policy pays lump CASH for 74 specific SURGICAL OPERATIONS. What a help . . . what a blessing it is to fall back on this kind of coverage in time of need.

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Then, too, there are liberal Benefits in lieu of others for accidental LOSS OF HANDS, FEET OR EYES; Benefits for EMERGENCY HOSPITAL TREATMENT for accidents involving no confinement, etc. Imagine all this wonderful value and coverage at a rate for adults of only about 3¢ a day, 1½¢ a day for children to age

18 . . . and CHILDREN GET FULL BENEFITS. (Maternity Rider is available at small additional charge.)

IMPORTANT—The NORTH AMERICAN POLICY pays you FULL BENEFITS regardless of money you collect from other insurance sources for the same disability, including Workmen's Compensation. WE PAY DIRECT TO YOU! This means, if you are already carrying Hospitalization—be smart . . . buy this additional Policy, with its extra cash benefits, to protect yourself against today's higher Hospital costs. Don't Delay! MAIL COUPON BELOW for FREE DETAILS. No Agent will call!

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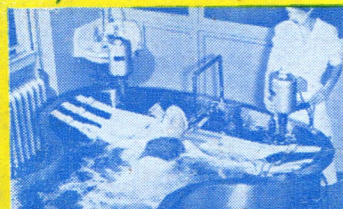
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