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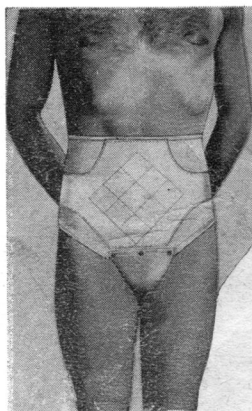
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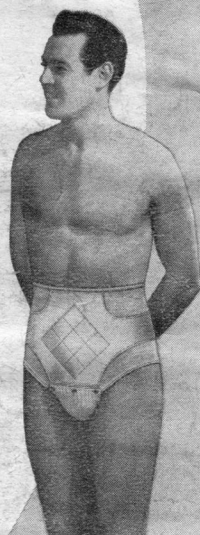
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NEW DETECTIVE

BEST IN CRIME FICTION 25c

MAGAZINE

Vol. 19

Contents for April, 1953

No. 1

TWO BIG NOVELETTES

MURDER SAILS AT MIDNIGHT.....Eustace L. Adams 12

They lived fast . . . and died faster . . . those who challenged that crimson night. . .

MURDER—AS USUAL.....Day Keene 84

Solve—if you dare—the riddle of the laughing sinners who sneered at the perils of hell-fire—and met swift death in flames!

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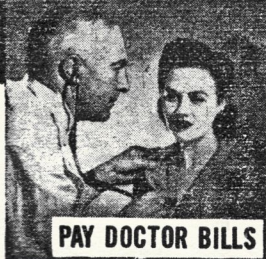
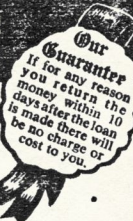
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THE WITNESS CHAIR

Guest-Conducted by John D. Fitzgerald

Authorities must know the language of the underworld—both in order to forestall crime and to handle criminals en masse. This language is not just “tough talk”—but a deliberately developed code for those who live in the shadows. On the following pages Mr. Fitzgerald, a noted student of criminal personality, presents another vignette of the underworld, as told—with translations. See how much you can understand of the talk of those who would destroy you!

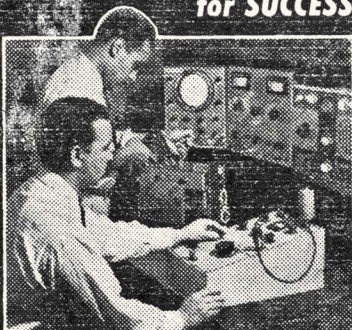
VIGNETTE No. 4.

A fed collared Jerry The Junkie on general principles and pushed him into a doorway. He frisked Jerry and found a works and an eighth of smack on the junkie. Jerry knew it meant the cure and so he made a book with the fed. He told the fed he would set up his connection if given a pass. The fed contacted his boss and then signed the book. That night Jerry met his connection and bought a quarter of H with a fin that had been through the laundry. The feds bagged the connection dead bang. The connection knew that he would go over for at least a handful and decided to turn fink himself. So he made a book with the feds. He told them that he would put the finger on the plant if given a pass. The feds signed the book. So the connection put the phone

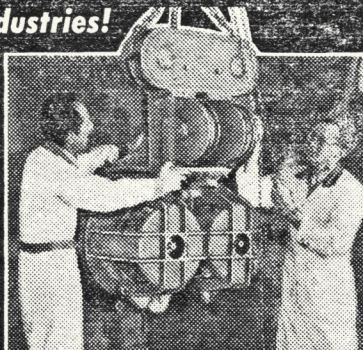
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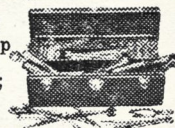


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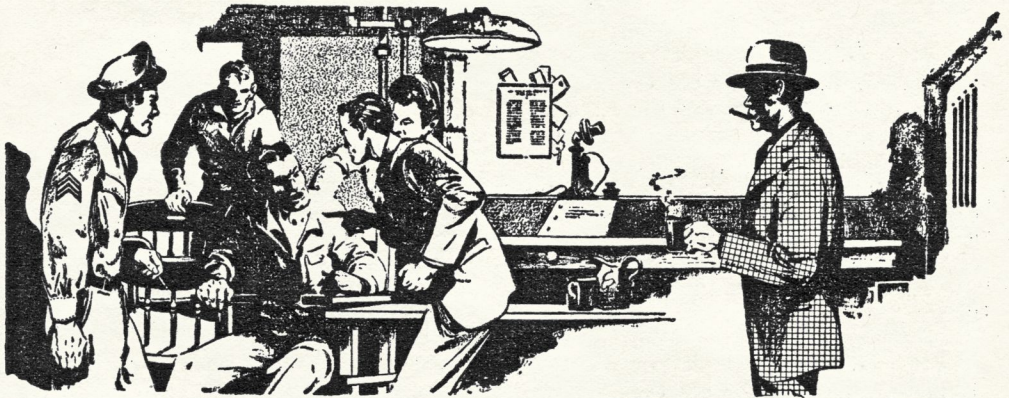
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(Continued from page 6)

on the plant and ordered ten pieces of stuff. When the plant showed up with the ten pieces of junk, the feds get him dead bang. The plant knew that he would get a double handful or more in the federal pokey and so he decided to turn fink. He made book with the feds, that he would finger the junk syndicate's drop, if given a pass. The feds signed the book. Acting on the info given them by the plant they knocked off the drop and grabbed the head man of the syndicate and two hundred grand worth of smack and raw gum.

All the prisoners were then taken to the federal detention prison.



"You're a dirty finkeroo," the head man of the smack syndicate said. . . .

"You are a dirty finkeroo," the head man of the smack syndicate said to the plant.

"You are a dirty rat," the plant said to the connection.

"You are a dirty stool pigeon," the connection said to Jerry The Junkie.

Poor Jerry looked helplessly around the room until he latched onto the fed who had pushed him into the doorway. Jerry knew that he wasn't going to get a pass. He knew that the connection and the plant weren't going to get a pass. Suddenly his face brightened and sick as he was from a yen he drew himself up and put the finger on the fed that had nailed him.

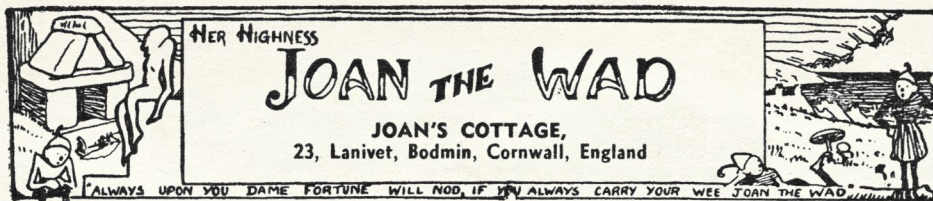
"You are a dirty doublecrosser," Jerry said.

TRANSLATION.

A federal officer arrested Jerry The Junkie on suspicion and pushed him into a doorway. He searched Jerry and found a hypodermic needle, an eye dropper, a teaspoon and an eighth of an ounce of heroin on the drug addict. Jerry knew that it meant he would be sent to prison for the drug cure and so he made a bargain with the federal officer. He told the federal officer, that he would arrange to have the dope peddler from whom he bought the heroin put in a position so that the federal officers could catch the dope peddler with the goods, if the federal officer would let him go. The

federal officer got in touch with his superiors and then agreed to the bargain. That night Jerry met the dope peddler and bought a quarter of an ounce of heroin with a marked five dollar bill. The federal officers arrested the dope peddler and had an airtight case against him. The dope peddler knew that he would be sent to prison for at least five years and decided he would be a stool pigeon himself. So he made a bargain with the federal officers. He told them that he would arrange it so they could arrest the wholesaler from whom the peddler bought drugs, if the federal officers would let him go. The federal men agreed to the bargain.

(Continued on page 112)



AS HEALER. One Lady writes: "My sister suffered very badly for years, but since I gave her a Joan the Wad to keep near her she is much easier. Do you think this is due to Joan or the water from the Lucky Well?"

AS LUCK BRINGER. Another writes: "Since the war my wife and I have been dogged by persistent ill-luck and we seemed to be sinking lower and lower. One day someone sent us a Joan the Wad. We have never found out who it was, but, coincidence if you like, within a week I got a much better job and my wife had some money left her. Since then we have never looked back and, needless to say, swear by 'Queen Joan'."

AS MATCHMAKER. A young girl wrote and informed me that she had had scores of boy friends, but it was not until she had visited Cornwall and taken Joan back with her that she met the boy of her dreams, and as they got better acquainted she discovered he also has "Joan the Wad."

AS PRIZEWINNER. A young man wrote us only last week: "For two years I entered competitions without luck, but since getting Joan the Wad I have frequently been successful although I have not won a big prize. But I know that . . . who won \$5,600 in a competition has one because I gave it to him. When he won his \$5,600 he gave me \$280 for myself, so you see I have cause to bless 'Queen Joan'."

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AS SPECULATOR. A man writes: "I had some shares that for several years I couldn't give away. They were 14 cent shares and all of a sudden they went up in the market to \$1.10. I happened to be staring at Joan the Wad. Pure imagination, you may say, but I thought I saw her wink approvingly. I sold out, reinvested the money at greater profit and have prospered ever since."



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MURDER SAILS AT MIDNIGHT

by
**Eustace L.
Adams**



Having known Haida as well as I did, I should have been prepared.

LEE MAURY must have been living on borrowed time for months. I don't suppose he knew it, yet sometimes, thinking back, I wonder. He must have realized that a man has only so

much luck and that when he uses it up something is bound to happen. But no man, I imagine, expects to be murdered unless he is a gangster, or something, and even then he probably expects violent death to happen

They lived fast . . . and died faster . . . those who challenged that crimson night at the Buccaneer Yacht Club — whose Commodore was dressed to kill!



to the other fellow, and never to himself.

Lee Maury was no gangster. He was a stockbroker, a yachtsman and, almost, a gentleman. I guess he was surprised, all right, in those last terrible moments before

the breath ran out of him and he died.

We don't talk much about it at the Buccaneer Yacht Club. Now and then, when it rains as hard as it does in Florida and even the most hardened small-boat sailor hesitates to go out, some of us sit around the Cockpit Bar, talking, and sooner or later every eye reluctantly comes to rest on that corner table where Lee Maury and Haida Corbin used to sit. Then, because it still hags our memories, somebody speaks of Hell Week. That's what we call it, Hell Week.

Lee Maury and Haida Corbin had been sitting there the night it happened. Haida had been in the club since before dinner and she seemed to have gone on a liquid diet. Lee had joined her about ten o'clock and a good many of us noticed that they weren't doing too well together. Lee's smoothly handsome face was for once polite, rather than ardent. Beneath Haida's spectacular lashes her black eyes were stormy and she appeared to be doing most of the talking.

I was standing at the semicircular bar buying Dinah Deering one of her special Tom Collinses. Dinah had an arrangement with the bar steward. To save argument, she ordered Tom Collinses, but when they came out they were always plain lemonade.

"Tony," Dinah said over the rim of her glass, "isn't there some way the board of directors could demand Lee's resignation? Right now, I mean."

I, heaven help me, was commodore, which automatically made me the stooge for everything that came up—and, of course, there were a lot of things I could do in the club. But there were also things I couldn't do, not even for Dinah.

"Listen, Di," I said, "if we gave the old heave-ho to every member who makes passes at another man's wife, who'd be left to pay dues?"

The Bosworth boy was, as usual, standing very close to Dinah. He was a good-looking kid of twenty-four or so, with a deep tan and hair that was bleached almost

white by the sun. But his face was already showing the mark of liquor.

"That monkey!" he said, a trifle thickly. "Why doesn't Allan Corbin take a baseball bat and—" He stalked away.

Dinah winced. She said in a troubled voice. "I wish that Tim wouldn't drink so much."

Tim, I thought, would always drink too much. I studied Dinah's small, intent face. She was as pale tonight as I had ever seen her. "I guess we'll have to take Tim's bar privileges away again," I told her, reassuringly. Then: "Something is bothering you, Di, and I don't think it's Tim Bosworth. Would it be Lee Maury? Look, Di, you're not still fond of that lug, are you?"

She closed her very blue eyes. "No," she said. "Haida Corbin can have him, and welcome."

IT WAS exactly twelve-thirty when Lee Maury got up and went out by the terrace door, leaving Haida sitting there. I wondered if I should go over and sit with her. It was Saturday night and the winter crowd was simply panting for something new to gossip about, especially if it concerned Lee and Haida, who had given them most of their fun all season. I had just about decided to be an Eagle Scout when Haida made it unnecessary. She pushed back her chair and stood up.

She was in her late twenties and practically every man in the club, including me, Tony Spencer, thought she was beautiful, although the women took a murky view of her from all angles. But she was not beautiful now. Her brilliant mouth was slack and there was a gleam of wildness in her eyes as she came straight over to us at the bar.

"Dinah," she said, "I've just heard." Her voice was low but there was a quality to it which cut like a blade through the surrounding babble of conversation.

Having known Haida as well as I had, I should have been prepared for anything.

That look was in her eyes, on her mouth. But her right hand flashed out before I could get myself set. There was a sharp smack and on Dinah's lovely cheek was pinkly silhouetted the clear imprint of Haida's palm and fingers. I gave Haida a push that rocked her back on her heels. Somebody caught her and steadied her.

Dinah just stood there, saying nothing at all. Instinctively her fingers flew up to touch her smooth cheek. It is odd how quiet a place can seem when it is really filled with noise. Only those who had been standing very near had seen this thing happen. Yet instantly a pool of silence widened around us.

"Tim," I snapped at the Bosworth boy, "telephone Allan Corbin that his wife is drunk. Tell him to come and take her home."

"I'm not drunk," Haida said steadily. "And I'm not going home."

F. Wellington Barton, Pelican Harbor's most prosperous lawyer, came bustling up. He had all the delicate instincts of an ambulance chaser.

"Barton," I said, "take Haida outside and give her some air."

Barton was smart. He made an excellent living being smart. He closed his hand around Haida's elbow and led her toward the terrace door through which, only a few minutes before, Lee Maury had passed on his way to be murdered.

Dinah turned and moved swiftly out of the bar. I wanted to follow her, but I waited a moment to let them gang me instead of her. In an instant there were half a dozen around me, all asking questions.

"Tony Spencer, I told you when you were elected commodore that you'd have to do something about the Corbins," said Mrs. F. Wellington Barton, a tall, stringy woman and as vicious a gossip as I had ever known. "Why did Haida slap her?"

I made an excuse and got away from there, hoping to catch Dinah before she shoved off. Tim Bosworth stopped me.

"Commodore," he said, "Allan Corbin says his wife can go to hell. He isn't coming after her."

"There's a husband for you!" I said, exasperated. "Well, Barton's her lawyer. Let him figure out what to do with her."

Dinah's grey convertible was gone from the parking lot. She would have gone straight home, I decided, so I took out after her. But I had no luck. Her car was not in front of her apartment, nor was it parked in the rear. And her corner window on the second floor was dark. I waited a minute or two, then drove away. I did not go straight home, a fact which was presently to cause me some of the most embarrassing moments of my life. But I knew I wouldn't be able to sleep. I would just roll and toss, wishing Haida had not slapped Dinah, wishing I were back anywhere but the spot I was in.

Finally I drove to the end of Dinah's street and parked where I could look across the moon-spangled water. I cut my motor, turned off the lights and sat there waiting for the cool salt breeze to clear the fuzz from my brain.

That phrase of Haida's, "*Dinah, I've just heard. . .*" What kind of double-talk was that? I had known Dinah since she had been a leggy, honey-haired kid who couldn't be kept out of boats. And of this I was entirely sure—never in her twenty-one years had Di done anything which could possibly merit a public humiliation like that. Before I had gone into the service she had been just a youngster who had owned her Snipe-class sloop, entered all the races and exasperated the older sailors chiefly because very few of them could match her sailing, especially on a hard thrash to windward or on a broad reach in half a gale.

She did very little sailing now. While I had been in the Navy she had grown up; she was no longer the hoydenish kid I had always known. She had turned into a young woman so altogether lovely that I

caught my breath, hard, the first time I saw her.

Another thing—a year ago, after she had been graduated from finishing school, Lee Maury had made a play for her. He had a persuasive line which could charm a bird out of a tree. For a while, they told me, Di had fallen for him pretty hard, but just about the time the older members were going to tell her what a mug he was, Di herself had made it unnecessary. She went away on one of those apparently endless visits to kinfolk that Southern women so love to make. Lee Maury, I heard, pouted around for a time, then focused the white-hot beam of his personality upon Haida, who was seven years older than Di in age, a hundred in experience, and none too comfortably married to Allan Corbin.

When Di returned to Pelican Harbor, a week or so after I got back into civilian life, it was apparent to most that they need worry no longer about Di. But I was not sure. It was hard to appraise her state of mind because she had changed so much while I was away.

But there was a new somberness in her level eyes, especially when she thought nobody was watching her, which I was most of the time. But she and Lee Maury appeared to be little more than acquaintances, which was just as it should be, for he was poison to women in any language, including the Scandinavian, or whatever it was he used to beguile them into being very foolish indeed.

Sitting there in my car and revolving all these gloomy thoughts in my tired mind, I must have dozed off. At any rate, I woke up with a start and glanced at my wrist watch. It was nearly four o'clock. I started the motor, kicked my clutch and headed for home. I had let my houseboy have the night off, which, as things developed, was unfortunate. It was the one night in the year when he should have been there. But how could I have known that there was a determined killer loose that balmy Florida night?

THE next morning was Sunday, and at eight-thirty Handy, my houseboy, woke me up to tell me that the boat steward at the yacht club wished to speak to me on the phone. I listened to the man sleepily. Lee Maury's sailboat, it seemed, was missing from the slips.

"Why don't you call Mr. Maury about it?" I demanded.

"I tried to, Commodore, but his man says he hasn't been home all night."

"He probably went out for an early morning sail."

"No, sir. The chef got here at five-thirty and Mr. Maury hasn't been around. He's not one to go sailing before sun-up. He never has."

I knew that as well as the boat steward did. Suddenly I remembered Lee's leaving Haida at her table and going out the terrace door. That had been just before the slapping episode.

"I think he went out for a sail last night about midnight," I said. "If he wants to slat around all night, that's his business."

I hung up. I also began to worry. The Snipe is perhaps the finest fifteen-and-a-half-foot racing sloop ever designed. But after three or four hours of wet sailing, you have definitely had enough. Lee had been out eight or nine hours, if he had taken his boat out a little after midnight. And he just was not that rabid a sailor.

I called Ham Rogers, our fleet captain, and asked him to rout out his gang and start a search.

By the time I arrived at the club, Ham had rounded up the owners of three cruisers and was giving them their orders. The town of Pelican Harbor is on a key, which is about ten miles long and a mile wide. Its eastern side is washed by the Gulf Stream, its western by the placid waters of Pelican Bay. Although the yacht club used its influence to discourage small-boat sailors from venturing through Buccaneer Pass into the open Atlantic, there were always a few damned fools who would go out

whenever they had the chance. A dozen times a year we had to go hunting for them. We always found their boats. Usually we found the damned fools, too.

"Maury probably sailed outside," said Ham Rogers, "got becalmed and is drifting north with the Stream. We'll ask the Coast Guard on duty at the pass. They'll have logged him out if he went by during the night."

The Bosworth boy, red-eyed and irritable, climbed from the cockpit of his thirty-six foot ketch and came along the walkway to ask what all the excitement was about.

Ham Rogers told him. "Want to come along?" he asked.

"To hunt for Lee Maury?" Bosworth scoffed. "Thank you very much, but no. I'd be afraid we'd find him."

When the searchers had shoved off, Bosworth and I strolled past the line of cruisers, schooners and ketches tied up in the slips. We paused at Slip 12, where my own boat, *Restless*, a thirty-foot express cruiser, lay quietly at her lines. I was uneasy, tempted to take her out to join the search.

Suddenly I snapped to alertness. She was not exactly as I had left her the last time I had used her. There was not enough slack in her spring lines and one of the side curtains had not been completely secured. Puzzled, I jumped aboard and within a few seconds I knew that somebody had been using her.

"Tim," I called. "You live aboard your boat. Did you see anyone taking this cruiser out last night?"

"No," said Bosworth, yawning. "But I saw her out."

"You mean you saw her come in?"

"No. I was down the island a way in my car. I saw her in the bay, running south pretty fast."

"I wish our short-wave sets weren't sealed," I said, angrily. "I'd like to call the guard boat at the pass to ask if they saw her. Sure you didn't hear her come in?"

"No," Tim said from the walkway.

"Fact is, I was pretty boiled, and when I turned in I slept as if somebody had hit me with a caulking mallet. Why are you so upset? Any damage done?"

"I don't let anybody use my boat without permission," I said, climbing back on the walkway.

A slim, vivid figure came out of the clubhouse, stood for a moment on the terrace, then came down to meet us. It was Dinah. She was wearing a fluffy sweater of powder blue and abbreviated shorts of darker hue. She looked wonderful.

"Tony—is it true that Lee is missing?"

"Yes," I said. "But there's no breeze. He's probably just drifting around somewhere. Ham is hunting for him with three other boats. When they find him they'll tow him back."

We wandered along to Tim's ketch and went aboard. "A drink, Dinah?" Tim asked.

She shuddered. "The idea is repulsive."

Tim went into the cabin and returned with a highball. By its color I knew he had slugged it plenty. I thought again how good-looking he would be if he would let the stuff alone. Even the way he was, I didn't blame Di for letting him follow her around. Maybe she was sorry for him. You can never tell how a woman will feel about any given subject—or man.

I had only to glance into a mirror to know I would never win any beauty contests. My shoulders are pretty good and my stomach is flat, but my nose is too big. And in my last year at Princeton a hockey puck had put a dent in the right side of my jaw.

We sat in wicker chairs in Tim's cockpit, waiting for Ham and the others to return. Di looked tired and distraught. There were deep shadows under her eyes and her mouth was turned down at the corners.

"You could use some sleep, Di," I said. I wanted to ask her where she had gone after leaving the club. Instead, I asked, "What time did you turn in?"

"Much too late," she said, and let it go that way.

It was perhaps an hour later that the steward hurried down to tell me that Ham Rogers wanted me on the ship-to-shore. Di started violently. I did not meet her level glance as I left the cockpit. I took the call in my office, with the door closed.

"Tony," said Ham, through the static, "we've found Maury's Snipe. She was capsized and drifting north in the Stream. But there's no sign of Maury."

"Capsized? How far off shore?"

"About six miles. Too far to swim, if that's what you mean."

I thought swiftly. There had been no squalls during the night.

"Are her sails up, Ham?"

"Yes. We can't imagine why she turned over. We're bailing her out and towing her back in. But look, Tony, the crew of the guard boat said you were out last night in the *Restless*."

"I wasn't," I snapped.

"The *Restless* was. They saw her."

"Did they stop her to see who was aboard?"

"No," Ham admitted in a disgusted voice, "and I'm putting the whole crew on report for it. They recognized your boat and were so sure it was you that they didn't bother to challenge her."

"How long was she outside?" I asked.

"About an hour, they say. Well, we'll be back before long."

I put down the phone. I looked up and there were Dinah and Tim standing just inside the door, staring at me with wide-open eyes.

"Did they find him?" Di asked.

"Not yet," I said, trying to sound cheerful. "But they will, all right."

"You said his boat was capsized," Tim said accusingly.

"It was. But Lee knew enough to stay with the Snipe until some passing boat, perhaps a shrimper or a patrol boat, picked him up. You wait and see."

"No," said Dinah in a breaking voice. "I have a feeling."

She turned and walked swiftly out of the room. Tim ambled along after her. I sat for a moment, looking somberly at the phone. Di was taking this harder than I should have expected. Perhaps she had really been in love with him.

I picked up the phone and, just to keep the record straight, called the sheriff's office and told him what had happened.

"Any chance he has been picked up?" asked Sheriff McDonald.

"A chance, Poot, but we should have heard by now."

"Well," said Poot McDonald, in his soft Southern drawl, "if you had to lose a member you could spare him better than most."

"It's bad for boating," I said, and hung up.

CHAPTER TWO

The Poot and the Puss

LATE that afternoon the Coast Guard found Lee Maury. His body had drifted into the Gulf Stream and was nearly five miles north of the spot where they had found his boat. There was a bullet hole drilled neatly between his eyes.

It was Sheriff McDonald who told me. He came to the club, knowing I was usually there between five and six. As always, he took off his shabby felt hat the instant he entered the clubhouse. In the opinion of most people, Poot was no more fitted to be sheriff than he was to be the Angel Gabriel. He had been a deputy for a dozen years, serving summonses, investigating cutting scrapes in the slum section and closing jukes when they got too noisy. But somehow there had occurred one of the periodic upheavals in county politics and Poot, to his own complete astonishment, found himself sheriff. He sat down on the edge of a chair and twirled his black hat around one stubby forefinger.

"Commodore," he said mildly, "we got Mr. Maury's body at the undertaker's. He's shot spang through the head. At close range, too. You can see the powder marks."

I stared incredulously. "You mean he killed himself?"

"Could be," Poot admitted cautiously. "But about the only way you can be sure a man kills himself is to watch him do it. Know any reason he'd want to do a thing like that?"

"I imagine his brokerage business was about to fold. He hasn't done much business since that trouble last year."

"I wasn't sheriff then, and I never was up much on those things. Was it pretty raw?"

"Very. His clients lent him money to invest for them in a discretionary pool. Some of the early birds got dividends of ten percent a month, but they were only the shills. They boasted about it and others flocked in. Then there was a break in the market and Maury announced that the pool had been wiped out. He was *so* sorry! Some of the suckers went out after him, and if F. Wellington Barton had not showed the jury that Maury's printed agreement with the losers protected him against bad judgment and practically everything but hurricanes and flat feet, he'd be doing time now. It was all there, in very small type, that nobody had bothered to read."

"That wouldn't be exactly healthy for him—in many ways," Poot mused. "You think he had about run out of money?"

"And about out of friends, too," I agreed.

Poot was silent for a moment, while I tried to get used to knowing that Lee Maury, who had been alive last night, was dead now. It didn't seem to matter a great deal, somehow—except for others who might be hurt.

Poot's round face was sober as his china-blue eyes looked into mine. "Seen Mrs. Corbin around today?"

I blinked. "You don't miss much, do you, Poot?"

"More'n I should," he said glumly.

"But they elected me sheriff and I got to do my sorry best. Mrs. Corbin called up the Bay View Inn about dinner time last night and reserved a room, but she never took it. Little while ago I called Mr. Corbin and asked him did he know where his wife was. He said he didn't, and was glad of it, and hung up."

I gripped the edge of my desk. I knew she had been something less than madly in love with Allan Corbin for a long time, especially since Lee Maury had been giving her a rush, but I didn't know it had come to this. I sparred for time.

"Why are you interested in Haida Corbin, Poot?" I asked.

"Well, they been chasing around together, and there was that slapping business last night."

"How did you hear about that?"

"In my business, you got to hear things," Poot said, matter-of-factly. "Why did Mrs. Corbin slap Miss Deering?"

"I wish I knew," I said earnestly.

"So do I. I'm fixing to ask her." He shifted his large feet uncomfortably. "Let's you and me go see Mr. Corbin."

"No. He isn't exactly fond of me."

"No?" Poot acted surprised. "Why not?"

I felt the blood going to my cheeks. "Well, I used to be crazy about his wife. That is, of course, before he married her."

"Yeah, I remember," said Poot, to my amazement. "Same time, might be you could help me. Come on."

There was a velvet compulsion in his voice which somehow pulled me to my feet. There was a crowd in the Cockpit Bar. Poot and I escaped by the side door. In silence we drove north on Bay Road.

ALLAN CORBIN'S cottage, a rather showy place in the modern manner, was at the water's edge, overlooking Pelican Bay. The maid showed us into the living room whose huge picture window framed a breathtaking view of water and sky.

Allan Corbin came in, big and powerful and bad-tempered. His body bulked his tweeds, which looked as if he had slept in them. He glowered at us, making no effort to be polite.

"Mr. Corbin," Poot asked without preamble, "do you know where your wife is now?"

"I told you on the phone that I didn't, and don't want to." Corbin's voice was almost a snarl. "Since when is it a matter for the sheriff when a man's wife leaves him?"

So there it was. Haida *had* left him. And I thought, with something like surprise, that eventually she probably would have left any man. Even Lee Maury—if he had lived.

"Have you heard about Mr. Maury?" Poot asked.

"He's probably in New York by now," said Allan. "He's sure finished in this town."

Poot appeared to be thinking this over. Allan's hulking form swung away from us. He stood at the window, watching Ham Rogers' cruiser going north in the channel. Idly I speculated on the makeup of Ham's crew, but his boat was too far out for me to see.

"Mr. Maury is dead, Mr. Corbin," Poot said mildly.

Allan spun around, moving swiftly for so huge a man.

"Say that again!"

"Looks like somebody threw down on him and blasted him plumb between the eyes," Poot said.

Now Allan had his blocky face all set. It didn't show a thing. "Well," he said at last, "let's be conventional if we die for it. It is a loss. I knew him very, very well."

"It's no loss to you," said Poot, his voice faintly irritable.

Suddenly Allan's expression broke. His lips thinned and the lids fell over his hard grey eyes.

"Okay, listen, then," he said in a rush of words. "It will come out—some of it, anyway—so I may as well tell you now. At noon yesterday my wife called me and asked me to come right home from my office. I did. Lee was here. Haida announced that she and he were in love. Imagine, telling me that when everybody in town has been laughing at me for months! She wanted me to give her a divorce so she could marry him. She was rather—unpleasantly dramatic about it!"

His voice trailed away. It is not a pretty sight, that of a man tearing himself to bits before your eyes. I wished I hadn't come. I had never liked Allan Corbin and I didn't like him now, but I was definitely not enjoying this.

"So then?" the sheriff asked gently.

Alan took a full breath. "I told them they had no reason to feel sorry for me. There's never been a minute, since the first month of our married life, when Haida couldn't have had a divorce any time she wished. I just stood there laughing at them, because they were so surprised. Lee Maury's jaw dropped down to here. I said, 'Maury, you ought to see what Haida looks like before breakfast. And you ought to hear the way she talks when she can't have her own way. And you ought to see what this house looks like on the maid's day off.'

"Then I said, 'Maury, for your own protection, you ought to take Haida away—say to some nice quiet place like a fishing camp, where maybe she'll be a little bored. Spend two weeks there, just a little longer than she wants to stay. Then, if you'll marry her, I'll give you all your honeymoon expenses for a wedding present and—'

"Allan," I cut in, "are you deliberately making yourself more of a stinker than you really are or—"

He snapped, giving me an ugly look, "With Haida any man's a stinker—if he's a man. You should know."

I took a couple of fast steps forward, but

Poot McDonald, despite his bulk, was very fast—enough to get between us. The hot anger died in me, leaving a slow, cold rage. I wondered if that was because Corbin had found how not to be hurt by Haida. I went back and stood near the door.

"Mr. Corbin," Poot said, "how did Mr. Maury act when you talked like that?"

"Ever stick a pin in a circus balloon?"

Allan grinned with very real satisfaction. "He couldn't seem to think of anything to say. So I offered to help Haida with her packing if she was in a hurry to get out. She and Maury got pretty sore about that—I guess they wanted me to rant and rave—so I got out of here and went back to the office. The maid says Haida packed her overnight bag and said she'd send for the rest of her things in a couple of days."

"Have you seen her since?" Poot asked thoughtfully.

"No."

There was a long, uncomfortable silence. Then Poot asked, "Been doing much skeet shooting lately, Mr. Corbin? As I remember, you used to be a pretty fair shot."

Allan looked straight at him. "Don't keep on just beating your gums, McDonald," he said. "Come right out with it. Did I kill Lee Maury? No, I did not. Now are you through?"

"Almost," said Poot, not taking offense. "You might tell me what you did last night between, say, twelve-thirty and four."

"Except for about half an hour," Allan replied, "I was right here. About midnight somebody phoned me from the club, asking me to come after Haida because she was plastered. I didn't. But a couple of hours later I wandered over there just to see what was going on. She had gone. I went down to the Snipe slips to see if she and Maury were there. They weren't. So I came home and turned in."

"Anyone see you here?" Poot asked. "Your maid, for instance."

"No. The maid sleeps out. You'll have to take my word for it."

Poot nodded and turned toward me. At the door he swung back to Allan. "Mr. Corbin," he said tonelessly, "you wouldn't be thinking of leaving town in the next few days, would you?"

"I don't know," said Allan, shortly. "Why?"

"I'd just as soon you wouldn't," Poot said.

"LET'S drive to Mr. Maury's house," Poot suggested when I had started my car, "and have a little look around." "Poot, do you think Allan killed Lee?" I asked.

"Who'd have a better reason?"

"I've been thinking about Haida," I said. "With a man like Corbin, money might be a better reason. And there he'd have to stand in line to take his turn at killing Lee."

"Money could be a motive, all right," Poot admitted. Then he said, "Slow down, will you?"

I took my foot from the pedal and looked at him.

"Just how fond of Mrs. Corbin did you use to be?" he asked.

He made no effort to hurry my answer. He just sat there, waiting for me to speak.

"I don't think I was really in love with her," I said, choosing my words carefully. "But before I went into the Navy I liked her a lot."

"Remember seeing you two in that yellow roadster you had," said Poot. "She was Haida Williams then, and just about the prettiest girl in town. But wild. She was always wild."

"We had an argument," I went on, "and then I signed up for the Navy. A month later I got an announcement saying she had married Allan."

"I hate to ask you this," Poot said, "but have you been seeing much of her since you came back?"

"Never on purpose," I said promptly. "There was nothing left there for me."

He nodded moodily. Despite the slow-

ness of our pace we had almost reached the southern tip of the island. The houses were widely separated here. Lee Maury's place was at the very end. From his porch you could have thrown a coquina shell into the Atlantic, or into the bay, or into Buccaneer Pass, so narrow was the key at the point.

"That," said Poot in an odd voice, "is funny."

I followed the line of his eyes to Maury's house. A thin thread of smoke was rising from the chimney. Instinctively I stamped on the accelerator. Then, as I recognized a grey convertible at the curb, I slowed down.

"Poot," I said lamely, "there's something I have to do at the club. Let's come back here later."

Poot just looked at me, so I knew it was no use. I pulled up behind the grey car. Poot led the way to the house. He opened the door without knocking.

And there was Dinah, seated at Maury's desk, methodically going through his drawers, while in the fireplace a heap of charred papers smoked feebly. Dinah was so preoccupied that she had not heard us enter. She looked up and started violently. Then, slowly, tiredly, she rose.

"Hi, stupid," I said, trying to make my voice sound cheerful.

Poot walked slowly to the fireplace and stared down at the charred bits. A vagrant breeze sifted in from the open door. The burned papers stirred and collapsed into ashes. Poot turned toward Dinah, who was watching him with such a stricken expression that I wanted to put my arms around her and assure her that everything would be all right. But things were far from all right.

Poot's expression was not stern as he looked at her. He seemed to be regretful, merely, and troubled.

"You really shouldn't ought to have done this, Miss Deering," he said. "Have you heard that Mr. Maury—wouldn't be com-

ing back?" He regarded her with anxiety.

"Yes," said Di in a thin voice. "I heard it downtown."

"You were looking through his papers. Why?"

For a moment Dinah did not answer. She glanced at me and I tried frantically to think of something helpful. But my own thoughts were too confused. So Dinah's affair with Maury, I thought dismally, had turned out to be the sort of thing which left papers to be burned. I felt as if someone had kicked me in the stomach.

After quite a while Dinah said, "I'm not going to tell you why, Sheriff."

"She's upset now, Poot," I cut in. "Why don't you ask her these questions a little later?"

"If I knew what she was burning, or trying to find," said Poot, thinking his slow way along, "I might be able to make a better guess what happened to Mr. Maury."

"Don't you know what happened to him?" Di demanded. "Didn't he kill himself in his boat?"

"That's what they're saying," said Poot, not committing himself. "Well, we won't talk any more about the papers right now, but there is something I'd be proud to know, Miss Deering. Why did Mrs. Corbin slap you last night?"

Dinah's eyes became wider. "Is it any of your business why she slapped me?"

"In this case," Poot said quietly, "it might be."

"Well," said Dinah, making up her mind, "go ahead and put me in jail, if it's a crime to be slapped. See if the judge can make me tell him."

Poot tried a change in tactics. "When you left the club last night, where did you go?"

"I don't see that that's anybody's business, either," said Dinah. "But in this case I don't mind telling you. I went home."

"Straight home?"

Dinah hesitated.

"Listen, Dinah," I burst out. "This is pretty serious business. Lee Maury's dead. They don't know that it's suicide. Maybe you'd better not answer any more questions until you've talked to Barton."

"You—you mean it might be murder?" Dinah asked me, becoming very white.

"I doubt it, but it's possible," I said.

"Is F. Wellington Barton her lawyer?" Poot asked. I nodded and he said, "Why does she have *him*?"

"Well, why not?" I said. "He was her mother's lawyer. He was Maury's lawyer, and Corbin's, and Bosworth's and plenty of others, too."

"Is he yours?" Poot asked.

"I should say not."

"Miss Deering," Poot said mildly, "if you're in any kind of a jam you don't have to answer, but can't you tell me whether or not you went straight back to your apartment from the club?"

"I went first to Tony's," she said unexpectedly.

"You went to my place?" I said. "Why, darling?"

"I wanted to tell you something and I thought on account of what had happened you'd be going home right away."

"How long did you wait at the commodore's apartment?" Poot asked, after a quick glance at me.

"I didn't even go in. I rang the bell but nobody answered and his windows were all dark. So I just sat in my car and waited, but I guess he stayed at the club."

"Waited how long?" Poot persisted.

"I don't know. Maybe an hour."

"Di," I said, "what did you want to tell me?"

She shook her bright head. "I'm not in the mood to tell you now."

"Miss Deering," said Poot, "did anyone see you when you went to your own apartment? I mean, who could tell me just what time it was when you went in?"

"Tim Bosworth might."

"Where did Tim Bosworth come in?"

Poot looked at her sharply.

"He didn't come in. He had been sitting in the car with me, waiting for Tony to come home. He had been looking for me. When he didn't find me at home he drove around and found me in front of Tony's."

"What time was this?"

"Perhaps three-quarters of an hour after I left the club. He wanted to be sure I wasn't too upset about Haida's slapping me. He parked behind me and got into my car. We talked awhile. Then I said I was going home. He followed me, waiting until I had put my car in the garage and then drove away. So maybe he knows what time it was."

I felt terrible. Tim Bosworth had more sense than I had. Dinah had wanted to see me, but Tim had found her. I had not.

"Mr. McDonald," Dinah said, "may I go home now?"

"Of course," said Poot.

"I'll ride home with you," I offered. "Poot can drive my car back to the club."

"No, Tony," she said. "I want to go alone."

I followed her out to the car, but she closed the door right in my face. "Please, Tony," she said, so there was nothing to do but stand there and watch her drive away.

Back in the house I found Poot methodically going through Lee Maury's papers.

"Poot," I said bluntly, "you've decided that Maury was murdered. Do you think Miss Deering killed him?"

"I don't even know that he didn't kill himself." Poot's voice sounded almost as discouraged as mine. "No harm in finding out as much as I can, is there?"

He drew the telephone stand toward him and dialed his office. "Chick," he said after a moment, "anyone located Mrs. Corbin yet? . . . Finished checking at the depot and the bus station? . . . Well, if you've finished the hotels, try the boarding houses and tourist camps."

He replaced the instrument, then turned to me, his eyes deeply troubled.

"Commodore," he said, "you probably got things to do. I'm going to stay here a while. And see can you find out why Mrs. Corbin slapped Miss Deering. I got a feeling that's important."

"I'll try," I said, without conviction.

I drove straight to Dinah's apartment and hammered at her door until I heard her shaky voice through the panel.

"Tony, go away," she begged. "I—I'm taking a bath."

"I'll wait," I said, grimly.

"No, please. I'll see you tomorrow. Honest, I will, Tony."

I knew Dinah. I left, feeling very helpless and confused about everything.

CHAPTER THREE

The Missing Gun

IT WAS not until afternoon of the next day that the Coast Guard found Haida's body. Poot, it appeared, had asked them to continue the search, just in case.

I had put in one of the most unpleasant mornings of my life. I had tried to call Dinah, but there was no answer. About ten-thirty I called Poot. His gloomy voice informed me that his deputies were still combing the town for Haida, but had found no trace of her.

I went over to the club. Henry, the steward, told me that Dinah and young Bosworth had been around during the morning. Poot had been around, too. I went into my office, pulled out the latest report from the treasurer and tried to pin my mind to its prosaic figures. But I kept wondering whether Lee had killed himself, and where Haida was now, and why she had slapped Dinah, and why a guy like Lee should have any papers that Dinah had felt forced to burn.

I was lunching from a tray on my desk when the telephone rang. It was Mrs. F. Wellington Barton. She asked, smugly, what the board was doing about the Cor-

bins. I was tempted to counter this by asking her what the Bar Association was doing about her husband. But even as that flip retort flashed through my mind it was wiped out by a sinister memory. The charges against Barton had been filed by Lee Maury, who was dead, perhaps murdered.

So I heard my own voice saying, "We don't have to do anything about them, Margot. Before me now is a letter from Allan Corbin, resigning from the club."

There was a silence at the other end of the line. I could picture Margot Barton sitting there, white with disappointment. She had always hated Haida and would have loved to hear details of a board meeting at which Allan Corbin had been asked for his resignation. Margot was a strange woman. Tall, thin as a knotted rope, she was said to be the driving force behind her husband and, according to many, the reason for his ethics having stripped their gears in the last few years.

"So Allan has resigned," she said, her voice spuriously pleased. "How wise he was! Tell me, Tony, why did Haida slap Dinah?"

"The way I get it, Margot," I said in a low, confidential whisper, "she didn't like Dinah's hair parted on the side."

Feeling a little better, I hung up. Instantly the phone rang again.

"This is Poot McDonald, Commodore," said a drawling voice. "We got ourselves a smart jag of trouble. They just brought Mrs. Corbin's body in. Somebody shoved a gun against her forehead and let her have it."

For a moment the office rocked around me. "It must have been murder and suicide, Poot," I said dully.

"Then Mr. Maury must have shot her before he killed himself. When women commit suicide they hardly ever mess their faces up like that. I wish I knew what tipped that sailboat over. There was almost no wind that night. I'll be coming over in

a few minutes." And the wire went dead.

I don't know how long I had been sitting there, just staring at nothing, when Dinah hurried in. She was wearing blue overalls made of sailcloth. I was getting used to her pallor.

"Tony," she burst out, "come down to the slips with me. I want to show you something." Then she took a second look at me. I guess my face looked pretty awful. "What's the matter?"

I said, "You'll be hearing it pretty soon, so I'll tell you. They've found Haida. Dead. Shot."

Dinah stared at me incredulously. Well, I didn't believe it myself, yet.

"That's just too terrible, Tony," she whispered. Then: "Listen, Tony, you've got to come with me. Right now. This minute."

The urgency of her voice got through to me. We went out the side door, circled the building and headed down toward the slips. I hardly noticed where we were going. I was still trying to adjust my mind to the thought that vivid, stormy, unpredictable Haida, whom I had once thought I loved, was dead, murdered. She had been born to trouble—a beautiful, tempestuous girl who, in dying, was leaving plenty of trouble behind her.

Following Dinah toward the slips, some gossip tie-up I had heard about F. Wellington Barton's troubles with the Bar Association intruded into my mind. Once Barton had kept Lee Maury out of jail, but of late the two had spoken only when necessary and then with obvious reserve. Could it be that with Lee dead there would be nobody to press the charges of unethical conduct before the grievance committee of the association?

Thinking of this, I almost bumped into Dinah, who had come to a stop alongside the *Restless*.

"Look," she whispered, after a quick glance all around us. She pointed down at the smooth planking of my cruiser. There,

about a foot above the water line and a little aft of the bow, was a ground-in streak of blue paint six or eight inches long. "Tony," said Dinah, "I saw the sheriff looking at that scratch this morning. And that isn't all. The—"

I didn't wait for more. I hurried past the bigger boats and the Coast Guard fleet to the Snipe slips, where our colorful squadron of twenty-four little racing sloops lay at their lines. Among them were two blue ones, but only Maury's, which had been tied up pending final disposition, was wearing that special shade called Bimini blue.

"See that?" murmured Di at my shoulder. "There, just under the shrouds."

I saw it, all right. Along the rubbing rail was a scraped place on the half-round, lightly dusted with white paint. Like the scratched plank on my boat, it was about a foot above the water. My eyes went from that to the ugly black stain in the painted canvas of the deck—the stain which no amount of scrubbing had removed. I shuddered.

"Tony," Di said in a choked voice, "where's your automatic? The one you kill sharks with?"

"In its holster against the bulkhead, where it always is."

"But it isn't, Tony!" she wailed. "I know where you hide the key to your cabin, so I looked. It isn't there."

I was no longer inattentive. I was beginning to get it. I moved hurriedly back to the *Restless*, dropped into the cockpit. I got the key and unlocked my cabin door. My holster, hanging beside the fire extinguisher, was empty.

"Hello, Poot," Dinah called with extraordinary calm.

I CLIMBED out of the cabin. The sheriff was above us on the walkway, a shabby, undistinguished figure, obviously ill at ease. "Come on aboard, Poot," I called. "I want to talk to you."

Awkwardly he scrambled down.

"I hear you were looking at that blue scratch on my boat," I said at once. "Where did you hear about it?"

"Yeah, I was. Somebody phoned me. A woman."

"What woman?" Dinah flared.

"I don't rightly know. She just said, 'Ask Commodore Seymore about the scratch on his boat that matches the one on Mr. Maury's Snipe.' Then she hung up. Being a dial phone, I couldn't trace the call. Well, what about the scratch, Commodore?"

"This boat bumped into the Snipe," I said grimly. "But when, or where, I haven't the slightest idea."

Poot sighed in a discouraged way. "This," he said, "is purely a mess. I ought to send down to Miami for one of those regular detectives, but it would cost the county plenty." He looked uncertainly at Dinah. "How would it be, Commodore," he added, "for you and me to have a little talk?"

Di did not move. She had that stubborn look on her face.

"Scram, Di," I said. "The sheriff wants to talk to me."

For a moment I thought she would refuse. Then she began to climb out of the cockpit.

"Miss Deering," Poot called after her, "before you go messing around with any more of Mr. Maury's things, consult your lawyer, will you?"

"I've already consulted him," said Di, and moved away.

"Poot," I said, "did you tell Allan Corbin about his wife being found?"

"Yeah."

"Did he act surprised?"

"I couldn't rightly tell. He just looked at me and asked where she was and when could he see her."

We heard Dinah's rope-soled feet returning along the walkway above. "Sheriff," she called down, "what was Haida wearing when she was found?"

"Short pants and—you know—a green thing that didn't quite meet at the waistband."

"A halter. That's one of the sailing costumes she kept in her locker. Have you looked there for the long turquoise gown she was wearing that night?"

"It wasn't there," Poot said.

"It should be," Di mused. "She must have changed in the locker room when she got the idea of going for a sail."

"Mr. Barton," Poot said, "told me he walked her around a while on the terrace. He wanted to take her home, but she wouldn't go. She went into the powder room and he waited for her nearly an hour. Then he asked the maid where she was. She must've snuck out the side door."

Dinah turned away without a word. We heard her walking rapidly along the boards toward the clubhouse.

"Poot," I said, "have you heard anything about the charges against Barton before the Bar Association?"

"Who hasn't?" Poot replied dryly. "I hope they get him, too. I have a lot to do with lawyers, and sort of know their ways. But that Mr. Barton! Ever hear him make a speech?"

"Too often."

"I hear tell that he practices every one of them for hours before a mirror, gestures and all—" Poot removed his shabby felt hat and scratched his balding head. "Some-day I'll talk myself out of office," he said ruefully, "but I purely hate a hypocrite."

"Look, Poot," I said abruptly. "That scratch on this boat isn't all that worries me. Somebody borrowed her Saturday night and stole the forty-five I used to kill sharks, sometimes, when they foul my fishing lines."

"Nobody stole it," Poot said calmly. "I borrowed it."

Relief and indignation swept over me in alternate waves. "If you wanted it," I snapped, "why didn't you ask for it?"

"If you'd been around this morning I

would've," he replied, easily. "When I heard from that woman this morning about the scratch on this boat, I had to see it. It appeared pretty plain that she was in on the deal somewhere, so you can't rightly blame me if, while I was here, I sort of looked her over. I wouldn't depend too much on that padlock, Commodore. I picked it with a little hunk of bent wire."

"And took my gun," I added, still pretty sore.

"Yeah," he said mildly, "when I found that two shots had been fired from it. . . ."

I SUPPOSE it had been in the back of my mind that my gun had been used for murder ever since Dinah had told me it was missing. Nevertheless, it was a shock to hear the sheriff say it.

"Commodore," he said without emphasis, "did anyone have an extra key to your cabin?"

"No, but look." I took the tiny key,

went to the starboard side of the cockpit and slipped it into the beading of the drop curtain. "That's where I keep it. I'm a fool for losing keys. This one fits the door and the ignition as well."

"Kind of careless with it, aren't you?"

"There's never been any stealing around here."

Poot said gloomily, "Thing is, there's no telling who'll commit a murder. You or I might, if we got pushed too far. . . . Of the folks who might know you keep the key hidden there, how many could run this boat?"

"Most of them. The controls are standardized."

"Could Mr. Corbin?"

"Yes, and so could Barton, and Bosworth and—"

"Could Miss Deering?"

"Certainly, and so could Margot Barton."

"Did most of those people lose money on



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that phoney pool racket of Mr. Maury's you told me about?"

"Barton didn't. He drew up all the papers. He made a fat fee out of it. Dinah Deering didn't, either. What little money her mother left her is tied up in a trust fund."

"Did you lose any, Commodore?"

"No. I saw the play coming up. I tried to persuade a lot of them not to go into the deal."

"I can look up the whole thing in the records," said Poot. "Commodore, I'm obliged to ask you something. What were you doing last night after midnight?"

I knew this wasn't going to sound too good, and when I told him how I had dozed off in my car and spent most of the night there, it didn't sound even as good as I had hoped.

"Happen to drive in anywhere for a hot dog, or see anyone you knew?" Poot asked, unhappily.

"No."

"What time did you go to bed?"

"About four-thirty."

"Could you prove it?"

"No."

Poot looked at me reproachfully. "I wish you could help me more. If I were a real detective, now, I'd have a right to be suspicious of you."

"Well, are you?"

"Not much, yet, but I might be before this mess is all cleared up. Here's a funny thing—plenty of folks saw Mr. Maury in that boat, but nobody saw a woman. Might be Mrs. Corbin just ducked her head under the gunwale, time and again, so's they couldn't see her."

"Easy to do."

"The guard boat at the pass saw a man at the helm when he tacked out and Al Royal, the commercial fisherman, was coming in with a load of mullet and snapper. He passed the Snipe and waved to the man, but he says he saw no hide nor hair of a woman."

"Did he see the *Restless*?" I asked.

"Yeah, but not close enough to see who was at the wheel. Might've been you, he says, or might've been anybody."

"It was someone else," I said flatly.

"You done told me," he replied, not looking at me.

"Well, what are you getting at—that Haida didn't go out with Lee in his Snipe?"

"I'm sort of turning it over in my mind."

"But she was found at sea."

"Might be she's the one who borrowed your boat to go out and find Mr. Maury, seeing as she had an argument with him that evening."

"So she took my gun and shot him and then killed herself. Then who brought my boat back and tied her up?"

"She didn't shoot herself," said Poot, with conviction. "Maybe she got someone to go out there with her in this boat. He—or she—shot both Mrs. Corbin and Mr. Maury, then brought the boat back."

"There was no blood on this boat," I said, "nor any sign that any has been washed off. What about fingerprints?"

"Commodore," said Poot sadly, "your gun had been wiped off, and so had the steering wheel. And by the looks of your cockpit, I'll probably find the prints of half the members of the club. Let's go on up."

WE WALKED toward the big sprawling building. There was already quite a crowd in the Cockpit Bar. They had come to savor all the bad news, I guessed. Ham Rogers was sitting glumly with three other uniformed men at a corner table. Tim Bosworth was leaning on the bar, a highball glass in his hand. F. Wellington Barton was surrounded by half a dozen listeners and was talking in his best courtroom manner. He tried to flag us to the bar, but I wasn't having any, and neither was Poot. Barton left his group and hurried after us.

"Isn't this frightful, Spencer," he said, catching us at my office door, "this news

about Haida? It seems incredible."

To my astonishment, Poot stopped just inside the threshold and faced Barton squarely.

"Mr. Barton," he said with a crispness which was new to me, "I'd like to know where you were after midnight Saturday night."

For a moment Barton was thrown for a loss, but he recovered himself with agility, stepped into my office and closed the door behind him.

"Am I a suspect, Sheriff?" he asked, smiling indulgently.

"Among others," said Poot, not giving ground. "You haven't answered my question."

Barton's smile grew chill. "McDonald, did you ever hear that the governor could remove a sheriff from office?" he asked.

"Yeah," said Poot, "and did you ever hear that upon recommendation of the Bar Association a lawyer could be disbarred?"

A spot of color mottled Barton's cheekbones. "Sheriff," he said softly, "you are sticking your neck out."

"It's stuck out a mile already," Poot said, unabashed. "Who preferred those charges against you with the Grievance Committee?"

"I suppose," said Barton, "that you have access to the records."

"I can find out right now on the telephone," Poot said. "But I thought you could save me time."

Barton made up his mind. "Well," he said easily, "the whole unfortunate business was a misunderstanding which, had Maury lived, would have been expunged at the next meeting of the committee. A tempest in a teapot."

"So Mr. Maury filed the charges," Poot said, watching him.

"Yes, and it was most unfortunate for me that he didn't live to withdraw them this week."

"Anybody but you know he was going to withdraw them?"

"I wouldn't know," said Barton with a shrug.

"What kind of charges were they?"

"Allan Corbin and some of the others were trying to collect from Maury some of the money they had lost in the discretionary pool. I arbitrated the matter and was just about to make a friendly settlement when something made Maury think I was double-crossing him, and he lost his head."

"Arbitrate? You mean you represented both sides? Did they know that?"

"Naturally," said Barton, just a shade too heartily, I thought.

"Did you collect fees from both sides?"

"I intended to collect half my usual fee from both sides."

"So?" Poot murmured skeptically. "But now, without Mr. Maury to press the charges, the case will blow up, eh?"

"A most unsatisfactory way for it to end," Barton assured him, warmly. "It would have been much better if Lee had lived to withdraw them voluntarily."

"If he was going to withdraw them," Poot said.

"You doubt my word?" Barton snapped.

"W-e-l-l," Poot drawled—and left it hanging. "Let's drive in a brass tack or two. You ready now to tell me what you did Saturday night?"

"I don't have to, but I will," said Barton. "I got in about six hours of sleep. Haida pulled a fast one. She went into the powder room and I waited nearly an hour for her to come out."

"And you sent the maid to find her," Poot added, "and Mrs. Corbin had gone out the side door."

Barton's bushy eyebrows twitched upward. "Been doing some checking, I see. Well, congratulations. To go on, there was no use in sticking around, so I went straight home."

"With your wife?"

"Alone. Mrs. Barton was a little upset because I had not returned to our table in

all that time. So she left the club in a cab. I went home in our car."

"I suppose," said Poot, "she can testify that you got home a little later and were there all night?"

"I'll ask her," Barton said calmly. "When I got home the door of her room was closed. I went directly to my room and turned in. I can't even be sure she heard me come into the house." He bent a sultry stare upon the sheriff. "I find myself a little bored with all this, McDonald. If you wish to subpoena me, or arrest me, you know where to find me."

He turned and strode out.

"You've made an enemy, Poot," I said.

"I guess so," Poot said glumly. "And the trouble is, he does have some political influence. I bet you two bits that he calls Tallahassee on the phone and complains to the governor. Ring for the steward, will you, Commodore?"

I pushed the buzzer. Henry, the chief steward, answered promptly.

"Hiyuh, Hank," Poot said as I was about to introduce them. "Did you happen to see Mrs. Corbin's husband around here Saturday night?"

"Yes, sir. He came in about two o'clock looking for his wife."

"How'd he act? Ornerly?"

"Pretty mad, sir. When he couldn't find her, he went out the terrace door. We didn't see him again."

"Now," I said with satisfaction, "we're getting somewhere."

Poot looked at me speculatively. "But maybe not where we want to go. Okay, Hank, that's all." When Henry had withdrawn, Poot resumed his twirling of his black felt hat. "What I ought to do," he declared irritably, "is to arrest all the members of this club and throw them in separate cells in the jailhouse. Come about the day after tomorrow they'd be begging to tell the whole story. Look at the way it is now: Mr. Barton killed Mr. Maury so Mr. Maury couldn't press the charges which would

disbar him. You killed Mr. Maury because you're still brooding on account of he took Mrs. Corbin away from you—"

"He didn't take her away from me!" I flamed. "If he took her away from anybody it was from her husband, Allan Corbin."

"All right, all right. Mr. Corbin killed him, then. And young Mr. Bosworth killed him because he couldn't get back the money he lost in that pool racket. Mrs. Barton killed him because she was afraid with her husband's practice gone, and him disgraced, she'd be down to living on grits and side meat. Miss Deering killed him because he had something on her and—"

"What could Lee have on anyone like Dinah?" I demanded.

"I wish I knew," said Poot, simply. "But why was she trying to find some of his papers and burn them?"

"You haven't a motive in the lot that wouldn't be laughed out of court," I declared.

"I got the makings," he said confidently.

CHAPTER FOUR

Dressed To Kill

MONDAY is usually the slowest day of the week in the bar and restaurant of the yacht club. But not this Monday. Practically everybody was there for dinner, and we were forced to put on three extra waiters.

"Next time business falls off," said the chairman of the house committee, "just remember the formula. Have a couple of murders."

"Stop talking like that!" said a low voice behind me.

I turned and my spirits lifted. Dinah was beautiful in a simple white sports dress, and all the lights in the room seemed to focus on her honey-colored head. But her blue eyes were darker than usual and her mouth looked drawn and anxious.

"Does Poot know yet who killed them?" she whispered.

"No. Listen, Di. If you'd just tell him what Haida meant when she said, 'I've just heard,' it would—or might—help a lot. Or if you'd tell what papers you were looking for in Maury's desk—"

"No, Tony," she said. "I'd have told you Saturday night if I'd had the chance. But not now."

"I tried to find you Saturday night," I said. "I hurried after you, but you weren't at home."

There was no chance to say more because the Bosworth boy barged up. "Commodore," he said, an undertone of excitement in his voice, "why didn't you stay away tonight?"

"Why should I?"

"Haven't you heard? They're saying the sheriff is going to arrest you."

"Who's saying it?" I asked him.

"Well, I was just passing Margot Barton's table. She was telling somebody."

"A murderer," I said, "is supposed to have a motive. Did you hear what mine was?"

"Oh, everybody knows that," Tim said, swishing the ice around in his glass. "Jealousy. Weren't you just waiting for Haida to get tired of Lee Maury so she'd come back to you?" He looked at me, then backed hastily away. "Don't get sore at me, Commodore. I was only passing along what I'd heard."

I counted up to ten. By that time the blood had stopped pounding at my wrists and in my temples. "Come into my office," I said, "and we'll talk this out. Di, you come along, too."

I led the way through the restaurant and put the noise and confusion behind us. I opened my office door and saw Poot McDonald sitting at my desk, staring thoughtfully at an overnight case of red leather.

"Don't wait for an invitation, Poot," I snapped. "Just consider this office your own."

"I didn't think you'd mind," he said in a hurt voice. "The steward gave me this bag and I wanted to look it over."

"That's Haida's overnight case!" Dinah burst out.

"Yeah, I know," said Poot. "I got to thinking it had to be somewhere, so we finally found it away back on top of that closet you use for cleaning things." He jabbed at the contents with his stubby forefinger. "She didn't plan to go very far with it. Here's that blue evening dress Miss Deering said she'd been wearing, and a green dress, all folded careful-like, and a lot of makeup stuff, and—" Poot blushed—"and a right smart jag of pink silk things."

"She did change in the locker room, then," Di said slowly. "She put on her sailing things and planned to put on that green outfit when she came back, so she'd look all right in the morning."

"How did she know Lee would take her sailing?" I demanded. "They'd been having an argument and he walked out on her."

"She probably just talked him into taking her," Di said. "You know, to make up, or something. She—" Suddenly Di's words broke off. She drew a long breath and her eyes expanded. "Poot," she cried excitedly, "I've just thought of something. Remember a woman called you up to tell you about the scratch on the *Restless* that would prove she bumped into Lee's Snipe?"

"Yeah, I remember," said Poot, watching her closely.

"Would you recognize that voice if you heard it again on the phone?"

"I reckon so," said the sheriff, his eyes gleaming.

Dinah reached for the phone. The Buccaneer Yacht Club is not large enough to need a switchboard. We have three outside lines, one in the kitchen, one in the steward's office, and this one on my desk. Dinah's finger shook as she dialed the steward's number.

"Henry?" she said in a moment. "This is Miss Deering. Mrs. Barton is in the bar."

Ask her to come to the phone, please, but don't tell her who's calling."

She handed the receiver to Poot. An in-state later he spoke into the phone. "Mrs. Barton? Howdy, this is Sheriff McDonald. . . . Yes, we're making progress, Mrs. Barton. . . . Yes." Almost imperceptibly he nodded to Dinah. "I just wanted to thank you, Mrs. Barton, for calling my attention to the scratch on the commodore's boat. Oh, you just happened to notice it, did you? . . . No, we're not arresting him tonight. . . . No, I don't know. . . . Good-by."

BEFORE I realized what I was doing I was on my feet and halfway to the door.

"Commodore!" Poot called. "You fixing to spoil everything? We're doing fine. Just relax, will you?"

"So we're doing fine, are we?" I said. "Okay, then name the murderer."

"I got a feeling that I'm just fixing to do that," said Poot. "But I'd be proud to know why Mrs. Barton had to tell me about that scratch."

"A red herring," said Tim Bosworth. "It took you off her husband's trail."

"Did it?" Poot said, looking at him thoughtfully. "Mr. Bosworth, you tried to get your money back, or leastways, some of it, when that pool thing Mr. Maury was running went busted, didn't you?"

"I'll say! But with Barton representing me, a fine chance I had!"

"When you hired Mr. Barton did you know that he represented Mr. Maury, too?"

"Of course I didn't. But when I began to suspect it, he sang me some sweet song about arbitrating the matter and saving me a lot of dough. He'd only charge me half his fee, he said. I ran him off my boat and told him from then on I'd lick him every time he set foot aboard again."

"Who'd you tell about this?"

"Nobody," Bosworth said. "I didn't want to look like a damned fool."

"One more thing," said Poot, "and then

I've got to go. I never did get around to asking you what you did Saturday night after you left the club."

"I drove to Dinah's apartment. I must have left the club about a half hour after she did. I knew she'd be feeling low in her mind and I wanted to cheer her up. But she wasn't home. I thought she might have gone out with the commodore, so I drove over to his place. And there she was, sitting outside in her car. I parked behind her and got into her car. We sat there, talking and waiting for the commodore to come home. After a while she got sleepy, so I followed her to her apartment and then went on."

"Went on where?"

"I started back to my boat, but after Di went into the house I had a couple of drinks—I had a bottle in the car—and as I drove down Bay Road I suddenly realized that I was tighter than I thought. I wasn't driving any too well. So I pulled off the shoulder of the road, about a block this side of Corbin's house, to sober up a little."

"What time was it?"

"Maybe two, maybe three in the morning. I couldn't be too sure."

"All these people sitting around in their cars, and it pretty near sun-up, and a couple of murders going on," Poot said, sighing. "Next time there's a murder happening, God forbid, we'll know it on account of all the extra cars parked around. Look, Mr. Bosworth, I hear you saw the commodore's cruiser going by."

Tim shifted his feet uncomfortably. "I'm afraid I did," he murmured.

"Well," said Poot, an edge coming into his voice, "there was a good moon. Who was running the boat?"

"I—I couldn't be sure," Tim said, not looking at me. "His head was shadowed by the canopy over the cockpit."

"If you could see that," said Poot, "you could see the rest of his body—or most of it—as he stood there at the wheel. How was he dressed?"

I was astonished to find myself sitting

on the edge of my chair. Tension had suddenly come into the room. Di was as white as death. Tim was looking everywhere but at me. Poot's voice, maddeningly calm, bored into that electric silence.

"Tell me what you could see, Mr. Bosworth."

"He—he had on a dark coat, or sweater, either blue or black or dark brown, and white slacks," Tim faltered.

Instantly my mind raced back. F. Wellington Barton had been wearing a double-breasted white suit that night. Tim Bosworth was wearing a white coat and dark trousers. Corbin had on a rumpled suit of light grey tropical worsted. My heart began to pound so hard that I thought the others must be able to hear it.

Poot was staring fixedly at the Bosworth boy. "You're sure about the dark coat or sweater and the white pants? This might be pretty important."

Tim licked dry lips. "I'm sorry," he croaked, "but I'm sure."

Poot looked at me. I nodded. Of the entire group we had been talking about, I was the only one who had been wearing a dark coat and white slacks that night.

"Tim!" Dinah burst out. "You promised!"

"Forget it, Tim," I said tiredly. "You had to tell what you saw."

"I know you didn't kill them, Commodore," he said apologetically. "Anyone could have gone home, put on that outfit and swiped your boat."

"It seems to me," Poot said, dry-voiced, "it's just about time you-all stopped trying to cover each other up."

"I haven't tried to cover up anything or anybody!" I flared.

"Remember when we were going to Mr. Maury's house?" he asked, coldly. "And you saw Miss Deering's car there, and you wanted to get me away so I wouldn't find her inside?" He turned his heavy head toward Dinah. "And didn't you ask Mr. Bosworth not to tell me about the dark

coat and white pants? You're not being frank with me even yet, Miss Deering, and we both know it."

"But Tony didn't kill them!" Dinah wailed. "It might even have been me, dressed up like that. Tim, could you have told whether it was a man or a woman?"

Wordlessly, Tim shook his head.

"I haven't said the commodore killed them, Miss Deering," Poot countered, "and I've known all along that it could have been a woman. The dark coat and white pants don't altogether change that."

"Well, if you've known all these things for so long," said Tim, regaining some of his composure, "why don't you fit them all together and arrest somebody?"

"Listen, Mr. Bosworth," said Poot, "I'm going to arrest somebody for these murders unless the governor removes me from office before I see the way it happened. I can almost see it now—"

"And can you almost see the murderer, too?" I snapped.

"Yeah," he said, "I almost can." He rose to his feet, slammed the cover of Haida's overnight case and flipped the fasteners. He started for the door. "I bid you good night," he said, politely, and left the office.

Dinah drew a long, shuddering breath. "Tony," she said in a very small voice, "would you mind driving me home?"

THE dial indicated that she had half a tank of gas, so I did not drive her straight home. It was pretty fine, having her alone in the car with me. Restful, after so much trouble. She sat back, with her long, slim legs under the panel, her slender body lounging tiredly in the deep upholstery, her bright head tipped against the cushions.

"Tony," she said after a very long time, "I've got to tell you something. I've been trying to tell you for ages, but somehow I've never been able to do it. I made up my mind Saturday night, and that's why I went

to your apartment, to tell you. But I've been so ashamed, Tony, so ashamed!" Then she came out with it, and her voice was so ragged I wasn't sure I heard her. "Tony, I am married to Maury!"

The car must have hit a bump, or something, but I straightened it out before it went off the road. I knew I had to say something and say it fast.

"You have your tenses mixed, darling," I said, and my voice sounded pretty good. "You may have been married to him, but you aren't any more, because he is dead."

"It—it happened just after I came home from college," she said in a dreary tone. "He was very attractive and he—well, I guess he sort of rushed me off my feet. I was a little flattered, I guess, because he was older and he remembered all the things girls like men to remember. You know, flowers almost every day and—and—"

"Honey," I said when her voice faltered, "why did it have to be a secret marriage?"

"He said he was in trouble with his investments and that he had a lot of enemies who were trying to ruin him. I don't know now what that had to do with eloping secretly, but he made it all sound very reasonable at the time. Anyway," she went on in a strained monotone, "we went to Everglades City so we could be married in Collier County. We could get a license right away there and the notices wouldn't be published in our newspaper."

I could feel her shoulder quivering against my arm. I found her hand and held it very tightly in mine.

"So—we were married. It was late, but we hadn't had dinner. We registered at the hotel and they said they would cook something for us. And—oh, Tony, he was just awful! I couldn't even swallow anything. He—he talked as if he were apologizing about the affairs he had had before he had met me, but he was really bragging, Tony, about how irresistible he was with women. He thought he had me now, and he didn't really care if I saw him the way he was.

Or maybe he thought I'd like him that way. I didn't know what to do. I just sat there, listening and trying to think of something to say, and ordering more things I couldn't eat just to make the dinner last longer.

"After dinner, I told him to go on up to the room, that I wanted to buy something. He wanted to go with me, but I wouldn't let him, and finally I told him I'd make a scene right in the lobby if he didn't let me go alone. So he went up, not liking it at all. I whipped out of that hotel, not knowing what to do next. I found there was a north-bound bus in ten minutes. I didn't care where it went. I just got on. At Tampa I finally made up my mind. I cashed a check and got on a plane. I flew up to New York and visited some friends there. And on my way south, I did some more visiting."

"Did he make any effort—"

"He wrote me a letter. It was forwarded to me. He told me his heart was broken, but that if I wanted it, he'd let me get an annulment without any publicity at all. That is, on one condition."

"What condition?" I snarled.

"He told me he was in serious financial trouble. He said that if I would lend him twenty thousand dollars he'd see that everything went through smoothly and I could forget I ever knew him."

"So he blackmailed you!"

"Mr. Barton didn't call it that. I telephoned him—"

"Barton was his lawyer!"

"But he had been my family's lawyer for years. I trusted him. He told me I'd better come back by plane, and I did. He said I was in a spot—that Lee had the wedding certificate, and a photostat of the hotel register, and that I could never prove I hadn't gone up to the room with him, and that Lee could block the annulment and would fight a divorce, claiming that I had no grounds at all. He said Lee was a pretty low character, and he didn't blame me for being ashamed of having acted so impulsive-

ly. He suggested that I lend Lee half the amount, ten thousand dollars, provided Lee would give me a note for it and also give me the wedding certificate and a written statement, notarized, saying I had never lived with him.

"So," she added on an outgoing breath, "I did give Lee the ten thousand. But something slipped up, and Barton never could get Lee to give me the papers. I was looking for them that morning when you and Poot found me hunting through Lee's desk."

"Why did Lee get the money from Barton without surrendering the papers?" I demanded. I stamped on the accelerator. "I'm going to have a little talk with that monkey right now!"

"Oh, Tony!" she cried. "Wait. That's why I never told you. I thought you'd do something rash. Please slow down!"

But I didn't take my foot off the accelerator until an idea struck me. "Di," I said, "is that why Haida slapped you Saturday night?"

"I think so. You see, Lee had kept postponing the annulment business. And Barton kept advising me to give Lee a little more time. Well, a week or so ago I thought he was going to let me get it without any publicity. He was in love with Haida, you see, and wanted to marry her. Then something must have happened, because at that little table I heard Haida tell him he just had to marry her, but he didn't seem to want to."

"The talk with Allan Corbin that noon," I murmured.

"But I think he told Haida then that he couldn't marry her because he was married to me," said Dinah, her voice desperately unhappy.

"I wish I'd been the one who killed him!" I declared.

"There's something else," Dinah began, but she never finished.

A police radio car pulled up beside us and flagged us to a stop. Chick Walsh,

one of Poot's deputies, leaned out of the window.

"Evenin', Commodore," he said politely. "Evenin', Miss Deerin'. I been a-huntin' you for nigh on to thutty minutes. Poot wants to know would you-all hurry back to the yacht club right away?"

I glanced at Di. She was sitting bolt upright and there were lines of strain on her beautiful face.

"Di," I whispered, "did you kill Lee? If you did, we'll make a break for it. We can run away from that old iron he's driving."

"No, we'll go back to the club," she said, her voice infinitely tired.

THE lights in the lounge had been turned off, as had those in the restaurant. The Cockpit Bar was dark. But a dull glow behind the drawn shades of the board room indicated that activity of some sort was going on in there, as did several cars standing in the parking lot. Silently Dinah and I walked through the lounge. I slid my hand under her elbow and held her close to me.

Opening the door of the board room, I glanced around and knew that this was it. The chips were down. The sheriff, looking very much out of place, was in my chair at the head of the long table and the others were sitting there in brooding silence.

"Come in," Poot said. "I figured a little meeting here would make less gossip than if I had you-all down to the county courthouse."

There were two empty chairs on the left side of the table between Poot and Allan Corbin, whose huge figure was slumped, as if he was too tired to sit there. I put Dinah next to Poot and took the chair beside Allan. Beyond Allan Corbin, Tim Bosworth sat at the foot of the table, a half-empty glass in his hand. To my astonishment, I saw Margot Barton sitting beside her husband at the opposite side of the board. She looked pale and preoccupied, her bird-

like eyes darting from one intent face to another.

Thoughtfully Poot stared down at two objects before him, the five-cent notebook in which he had jotted down his findings in the case, and a chart of Pelican Bay.

"I'm purely sorry," he drawled, "to keep you-all up so late. But when I got back to my office a little bit ago there was a phone call from the governor. He told me if I don't arrest the murderer before tomorrow noon, he'll kick me out and send some regular detectives from Tampa or Miami." Steadily he regarded F. Wellington Barton. "I have you to thank for that, Mr. Barton, but I'm fixing to arrest the killer before we leave this room tonight."

"I warned you, Sheriff," said Barton, "but nobody will be more pleased than I if—"

"Be quiet, Fred," said his wife, sharply.

Instantly Fred Wellington Barton was quiet. He looked down at his fingers in an effort to avoid our eyes. His wife clamped her thin lips together and stared warily at Poot.

"I figured," Poot said mildly, "we'd all get together, nice and friendly-like, to sort of sift things out. To get a conviction in a murder case, the State's Attorney ought to have a motive or he has two strikes on him at the start. I wouldn't want to turn this over to him with the edges all unstuck." He looked slowly around the table. "Mr. Maury being the kind of a man he was, every one of you has a motive for killing him."

"Just let's see you make my motive stand up before a jury," Barton exploded.

"Fred, be quiet," Margot snapped.

"Mr. Barton," Poot said, "according to the minutes of the last meeting of the Grievance Committee of the County Bar Association, Mr. Maury claimed you represented both sides of an argument without the knowledge of—"

"That's a damned lie!" Barton shouted. "Both sides knew I—"

"Mr. Bosworth," Poot interrupted, "you told me you didn't know that Mr. Barton represented Mr. Maury, too."

"Right," said Tim. "Not until I heard about it much later."

"You lie," Barton said, hotly.

"Could Mr. Maury've lived two more days," Poot went on, inexorably, "he'd've testified against you. More'n that, there was a little matter of blackmail floating around that worried you."

Margot Barton closed her eyes and sat very still. Barton shot a glance at Dinah, then at his wife. He moistened his full lips and tried to speak, but no words came.

"No use denying it," Poot said. "The banks take pictures of every check they clear, and I've seen them. Trouble was, Mr. Barton, you played both sides of the main street too many times, and the town's too small for that. You advised Mrs. Maury to buy her annulment for ten thousand dollars. That's blackmail, in this county. Top of that, you held half of it out on Mr. Maury. You gave him half and told him that's all you could talk Mrs. Maury into paying."

"Mrs. Maury?" Allan Corbin gasped. "Was that louse married?"

"He was married to me," said Dinah clearly.

Savagely, Allan turned on her. "Did Haida know that?"

"I—I think he told her Saturday night," Dinah said, her voice becoming shaky.

"Why did you keep it a secret?" Allan demanded. "If you hadn't, maybe Haida wouldn't have been so nuts about him. Maybe she'd have been alive right now."

"You think that would have stopped Haida?" I snapped at him.

"God only knows!" he said, and put his face in his big hands. Then he looked up again, his eyes very hard and bright. "So this double killing fixes everything up, doesn't it?" he asked in an ugly voice. "Dinah isn't married any more, doesn't have to pay any more blackmail. It leaves

her free to marry again. Marry you, for instance. But why," he added desperately, "did you have to kill Haida, too?"

"We'll get to that in a little bit," Poot cut in. He turned to Margot. "Mrs. Barton, how come you telephoned me to tell me the scratch on the commodore's boat matched the one on Mr. Maury's Snipe?"

"Margot!" her husband breathed. "Did you do that?"

Margot did not even glance at him. She looked at Poot.

"Because," she said through stiff lips, "I thought it was high time somebody gave a little thought to Tony Spencer. He always hated Lee. He stopped people from investing with Lee. He's been in love with Dinah Deering for a long time. Everybody knows that. And with Lee out of the way, Dinah would be a widow and he could marry her."

Slowly Poot turned to me. I had found Dinah's hand under the table and was clinging to it. It seemed to steady me.

"Commodore, did you know she was married to Mr. Maury?" Poot asked me.

"Not until just a few minutes ago," I said.

Back went Poot's solemn face to Margot. "I want your real reason, Mrs. Barton," he said quietly.

For some instants you could hear Margot breathing, and it was a terrible sound in that thick silence. Then, incredibly, she began to cry. Somehow it had never occurred to me that Margot Barton *could* cry.

"Poot," she said in a stricken voice, a voice from which all pride, all arrogance, had vanished, "I was afraid my husband had killed them and—and—I don't know yet whether he did or not!"

F. Wellington Barton, horrified, reached blindly toward her, but she brushed his hand away.

"I didn't see Fred come in that night," she hurried on, while her angular body shook with sobs, "and I didn't hear him. He says he came in, but he might be lying. Nowadays I never know. When we came

here ten years ago Fred was honest. Now he isn't. All he wants is money, social position and—"

"Mrs. Barton," Poot interrupted in a distressed tone. "I—"

But Margot had not had her say. "Fred *ought* to be disbarred. I've tried and tried to stop him from doing the unethical things he does. I've thought perhaps it was this town. There's an opening in a good law firm in Boston. I've begged him to ~~buy~~ buy into it. We could start all over again. But now—now there's this terrible thing and I don't know—don't know—"

"Margot," Barton said in a broken voice, "it isn't too late. We'll buy into—"

"Mrs. Barton," Poot interrupted, gently, "your husband didn't kill them. But it would be a proper idea, seems like, for you to move to Boston, or wherever. You're kind of bogged down here and pretty soon he's going to run plumb out of clients."

Poot reached into his pocket, produced a long envelope and slid it across the table to Dinah.

"Here's your wedding certificate," he told her. "Does seem like you could've told me about being married to Mr. Maury. Don't mind saying it would have saved me a lot of headaches. For quite a spell I had the idea you killed him. You had plenty of reason."

"I wanted to tell you, Poot," Dinah said in a shaky voice. "But I was so ashamed of it that it—it was almost an obsession. I thought—with Lee dead—it might be almost as if it had never happened at all. The wedding, I mean. But it wasn't. That's why I told Tony and Tim."

"You told Tim Bosworth?" My heart went suddenly very cold.

"Yes. I made up my mind to tell you after Haida slapped me. I went over to your apartment and waited for you to come home. But you didn't. Tim found me and sat in the car with me. I simply had to get it off my mind to someone, so I told Tim."

"Mrs. Barton," said Poot, "wasn't it

Mr. Bosworth who told you about the scratch on the commodore's boat?"

"Yes," Margot confessed. "And I thought it would divert suspicion from my husband and—"

"I know," said Poot, his voice hardening. Slowly he unfolded the chart of Pelican Bay. "I guess this thing is just about wrapped up and tied. I was fixing to show that each of you had a motive that would sound pretty bad to a jury, and had each done a right smart jag of things that would have gotten you into trouble, but maybe we'd better stop piddling around and get down to cases."

Dinah's hand moved convulsively in mine. Poot raised his head and looked straight down the long table.

"I know why you killed Mr. Maury, Bosworth," he said. "But why did you kill Mrs. Corbin, too?"

Beside me there was a quick movement. I grabbed Allan Corbin's arm and hauled him back into his chair.

Tim Bosworth smiled. "Guess again, Sheriff," he said.

"If you killed Haida," Allan roared, "I'll twist your damned head off!"

DINAH swayed and for a moment I thought she was going to faint. But she pulled herself together and looked at Bosworth, trying to read his expression. Across the table new hope had come into the misery-dulled eyes of Margot Barton. Her husband, turning to stare at Tim, put his hand on her shoulder. This time she did not brush it away. Tim finished his highball and, meeting his eyes above the rim of his glass, matched him, look for look.

"I aim to get the truth out of you, Bosworth," said Poot.

"It's your story you're stuck with, not mine," Tim said.

"You've hated Mr. Maury ever since he gave you that trimming in that pool racket of his. You thought you were a fine business man and it made you sore to lose a

lot of money just as soon as you came into your father's estate."

"That's right," Tim admitted easily. "Name me three people who don't hate him for gypping them. But that doesn't mean they all killed him."

"But you did," Poot stated. "You hated him enough like it was, but Saturday night when Miss Deering told you about being married to him, and about not being able to get shet of him and all—You *did* tell him about Mr. Maury holding back on the annulment, didn't you, Mrs. Maury?"

Dinah swallowed hard and looked frantically around.

"Yeah," Poot nodded, turning back to Tim, "she did tell you. You've been right fond of Mrs. Maury for a long time, Bosworth, and maybe you even had drunken dreams that some day she'd marry you. So when she went back to her apartment and you had yourself a couple more drinks you thought what a fine idea it would be to put some knots on Mr. Maury's head. Maybe you decided then it would be a good thing to kill him. A favor to Mrs. Maury and to yourself."

"I think you are drunk, Poot," said Bosworth coolly.

"Anyway," Poot went on, inexorably, "you went back to the club and found Mr. Maury's Snipe missing, so you guessed he had gone for a midnight sail. You probably parked your car where you said you did, near Mr. Corbin's house on Bay Road. You knew where the commodore kept the keys to his boat and you knew that you could probably find Mr. Maury in a little while. And if there was any dirty work, the commodore would be blamed, not you, and you haven't been very fond of the commodore for a right smart while. So you went out there, found the Snipe and killed them and—"

"A fine, circumstantial theory," said Tim, smiling, "but let's see you sell it to a jury. Just why would I kill Haida? She had never bothered me."

Once again Allan Corbin jerked in his chair and once again I put a restraining hand upon him.

"Mrs. Corbin," said Poot, "was crazy about Mr. Maury and wanted to marry him.



"Sitting there alone, the more she studied it, the madder she got. . . ."

But when her husband, here, said it was a fine idea and he was all for it, Mr. Maury kind of lost interest and began to back away from the proposition."

Allan Corbin groaned. There was no other sound.

"Saturday night," Poot went on, "she and Mr. Maury were arguing about it at their table in the bar. He got all riled up and walked out on her, after telling her how could he marry her when he was already married to Miss Deering. Leastways, I suppose so on account of what happened then. Sitting alone there, the more she studied on it, the madder she got, and then

she went over and took a swing at Miss Deering.

"Then, when Mr. Barton was walking her around and trying to take her home, she remembered that Mr. Maury had gone down toward the Snipe slips. She goes into the powder room, ducks out the side door and hurries down to talk to him. Maybe she thinks if she has time enough to talk, she can fix everything all up, hunky-dory, so she gets him to take her sailing. She changes into her sailing duds and out they go. Every time they see anybody, she puts, her head down under the gunwale, so she won't be recognized, which is why the Coast Guard and the commercial fisherman think Mr. Maury was all alone. But he wasn't."

"You can't prove all that stuff," said Bosworth, "not in a million years."

"I can prove you killed Mr. Maury," Poot told him, "and that's enough. You told one lie that spiked the whole thing down. You said that while you were parked there by Mr. Corbin's house you saw the commodore's boat go by. You said you saw her close enough in the moonlight to see that the man at the helm was wearing a blue—or anyway, a dark—coat and white pants. That had to be the commodore, which suited you just fine."

"I hated to identify the commodore," Bosworth protested, "but you made me tell you."

Poot smiled thinly and jabbed his stubby finger at the chart. "Mr. Corbin," he said slowly, "when the commodore and I went calling on you Sunday, we saw a boat go by."

"Ham Rogers' boat," I exclaimed. "And it was so far offshore than I couldn't see whether Ham was at the wheel or not."

"Mr. Corbin," Poot persisted, "how much water is there close to shore between your house and the yacht club?"

Allan roused himself with difficulty. "About a foot and a half at high tide," he said drearily. "The channel takes a bend off-shore right there."

"It swings way out toward the mainland!" Barton cried. "Even in the daytime nobody near Corbin's house could see what the helmsman was wearing."

"Commodore," said the sheriff, still boring in, "how much water does your boat draw?"

"Twenty-six inches," I said. "She'd be high and dry the minute she tried to cut across that bend."

"So," said Poot, with an air of finality. "That's what the chart says, too."

I noticed that Tim Bosworth no longer looked boyish. New lines had etched themselves into his face. A muscular tic jerked spasmodically at the corners of his compressed lips.

"Now will you tell us, Bosworth, why you killed Mrs. Corbin?" Poot asked grimly.

Tim Bosworth, his face working horribly, stood up. "I didn't even know she was in Maury's boat!" he burst out. "It was about like you guessed, Sheriff. I went out there to kill Lee Maury—and do I see any of you reaching for the crying towel? I do not. He was a louse alive and he's a louse dead, and you're all glad he's dead! I pulled alongside his Snipe, and that's where we bumped and made that blue scratch on the *Restless*. He seemed to be all alone. I had the commodore's gun out and I gave him the business and felt better for it. And then what happened! Up pops Haida's face. She had hidden under the gunwale when she saw a boat coming up. And there she was, a witness! So I just had to give it to her, too. Then I leaned outboard, grabbed the shrouds of the sailboat and tipped her over, figuring that the sea would clean away any bloodstains, and that the sharks and barracudas would accomplish the rest."

He put both hands on the table and looked at Dinah.

"It's all your fault," he screamed at her. "You've been mooning around after the commodore ever since he came back—a

bloody hero! And he ten years older than you!"

He stood there for another long, heart-breaking instant, then turned and raced for the door. Allan Corbin and I scrambled to our feet just as the door slammed. Poot's calm voice reached out and stopped us short.

"Don't trouble yourselves, gentlemen," he said in his soft Southern drawl. "A couple of my boys are waiting for him outside."

DINAH and I were in her car again, driving slowly down Beach Road. We weren't doing much talking. Too many things had happened to both of us in too short a time.

Lee Maury's big house was a mile or so ahead. I turned off the road, put out the lights and killed the motor. It was peaceful there, with the whole Atlantic Ocean stretched out before us, bright and glittering under the big white moon. And it was comforting to have Di sitting there so quietly beside me. Even more comforting to put my arm around her slim, proud shoulders and to hold her very tightly, and to know that from now on I could shield her, protect her from all trouble.

"Darling," I said in a low voice, "I've been such a fool since I came back here. You were such a kid when I left, and when I saw you again you had changed so. But I think there's never been a day when I didn't love you."

She whispered, "Yes, Tony. But who hasn't been a fool? And who am I to call you one?"

I put my forefinger under her chin and tipped her lovely face up to mine. I bent down and put my lips fully to hers. And, for a while, at least, all the heartaches were behind us, and the world stood still, and the stars were fine and bright, and the future was as straight and shining as the brilliant moon-path across the water. ■ ■ ■

THE LAST TRUMPET

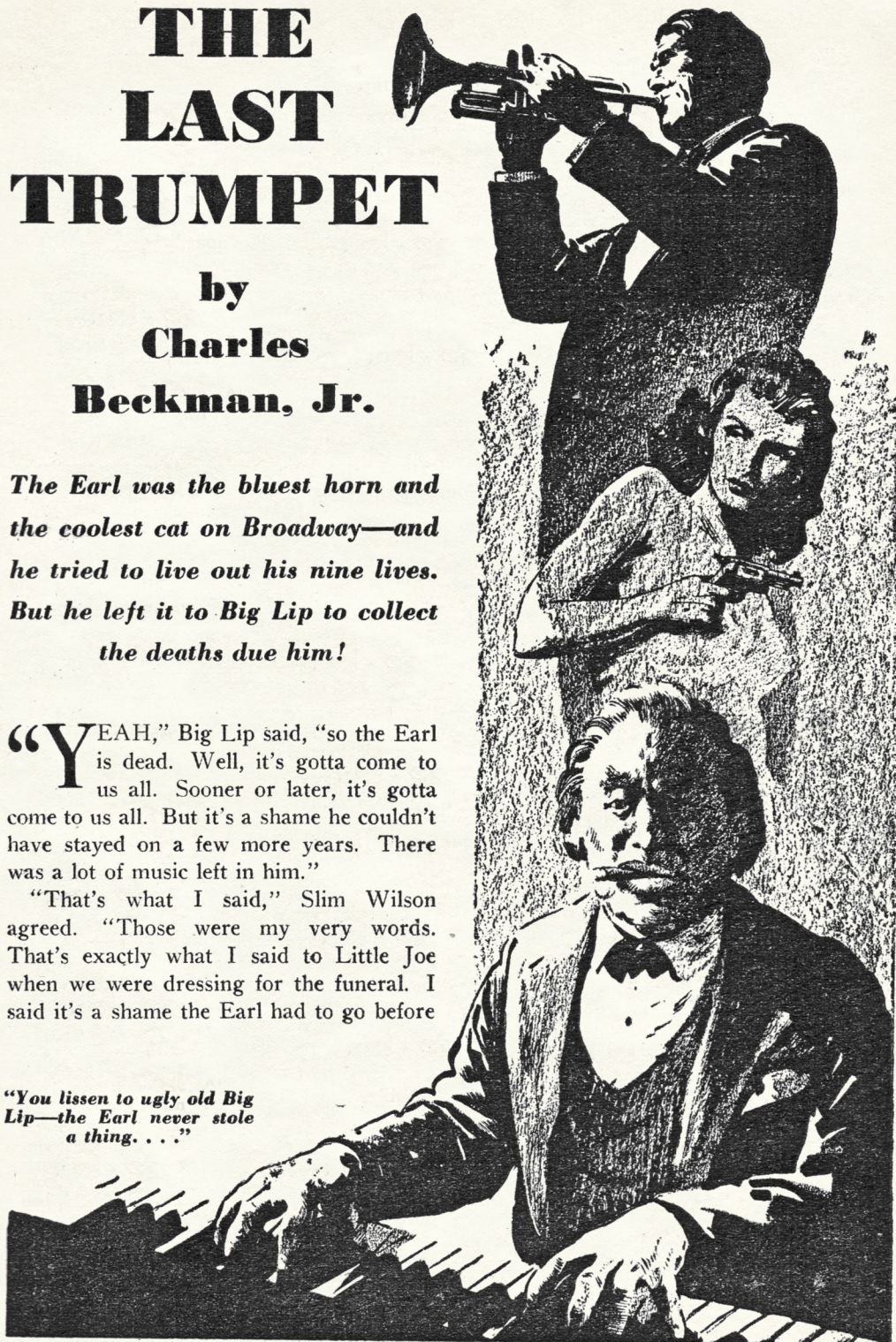
by
**Charles
Beckman, Jr.**

*The Earl was the bluest horn and
the coolest cat on Broadway—and
he tried to live out his nine lives.
But he left it to Big Lip to collect
the deaths due him!*

“YEAH,” Big Lip said, “so the Earl is dead. Well, it’s gotta come to us all. Sooner or later, it’s gotta come to us all. But it’s a shame he couldn’t have stayed on a few more years. There was a lot of music left in him.”

“That’s what I said,” Slim Wilson agreed. “Those were my very words. That’s exactly what I said to Little Joe when we were dressing for the funeral. I said it’s a shame the Earl had to go before

*“You listen to ugly old Big
Lip—the Earl never stole
a thing. . . .”*



he played all the music that was in him. Here, wait a minute, Big Lip, let me buy you this next beer. You paid for the last two and I want to get a couple now. Hey, Harry, ain't you got none colder than these you sold us? You run outa ice or somethin'?"

Big Lip shivered. He took his frayed cigar out of his mouth, looked at it, then put it back and lit it. "I don't like funerals. They give a man the shivers. And this damp cellar don't help none. I swear, it's funny. Look at me here, shivering and drinking ice cold beer. Guess I ought to be havin' a toddy or something, but the sweat's running offa me."

"I know—that's the way funerals affect me. They give me the cold sweats."

"Well, I guess we laid ol' Earl out the way he'd a wanted."

"Man couldn't-a wanted no better," Slim agreed. "I mean a man like the Earl. Just like the old days in New Orleans. Lord, I wonder how many funeral parades he played for in those days?"

"I don't know. But that's where he got his training. You know, blasting out on Rampart Street when they came back and let the tailgate on the wagon down so the 'bone man could run his horn and they swung out on that old time jazz. Something like that built up a man's lip. It wasn't like these easy jobs kids got nowadays, whispering into a mike in a cocktail lounge. A man just can't get no lip that away."

"None at all. None a-tall. Here, lemme light your cigar, man. It's went out again. Yeah, though, like you say, we laid him out in the old tradition, funeral band taking him to the graveyard, then coming back playing jazz."

"Wasn't nobody's heart in that."

"No, but we had to do it right."

"Yeah. The Earl wouldn't have wanted it loused up any. I guess he'll get written up in all the papers."

They fell silent for a minute.

"You reckon they'll ever find who murdered him?"

Big Lip took his cigar out of his mouth. "Look at me, sweatin' again. I swear I don't know how a man can be so cold and sweat so much."

"Funerals," Slim asserted. "They affect a man that way. No, the way I look at it, Earl had been messin' around with somebody's woman. I don't mean no disrespect, but he had a way of takin' after these young girls. And they went for him too. You know, he was a man up there on a bandstand with that gold horn of his. Even if he was in his fifties, he was a man, built powerful around the shoulders and good to look at. I think it was some kinda woman trouble, don't you reckon, Big Lip? I mean, I'm just guessin', but you knew him better than anybody else in town. You played with him since the twenties. Don't you think that's the way of it?"

"Well, yeah, I guess it coulda. When you start thinking about it, it coulda happened that way."

"You gonna want some more beer?"

"No, I got to get over and see Sally. She phoned me to come over. I guess she'll want us to keep the band going, anyway until the contract runs out."

"Poor Sally. She's takin' it hard, ain't she? Well, she'll have plenty to live on, though, off the royalties of the Earl's compositions. He's made a world of money off those compositions."

"Yeah, he thought up some awful pretty stuff. Give a man the shivers the way that cat'd sit there starin' off into space with that gold horn in his hands and pretty soon he'd lift it up, thoughtful like and start playing a new melody he'd dreamed up."

"Here, I'll get those last two."

Slim lingered to collect his change while the heavy, tired old man with the grey hair and thick lips that were his trade mark, plodded up the stairs. In the late afternoon sunlight, his musician's pallor was more pronounced than usual.

BIG LIP went over to the Earl's apartment to talk with Sally. She was a heavy, middle-aged woman with thickly powdered features and plump white fingers covered with diamonds. She had been a pretty girl when the Earl married her thirty years ago. He had long since tired of her, but she still adored him so he never ran her off more than once or twice and then he let her come back to him.

Big Lip sat down at the baby grand in their living room. Sally was rocking slowly, crying. She had taken the Earl's golden horn out of the case and laid it on the baby grand beside the Earl's picture. It glowed in the dusk, golden and mellow, like the notes the Earl had blown out of it. It made Big Lip want to play *Lament for Trumpet*, and he did, reverently, the way he played all of the Earl's melodies.

"You don't want to keep carrying on this way, Sally," he said as he played with his round, fat fingers. "The Earl wouldn't want you to be grievin' like that. He always lived happy."

"I know, Big Lip. I know the Earl would want it that way, just like you said. But that ain't why I'm cryin' now. Like I told you on the phone, I wanted you to come up here because I had some other bad news." She wadded her handkerchief up into a little wet ball and covered her brow with her hand. She rocked back and forth with her grief, crying harder. "Oh, Big Lip, you was the Earl's best friend. You know how he done. He cheated on me and he drank and gambled. But one thing he was true to, was his music. Now ain't that right, Big Lip? You was his best friend. Now ain't that the truth? He never would have stolen all that music and called it his own. Would he, Big Lip?"

Big Lip's fingers froze in the middle of an arpeggio. He took his frayed cigar out of his mouth and his lips turned down sourly. He got out his handkerchief and wiped at the beads of sweat that had come out on his forehead again.

He got up and lumbered over to Sally. "What are you talking about, woman?"

"It's that Allan Gerald, the Earl's brother." She had both of her hands over her face now, sobbing. "He come up here today, not two hours after we put Earl in his grave. He had all them papers that said the songs was his. He said he wrote 'em back in the twenties when he and the Earl had a band together. He said they was all his ideas for *Lament for Trumpet*, *The Red Woman*, *Handful of Stars*, *Black and Blue Rhapsody*—all of 'em. He had papers, Big Lip. Copyright papers, proving it. He said he was going to sue the Earl's estate for all the royalties off them songs."

Big Lip stood there, speechless.

"It ain't so, is it, Big Lip? I don't care about the money. I swear I don't. But this'll make the Earl out to be a cheap four-flusher instead of a great musician. They'll all laugh at him, and him dead and not able to defend himself. They can't do that to his memory, Big Lip. He was a great musician. He never stole no tunes."

Big Lip finally put his soggy cigar back in his mouth. "Course not he didn't, Sally. You sit there now and get ahold of yourself. There can't nobody say the Earl did anything like that, even his brother. I got to go down and get the band started playing for this evening. Let me think about this. I just can't see how Allan can come around saying a thing like that. He's too much of a dog to play anything right, much less think up a melody of his own."

Sally said, "He claimed the Earl has been paying him to keep quiet all these years, but now the Earl's dead and can't pay him no more hush money, so he wants all that royalty money for hisself."

Big Lip nodded and walked out.

HHE PLODDED over to "swing lane," Fifty-second Street, to the little basement joint where he had been playing with the Earl's new band for the past six months. He would take over the management of it

for Sally for the duration of their contract. After that they would probably split up, Big Lip more than likely heading for the West Coast.

He sat down at the piano now, like a sullen, grey-haired judge. The rest of the six-piece band was already on the stand, warming up their instruments. He tapped off the beat, struck an opening chord, and the ensemble slid into their natural, easy jazz, the way the Earl had styled the band.

They had a new trumpet man to take the Earl's place, a young fellow who blew a pretty enough horn and played all the Earl's solos the way he'd played them. But the magnetism of the great Earl's personality was gone and it was just another band, like the other dozens of bands that played on swing lane.

At the first intermission a man in a brown suit and a soft felt hat pushed off his forehead came over and showed Big Lip a badge. Big Lip stayed at the piano, his fingers running softly over the keys.

"Lieutenant Davidson, Homicide. I have to ask you some questions about the Earl."

"Yes sir. I'll tell you what I can."

"You know the Earl a long time?"

The big, ugly man with the shaggy head and thick lips gazed through his piano into the distant past. He played a chromatic progression and messed around with *Black and Blue Rhapsody* in C sharp. "Well, I grew up with him, Lieutenant. I went with him down to that pawn shop on Iberville Street in New Orleans when he bought his first horn. He was eleven years old, then."

"Your name is Sidney Johnson?"

"Yessir. All the cats call me Big Lip."

"Where were you Tuesday night at eleven o'clock when the Earl was killed up in that hotel room?"

"Here with the band. I always run the band for the Earl when he went somewhere."

"Did he tell you where he was going?"

"No sir. About ten o'clock he came over and told me he had to go somewhere for

just an hour. But he never came back."

"Did he look worried?"

"Yessir." The perspiration came out on Big Lip's forehead. He played a haunting minor chord.

"Did you know a gambler named Monte Rossi?"

Big Lip's fingers tripped over themselves. He stopped playing to take out a handkerchief and sponge the damp beads off his face. "Yessir, I think I did see him around here now and then."

"The Earl owed him a considerable amount in I.O.U.'s."

"Is that right now?"

"You know it's right! Monte has been spreading it around that you were supposed to take the money to him for the Earl the night the Earl was murdered. Now he's saying the Earl gave you the money before he got killed, but you put it in your pocket instead of taking it to Monte. Monte's sore about it. I hear it was something like ten grand."

Big Lip swallowed painfully.

"You know a woman named Melissa Scott?"

Big Lip dropped his cigar. He bent down to pick it up, changed his mind. He took out his handkerchief and dabbed at his bull neck.

"I can't say I know the chick, Lieutenant. Is she messed up in this somehow?"

"You might say that. The Earl went from here to a little hotel on Forty-Seventh Street Tuesday night. Shortly after he was killed, witnesses saw this Melissa Scott run out of his room. We checked his bank account. He has recently made out some large checks to this Melissa Scott. It looks like she was putting some kind of heat on him."

Big Lip took a fresh cigar out of his plaid sport coat pocket.

"We can't find where this Scott gal lives," the lieutenant said. "We thought you might help us."

"Oh. Well, I guess I don't know, mister. Do you think Monte Rossi might have killed him?" he asked hopefully.

"He might have. Or you might have. Ten grand is a lot of money."

Big Lip's hand shook.

"Or," the lieutenant added, "The Earl's half brother, Allan Gerald, might have. There was bad blood between them. However, we checked on Allan Gerald. He was in a crap game at the Recreation Parlor the time the Earl was killed. He's got witnesses."

Then the plainclothesman said, "I sure wish we could find Melissa Scott. You think anybody else on this band might know?"

"No sir. But you go ahead and ask them."

The man stayed around for a while. After he left, Big Lip played for another half hour. Then he suddenly got up and plodded off the stand.

He went out and hailed a taxi and rode it down to Times Square. He mingled with the crowd, went down a kiosk and took a subway for a couple of blocks. When he came out of that, he walked into a hotel, wandered around the lobby and went out a back exit. He stood on a dark street corner for a while, looking behind him. Finally he hailed another taxi.

Big Lip walked up two flights of stairs of a shabby building on the east side of town. He knocked on a door. A woman's voice told him to come in.

The girl was sitting on the edge of the unmade bed. Her face was shiny with perspiration. A lock of her dark hair had fallen into her eyes. She was smoking steadily, filling a saucer with butts.

"The police was around talking to me, Melissa," he said. "They think maybe you killed the Earl and they're looking for you."

She inhaled deeply, sucking in her cheeks. "I know. I know they're looking for me." Her lips curled. "I guess you told them where I was."

"I didn't tell them nothing. But they told me some folks saw you come running outa the Earl's room after he was killed Tuesday night."

"Yeah. I guess they saw that all right."

She was in her early twenties. She would have been pretty except for the wasted shadows under her eyes and the looseness around her mouth and the hard glitter in her eyes.

Big Lip sat down heavily. "Ain't it a shame what the craving for money can do to a woman."

"Oh, don't be a damn fool. I didn't kill him. I got a telephone call Tuesday night to hurry over to that hotel room. When I got there I found him dead. Somebody killed him and tried to frame me for it. They sure succeeded."

"You expect the police to believe that?"

"No. That's why I'm scared. They're going to pin this on me. Just as sure as I'm sitting here."

"But if you got an idea who called you—"

"I got an idea," she said, stabbing out her cigarette in the saucer savagely.

"But you're not gonna say who it was?"

"I can't. And anyway, it wouldn't do any good. No good at all."

Big Lip chewed on his cigar. After a while he heaved himself out of the chair. He shuffled to the door.

She called after him, "Monte Rossi was up here."

Big Lip stopped and stared at the door jamb. A drop of sweat traced a crooked pattern down the creases in his thick neck.

"He was lookin' for you. He's madder'n hell about something."

Big Lip nodded heavily. He took out his handkerchief and dabbed at his face. His hand was shaking. Then he went down and took a cab to the Recreation Parlor.

IT WAS a musicians' hangout. There was a bunch of them down there tonight. They were standing around in little groups,

talking about the sensational murder of the great trumpet player and composer, Earl Gerald.

Big Lip sat down at a booth by himself and ordered a beer. Presently one of the musicians, a thin, dark-haired man with slender, nervous hands detached himself from the others and sat down in the booth with Big Lip.

"Evening, Big Lip."

"Evening, Mannie. You not working to-night?"

"Naw. The job at the Purple Lounge folded. We're going into some kind of up-holstered sewer in the Village for six weeks, starting Saturday. Say, have you heard what Allan Gerald, Earl's brother is spreading around?"

"What is Allan Gerald spreading around?" Big Lip asked, sipping the head off the glass of beer.

"He says he wrote all them tunes that made the Earl famous. Says he's got copy-right papers to prove it. Ain't that something—the Earl with all his diamond stick pins and big talk, nothin' but a bum?"

"Don't you say that, Mannie. Don't you go to believing all the jazz that Allan Gerald spouts off. Now you listen to me, ugly old Big Lip. The Earl ain't never stole a thing. I played with that cat when he didn't know how to finger the "C" scale on his horn. He didn't have to steal those melodies; he was born with them. He was playing them when we was in high school. He wrote 'em all down and the band director made an arrangement for them. He used to play them around in jam sessions, ten years before he ever bothered to write 'em and get a copyright. That no-good Allan Gerald is the one did the stealing. If he's got any copyright it's because he used to hear the Earl fooling around with those tunes when they had a band together and he stole 'em then from the Earl!"

"Well, I guess you ought to know, Big Lip. Better'n anybody. But you'n Sally will have a hard time proving it. And

meantime, Allan Gerald is sure going around hurtin' the Earl's reputation."

Big Lip chewed his cigar sourly. "Say, Mannie, was there a dice game going on here Tuesday night?"

"Well, I think so. Just a small one upstairs. Three or four fellows. Allan Gerald was up there, I think, and Cat Biggers and some of the guys. Why?"

"Nothin'. That Cat over there?"

"Yeah. The heavy-set boy with the corn on his lip. He blows trumpet with a bop outfit on Fifty-second."

Big Lip got ponderously to his feet. He called Cat Biggers into a corner.

"You was playing dice here Tuesday night, Cat?"

"What if I was, Big Lip?"

"Nothin'. Was Allan Gerald with you?"

"Why yes, he was, if it's any business of yours."

"You wouldn't lie to me, Cat?"

Biggers looked startled. He covered it with a bluff of anger. "Listen, you ain't coming around here callin' me a liar."

"That's just what I'm doin', Cat. I'm callin' you a liar. Allan wasn't here at all, was he?"

Biggers was shaking all over. Big Lip thought for a minute that the trumpet player would take a poke at him. But he just stood there shaking and finally turned around and walked off.

Big Lip touched a flickering match to the dead end of his cigar. He threw the match on the floor and lumbered out of the place.

He stood on the corner waiting for a taxi.

HE WAS there maybe two minutes when Monte Rossi came up beside him and said, "Good evening, Big Lip."

Big Lip gave a little jump when Monte Rossi came up from behind him that way. He looked around and said a bit shakily, "Well, hello, Mr. Rossi. It's nice to see you."

"I'll bet it is," Rossi smiled.

The gambler had a soft, slurring voice like two pieces of silk being rubbed together. He was dressed in a dark blue suit with a fine deep red pin stripe. He had a white silk shirt on and a wine necktie with a hula girl hand-painted on it. He had both his hands in his coat pocket.

"No use you waiting on a taxi, Big Lip," he said pleasantly. "My car is parked right around the corner."

"Well, that's sure nice of you, Mr. Rossi. But I sure don't want to put you out of your way. No, I'll just wait here and a taxi will be along directly and take me back on over to Fifty-second where I'm going—"

"I think you better come with me, Big Lip."

Large drops of perspiration stood out across the big man's forehead. One of them traced a wet pattern down his cheek. His shirt collar had become soggy. He looked around the street. It was deserted. Then he looked back at Monte Rossi. The dead cigar fell out of his mouth and he started moving.

Like most white musicians who played every night in smoke-filled joints and slept all day, his complexion had an unhealthy pallor. Now it looked grey.

Rossi's man drove the big sedan. They cruised slowly through dark back streets.

Rossi and the piano player sat in the back seat.

"Now, I just thought I'd pick up that money, Big Lip. I know it's a lot of cash to be carrying around with you. No use in you worrying about it. You just give it over to me now and I'll give you the Earl's I. O. U.'s and you can give them to his widow."

Big Lip worked his forefinger under his soggy shirt collar. "Money, Mr. Rossi? What's this money you're talkin' about?"

Rossi chuckled. It sounded like somebody crumpling up an old newspaper.

Big Lip said, "You better tell your man he's sure going out of the way, Mr. Rossi.

I got to get back to the place. Band sounds awful bad without a piano. You tell him to turn left up here and head back to Fifty-second—"

Rossi leaned forward. He told his driver to stop at the next deserted alley. Then he took his left hand out of his pocket. He was holding a sap, a leather covered pouch of lead shot with a braided thong.

Big Lip's mouth felt like somebody's lawn after a six month's drouth.

The driver stopped the car in the mouth of the alley. He got out and went around the front. He lit a cigarette and stood there, looking up and down. Rossi opened the door and pushed Big Lip into the alley.

It was dark there and smelled of garbage. A stray cat howled and scurried from under their feet. It was silent then, except for the scuffling of their shoes on the cobblestones and the muffled thud of the sap and the whispered grunts of Big Lip who was holding his hands before his face.

Big Lip was down on one knee, holding his arm over his face and trying to get his breath. It felt as if the sap had broken his ribs because every time he tried to breathe something in his chest grated and stabbed at his lung.

"Don't hit me no more, Mr. Rossi," he pleaded. "I don't have that ten thousand dollars. I swear I don't. The Earl never gave it to me that night. He said he was going to. He told me he was going to give it to me later that night and he wanted me to take it over to your place after we got through for the evening. He was going to put it in a bag for me and I was supposed to give it to you and get the I.O.U.'s. But he never gave it to me. He got this telephone call about ten and he told me he was leaving for a while. He never came back. I swear that's the way it was, Mr. Rossi."

"You're lying, you damn honky-tonk piano player. He gave you that ten thousand, all right. Then you knocked him off and put the money in your pocket. Now ain't that right?"

"No! Ow! No, I swear he didn't—Ow! Don't do that, Mr. Rossi! I can't stand no more—oh, my God—"

Then everything was black for a while.

When Big Lip came dazedly around, he was sitting propped up against a brick wall in the alley. A police prowler car was shining its headlights into the alley and the plainclothesman, Lieutenant Davidson, was kneeling beside him.

"You lost us for a while," he said. "I had a tail on you, but you lost him when you left your night club. We didn't pick you up again until you went down to the Recreation Club. It's a good thing you did. Rossi was about to beat your brains out."

"You arrest him?" Big Lip mumbled.

"Yeah. He won't be beating anybody up for a while."

"Are you gonna arrest me for anything?"

"I don't know. Do you want to tell me where the Scott girl is hiding out?"

"I said, I don't know."

Davidson thumbed his felt hat back on his head. "You're letting yourself in for a lot of trouble, Big Lip. I'm going to have to arrest somebody pretty soon. If we can't find Melissa Scott, it might be you."

Big Lip nursed his bruised jaw in silence.

"Okay, have it your way." Davidson stood up. "Where you want us to take you?"

"Back to the club," Big Lip said. "I got to finish out this evenin's job."

"Good Lord, you don't look like you're in any condition to play."

"I'm all right," Big Lip said, crawling painfully to his feet. He felt around in his pocket for a cigar, found a broken one in his breast pocket, and stuck half of it in his mouth.

WHEN they took him back to Club 52, they let him out on the front sidewalk. Big Lip went into the club, walked between the tables, past the band stand out the back door, and got himself a taxi. He

drove to an apartment building on Third Avenue. He went up to the third floor and knocked on Allan Gerald's door.

Gerald opened the door a crack and peered out. His jaw sagged. "Big Lip. What the hell 'r you doin' here?"

Big Lip gave the door a shove and propelled his ungainly body into the room. He looked distastefully at the great Earl's half brother. Allan was a skinny little pale-faced weasel. He played some piano but the sound of it was like him—insipid, shallow, artificial. From a musical, physical or character standpoint, Allan wasn't fit to take the Earl's horn out of his case for him.

"I was talkin' to Sally," Big Lip said. "She says you got some crooked copyright papers says you wrote the Earl's tunes."

"Crooked, hell. They're legal. I'll show 'em to you."

"You don't show me nothin'. Even if I saw it wrote down with ten lawyers signing it I wouldn't believe the Earl stole any tunes. I knew him too well. I guess out of all the people in the world who knew the Earl, you and me know him the best. And we both know the Earl wrote those tunes. Don't we, Allan?"

Allan Gerald moistened his lip. There was a crafty gleam in his eyes. "Between you an' me, Big Lip, we know that. But from now on, in the eyes of the world, the Earl is going to be a bum. All our lives, he's had the good things—the fame, the glory, the money. I ain't had nothin', except what I could make him pay me to keep quiet about those copyrights. Well, now I'm stepping into the Earl's shoes. I got the copyrights to prove those tunes are mine and you and Sally can't do nothing about it. I'm going to get all those royalties and I'm going to take his band. I'm going to put you on notice for the first thing and then I'm going to take that honky-tonk jazz band and make a smooth commercial hotel band out of it and make me some money."

"You mean," Big Lip said sadly, his heavy mouth turning down at the corners,

"you'll take the soul out of a great, sincere organization and make a cheap mickey band outa it."

He felt around in his pocket for a match, couldn't find one. Then he picked up Allan Gerald's cigarette lighter off a table and sucked the flame against the cold ashes on the tip of his cigar.

"I can see the picture," he went on, "and don't you think I can't. You never fooled me none. You was blackmailin' the Earl to keep quiet about the copyrights. And you was makin' Melissa collect for you. That's why the Earl's bank showed canceled checks made out to her. The cops found that out, but they ain't found out Melissa was married to you. Nor, they ain't found out that Tuesday night, the Earl finally got some kind of real proof that those tunes was his. He went up to that hotel room to meet you. He shoved that there proof right under your nose, Allan Gerald. So you couldn't go on blackmailin' him no more. And he was goin' to have you sent to jail for all the blackmailin' you done to him in the past. So you killed him. Jest as sure as the Earl ever hit high C, you killed him. You was tired of Melissa anyway, so you phoned and told her to go up to where the Duke was layin' dead, hopin' she'd get picked up for the murder. Well, she darn near did."

Gerald was backing away, his face sick and frightened. "You can't prove that," he whispered hoarsely, licking his lips. "I was in the Recreation Club, shooting craps with some guys. I got three witnesses."

"I know," Big Lip said sadly, heavily. "Cat Biggers is one of them. I talked to him. You paid them witnesses off. You paid 'em off too good. They'll never tell the truth. So the police won't ever be able to send you to the chair for the murder of your half brother, the Earl. But I'm going to get you for this, Allan Gerald. The Earl was more to me than a brother. I worshipped the man from the first day he touched a horn to his lips. He was greater than all of us. He played stuff that was beyond the power of mortal man to understand. And you killed him, and I'm gonna get you, Allan." The big, ugly man's voice sank to a whisper. "So help me—I'm going to get you for this."

Allan Gerald dragged a short-snouted, nasty-looking revolver out of his pocket. "You get outa here," he cried, his voice rising to a falsetto. "You got no call to come around here talkin' like that. You get outa here right now, Big Lip. You hear me? Get out—"

BIG LIP lumbered out of the room, his face sad. He walked for a long time, out in the cold damp night. Finally he took a cab over to Melissa's room again.

This time she did not answer his knock on the door. He tried the knob. It was unlocked. He went into the room.

She was there on the floor where she died. The front of her blouse was stained red. The revolver was still clutched in her right hand.

Big Lip sat down, all the strength gone



out of his legs. He wiped a tear out of the corner of his eyes with his big, stubby forefinger. Then he searched his pocket for a match. He found Allan Gerald's initialed lighter which he had picked up and absently dropped in a pocket back in Gerald's room. He lit his cold cigar with it. He sat there for a while, blinking sadly.

Finally he noticed Melissa's suicide note on the dresser.

It was lying on a legal document which was a copyright notice dated some years back. The note said she was going to kill herself because she was convinced the police would find her and pin the Earl's murder on her. And because her husband, Allan Gerald, no longer loved her. She still loved him, too much to want to go on living without him.

She wanted Sally, the Earl's widow to have the copyright papers. They dated back to the Earl's high school days and they covered some compositions he had written, which the band master had arranged and had copyrighted for him then, when he was still a boy. They contained the themes of all the melodies he later made famous. They proved the originality of everything he had ever written.

This was the proof that the Earl had found which wiped out Allan Gerald's claim to the compositions. How Melissa had come by them, Big Lip could only guess. Probably she had found them among Allan's papers since Tuesday night.

Big Lip stuffed the copyright paper in his pocket. He tore up the suicide note and thoughtfully swallowed it.

Then he took the pistol out of Melissa's dead hand, put it in his pocket. With a handkerchief, he picked up her lipstick from the dresser, scrawled a name on the floor near her outstretched hand, dropped the lipstick. He wiped every place in the room he might have touched. Just before leaving, he took out Allan Gerald's initialed cigarette lighter, wiped it, and dropped it on the floor.

He walked out and closed the door softly.

Before returning to Club 52, he made a brief telephone call to police headquarters. It was a strange call. His voice sounded muffled and not at all like itself.

He had been back at the Club 52 a couple of hours when the police inspector, Lieutenant Davidson came in with a pale-faced Allan Gerald. Most of the crowd had gone by now and the boys were jamming a bit in the late hours.

Allan Gerald came up to the stand, fairly dragging Lieutenant Davidson to whom he was handcuffed. Allan's weasel face was sweat-slick.

"Big Lip," he babbled, "these crazy policemen got a telephone call and they went and found Melissa murdered in a room on the east side. Then they come over to my place and arrested *me*. Look, at the time they said she died, you was over in my room talking to me. You tell 'em, Big Lip. You tell 'em I was there and I couldn't have killed her."

Big Lip was playing *Lament for Trumpet* tenderly with his broad, stubby fingers. "Why, Allan Gerald, how you carry on. You know I ain't seen you for days. He really kill that poor girl, Lieutenant?"

"Yeah. We found out she was his wife. The way we figure it, she had been playing around with the Earl, getting money from him. Tuesday night she got sore at him and shot him. This guy, Allan, finds out, tracks her down and kills her tonight. But she wrote his name with her lipstick before she died. Sorry to bother you, Big Lip. He insisted on dragging us down here. Come on, Allan!"

"No! No, please! Big Lip, you tell 'em! You hear me, Big Lip? Don't you let them send me to the electric chair for killin' Melissa. You know I didn't—"

Long after they had gone, Big Lip continued to play *Lament for Trumpet*, softly, sadly.

He played it for the Earl because it had been his theme song. ■ ■ ■

DIE A LITTLE LONGER

by
Richard Deming

*Death called a day early for Maida
—and wore a madman's face!*

THE second time Maida peered through the trellised vines which formed shimmering green curtains on all sides of the porch, she uttered a squeal of dismay. The wide-shouldered young man who had spent five minutes studying the name on her mailbox was turning into

She was raising the receiver before she noticed he had followed her. . . .



the steep lane and approaching the house.

It absolutely could not be the new owner arriving to take possession a day before she expected him, when none of the dishes were packed and her final house cleaning had left her looking like she had wallowed in a coal bin. It absolutely could not be, but it probably was, for no one but the mailman had called in three weeks.

Setting the dishes she was holding alongside a half-filled barrel, she rushed into the house and whisked the dust wrapper from her hair. In the mirror over the kitchen sink she examined the face Tom occasionally described as "tony," noting its toniness was at the moment incognito behind a good deal of plebian dirt. She attacked the dirt with the dampened end of a dish towel and fluffed her loose black hair into a semblance of order.

By the time she returned to the front door, her visitor was mounting the porch steps. Viewed closely, he was not as young as he had seemed at fifty yards. Maida judged him about her own age—thirty. He had the strong shoulders and powerful arms of an athlete, but his rather pale features and colorless eyes seemed those of a person whose life involved little physical activity. His expression was tinged with wariness, as though he were not sure what his reception would be.

"Mrs. Kirk?" he asked with a touch of diffidence.

"Yes. And you're Mr. Steuben?"

His eyes turned blank and a curious expression of surprise crossed his face. Then his features relaxed into an amused grin. "How did you know?"

"Easy," Maida said, matching his grin. "No one ever calls here. Come in."

She moved aside and he stepped past her into the hall, glanced quickly up the stairs and went on into the front room.

"There are only boxes to sit on," Maida apologized. "The furniture's all shipped except for my bed and a spare cot in the maid's room I'm leaving."

He said, "May I have a glass of water?"

Surprised by the abruptness of his request, she looked at him for a moment open-mouthed. Then she said, "Certainly," and went to the kitchen to get him one.

When she brought it back, he drank thirstily and set the empty glass on one of the boxes.

"No one at all?" he asked idly.

"I beg your pardon?"

His colorless eyes touched her face briefly before continuing about the room in slow inventory. "Calls here, I mean."

"Oh," Maida said, following him back to their initial conversation. "No one but the mailman. It's what you wanted, isn't it?"

The achromatic eyes fixed on her face again, and the suggestion of a smile touched his lips. "Yes. That's what I wanted."

"It was lucky we both happened to engage the same real-estate man," Maida said, making conversation to cover her embarrassment at his standing there as though waiting for something to happen. "You searching all the way from New York for a secluded place to work, which I imagine was hard to find, and us looking for a buyer for a place twenty miles from nowhere, which I *know* was hard to find." She added quickly, "Of course it's an excellent house and the view is lovely."

He stood quietly with his hands behind him, making no reply.

"I didn't expect you until tomorrow," she said nervously. "Were you planning to take possession immediately?"

His expression was musing, as though he pondered her question, and he did not reply for so long she began to suspect he had not heard her. "I'm sorry if it inconveniences you," he said finally. "I planned to spend the night in Kingston, but my baggage failed to arrive and it contains my traveler's checks. There's no need for you to leave, however, unless you fear the conventions. You mentioned a spare cot?"

Her back stiffened indignantly at his air of proprietorship and calm assumption that

if anyone left, it should be she. At the same time it occurred to her he should have had no difficulty obtaining credit at the Kingston Hotel until his luggage arrived. Mr. Regan, the real estate man, would certainly have vouched for him.

She said sharply, "I'm afraid I couldn't leave before tomorrow, even if I wanted to, unless I walk the twenty miles to Kingston. My husband doesn't plan to pick me up till morning." She could not forbear adding, "I don't fear the conventions, as you put it, because all the doors in this house lock."

Her flash of anger brought a surprised grin to his lips, and laughter replaced the reserved opacity of his eyes. "I really am sorry," he said.

IMMEDIATELY she liked him better. She grinned back and said briskly, "You're probably eager to see the house. I never before heard of anyone buying a house unseen. You must have great trust in Mr. Regan."

But apparently her anger only momentarily had jarred him from inward contemplation. "Mr. Regan?" he asked in the tone of one half-listening.

"The real estate man."

"Oh yes," he said. "Very reliable fellow."

She preceded him through the downstairs, showing him the dining room, the study, the great sun porch and the kitchen.

"You have everything here you'd have in the city," she told him, "except neighbors. Central heating, electricity, running water and even a telephone. Of course the phone keeps you awake all night because it rings for eight other parties on the line, but you can't have everything and solitude too."

"I see," he said vaguely, with no smile on his face.

Being proudly interested in the house herself, he seemed to her disappointingly disinterested for a new tenant. She led him up the wide, heavy staircase to the second floor, showed him the big, old-fashioned

bath at the head of the stairs, the four bedrooms, and indicated the wing where he would sleep that night on the folding metal cot.

"I'm afraid you'll have to do without sheets," she told him. "But I kept out an extra blanket for my own bed, and you can have that."

He was over by the window, looking down. "What's that for?" he asked.

She moved over beside him and saw he was examining the two-foot edge of roofing which encircled the outside of the house between the lower and upper floors.

"That was Tom's father doing," she said, laughing. "Originally the house was one story, and when my husband's father added the second, he saved material by letting the original roof stick out like that. Actually it isn't unattractive from the ground. Gives a rather quaint effect. Tom calls it 'the burglar's walk.'"

As they went downstairs again she was rather piqued that he seemed to show such little interest in the house.

When he followed her out on the front porch, she said, "You'll have to excuse me if I leave you to your own devices most of the day. I have five barrels of dishes to pack. Do you have to return to Kingston to check on your luggage?"

"No," he said. "It won't arrive tonight."

"How did you get out here, anyway?" she asked, suddenly remembering she had seen no taxi when he first appeared at the gate.

"Caught a ride." Abruptly he changed the subject. "May I help with your packing?"

"I'd appreciate it very much," she said, pleased. "You can start wrapping those cups in newspaper while I run down to the box for mail. The mailman's due now." She indicated the stacked cups on the porch and the pile of old newspapers.

In the near-distance she heard the backfire of Mr. Rawlin's old sedan. And because

she would not see the mailman again and wished to tell him good-by, she started to run toward the mailbox. The old man brought his car to a creaking halt, and when he saw Maida running down the lane, he waited for her.

"Nothing today but the paper, Mrs. Kirk." He handed it out to her. "Guess you'll be gone from here tomorrow."

"Yes," she said. "I wanted to tell you good-by and thanks for your excellent service. You've sort of kept me in touch with civilization these last weeks since Tom took the job in Kingston."

"Guess you don't see many people aside from me," the old man agreed. "Kind of lonely for you."

"I'll be glad to be settled in Kingston," Maida said. "But I will miss you, Mr. Rawlin."

He smiled at her, pleased. "Miss you too, Mrs. Kirk." He shifted into low and let the clutch out part way, then pressed down on the pedal again. "Almost forgot to tell you. Keep your place locked to-night and don't let in no strangers. Crazy feller escaped from the state hospital over to Belmont."

"Oh?" Maida said. "Anyone dangerous?"

"Well, not necessarily. Radio says he acts normal most times, and probably wouldn't bother nobody unless they bothered him first. But anything gets him mad, he turns to a homey-cidal maniac. Probably he'll never come near here, but no sense taking chances. You lock up tight."

She said, "Thanks for the warning, but I won't be alone tonight. The new owner arrived a day early."

Then she bit at her tongue, wondering what his old-fashioned rules of conduct would make of a married woman staying alone in the same house with a stranger. But apparently Mr. Rawlin had an entirely clean mind.

"Good," he said. "Woman oughtn't be alone out here, even if there wasn't a

homey-cidal maniac running around."

When she got back to the porch her guest had wrapped several cups and was placing them carefully in one of the barrels.

Setting the newspaper on the porch rail, Maida said, "I thought we'd have chicken for lunch. I'll kill it now, so it will have a chance to drain and cool before I fry it."

He said, "I'll kill it for you, if you like."

She agreed willingly, for chicken-killing was a task she detested. "There's only one left in the chicken house," she said. She told him where to find the chicken house and the axe.

WHILE he was gone, she began wrapping some more cups, and in about five minutes she heard the hen squawking at the side of the house. The squawking continued, shrill and terrified, for so long it began to get on her nerves. *Why doesn't he kill it?* she thought, and then wondered if perhaps he had never killed a chicken and did not know how.

Setting down the cup she was wrapping, she hurried around the side of the house. Her visitor was seated on the chopping block with the fryer's legs clamped between his knees, one hand expertly holding the bird motionless by pinning its wings together. With the other hand he was methodically plucking it.

For a moment she stared at the scene in incredulous horror. Then she grasped the bird by the throat, jerked it from him and twisted its neck with one experienced flip.

"That's the cruelest thing I've ever seen done!" she snapped at him furiously.

His face darkened, causing a large vein to bulge in his forehead. Almost sullenly he said, "A live-plucked chicken is more tender."

"I prefer to chance the toughness! And I don't believe it anyway!"

He rose from the chopping block and stood before her with his nostrils flared and the large vein beating in his forehead. She realized he was angry, but he was no more

angry than she. Brusquely she turned her back and started toward the house with the chicken.

She heard him take two steps behind her, and his breath made a hissing sound as it expelled between clenched teeth. Then there was a swish, and the sigh of an axe crunching into solid wood. She glanced back to see he had released some of his anger by burying the axe blade so deeply in the chopping block, he was having difficulty wrenching it loose.

In the kitchen she decapitated the bird and let it drain in the sink. While it was draining she heard the axe strike the chopping block twice more and was rather startled at his childish display of temper.

He's acting like a maniac, she thought indignantly.

Maniac! When the frightening thought jumped into her mind, irritation gushed away as though someone had pulled a plug. Could her guest be. . . .

Of course not, she told herself immediately—hadn't he identified himself? But she was nevertheless frightened. Certainly he was peculiar. His vagueness and inattention, for example. Were insane persons vague? And his plucking a live chicken. Would any sane person so senselessly cause pain? Of course it was really no more cruel than boiling lobster alive, except lobsters were unable to squawk.

She was being silly, she decided. Her guest could not possibly be the escaped maniac masquerading as Mr. Steuben, for how could he have known she was expecting a Mr. Steuben? She thought back to when he had introduced himself.

The sharp edge of panic touched her. He had not introduced himself! She had simply assumed he was Mr. Steuben and called him by name. Her mind rushed back over each incident since he had arrived, examining it through a crystal of fear. In no instance could she remember his volunteering any information which might indicate he had ever even heard of George Steuben.

She tried to drown growing fright by forcing her thoughts to rebut her suspicions. He spoke as though educated, much as she imagined a professional writer would speak. And even in the improbable event of his being the escaped maniac, Mr. Rawlin had said he was dangerous only if angered.

But he was angry! She began to tremble as she realized there had been silence in the yard for some minutes. At that moment he appeared at the kitchen door, his face pale and his eyes avoiding hers.

"Anything I can do?" he asked quietly.

Unreasoning fear diffused through her body. "No thanks," she managed to say.

For a time he stood motionless, his eyes still averted, then walked away and she saw him round the corner toward the front porch.

Why, he's ashamed of showing anger! she thought with relief. *He must be George Steuben.*

And even if he were the escaped lunatic, she told herself, there was no danger if she did not rouse him again. Surely if he intended any harm, the chicken incident would have made him act. If she showed no change in her attitude, she could safely get by until Tom phoned, as he did every afternoon. She wished there were some way to reach Tom immediately, but knew he would be visiting prospects.

SHE could hear no sound from the front of the house, and the silence began to panic her again. She dreaded leaving the sanctuary of the kitchen, but dreaded even more not knowing what her guest was doing. She waited uncertainly until she thought her delay might cause him to come looking for her, and the thought added to her panic. Finally, like a person taking a cold plunge, she steeled her mind and nearly ran through the house to the front porch.

He was quietly wrapping dishes.

After her emotional orgy, this anticlimax jolted her nearly as much as if she had

found him waiting with a raised axe, and when he glanced up with his usual disinterest, she felt her face flame red with shame at her suspicions. Immediately his eyes lost their blankness to become alert. He rose slowly, and she fancied his mouth corners began a sullen droop.

At once her fears rushed back ten-fold. *I can't let him know I suspect*, she told herself, knowing as she silently repeated it her blush was fading to a dull pallor. *I can't let him know I suspect.*

For the first time since his arrival she had his full attention. From slightly narrowed eyes he examined her face intently, seeming to search beyond the surface for her inner thoughts.

Brightly, and she hoped not too wildly, she said, "You've finished ever so many! I'll pack while you wrap."

She began placing the dishes he had wrapped in a barrel and stuffing newspapers around them. She was conscious that he made no move to resume wrapping, instead continuing to watch her from strangely alert eyes, but she kept her own gaze concentrated on her work, hoping ostrich-like this would somehow conceal her paleness.

Eventually he stooped and again began wrapping dishes. But his former air of inattention had evaporated. During the next hour and a half she was acutely aware of his silent examination, and tension grew in her until she worked like an automaton, hardly conscious of what she was doing because of her fear of the man at her side. Not once during this time did she speak.

Then four of the barrels were filled and there were no more dishes to pack. All excuse for silence was gone.

Attempting a smile that failed, she looked past his shoulder instead of at his face and said in too high a voice, "The rest of the dishes are still in the kitchen cabinet. Let's stop for lunch."

Not awaiting reply, she went into the house, forcing herself to move without

hurry. Supporting herself against the kitchen sink, she closed her eyes and let a controlled tremor loosen the tight muscles of her body.

Another minute and she would have screamed, she thought. She must get a grip on her emotions and think of her guest as George Steuben instead of as a maniac. He probably was Mr. Steuben, she mentally added, without conviction.

She brought herself to steadiness by conceiving of her situation as a struggle between two different parts of her. The maniac, if he were a maniac, was not her danger. Her own fear was the enemy, and the courage to conceal it her only defense. Insane or not, he meant her no harm, of that her mind, if not her emotions, was convinced. Her sole danger was inciting his anger by disclosing to him her unreasoning fear.

He remained on the porch while she prepared lunch, and by the time she had cut up and fried the chicken, she had calmed to the point where she was able to call in a firm voice, "Lunch is ready, Mr. Steuben."

When he came into the kitchen she was even able to manage a hostesslike apology for the meal.

"I'm afraid it's a camping-out sort of thing," she said. "But I wasn't expecting a guest."

They ate with their plates on their laps, seated on boxes which she had him bring from the front room. During lunch she exercised her new-found self-control by chatting casually about the house and about Tom's new job in Kingston. At first she found herself speaking too rapidly, and as he listened without comment, there grew in her a horrible feeling that she must continue chattering forever because he would grow violent the moment she stopped. But when his alertness gradually faded to inattention, her confidence grew, and by the time lunch was over her fear had subsided to a mild uneasiness.

She decided her guest actually was Mr.

Steuben, and being alone so much recently had oversharpened her imagination.

After she had washed the dishes and he had wiped, they went back to work. And as practice improved the part she was playing, no one would have suspected that beneath her occasional matter-of-fact remarks lay the embers of hysteria.

Once when his hand accidentally touched hers, she jerked away so suddenly he flushed and his mouth corners drooped. But even this she was able to counteract with gay chatter, and neither mentioned the contact.

By two o'clock the last barrel was filled and there was nothing more to do but wait for the arrival of the truck in the morning. Her battle was nearly won, for Tom would phone at any time now, and she meant to ask him to come for her immediately. She no longer had any intention of spending the night in the house, even though her guest probably was merely the new owner.

AS THEY both relaxed on the porch steps with cigarettes, the phone began to ring. Maida cocked her head to listen, counting three short and two long.

"That's us," she said, rising. "Probably Tom to tell me not to forget the slippers he left."

She went into the kitchen and was raising the receiver before she noticed he had followed and was standing in the door watching her. She hesitated, wondering how she could get her feelings across to Tom without making her guest suspicious, then managed an impersonal smile in his direction and placed the receiver to her ear.

She said, "Hello," into the phone, and Tom's voice said, "Maida, are you all right?"

"Of course," she said quietly, conscious of her guest's eyes upon her. "Why wouldn't I be?"

"I was just kind of worried. Heard a radio report about a maniac escaping from Belmont, and he was last seen a couple of miles from there. You close and lock all the

downstairs shutters and doors, will you?"

She said, "All right, dear. But you don't have to worry. I'm well protected." Deliberately she made her voice falsely bright in the hope Tom would catch the false note.

"How do you mean?"

"Mr. Steuben arrived a day early. He's sleeping in the maid's room tonight."

Tom did not reply for such a long time, she knew she must have succeeded in transmitting a sense of something being askew. When he finally spoke, his voice was so low she could barely hear him.

"Can Mr. Steuben hear or see you now, Maida?"

"Both," she said. "Why?"

"Maida, listen to me carefully and don't change your expression. I'll get there as fast as I can."

Her relief at having so easily gotten across her call for assistance mixed with surprise at his perceptiveness, for ordinarily Tom was not so psychic to her moods. But his next words explained his immediate grasp of the situation.

His voice came so slowly the words were spaced to stand individually in her mind. "Maida, I was bringing George Steuben out in the morning. He's sitting here with me now."

Psychologists say cowardice is nine-tenths fear of the unknown, that courage increases with knowledge of definite dangers to be faced. Not so with Maida. Against the uncertain possibility that she was isolated with a homicidal maniac, courage had built a defense around her one vulnerability—hysteria. The sudden removal of uncertainty left a chink in her defensive armor through which slow fear seeped, growing and spreading until she was suffused with terror.

She held the phone to her ear and simply waited, knowing the colorless eyes in the doorway were watching her and the ears were taking in her side of the conversation. She felt she could not speak, could not hang up, could not move, ever, but must dumbly

sit through eternity with the phone in her hand.

Tom said, "Maida, if he's still listening, repeat after me carefully: 'All right, dear. See you in the morning.'"

She made a desperate effort and managed to say dully, "All right, dear. See you in the morning."

"Good girl. Now keep control of yourself and don't rouse his suspicion. I'm starting right now."

After he hung up, another fifteen seconds passed before she was able to put down the receiver. She rose stiffly, not looking at the man in the doorway, and somehow managed to propel herself to the sink. She drew a glass of water and sipped at it while she fought to stem a fit of trembling.

It's no different now than it was a minute ago, her intellect told her, but her emotions screamed. He's insane! He's insane and he's watching me!

She had to regain control of herself. Nothing was changed. He was the same man she had worked beside all day without suffering harm. She was still safe as long as she did not arouse his anger by exhibiting fear.

"Was that your husband?" asked a quiet voice immediately behind her.

The glass dropped from her hand and shattered in the sink. Swallowing a scream, she turned and managed to say gaily, "You frightened me. You shouldn't sneak up on people."

"Was that your husband?" he repeated.

"Yes. He wanted to be sure I didn't forget the slippers."

"You told him I was here." It was a statement, not a question.

"Yes. He was glad to know you arrived a day early." To her own ears her words sounded as stilted as the dialogue of an amateur play.

SHE slipped past him and went through the kitchen door, through the dining room and front hall to the porch, knowing

he followed one step behind her and suppressing a wild urge to break into a run. She kept right on going down the porch steps, her legs moving without grace in the jerky manner of a marionette.

"Where are you going?" he asked. His tone was not sharp, but it contained an element of command.

She stopped abruptly and turned. "To the mail box. Sometimes there's afternoon mail."

He shook his head. "No. You know very well there's no afternoon delivery."

She stood stiffly looking up at him, trying to think of some plausible reply, conscious that her face was draining of color but unable to prevent it.

His face darkened slightly, and he said in a sullen voice, "You know who I am."

She summoned a grin she knew was ghastly. "Why of course. You're Mr. Steuben."

"Don't try to humor me!" he said harshly. "There's nothing the matter with me that I have to be humored." His voice developed an edge of forced patience. "Please don't be afraid of me. I have no intention of harming you."

She could make no reply. She could do nothing but continue to stare at him, the ghastly grin frozen to her face.

He spaced his words carefully, as though it were important she understand each one. "All I wanted at first was a drink of water. But when you practically insisted I owned the house, I took advantage of it. Why shouldn't I have? They're patrolling every road and I had to stay somewhere. I'm a human being, not an animal to be kept in a cage. I've as much right to a normal life as anyone."

She knew her warped grin was beginning to irritate him, but it had set like cement and there was no way for her to get rid of it. As she continued to stand without speaking or changing expression, his face grew darker and the vein in his forehead bulged slightly.

With a final effort she broke the shackles of her terror and found her vocal chords and body would again obey her will. A residual bit of reason whispered safety lay in simply calming herself, but every nerve in her body screamed for flight.

In a cracking falsetto she said, "I have to go upstairs," and circled around him with her heart trying to pry apart her jaws.

He made no move to stop her, but as she started to climb the stairs, he was only one step behind. In spite of herself she quickened her pace until she was nearly running. When she reached the top, she continued straight ahead into the bathroom. He came to a halt, then turned quickly and moved back to the stair head.

She closed the door gently, shutting out the sight of his watchful face, noting as she did that it had darkened angrily. Hidden from him, she sank to her knees and dropped her face to her palms, while violent trembling shook her body. How long would it take Tom to drive twenty miles? Oh, Lord, how long would it take?

When his voice came through the door, it had thickened coarsely. "If you're just hiding, don't do it. I said I wouldn't hurt you."

Struggling to her feet, she turned the water in the sink on full blast. She tried to think of some method of blocking the door, but the bathroom contained nothing movable. She opened the linen closet to stare at the bare shelves, started to close it again, then stopped with her hand on the tiny knob. A pulse of hope throbbed through her as she examined the heavy shelves.

She put her fingers under one and pressed upward. It lifted slightly. They were not nailed in!

Estimatingly she compared the length of the shelves with the distance from the edge of the sink to the bathroom doorknob. Then she quietly removed the center shelf.

It was heavy and cumbersome, as all things in this house were heavy and cumbersome, but she managed to get it resting

on the edge of the sink without making so much noise that it would be audible above the running water. Bracing one end against the hot water faucet, she slowly lowered the other end toward the door, and felt a surge of relief when it touched just above the knob.

THE knob rattled, there was silence for a minute, and then the door shook as the man outside rammed his shoulder



IN THE NEXT ISSUE

THE WANDERER'S NECKLACE

By H. Rider Haggard

Strange relic of a forgotten time, it lay awaiting its foreordained day of destiny in a hidden Viking grave. . . . For then a long dead hand would reach for it, and grasp again the love and glory of the centuries—and its final, inescapable doom.

This great story by the master of mystic drama will feature the April issue, in response to the repeated requests of our many readers for more of this author's rare and hard-to-find classic works. And other short classics of distinction.

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against it. Her heart pounded terrifically as the door trembled twice more, but gradually subsided as she saw the brace was going to hold.

She was safe! Almost calmly she turned off the water and leaned against the sink to await Tom's arrival. Twenty miles, ten of it dirt road. Say ten minutes to get the police—for surely he would bring police—ten minutes to make the first ten miles and twenty minutes to make the second. Forty minutes altogether, and nearly half of that must have passed already.

Only silence came from the other side of the door. She bent to examine the wooden shelf, then, satisfied of its security, walked to the open window and looked out. A robin perched on the burglar's walk cocked his head at her and flew away.

A splintering crash swung her around. And when she saw the corner of an axe blade protruding through a gash in the door's upper panel, all her previous terror rushed back in supersaturated strength to batter against her mind in wave after panicking wave. The axe head sawed back and forth, then wrenched free. For the space of a pulse beat there was complete silence, and then with an oddly quiet crunch, the axe broke through.

Twice more the heavy blade gashed chunks of paneling from the door, until a hole the size of a man's head appeared. A face showed through the hole, but it was not a face she recognized. The features were blood-red, and a huge vein bulged beneath the damp fringe of hair falling haphazardly across his brow. The eyes were no longer colorless, but blazed with the intensity of burning oil, and the lips were spread wide over clenched teeth, through which a spray of spittle hissed.

For a full minute the maniac stared at Maida with devouring fury. Then his face disappeared and a thick right arm slid through the hole, groping for the wedged shelf. His fingers grasped it and jerked upward so that it gave a quarter inch.

Maida threw herself at the board, slammed it back in place and tried to claw the groping arm away from it. But the moment she touched the arm, his hand flashed from its grip on the shelf to clamp around her wrist.

Sinking to her knees, Maida screamed. The sound cascaded from the walls, echoed and re-echoed around her as she poured out her terror in scream after scream.

She felt herself jerked to her feet, and her screams faded to animal-like whimpers as the madman's arm slowly withdrew from the hole, drawing hers steadily toward it. She saw he intended to pull her arm through to his own side, and in desperation she grasped his forearm with her other hand and sank her teeth into the wrist.

He let go so suddenly she stumbled backward and sprawled full-length upon the floor. Half-stunned by the fall and nauseated by the taste of blood on her lips, she simply lay there listening to the strangled hiss of his breathing.

Then the axe smashed against the door, smashed again and again until the panel shattered in a dozen places and finally fell apart, leaving a jagged opening two-feet square. Maida managed to get to her feet, and she cowered toward the window as his head and shoulders thrust through the opening and he began to pull himself into the room.

Without conscious thought she flung one leg over the window sill, felt the burglar's walk beneath her foot and swung the other leg through. As the maniac's hands touched the floor and his feet wriggled through the hole, Maida moved precariously along the slanting roof edge toward her bedroom window. Halfway she glanced at the ground twenty feet below, then stopped with her body pressed against the outer wall as dizziness flowed over her. She thought she was going to fall, but was shocked from the notion by the sudden appearance of the lunatic's head from the bathroom window.

With a burst of speed she edged away

from him until her hand touched the sill outside her bedroom. His head disappeared.

Quickly she moved back along the burglar's walk toward the bathroom. His head and shoulders appeared around the corner of the window she had just left, one arm moved in a long arc and the axe spun past her so closely the handle grazed her back.

Almost as a continuation of the axe-throwing motion, he swung himself outside and side-stepped toward her rapidly. She barely had time to fall head-first into the bathroom when his hand was reaching for the sill.

With the unthinking instinct of a cornered animal she knew she could never escape through flight. The same primitive instinct made her swivel without rising from her knees, grasp the inner window's lower edge and slam it upon his hand.

The madman shrieked in enraged pain, but held his one-handed grip. As the fingers of his free hand curled beneath the window and forced it up again, Maida lifted the heavy shelf from the floor and swung it over her head like an unwieldy club. Now both his hands grasped the window sill preparatory to his vault into the room.

Maida slammed the shelf down across his knuckles.

His hands jerked back and he stood erect on the burglar's walk, his arms gyroscoping to maintain balance. Slower and slower they circled as he recovered, stopped his teetering and again leaned inward toward the window.

Maida smashed the linen closet shelf through the glass of both panes squarely into his face. As he tumbled backward, his feet flew up over his head in a sickening half somersault, and he disappeared head down.

When she could bring herself to peer over the edge of the window, he lay on the ground with his head impossibly bent under his arm, like a sleeping bird.

Slowly Maida straightened herself. She pushed her hands downward along her

thighs, smoothing her house dress. Poisedly she descended the stairs, politely edging past the policeman with drawn gun and open mouth whom she met halfway down.

At the bottom of the stairs stood Tom, his mouth as open as the policeman's. Maida held out one hand to her husband as though offering it to be kissed.

"He only wanted a drink of water," she said in a high voice.

She began to laugh hysterically. ■ ■ ■



Joe could remember the quarrel, the foolish, drunken dancing, the bitter accusations. . . . But nothing could fill in the horrible blank space between then and this moment, as he stared, unbelieving, at Lyra's body, at the crimson gash in her throat. . . .

Killer in the Corner!

A Thrill-Packed Mystery

By Francis K. Allan

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DETECTIVE 25c TALES

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STRANGE TRAILS



BLIND JUSTICE

HEINRICH MARICK THOUGHT HE HAD LEFT NOTHING TO BLIND CHANCE IN PLOTTING HIS "PERFECT" MURDER. HIS FIANCEE, MRS. MARIA LUCKINI, A WELL-TO-DO WIDOW OF INNSBRUCK, AUSTRIA, HAD MADE A WILL IN HIS FAVOR AND EVERYTHING WAS READY WHEN HE CALLED AT HER APARTMENT THAT EVENING IN JULY, 1935.

INSISTING SHE DID NOT LOOK WELL, HE MIXED HER A SLEEPING DRAUGHT — TRIPLE STRENGTH — AND SAT WITH HER UNTIL SHE FELL ASLEEP. THEN HE CONNECTED A RUBBER TUBE TO A GASJET ON THE KITCHEN STOVE, STRETCHED IT INTO THE BEDROOM, CLOSED THE DOOR AND TURNED ON THE GAS. AFTER FILCHING THE LATCH KEY FROM HER POCKETBOOK, HE WENT HOME TO HIS FURNISHED ROOM.

NEXT MORNING HE RETURNED, SLIPPED THE TUBE INTO HIS POCKET, REPLACED THE LATCH KEY, OPENED ALL THE GAS JETS ON THE STOVE AND HURRIED DOWN TO THE JANITOR TO REPORT THAT MRS. LUCKINI DID NOT ANSWER HER DOOR, AND HE SMELLED GAS.

AFTER ASCERTAINING THAT MRS. LUCKINI WAS DEAD, THE JANITOR NOTIFIED POLICE WHO FOUND IT A CLEAR CASE OF SUICIDE AND OFFERED THEIR SYMPATHY TO THE BEREAVED SWEETHEART.

CHANCE ENTERED IN THE FORM OF MRS. JOSEFINA BERNHAUER, MARICK'S BLIND CHARWOMAN, WHO CAME TO HIS ROOM TO OFFER HER CONDOLENCES. TO HER SENSES, MADE KEENER BY THE LOSS OF THE MOST IMPORTANT ONE, HIS PROTESTATIONS OF GRIEF DID NOT RING TRUE.

39-197

to MURDER by LEE

AFTER HE HAD LEFT, THE BLIND WOMAN TIDIED UP HIS ROOM AS USUAL, GOING OVER EVERYTHING CAREFULLY, METHODICALLY, WITH HER SENSITIVE HANDS. FINISHED, SHE STOOD FOR SOME TIME, HEAD COCKED AS THOUGH LISTENING FOR A SOUND THAT ONLY THE SIGHTLESS COULD HEAR. SHE SNIFFED THE AIR, THEN SNIFFED AGAIN.

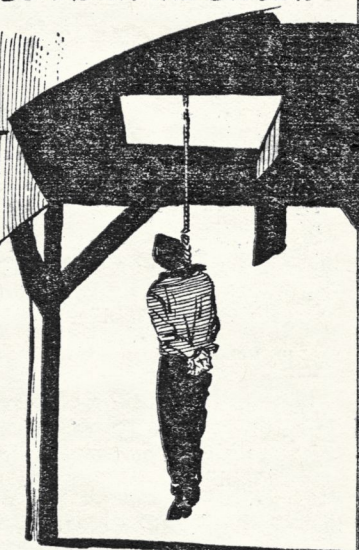
SHE MOVED UNERRINGLY TO THE BUREAU. YES, THE ELUSIVE ODOR WAS STRONGER HERE. SHE OPENED DRAWER AFTER DRAWER, FUMBLING THROUGH CLOTHING UNTIL HER HANDS ENCOUNTERED A BOX. INSIDE WAS A LENGTH OF RUBBER TUBING WHICH REEKED OF GAS. SINCE THERE WAS NO STOVE IN THE ROOM, THIS CLEARLY WAS A MATTER FOR THE POLICE.

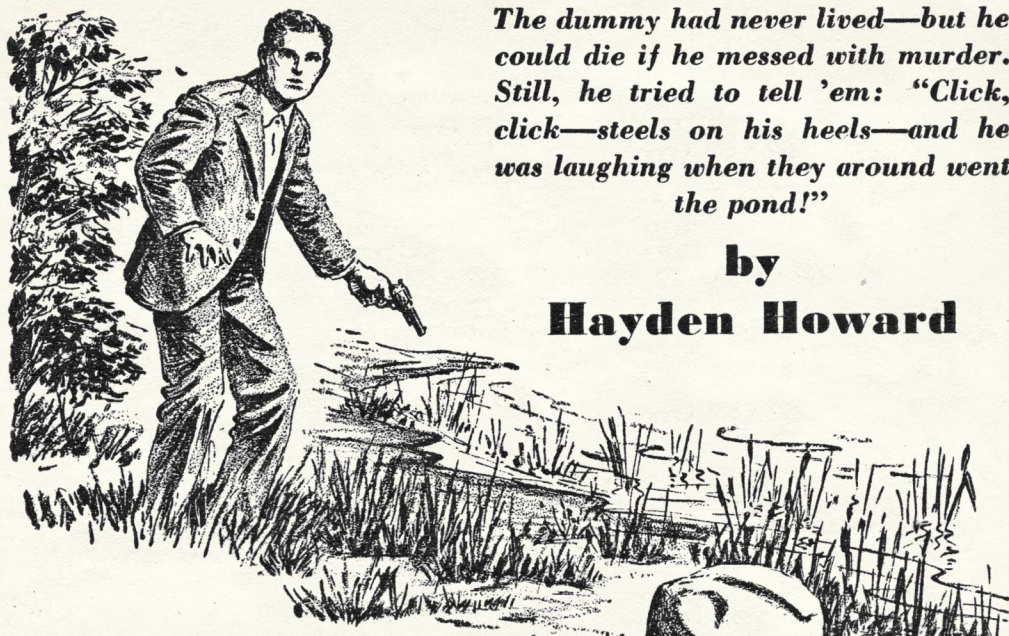


DETECTIVES CALLED AND ASKED POLITELY ABOUT THE TUBING IN THE BUREAU. MARICK DENIED HAVING ANY THERE. THEY LOOKED AND FOUND NONE, BUT A SEARCH REVEALED WHERE HE HAD REHIDDEN IT BEHIND A LOOSE BOARD IN THE CLOSET.



AT FIRST MARICK TRIED TO EXPLAIN THAT HE HAD ONLY "HELPED" HIS FIANCEE COMMIT SUICIDE. BUT BLIND CHANCE HAD SO FOULED UP HIS "PERFECT" CRIME THAT HE CONFESSED AND EVENTUALLY CELEBRATED HIS FAILURE ON THE SCAFFOLD.





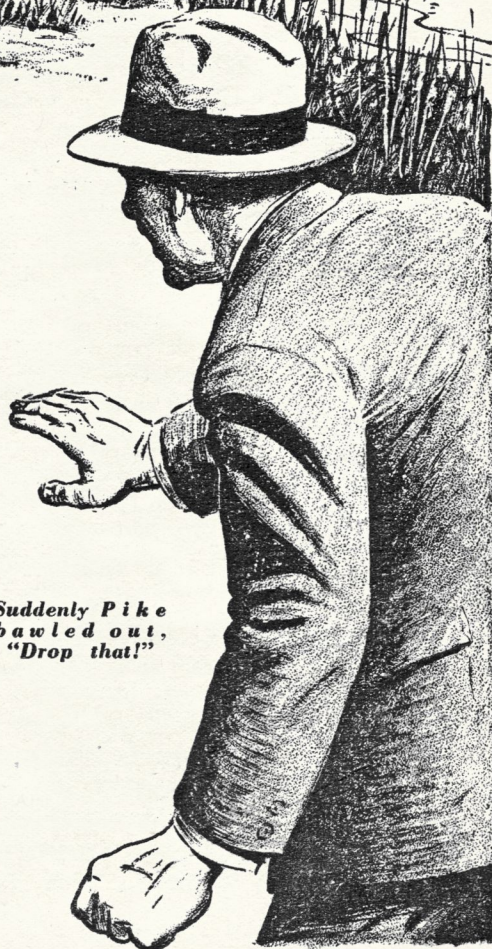
The dummy had never lived—but he could die if he messed with murder. Still, he tried to tell 'em: "Click, click—steels on his heels—and he was laughing when they around went the pond!"

by
Hayden Howard

THE DUMMY AND THE DEATH WEB

AS DENNY came out of the park rest room, the brunette sunning on the grass, with nylons rolled down to show her gold anklet and flowered skirt arranged above her knees, hopefully lifted her eyelids.

Nose wrinkling, she rolled disgustedly to her stomach and elbows, and scowled at a pill-bug lost in the grass. For Denny was a broad-shouldered, bronze-cheeked young



*Suddenly Pike
bawled out,
"Drop that!"*

man with a romantically cleft chin, and lower lip shiny with saliva. He walked with hitching, spastic lurches. His brow writhed in his desperate concentration to make his feet lift and come down alternately.

"Hey, Denny."

Across the pavement, aflutter with pigeons, Patrolman Reiser beckoned.

Smiling shyly at his friend, Denny clumped gently toward him through the beggars' chickens.

"Denny, your pants are unbuttoned."

Ruddy purple beneath his tan and ducking his curly chestnut head in shame, Denny took the hint and acted upon it.

"That's O.K. Denny. Here's fifteen cents. Would you get a couple of cokes, one for you and one for me, and be sure to have the girl uncap them for you?"

Denny's magnificent sunlit head wagged up and down with the delighted vigor of a puppy's tail. His hand advanced toward the dime and nickel in a series of uncontrollable, spastic lunges.

"Don't take too long, Denny. In ten minutes I have to relieve Weskirk at the duck pond. They're still dragging for the gun."

Hand scooping frantically at the air, Denny blurted an earnest, meaningless sound. His wrinkled forehead reflected his inner struggle to make his vocal cords tell what stood so clearly and urgently in his mind. The message exploded, damp and triumphant.

"Straws?"

"Sure, if you want them Denny."

Afterward, bubbling thoughtfully through his coke straw, Denny stood against the rope the police had strung to keep the gawkers back, and watched the little electric boat, low with the weight of two policemen, drone round and round the outlet valve in the center of the duck pond.

His friend Reiser stood among the yellow iris on the mudflat with his back to the guard rope, watching the dragging operation. There was no longer a crowd to keep back, just a few bums from the bamboo

jungle who laughed and shoved each other whenever the cops in the boat snagged up a beer-can or sodden shoe.

The bums parted with hurried quiet as two plainclothesmen, the taller one a glowering, lumpy-nosed giant, hustled a swollen-eyed young man toward the rope. While the smaller detective whose wrist was manacled to the young man's ducked under the rope with a tired groan, the big one marched to Reiser, spoke shortly to him, then bellowed through his cupped hands at the cops in the boat. They shook their heads, then nodded in unison, and the boat accelerated around the pond like an angry bumblebee.

As Reiser and the detective walked back to the manacled young man, Denny heard the big man's voice grate irritably. "You keep the bums off the grass, Reiser. I'll solve the crimes. Now go get me a coke."

The patrolman's mouth opened sharply, but the small detective was shaking his head warningly, and Reiser turned on his heel and walked to the rope.

"Here's thirty-five cents, Denny. Would you get us five cokes?"

WHEN Denny lurched proudly back, he located the four of them under the shade of the monkey-puzzle tree. Smiling shyly, he handed a bottle to Reiser, one to the small detective, one to the sad-looking young man, and one to the big lumpy-nosed detective.

"Hey, Reiser," the giant barked, "What am I supposed to do, bite the bottle cap off?"

Denny's jaw sagged in dismay.

"Keep your teeth in your pocket, Pike," the little detective said soothingly, and produced a Boy Scout knife complete with bottle-opener.

After a long pull on his coke, Pike belched and squinted at the downcast young man.

"Lissen Russel, why'n hell don't you tell the truth? We been dragging since dawn."

Pike jabbed his forefinger at Denny. "Even this dummy here can see you didn't throw it in the pond."

"It was so dark," Russel's voice was quiet and empty; "And I lost my head when I found her like that. I just threw it away and heard it splash."

Pike bared his teeth at Reiser.

"The first time this kid tells it, right after he gives himself up, he confesses he shot her and threw the gun straight in the pond. Sure, sure, he can lead us right where he threw it, he says. But now he's thinking about the fry-seat. Now, he has her committing suicide and him finding her afterward and just throwing the gun, he doesn't know where. And he doesn't want us to know where."

He whirled at Russel. "You're lying. Maybe you threw it in the bamboo, huh? Lissen, Russel, you're going to smell like bacon frying whether we find that gun or not."

His great, furry hand seized Russel's coat lapels, shirt-front and tie as he belated: "Let's have it, make it quick, you're costing the taxpayers money."

Russel turned his head away.

Pike gave him a backward shove that nearly upset the attached detective. Denny made a sputtering sound.

The big detective slowly turned as if he physically felt Denny's glare, and returned Denny's gaze, lip curling under his lumpy nose until his teeth glinted in the sunlight. Suddenly he whirled at Reiser.

"Who gave you permission to let this dummy in?"

Before the patrolman could answer, Denny's ruddy, agitated face blurted: "Maggot. No-nuh, magnet."

Pike's nostrils flared.

"And stick it up," Denny hastily explained.

"Reiser," Pike bellowed as if in pain, "tell this dummy to go 'way."

"He means magnet. Maybe he means drag for the revolver with an electro-

magnet?" the smaller detective suggested cautiously as they watched Denny's bent form lurch and jerk across the lawn.

A leggy girl in a grey suit and beret ducked under the rope and trotted toward Denny and past him toward the monkey-puzzle tree. And Reiser started forward to turn her back.

"Hold it, Reiser," Pike began to grin like an orangutan while adjusting his hand-painted tie as the girl came closer.

She was carrying a steno pad and was obviously a sob-sister for the local newspaper.

Denny paused outside the rope, head cocked, lips trembling, listening to Pike's loudly pleasant replies.

"Yes, miss, I'm handling the Betty Janson case and this is her boy friend, Russel, this bird right here. Yes, I'd like to let you talk to him but the commissioner has a ruling, no interviews. . . . Oh, we expect to find the gun any minute."

The girl smiled winningly. "Can I say something to him?"

"Sure," Pike laughed, "but he isn't going to answer."

The girl sidestepped the detective and her voice shrilled: "I just came from the coroner's interview. Betcha can't guess what they found."

Russel turned his face away.

Pike emitted a surprised snort. "Now we really got him. Russel, that was baloney about Betty Janson telling you to leave her alone, it was you marry her or else, wasn't it, boys?"

He turned to the girl reporter. "There's plenty of motive for your newspaper to have fun with. You can take it from me, quote me in fact, gun or no gun, this case is solved. Since there was no contact wound in the back of her head, we never did believe she committed suicide; she'd have had to been double-jointed to do that. Good, sound police work beats them every time."

"Shake it up out there," he bellowed at

the cops in the boat, and turned smiling to the girl. "We like to hand the D.A. a nice neat case. As I say, presentation of the murder weapon won't be necessary, but it's like salt in your beer, that little something extra that makes it just right. And I wouldn't be surprised if we have a written confession before you go to press. Sort of like pretzels to go with that beer. The D.A. will really be happy about just one day in court, not costing the taxpayers hardly anything at all."

As the group ambled toward the rope, Pike grinned from the girl to Denny who was standing against the barrier. "Listen to this dummy talk; he's really a scream."

"Hey you," he roared. "Who gave you permission to lean on that rope?"

DENNY'S jaw cramped agonizingly, his eyes bulged with effort. Instead of the stuttering apology they expected, his words came out: "At night they water the lawns."

The girl giggled and Pike whooped.

"Th-th-the pond gets littler in the daytime," Denny insisted angrily.

"He's cute," the girl laughed as Denny ducked clumsily under the rope and lurched toward the pond, elbows akimbo with determination.

"Poor thing," she murmured after him. "He would have been such a handsome man."

"That dummy?" Pike sneered, rubbing his nose.

"He can read."

"Reiser," Pike shouted, "what'd you mean by that crack?"

"I just meant Denny's smarter than he seems. People judge how intelligent a fellow is by the way he talks. It's hard for Denny to talk so they make the mistake of assuming he's an idiot."

Pike guffawed. "Well, I'm glad he's not swinging on my family tree. Look at him rooting into those irises on the mudbank. What's he looking for, his dinner?"

The girl giggled uncomfortably.

While they watched, Denny straightened, and hitched and jerked toward them.

Suddenly Pike bawled: "Drop that!" and vaulted the rope. Running, he drew out a pencil. Inserting it in the muzzle, he lifted the revolver Denny had obediently let fall at the pond's high-water mark. Although Denny had retrieved the revolver from the drying mudbank, water from the irrigation-lowered pond dribbled out of the barrel.

"Dumb fool," Pike muttered. "You wiped out all the fingerprints."

Suddenly grinning, he advanced on Rüssel. "So this is what you blew her head open with."

The young man's lips winced, and he turned his head away with a strangling sound. But he whirled at Pike.

"She was dead when I found her. How many times do I have to tell you? The revolver lay by her purse under her skirt. I told you it was pearl-handled. What more do you want? That's it." His voice began to shudder. "When I saw she'd committed suicide, I didn't really understand why; she'd never told me—"

"See, I followed her into the park. I tried to hold her so she'd stop being angry with me, and she took this gun out of her purse and told me to go away or she'd do something terrible, but I thought she was just trying to be dramatic or something. See, we'd been fighting because I didn't want to get married until I could find a better job. But she kept after me that we should set the date. But she never told me there was anything else."

"I got mad when she pointed the gun, and I went off and walked around and watched the Merchant's Torchlight Parade for a while, and then got worried and came back looking for Betty. I found her lying over there. I could see she'd shot herself. But it was my fault, and I ought to pay for it somehow, I thought. I didn't know what I was thinking. I threw the gun into the dark and heard it splash, and

ran to the police station and said I did it. But I didn't. She was that way when I found her." Russel paused gasping for breath.

Tongue between her teeth, the newspaper girl was writing furiously.

Pike shrugged and, using a handkerchief, broke open the revolver. "Hey, what did you do? Reload it? This gun's still got six bullets!"

The young man turned his head away.

"You said thirty-eight caliber, didn't you?" Pike squawled. "This gun's only a thirty-two."

"I didn't say, I couldn't tell, it was dark," Russel retorted over his shoulder.

"The preliminary autopsy said the bullet was a thirty-eight," Pike wheezed. "Lissen, what are you trying to pull? Betty Janson was murdered with a thirty-eight, but you say this thirty-two, that hasn't even been shot off, was the gun."

He took a threatening step toward Russel, remembered the girl reporter and stopped, pivoted stiffly and bellowed out across the pond: "Hey, you two, get off your hands. Get that boat dragging. You're going to find the murder gun or stay out all night."

He marched away through the park with the small detective and Russell and the girl tagging behind.

Reiser grinned maliciously at Pike's back. "Now the commissioner is really going to be stepping on Pike's tail, what with this, and that shooting behind the Blue Ballroom already a month without a fresh lead. The newspapers now have two unsolved woman-murders to needle the commissioner with."

"Wh-why does-nut he unnerstand I'm notta dummy?" Denny panted angrily. "I uh show him I'm notta dummy!"

His forehead wrinkled with inner exertion. "Buh-oath shot there when was a big noise, parade and dancing band, only outside behind."

"Read about it, eh?" The patrolman

nodded compassionately and looked around as though he were trying to think of another subject of conversation that would help Denny forget his hurt feelings. But he gave up, shrugged. "The two murders don't fit, Denny. The Blue Ballroom hostess had her purse stolen. Betty Janson's was found beside her with eleven dollars in it, and a loose thirty-two caliber bullet. Apparently nothing stolen from it. Only a maniac, or someone like Russel who lost his head and killed her for personal reasons, would shoot a girl in a public park."

"R-russell loved her and didn't kill her." Denny insisted with childlike positiveness. "Came back from parade before behind ballroom man had time to take her money. Heard Russel and ran."

"May-be," Reiser soothed. "But the little dick who was cuffed to Russel, name of Pete Burke, was telling me the first thing Pike did was compare the two murder bullets, both thirty-eight's, both S&W Police Specials, but they were from different guns. And kids looking for a baseball found the first thirty-eight in a storm drain only a block from the Blue Ballroom."

Denny's arms flapped with frustrated irritation. "I uh, uh think ole Pike murdered her!"

Reiser laughed, shaking his head. "Pike would like to kill people, Denny. But he never quite does."

He went on soothingly: "You want to take those coke bottles back for the deposit?"

Denny's mouth opened and closed, wordless as a fish.

"Two cents on each bottle," Reiser continued, "You can buy yourself a funny-book or a couple of candy bars."

"Tracks!" Denny exploded dramatically.

REISER kept a straight face. "Yes, Denny, there were lots of those. Burke was saying Pike had him make whole suitcases full of plaster casts of the tracks around her body—Russel's, and all of the

people who walked there during the day and those who may have passed by in the dark without noticing her lying there, lots of tracks. One man had hammer-toes, another had holes in his soles. Some women had spike heels, others wore flats. One little guy had steel taps on both toes and heels to keep his shoes from wearing. Burke was saying there were so many mixed up tracks they only took plaster casts of the ones on top that looked dampest. But even so, when Russel gave himself up, they filled a whole ashcan with those wasted plaster shoes."

"Clicky," Denny exclaimed excitedly. "I show P-pike who's a dummy!"

"Huh?"

"One of the bummas, uh bums, uh," Denny's face turned purple with frustrated effort as he pawed the air. "Hums, who was watching, laughing. Pike came. He-he went away, click, click, click."

"Pike?"

"No," Denny sprayed the air as he tried to explain. "Bum, um, bums, click, click, that's who."

"Where'd he go?" Reiser looked about quickly.

Denny pointed toward the bamboo jungle.

Reiser smiled. "It's full of bums. What with who's on the city council now, we don't try to chase them out so long as they don't build fires."

Denny's handsome face quivered as he repeated, "Click, click, steels on his heels. Tracks, tracks. Heavy in his pocket." He paused for effort, gasping. "Like a gun. And he was laughing when they around went the pond."

"You're not kidding me?" Reiser asked.

"Nuh, no. He hadda gun. I would told you, only some of the bummas talk to me, lots of times, not that one, crazy, screwy, click, click, though." Denny pawed the air, strong, cleft chin trembling. "I show ole Pike who's uh dummy, and give Reiser-my-friend a lead."

The patrolman hesitated, looking aimlessly about the park, everywhere but at the bamboo jungle. He whirled, hand drifting to his holster as he took a step toward the dense stand of giant's grass. But he changed his mind and trotted to the duck pond, where he exchanged shouts with the men in the electric boat.

There was a wait.

When they reached shore, one ran in the direction of the call box. After Reiser explained a little more, the other gasped, "Hell, man, considering who gave you the tip, I—uh—Pike's going to be sore as hell if this is a false alarm."

"It probably is," Reiser snapped, walking cautiously toward the towering clump of bamboo. "You circle to the right, stay well back so that you can watch that he doesn't come out. We won't go in because he'd just pop out the other side when there was bamboo between us. Denny, you stand here and shout if you see anyone start to come out."

The other policeman came panting back and Reiser stationed him so the bamboo jungle was effectively surrounded. Except for the little birds jumping on the dead leaves, it was quiet until Pike and two plainclothesmen arrived.

As the big detective waved them into the thick bamboo, the nervous cop from the electric boat sidled back to him and, palms open, whispered something.

Statement required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Acts of March 3, 1933 and July 2, 1946 (Title 39, United States Code, Section 233), showing the Ownership, Management, and Circulation of New Detective Magazine, published bi-monthly at Kokomo, Indiana, for October 1, 1952. 1. The names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, Henry Steeger, 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, New York. Editor, Henry Steeger, 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, New York. Managing editor, None. Business manager, None. 2. The owner is: Popular Publications, Inc., 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, New York. Henry Steeger, 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, New York. Shirley M. Steeger, 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, New York. 3. The known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None. 4. Paragraphs 2 and 3 include, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting; also the statements in the two paragraphs show the affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner. Signed, Henry Steeger, Publisher. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 7th day of October, 1952. Eugene Jelinek, Notary Public, State of New York. Qualified in Bronx County, No. 03-1962300. Certificate filed in Bronx and N. Y. counties. My Commission expires March 30, 1953. (Seal)—Form 3526—Rev. 8-50.

"Reiser," Pike bawled, "of all the dumb-headed, grandstanding foul-ups. Calling me back on this dummy's say-so. By godfrey, if there's nothing but squirrels in that bamboo, I'll have you shipped so far into the sticks, it'll take you a week to walk home for supper. And if it turns out to be only some old bum you were scared to chase out by yourself, by geeze, I'll have you shipped twice as far."

"Reiser!" he roared. "You're going to wish you'd never seen that dummy. Now get him out of here."

"Hey," an invisible cop shouted through the bamboos. "Halt!" He fell loudly. The bamboos clashed, thrashing their tops as though men were running in every direction.

With a surprised grunt Pike whipped his revolver from his shoulder holster and charged into the jungle. Reiser followed, leaving no one to shout a warning if the man with steel toe and heel taps burst out onto the lawn, so Denny came to a stop, listening.

He smiled as he heard Pike fall and curse. He knew what was tripping them. There were pieces of old tile pipe full of spiders in there all mixed up with the bamboo sprouts and fallen leaves, and trip wires the bums had strung so that they could not be approached and rolled while they slept.

All the invisible cops were shouting: "Stop, halt, look out, don't shoot you fool, that's me."

Denny smiled to himself, wondering if someone might accidentally shoot Pike.

"There he goes," a voice shrilled. "Halt, halt."

A shot cracked. Two more followed, quick as echoes.

The thrashing in the bamboo jungle quieted.

"Reiser, of all the dumb, stupid idiots," Pike's voice raged. "He hasn't any gun. He's just some little bum."

"You shot him, not me," Reiser snapped.

"He was charging right at me," Pike bawled.

WITH sickly curiosity, Denny pushed through the bamboo. The little bum lay on what had been his face a moment before—steel heel taps glinting in a beam of sunlight, one arm, grey with cobwebs, curled about his head. He was surrounded by cops with hands in their pockets, and disgusted expressions.

"He could have thrown away his gun as he ran," Reiser insisted.

"There he is again," Pike bawled unexpectedly, pointing his revolver at Denny.

"Co-cobwebs," Denny gasped. "His arm on," he tried to explain, lurching bravely past Pike and the corpse to a length of broken tile pipe.

"Get that dummy out of here," Pike said quietly.

"Denny," Reiser called. "They're black widow spiders in those pipes, you better go on home."

Defiantly Denny rose and hitched to the next pipe. When he withdrew his arm it was cobwebbed to the elbow. He was holding a dusty red purse.

"Oh, oh," someone muttered. "The woman who was murdered back of the Blue Ballroom."

As one man, they charged Denny. He dropped the purse and squirmed away. Pike, wrapping a handkerchief about his hand, picked it up and looked inside.

"Awright," he bawled, "we're going to search every pipe in this park. Denman, hold this purse and for Pete's sakes don't smudge it any more than it is already."

When Reiser discovered the thirty-eight revolver in the mouth of another tile pipe and, holding it by the muzzle and smiling narrowly, showed it to Pike, the lumpy-nosed detective's visage flushed with contradictory emotions.

Reiser inquired with an ill-suppressed smile, "Sir, don't you think the ballistics

(Continued on page 113)

McNair said gruffly, "Stow it, Doc. I dunno how long you been jabbin' these guys, but there sure must be a buck in it...."



by George W.
Morse

Marty O'Bannon's Slayride

When terror rode the hot, bright hours, Marty O'Bannon rode with it—fashioning the biggest news story of his life—one he could never write!

MARTY O'BANNON, crusty and venerable district man for the *Herald*, waddled through the heavy traffic of lower Ninth Street, perspiring profusely. He grunted a greeting to an aged man selling *slanina* at a sidewalk stall, held his course firmly until a pushcart vendor turned aside for him, then heaved his huge weight up a short flight of steps to the front of an aging frame house. He pushed a bell marked Dr. Steven Horák, M.D.

A woman came to the door. She was a

young woman with dark hair and a firm, Slavic face, so plain it approached beauty. She looked tired, but her housedress was neat and her smile warm.

She said, "Marty! Don't tell me the back is bothering yet again?"

Marty grunted, pushed by her and sank onto the worn couch of the waiting room. He leaned over, loosened shoelaces stretched taut over bulging insteps. Then he rubbed his lower back gingerly.

"Worse," he said disgustingly. "The Doc busy?"

"There is now a patient. He will see you soon."

Marty grunted again, rocked back and closed his eyes. Mrs. Horák looked at him affectionately, as she would at a rebellious child, and left the room. Presently the door to the inner office opened and Dr. Horák appeared. Marty sighed, lumbered to his feet and went in. He went straight to the doctor's telephone and dialed District Court. He said, "Gimme the clerk . . . Tom? Anything doing?"

He listened briefly, hung up. He called City Hospital and the 17th Police Precinct and repeated the procedure, then dialed the *Herald*. He asked for the city desk, said, "Nothing from the South End this edition," and slammed the instrument down.

The doctor watched, smiling. He was middle-aged with steel-rimmed glasses, thinning hair. His suit was ill-fitting, but it was freshly pressed. Like his wife's, his face showed weariness, age far beyond its years, but it was a good face, high-cheekboned and strong.

He said teasingly, "You are getting no murders yet this morning, Marty?"

Marty looked around him, at the worn but painfully neat office. He sighed. "I wish I had an easy job like this, Doc. Just sit and wait for patients. Just sit and wait." Then he rubbed his back and glared. "I come to get this fixed, not for the gab."

Dr. Horák moved to a wall basin and scrubbed his hands. He said smilingly,

"My, my. Marty has found no nice small children to eat yet for breakfast?"

He watched his patient peel shirt and undershirt from his massive frame, then went to work kneading, taping the back. There was the slam of a door and voices in the waiting room. There was silence, then Mrs. Horák appeared in the doorway.

She said, "A man outside is in bad pain, Stěpán. You had better come."

Dr. Horák looked up. He said, "Put him in the examination room. I will be there." He finished applying a hot, heavy layer of tape, said, "You will wait, please," then stepped through a connecting door and closed it behind him.

Marty, dressing, heard a man moaning and the soft voice of the doctor, the words indistinguishable. They went on for several minutes, then there was sudden commotion. There was a new voice, harshly-raised.

It was familiar, but for a second Marty couldn't place it. Then the words came, muffled by the door. "You gave this guy the needle, Doc. And this time is one too many."

And the Doctor's voice, blank with surprise. "The meaning of barging into my office like this, yes? Who are you? You will tell me the meaning?"

Marty jumped. The harsh voice registered. Without hesitation he crossed the room and opened the door.

IT WAS a strange scene in the examination room. There was a grey-haired, wispy man sitting on the white table, one shirtsleeve rolled up. There was Dr. Horák, frowning and angry, a hypo syringe in his hand. There was big, bullnecked McNair of Narcotics just shoving his badge back into his wallet, and behind him a young plainclothesman, his assistant. And in the opposite doorway Mrs. Horák, her eyes dark pools of fear.

McNair looked at Marty, surprised. He growled, "What're you doing here?"

Marty planted his feet firmly and took in the whole scene. He said tightly, "What gives?"

McNair seemed to relax; he almost grinned. He said, "There might be an item in it for you at that, Marty. Caught this guy giving the needle to a habitual user. We had a tip." He swung toward the Doctor and said reprovingly, "You otta know better'n' that, Doc. You know there's laws in this country about giving the stuff to a junkie." He added grimly, "You won't be practicin' much longer."

Dr. Horák seemed completely bewildered. Disbelief, then fear flooded over his face; in his excitement his accent crept thick into his voice. He sputtered, "Of course this man I have a narcotic given! He is in terrible pain! I have to, even to examine him! I have not seen him before, even! Is some mistake! I—"

McNair said gruffly, "Stow it, Doc. I dunno how long you been jabbin' these guys, but there sure must be a buck in it. Get your hat—we're takin' you downtown."

In the doorway Mrs. Horák's eyes were focused on McNair's wallet, the badge; her face was flat white. She gasped, "Police! Stěpán! I do not understand! You have not anything wrong done!"

McNair whirled. He looked at her pityingly. He said, "You don't believe it, lady? Here!"

He stepped quickly to the wispy man sitting on the table and jerked his arm, turning the inside towards them. "Show 'em, Manny. Show 'em those holes!"

The inside of the arm was a mass of scars, puncture scars from countless needles. The little man flinched; his eyes were watery.

McNair said, "Come along, Doc. You too, punk," and moved towards the door.

Marty O'Bannon moved too. He moved towards McNair, his eyes questioning, then stopped. He looked around him, and there was a puzzled frown on his pudgy face.

McNair said gruffly, "Call me at headquarters, Marty, and I'll give you the de-

tails for the paper. Right now—lay off."

Then Mrs. Horák was upon Marty, pleading. There was stark terror on her face.

"Marty! Police! You are not to let them take him! Stěpán has not done anything wrong, I swear! They will—"

Marty touched her arm, awkward. "Listen," he said. "Mrs. Horák—" He groped. "Police are—not like that here. They'll just take him down and book him, then he'll be back. It'll all straighten out. Of course there's some mistake."

"Come on," McNair said. He turned to the young plainclothesman. "Take that needle, Joe, and the tube."

"I go too!" Mrs. Horák's voice was near hysteria. Then she gasped, "The children!"

Marty said quickly, "You wait. Then you can go downtown with me. We'll follow them." He pushed past her then, went out into the heat and trucks, the communal life of Ninth Street. He walked three doors up and rapped on a window.

"Mary!" he bellowed. "Mary Renaldi!"

The curtains parted and a heavy woman peered out. "Go over to Doc Horák's," Marty said. "They gotta go downtown. Emergency. Mind the kids and phone, huh?"

Mrs. Renaldi nodded. "Sure," she said. "Sure, Marty."

Marty started down the block to his battered coupe, then suddenly slowed. He thought warningly, *O'Bannon, no. Remember? No trouble. No Headquarters. Not today. You're going home and sit still and gather news by phone and take care of this back. You . . .*

The look of terror on Mrs. Horák's face come to him; he tried at once to reject it. He said to himself fiercely, *so they bag this guy and it looks phoney; so what? It's no story; it's a couple of paragraphs. So, Headquarters? No!*

But the look of terror on Mrs. Horák's face wouldn't go away. Unconsciously Marty walked towards the coupe; it was

still there when he sank onto the tattered upholstery. He sat there a moment, thinking. Then he groaned aloud and drove back to the doctor's office.

When he got there the doctor and McNair and the wispy man were gone. Mrs. Horák was standing, tense, on the sidewalk.

She got in and said, "Marty! Police! He said Stěpán would not longer practice! How could it be? What did he do?" She smoothed her skirt with fumbling hands; tears welled in her eyes.

Marty swung the coupe onto the avenue, driving with conscious effort. The puzzled frown was back on his face. He said abruptly, "You ever see that grey-haired guy before? Anyone like him? They come in at night any time?"

"No! I have seen him never, or anyone like him! Marty, Stěpán did not sell the drugs! I know!"

"Tell me what happened this morning. How he got in."

Her hands clenched, unclenched. "I answered the door. A man shoved the grey-haired one inside and said 'Take care of him.' He was all bent over with pain, and he groaned. I called Stěpán. When he came he could hardly touch the man. He gave him the drug, to examine him. Then the door again, and those two men went past me. I could not stop them. Police!"

Marty's frown changed to a scowl; his short, fat fingers gripped the wheel hard. He nodded. Then, slowly, with the practice of thirty-six years in the district, he catalogued Doc Horák.

It was a bitter yet commonplace story, the Horáks'. They had come from the maelstrom of Europe a year ago, alone, unheralded; another of the pitifully few families who had by paths known only to themselves, managed to fight and starve their way to the promised land. An uptown foundation had then sponsored Dr. Horák, provided the meager funds for him to start his practice, and his life, anew.

And the Horáks had fitted into that new

life. They had struggled painfully through the language difficulties, and at first patients had been non-existent. But they had a glowing, burning pride in their new land, and courage, and determination. Their kids were the cleanest on the block, and the family went often to church. They were humble people, and they marveled openly at all that was theirs. Gradually, because people instinctively trusted him, patients had come. And Marty O'Bannon, who knew the district as his own body, had watched a new American family grow in the South End.

Marty shook his head; narcotics didn't fit. You sized up the guy like you had been sizing up guys for thirty-six years, and it didn't fit. The doc wasn't looking at that framed picture of the flag hanging over his desk and pushing dope too.

THE coupe pushed through the stickiness of downtown, then the greystone mass of Headquarters loomed. Mrs. Horák sobbed quietly. Marty parked; she touched him, anguished. "Marty!" she whispered. "*Pojd' me*. You will do what you can, *yoh?*"

Marty's fat, homely face looked suddenly embarrassed. He said awkwardly, "Look, Mrs. Horák. Sure. Sure I will. It'll come out all right. Now you come in and sit down and wait. He'll be upstairs and you won't be able to see him until they're through. But it won't be long."

They mounted the long stone steps, the woman hanging back as Marty puffed, slowed. Inside the big bleak anteroom there were benches; Marty left her. He panted up another flight of steps to the detective bureau; there was a uniformed sergeant sitting inside the low railing. His feet were on the desk, there was a radio going, and he was marking a racing form.

Marty grunted. He said, "Jim. Where's that doc Narcotics just brought in?"

The sergeant grinned. "The helpin' hand again, Marty? Or is it by some slim chance a story?" He waved. "Gettin' mugged."

Marty pushed through the swinging gate and started down the hall; then he stopped. He had a familiar, weary feeling of trouble ahead; he turned and looked back at the sergeant.

"I wish," he said wistfully, "I had a nice easy job like that. Just sittin' around all day listenin' to music and bettin' horses." Then he sighed and waddled into the big, barnlike room at the rear.

Dr. Horák was in front of the camera, erect and dignified, his head and shoulders silhouetted against a white frame with a number. His fingers were still smeared with fingerprint ink and his lips were a tight white line. There was fear on his face; his eyes kept darting to the uniforms, to the hated symbols of authority. The fear was controlled, but a lifetime in Europe was not forgotten in a moment.

McNair was standing beside the police photographer, towering over him, his grey pants baggy at the seat. He waved. Marty grinned reassuringly at the doctor, then, embarrassed, scowled at McNair.

He said, "You bookin' him on suspicion, Mac, or a straight charge?"

McNair said easily, "Straight charge, Marty. But we'll let him go on personal recognizance. There'll be a hearing on his dispensing license later."

Marty looked at him, puzzled, thinking. Thinking the thing didn't add up. If the doc was peddling the stuff it'd be heroin, the junkies' standby, not morphine. And the doc could have easily missed those puncture holes; the guy was in pain and the doc would have jabbed the outside of the arm because morphine doesn't go in a vein. And what about that pain? The guy hadn't looked in pain sitting there on the table. And for that matter, how come Narcotics is there—Johnny-on-the spot? The thing smelled like a planned fire.

Marty groaned; for a second he had a violent reaction. *O'Bannon*, he thought angrily, *go back and sit by your phone. It ain't any of your business. The Czech doc*

steps on someone's toes, so they grab him, so what? You're a newspaperman, not the South End Welfare Committee. Beat it.

He looked at Dr. Horák again and groaned. He said automatically, "Where'd the tip come from, Mac?"

McNair turned, scowling. He said, "You playin' copper again?"

Marty said patiently, "C'mon, Mac. You know I can find out."

McNair looked at him. He looked at thirty-six years of finding out, and he suddenly grinned. He said, "Sure, Marty. Hell, it's no secret. Seventeen. It's their baby."

"Where's the junkie?"

"In the tank." He added laconically, "He's been in half a dozen times on the same rap."

Marty grunted. He waited until the routine was complete and they turned the doctor loose; then he led him downstairs. He paused at the sergeant's desk and said, "Jim. The guys from the other sheets'll be checkin' over the blotter anytime now. Tell 'em not to phone in this story, willya? I don't want 'em usin' it—yet, anyway."

"I'll tell 'em, Marty."

Marty lumbered on. In the drabness of the front room Mrs. Horák flew to her husband, sobbing. The doctor passed a hand over his forehead, then touched her. He said haltingly. "Helenka. It is all a mistake. You know that, *tetičko*. I do not understand—"

Marty led them outside. They came into the sunlight and heat and stood there blinking. The doctor said, "We will go home. I have got to think—"

Marty said, "No, Doc. Not right now. We're going across the street, all three of us. We're going to have a nice, cool drink." He sighed. "I got some questions to ask, Doc."

The doctor said, "No. I must go home." His voice rose. "I must call the Foundation. A lawyer. They will take my dispensing license, my license to practice—"

Marty pushed. He said wearily, "Across the street, Doc," and led them into the cool of a saloon. They sat in a small booth at the rear, and ordered.

Marty looked the doctor squarely in the eye. He said, "You ever sell any of them guys narcotics, Doc?"

The doctor shook his head; he seemed bewildered. "No," he said, "No, Marty. Never."

Marty leaned back. He drank half his beer at a gulp. He murmured, "I knew that, Doc. I just wanted to make sure I was right."

He seemed to think. Dr. Horák, his wife beside him, holding tight, watched. Marty said slowly, "You're inna jam, Doc. But why? You spoke outta turn somewhere lately? Made any enemies?"

"No, Marty."

"You ain't been monkeyin' around any of these political coat-holders in the district? Nothin' like that?"

"No."

"No patients gone sour, mebbe? No cops?"

Dr. Horák shook his head. He said, "There is nothing like that," and added pleadingly, "The practice is growing. It is all good."

Marty drew a design in a puddle of beer. He sat there for a long time, looking at them, then he shook his head and stood up. He said softly, "We'll get a cab, Doc. You and the missus go home. But don't call anyone. Don't call anyone at all." He sighed. "I'll find out what it's all about. I'll let you know."

They went outside, and as they left the woman's eyes were on him, beseeching. Marty stood on the sidewalk sweating, aching.

Then he looked at his watch; it was near noon. He groaned audibly and crossed to a drugstore. He checked his news sources, called his paper. Then, his pudgy brow furrowed, he found his car and drove laboriously to Precinct Seventeen.

IT WAS a dingy, side street precinct, but it was the heart of Marty's beat. He lumbered up the steps and crossed to Riley, the lieutenant with ulcers sitting behind the high desk.

He said, "Gus. Narcotics bagged a Ninth Street doc this morning. Name of Horák. The tip came from here. You know?"

Riley was near retirement age, with a sallow, puffy face. He looked suddenly towards the offices to the rear when he heard the question, and he was at once uncomfortable.

He said, "Yuh, Marty," and added vaguely, "I dunno where it came from, though. We just gotta tip."

Marty waited. After a while he said, "Come on, Gus."

Gus waved towards the rear. He said, "You'd better ask Captain Coyne."

A twinge shot through Marty's back; he said softly, "I ain't askin' Coyne, Gus. I'm askin' you. What'm I, some cub you never seen before?"

Gus leaned over the desk. He looked unhappy. "Okay, Marty. Okay." He sighed. "So you'll get it anyway. Listen. I dunno how Coyne found out the doc was sellin' the stuff, but I know the doc got him sore one night. Plenty sore."

Marty's eyes opened in surprise. "Horák? How?"

Gus leaned further over the desk. He said, "You remember a while ago Coyne's brother-in-law, Cleary, drew a week's suspension and an official reprimand for gettin' drunk on duty?"

"Yeah," Marty said. "I heard."

"Some dame called in and said the cop on the beat was makin' trouble. We went out and rounded up Cleary. Brought him in here." He paused. "You know Marty, there's gotta be a doc's report on a thing like that, fast. It goes to Headquarters right off."

"Sure," Marty said. "From Ranzi, the precinct sawbones. He writes down 'heat prostration' or sumthin' like that on those

reports. He musta fouled up on this one."

"Ranzi was out of town, Marty. Coyne called a couple of other docs, but they knew better'n to come. Then he got Horák."

Marty's eyes narrowed. He waited.

"Horák came down and gave Cleary somethin' to get him back on his feet. Then Coyne gave him the report form to fill out. He hinted pretty hard to Horák he'd better write down 'acute indigestion,' Marty. I was here."

Marty waited further. Riley said, "Horák didn't seem to understand. Like he didn't think Coyne was serious, or like he was just plain dumb or somethin'. He wrote down 'acute alcoholism' and signed it. That report hadda go in."

Marty grimaced. Riley said, "Coyne was plenty sore. If he didn't know his way around Headquarters Cleary wouldn't have got off so easy. That doc otta know better'n that, Marty."

Marty seemed lost in thought. He said slowly, "The doc is new around these parts, Gus. He's green." He added, "Thanks, Gus. Thanks," and lumbered over to the water cooler. He stood there for long minutes, thinking. Why hadn't Horák told him about his visit to the precinct? About getting Coyne sore? What was he covering?

The answer came; the obvious answer, from the words of Gus. *Horák didn't seem to understand . . .*

"Sure," Marty said aloud. "Sure."

It simply would not occur to Horák that a policeman in this land would deliberately ask him to make out a false report; it would not occur to him that there were bad policemen who would get even. Horák wasn't covering anything; with complete, blind faith in all that was new, all that was good, he'd just brushed off the whole thing.

Marty groaned aloud. He thought of the big, overstuffed chair in his room up the block, where he could just sit and gather news by phone. He thought of the cool beer in the icebox, and groaned again. He muttered wrathfully, "O'Bannon, why? Why

do you get into these things? A green foreigner sold on the idea that all is peaches and cream behind the Statue of Liberty. Let him find out the hard way. You did, didn't you?"

It was sheer bravado; the anguished face of Mrs. Horák came to him, the Doc's complete bewilderment. He cursed, tried the water again, and returned to the problem at hand.

The gears of long experience meshed slowly, and his thoughts followed a familiar, distasteful pattern. Someone stepped out of line; something had to be done. So you dug up out of the back of your mind a lot of things you knew but didn't want to know; little things gleaned from knowing people and the district and from forever keeping your eyes open, and you used them as a lever to pry the guy back into line. Now you take Coyne. . . .

Marty thought for a long time. The little things slipped into place; he grimaced. He muttered, "Why these guys gotta pull this stuff? Why?" Then, hating what lay ahead, he passed up the precinct phone and found the seclusion of a drugstore phone booth across the street.

IT WAS stifling hot inside the booth. Marty, his huge bulk wedged in tight, suffered. He called the Highland National Bank, a few blocks away from the seventeenth precinct.

He said, "This is a Mr. O'Brien speaking. I'm closing a business deal with a Mr. Frank Coyne. Frank W. Coyne of Willis St., a policeman. I'm not asking his credit or anything, but I just want to verify the fact that he has an account there. Will you look it up for me, please?"

There was a pause. Marty mopped a streaming brow, then there was a voice. "Yes, Mr. O'Brien. We have an account here for a Frank W. Coyne of Willis St. Is that all?"

Marty grunted and hung up. He left the booth thankfully, cursed again when the

heat struck him outside. He looked at his watch; it was early afternoon and the day was at its worst. He waddled the few blocks to the Highland National Bank; the tar in the sidewalks was all bubbly. Then the bank's air conditioning blasted him, icy as he stepped into the marble foyer. Wet clothes were at once clammy against his skin and his back gave a warning spasm. "Air conditioning!" Marty wailed. "They would!"

He eyed the line of tellers' cages and shuffled disgustedly to one at the far end of the room. The little plaque in front said George C. Childs. He was a wizened little man, an automaton in a teller's tan coat. He smiled, and he seemed to mean it. He said, "Hello, Marty."

Marty leaned heavily on the counter. He said flatly, "I need some info, George. I ain't supposed to get it, but it won't go no further'n just me."

"Yes?"

"Guy name of Frank W. Coyne. Copper over at seventeen. He's got an account here. I gotta know what's in it, both checking and savings."

George looked startled. He said, "Marty! You know that's a tough one. A bank can't give out that stuff!" He looked at Marty and finished weakly, "I—yes, Marty." He picked up a phone and in a minute said, "Two hundred sixty-two dollars, checking account. No savings."

Marty slumped, visibly disappointed. He murmured, "That ain't it, George. It ain't enough. It must be the grocery money." He sighed, long and audibly, added, "I guess we gotta do this the hard way, George," and shuffled off to find another phone. George's puzzled look followed him.

Patiently, phlegmatically, Marty called banks. He called the others in the South End first, representing himself as Mr. O'Brien. Then, going through the alphabetical listing in the yellow book, he fed eleven more nickels into the box before he got results. There was an account for Frank

W. Coyne of Willis St. in the Monarch, far downtown. Coyne wouldn't be known in that area, and it made sense. . . .

He returned to the wizened little teller. He said, "George. You know anyone down at the Monarch outfit?"

"Yes," George said. "Sure," and added warily, "Why?"

Marty said guiltily, "Coyne has another account there."

George seemed to tense. He said, "Marty! This is going too far! I can't—"

Marty looked suddenly unhappy; very unhappy. He had to force the words. He said slowly, "George. How's that boy of yours? No more trouble about—uh—borrowing cars?"

The little man stopped; he moistened his lips. He said, "No, Marty. No. He's doing fine." He added, "It was—good of you, Marty. You know that."

Marty looked at the phone inside the cage. He murmured, "This is for a good cause, George. I'll—wait."

He shuffled over to a white marble bench and sat down, hating himself. His back ached in earnest now; the room was positively cold. It was ten minutes before George beckoned. He seemed jumpy, anxious. "It won't go any further, Marty? You'll forget where you got it?"

"Yes," Marty said.

"Coyne has forty-three thousand dollars in the Monarch, Marty."

Marty straightened up; for a second he looked almost cheerful. He said, "Good. And now forget it, George. Forget I ever came in. But thanks."

He looked around him for a moment, at the clean marble dignity of the bank, then he looked at George. He said wistfully, "I wish I had an easy job like this, George. Imagine. No troubles. Just settin' still and takin' in money all day. Uh—thanks again, George."

The air conditioning made the heat outside even worse; it seemed to smother Marty, to wrap him in heavy, soggy folds.

He fought the smothered feeling and the pushcarts and kids and trucks to the seventeenth precinct; when he arrived his clothes were limp, his feet ached, and he was hungry. He walked past Gus at the big desk, past the guard room and up to a glass-paneled door at the rear marked private. He put his hand on the knob, hesitated. He groaned, shrugged resignedly. Then he pushed the door open and walked in.

COYNE was a stocky, florid-faced man with heavy shoulders, iron-grey hair. He sat at a desk, blue-shirted, his paunch hanging over his belt. He looked up when Marty came in and the flush was apparent even on the florid skin.

He said, gravel-voiced, "Reporters come in here when I invite them, Marty. And then they knock."

Marty seemed to ignore him. He sank onto a chair, overflowed it, and mopped. Then he looked at Coyne. He said slowly, "I been comin' in here for thirty-six years, Frank. I ain't stoppin' just because they made you actin' captain."

Coyne opened his mouth, started to speak, then thought better. He growled, "What's on your mind?"

Marty leaned back; his eyes were half closed. He said, "Frank. You remember the lieutenant used to be on the front desk here? Reardon?"

"I remember him."

"In case you forgot, he's working the tenth precinct now. A good hour's trolley ride from his house, and the late shift at that. And he ain't a lieutenant any more; he's pounding a beat in the warehouse district instead of ridin' around in a nice plush cruiser."

"So?"

Marty yawned. "I just wanted you to remember, Frank. I had a talk with the commissioner before Reardon was moved out there. He had his fingers in that protection racket pie."

Coyne growled, "Listen, Marty. I'm busy. Get it off your chest."

Marty's head snapped forward; his eyes suddenly held Coyne's. He said, hard, "You weren't too busy to frame Doc Horák when he wouldn't write a phoney report on that wino brother-in-law of yours. You bulldozed that junkie stool-pigeon into faking a lotta pain and you tipped off McNair to be there when the needle went in. It's a dirty deal, Frank."

Coyne leaned forward. His fingers were white on the desk, his eyes slits. He said, "Prove it, Marty."

Marty sighed. "I don't have to prove it, Frank. I walk in the commissioner's office just as easy as I walk in this one."

"Yeah?"

Marty, for a moment hopeful, said, "You goin' to call it off, Frank? Tell Narcotics to drop it?"

Coyne grinned. It was an ugly grin. He said softly, "No!"

Marty's face fell. He was desperately tired. He said, "OK, Frank. I guess me and the commissioner have a little talk." He started to heave himself from the chair. Then he sighed and added thoughtfully, "I guess too, Frank, he'll be kinda curious about that forty-three thousand dollars you got stashed away downtown, in the Monarch. You weren't very smart, Frank. You shoulda put it inna box."

Coyne's face worked; he half rose. He snarled, "I don't know how you got your nose into my private affairs, Snooper. But so what? Any law against a guy having forty-three thousand bucks?"

"There is," Marty said, "when your salary is five thousand eight hundred seventy dollars and when Eddie Fernandos has opened up two new horserooms in this precinct within the last year. Them horserooms can't work without your say-so, Frank. And the commissioner don't like horserooms."

There were splotches of color on Coyne's face; he was tense, glaring. Marty started

to leave, then he whirled sharply to face the other man.

He said harshly, "Well, Frank?"

Coyne looked at him; a crafty look passed over his face.

He said warily, "I—might call off Narcotics, Marty."

Marty sat down, again, infinitely weary. He said heavily, "Look, Frank. I ain't no crusader. I ain't no one-man investigatin' committee. But there's a lot of bad needed dough in this district goes to those horse-rooms. You'll give Fernandos a week to close up. He'll just move to another precinct and open up again."

The officer's voice was a tight snarl. "I won't!"

Marty said softly, "You'll still have that forty-three thousand dollars, Frank. It's a lot of money. It's a lot better than havin' it impounded and gettin' kicked off the force. You know you can't hide it, now the bank's got a record. You got kids, Frank, and you ain't young any more."

There was hate in the officer's eyes, and greed, but there was also a flicker of thought. He swung his swivel chair viciously and stared out the window into the alley beyond.

Marty said quietly, "It'll be a tough rap if the commissioner gets it, Frank. An awful tough rap." Then his voice was a bark. "Well?"

Coyne turned and looked at him. There was determination in the fat man, in every inch of his being. Somehow he seemed to tower over the officer. Coyne swung again to the window and he was quiet for a very long time.

When he finally spoke his voice was muffled, quiet.

He said, "I—guess so, Marty. I guess so. I'll—tell Fernandos."

Marty sagged. He sat there a moment, listless. Then he said, "Narcotics first," and picked up the phone and handed it to Coyne.

Coyne spoke wearily too; he seemed

spent. He said, "McNair? The Horak case. Drop it. All of it." And slammed down the instrument.

Marty heard the words and almost grinned. He thought of Doc Horák then and the terrified, beseeching look on Mrs. Horák's face; for a moment the searching pain in his back seemed to let up. He reached for the phone again, then stopped. He thought of what he had told them: "*I'll find out what it's all about. I'll let you know.*"

He sat there for a long moment, wondering. Wondering hard.

Let them know? Let them know what? That a police officer in this land of milk and honey would ruin him because he wouldn't commit a dishonest act? That their hungry faith in their new life was wrong, all wrong? No, Marty. No. There are too many good cops doing a dirty, hard, honest job, and there is too little faith like that.

Far too little. . . .

Marty O'Bannon reverted to type. He spun the dial and his voice was a growl. He said, "Doc. Forget that thing this morning. Forget it like it never happened. It was all a mistake." Then, simply, he hung up.

He turned laboriously and got to his feet. His back hurt worse than ever. As an afterthought he looked at his watch; he picked up the phone a third time, checked his news sources, then dialed the *Herald*. He said gruffly, "Nothin' doin' in the South End," and started the instrument back to its cradle.

The voice of the desk man came back to him.

It said, "No stories, Marty? No slay-rides today? Then where the hell you been? Nothin' for the final, even? That's nothin' all day long."

The voice seemed to sigh. It said, "I wish I had a nice, easy job like that, Marty. Imagine, just sittin'. Just sittin' around waitin' for something to happen."



Founded in 1924

Article No. 866

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. 5511—Old-Timer Joins Up! By Jep. H. Pitts. Beginners, try U as "I," UB as "in," and -UBV as "-ing." Next, UK (i-) and KNNB (---n), "is" and "soon"; NH (o-) and HNF(-o-), "of" and "for"; HUFKP (frs-), "first"; etc.

U AZQX JXXB DNFMBV YFCRPNVFZLK HNF CXZFK, JEP
AXFXDUPA UK PAX HUFKP KXP NH ZBKDXFK U AZQX XQXF
KEJLUPPXG. TUKP LX DUPA CNEF AEBGFXG RXF YXBP
KNTQXFK. DUTT KXBG UB ZBNPAXF YURAXF KNNB!

No. 5512—Long Live Irene! By °Presbyos. Start with I, XFIX, XFO, and XU. Continue with DUX and phrase FIT GOOD, then UDOT and DIXAUDT.

BOILO FIT GOOD HOKADOH IT I GROTTADY XFIX LID GO
WIHO BOMBOXEIR AK DIXAUDT VARR IYMOO DUX XU WIZO
DOV VIMT EDXAR XFOP FINO BIAH KUM XFO URH UDOT.

No. 5513—Unsolved Mystery. By Zadig. Note pattern RPSR, comparing with RPO, STO, and SY. Then try for two quoted words "YEAR LOST."

JNEVTSGPOTA RPNFD *GEO'A "YEAR LOST," *ONVPROOF
*RPNTRL-*RUE, USA AGOFR NF *BTSFZO, SZZEHRNFV BET
RPO BSZR RPSR RPO AZOFOA EB SYE EB RPSR SHRPET'A
XOROZRNKO UTRNRFVA STO YSNX NF *GSTNA.

No. 5514—Golden Opportunity. By Alma L. Roy. BDGY and BYDKH provide entry, unlocking the phrase VRF VYDFHV. Follow up with FUGH, UFKA, ADHKTV, etc.

AHVGHZTXA ADHKTV UFKA OXF OHKKHT OYHOQ, GUPUZZUB

EUPCXZHV BDGY CZUPDVVUZA FUGH, ERG GUTXA CZUNDTHV
ZHXTA OXVY. PUZZK: "PXQH YXA BYDKH VRF VYDFHV!"

No. 5515—Sticky Stuff. By Joe Miller. Observe phrases YZ VDT and RZS VDT in connection with ERVTXYRK, proceeding then with GTRKYZH, GVREOG, etc.

VDT ERVTXYRK YZ VDT GTRKYZH GBCGVRZQT QPRVTS PZ
OPGVRHT GVREOG RZS VDT NKROG PN HPFTXZETZV
TZFTKPOTG QPZGYGVG KRXHTKL PN VROYPQR STUVXYZ.

No. 5516—Home Products. By R. G. A. Two-letter ER and ending -ERK provide entry to *OEKFCOOR, duly noting the thrice-used symbol O.

LEISURLY FIXO DOOR SEROL ER OXONT URO UH UAN
*ARECOL *YCICOY. MINKOYC, ZOEKFERK UNEKERIMMT
CZORCT-HUAN WINICY, ZIY HUARL ROIN *NEWFSURL,
*XENKEREI, ER *OEKFCOOR *HEHCT-*HEXO.

No. 5517—Caught Awing. By †Azoimide. Compare first word, ANY, with phrase JUAN NUP, for a start, continuing with UIPYWAP, AZOIPUA, etc.

ANY "CROWD PDUFFYZ," OBUOI HZYY-RLIWNYZ, HYOPAP
ROBUPNRT GLZUIS AZOIPUA CT HRTULS QLPA OCEBY
OXLOAUW PLZHOWYP, YVKYZART PWEKUUS LK UIPYWAP
JUAN NUP KZEALCYZOIA ZOMEZ-RUDY REJYZ CURR.

No. 5518—Couldn't Take It! By *Sara. Here's an example of internal alliteration, symbol R occurring in every word! Compare BNERT and BUTNRET, then fill out RLRRVUT, TNRFT, etc.

OLDER, ADZRO, ADR-ELTUZ RLXE-ZUTNREUB ALNREKESVO
RLRRVUT RLBRULDT, RVKGLBLDT TFLX-RNBVT. RVLLGO,
TNRFT; BNERT KRUEPO; RKVVKESVO BUTNRET.

No. 5519—Chance Witness. By °Prof. Xenon. This pangrammatic message is made up of all four-letter words! For start, try TUUT, noting high-frequency of symbols, both used as doubles.

NOPN QRTT TUUT SPQV WRPX AREU UHPQ WRNF, YZAW
BXCA VCNE PDFC QREU, TUUE UMPF BXCA QPBU. ARPV TCCD
IUFT NCWT. FOUJ TRHU GCFO, FOUW CWUD KZPL.

No. 5520—Strangely Attired. By H. Tilmon. This cipher tells a true story! Scene of action: Euclid Ave., Cleveland, Ohio. Asterisks in cryptograms are prefixed to capitalized words.

DHOXRA ECCATU WEB KAECXBZ JEOTA BHTA, RHHBTSXB
RED, CAP FXTHC, KYXUA VERSAU, OGWXBHGT ZCAAB UXA,
LANCE TUCXDAP TYXCU, CAP DOEXP DEBUT, NOGA UABBXT
TYHAT. RYECZA: TGTDXRXHGT DACTHB.

SOME unusual novelties, along with the regular crypts, will intrigue you in your current cipher column! †Zip, old-timer at crypt making and breaking, contributes No. X-5522, which uses only ten letters of the alphabet, these being signified in cipher by the ten digits. Further, these digits, arranged in numerical order, will spell an alphabetic key similar to those employed in our cryptic divisions. Solve No. X-5522, cryptofans, and reconstruct the secret key! Answer and full explanation will appear in our next issue.

No. X-5522. Numerical Cipher. By †Zip.

"75196 83513754; 651296 50247543; 58946, 913506, 12 6476136 975542 3151!"—50424 724 7 9424 543 54296, 31 9124, 83 5086 435824 31575813. 5465 85 61945894 51 644.

And now let's look at No. 5521, with its four subtractions! Four subtractions? Yes, indeed! For besides the three appearing externally in the puzzle, there is a "hidden subtraction" which may be built up from material in the division, permitting solution by another of our special methods for problems of this type. In Vedette's No. 5521, for instance, 4th-place symbols in the 3rd subtraction show key-sequence RA, indicating that R is one unit less than A.

(a)	(b)	(c)
DYT	DYT	RRSI
A	R	GRGN
RRSI	GRGN	DYT

Further, these two symbols also appear in the quotient; and as multipliers of the divisor DYT, yield the products GRGN and RRSI, and the multiplications (a) and (b) shown herewith. The "hidden subtraction" (c) now follows from the fact that the multipliers for these two products differ by one unit, thus showing that the difference between the products themselves must be equal to the divisor DYT. Were it not for this "hidden subtraction," the value of symbol D would not be immediately apparent. As it is, $R - R = D$ speedily identifies D as 9. And given this symbol, the rest of the solution readily follows. The plaintext, key, and encipherment for Zadig's No. X-5510, in last issue, are given herewith.

No. X-5510. "The eastern pass leads to a land swarming with ghouls; the western pass, into the Valley of Ants, past the fiery mountain, to the river so swift that it dazzles the eyes."—Arabian Nights.

Key: a b c d e f g h i j k l m
n o p q r s t u v w x y z
Q U A I N T F L O W E R S

Message: "The eastern pass . . . etc.

Cipher: "FLN NQTFNNO AQTT . . . etc.

Hosts of new fans, and of old-timers again taking up the cryptic challenge, continue to swell the ranks of our mystic circle! Latest newcomers: Jep. H. Pitts (see No. 5511), Jad, C. S. Burres, and Deo Edwards. Old-timers returning, with scores when last heard from: Lightning, 2 answers, Oct., 1938, absent 15 years; †Zip (see No. X-5522), 331 answers in Apr., 1939; †Alchemurg, 110, Sept., 1950. And these from 1951: Ed. and Carrie Schroeder, 12 in Feb., †V Roy, 1583 in April; *Gunga Din, 946 in June; †Rebbina, 184 in Oct.; and †Jayem, 3218 in December. Keep up the good work, cryptofans! And look for answers to current puzzles in next issue!

No. 5521—Cryptic Division. By Vedette. See text for symbol D. Then solve $IS - SI = SD$. The key runs thus: 01234 56789.

D	Y	T)	G	D	X	S	A	S	(R	X	A
				G	R	G	N						
				X	R	X	A						
				I	N	N	R						
				A	Y	I	S						
				R	R	S	I						
				N	S	D							

ANSWERS FOR LAST ISSUE

5499—Unlucky second-story man, caught red-handed with an artificial fur coat, imitation mink, insisted vehemently that it was a "bum wrap."

5500—A housewife in Wapakoneta

Took a trip through her state just to get a Marmalade recipe;

It was easy, you see,

She hitch-hiked to old Marietta.

5501—As woman customer approached department store refund desk to return an armful of unwanted goods, her small daughter inquired: "Is this the place, mother, where you change your mind?"

5502—At Xmas, Canadian three-year-old, being shown picture of wise men, cattle, shepherds with crooks, exclaims: "Gee, mum! Look at the guys with the hockey sticks!" Mother gives up.

5503—Initials, finals, letter positions, and patterns have broken more cryptograms than frequency counts, when odd words are used in construction.

5504—Definitions of the word "draft" or "draught": sketch; outline; money order; levy; selection for military service; current of air; depth of ship in water; drink; act of moving by pulling.

5505—Garden rogues gallery: Mexican bean, blister, asparagus, potato, flea, and striped cucumber beetles; cabbage, tomato, and corn-ear worms; squash bug, aphid, cutworm, and grasshopper.

5506—Random typographical marks: asterisk, ellipsis, virgule, caret, cedilla, breve, hyphen, macron, index, diaeresis, circumflex, dash, and obelisk.

5507—Robust rancher roves ranch. Reckless ranchmen, restraint removed, revel riotously. Ranchero returns, reprimands rascals, rebukes ringleader.

5508—Severed red-haired male human head, covered with oily film, hole through left temple, grotesquely staring from atop cement block adorning city dump, puzzles police. Murder? Student prank?

5509—Key:

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
C	R	Y	P	T	O	F	A	N	S

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.

MURDER - AS

*Mason screamed and
dove into the door-
way. . . .*

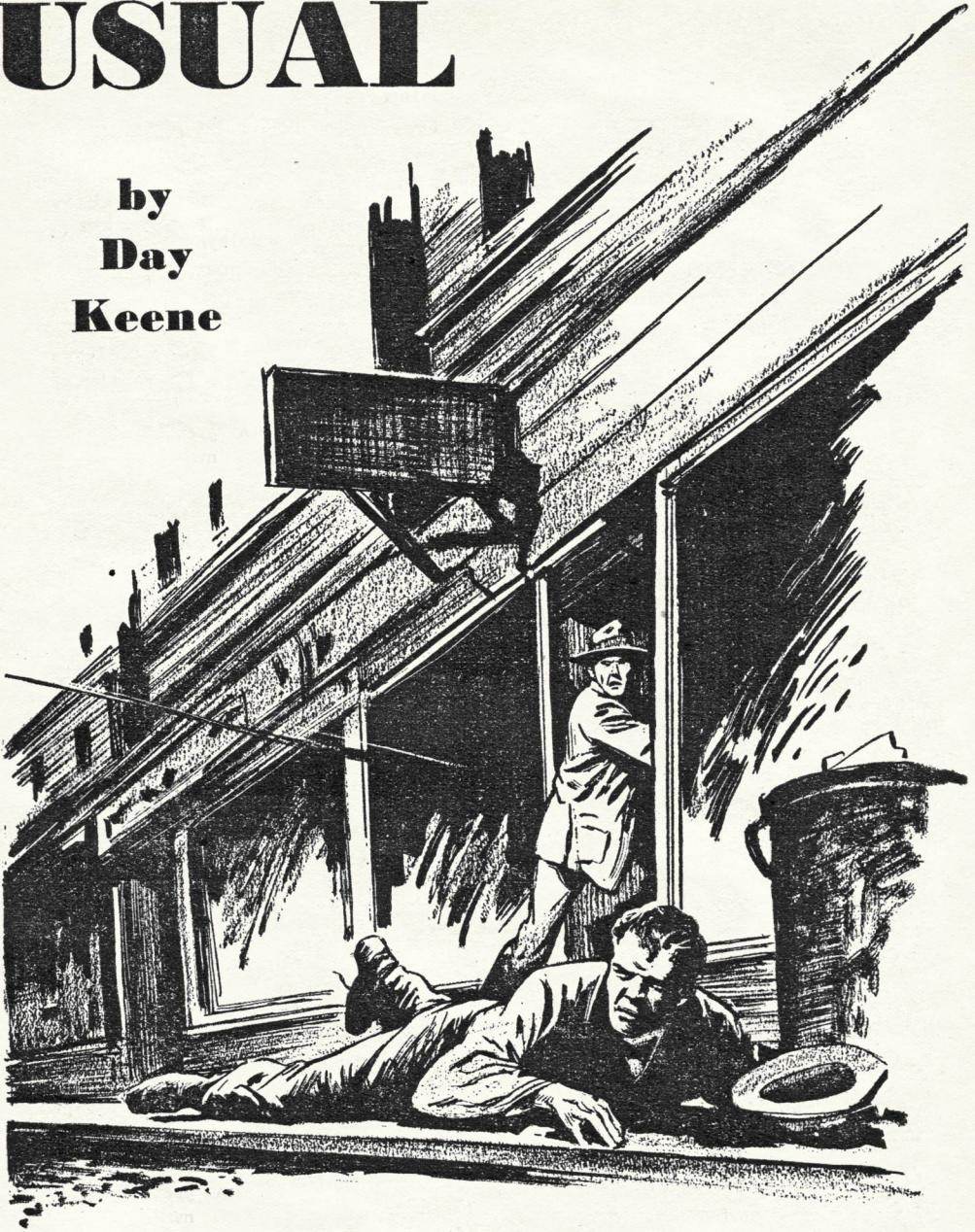


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*Solve—if you dare—the riddle of the laughing sinners
who sneered at the perils of hell-fire—and met swift death
in flames!*

USUAL

by
Day
Keene



THE series of deaths, or just retributions, as Paul the Prophet called them, began with the demise of Loudmouthed Johnny Kline who had picked up the reins of the south-side policy racket where the two Brown brothers had dropped them one cold spring night, when a stutter-

ing sub-machine gun had wound up their earthly affairs with .30 caliber periods.

There were those who believed that Kline had dictated the punctuation. That threw the subsequent police investigation of his own death off on the left foot. That, and the manner of his dying—Kline had been

warned that he would die in hell-fire, and he did. His screams could be heard for a mile. One moment he had been a man. The next, he was a blazing human pyre. The fact that his body burst into flame in front of Central Bureau did little to still the clamor in the papers. In fact, if it hadn't been for Herman the Great—but that comes later in the story.

The day was the third of July. It was also a Saturday. Those on the force who could get away, had left the city for the weekend. The noon hour crowd that milled listlessly in the lobby of the building and spilled out onto the walk was hot and tired and grumbling.

Kline came into Central Bureau accompanied by Bugs Mason, his bodyguard, and he was bathed in cold perspiration despite the fact that the day was stifling. Fear sweat glistened on his cheeks. It had soaked his expensive white silk suit into a shapeless rag. A swarthy man with a heavy beard that showed blue-black beneath the pallor of his close-shaven jowls, he looked as frightened as he was.

"Fourth floor, Homicide," he told the elevator operator. "And don't tell me there's no one up there. I have an appointment with Lieutenant Price."

Sam Tucker, the bail bond broker, saw Kline just as the elevator gates were closing and called good-naturedly, "Don't drink too much beer over the Fourth, Johnny, or you'll put out some of that fire."

"A wise guy," Kline told Mason. "The story is all over town."

The former jockey soothed him. "Hang onto yourself now, Johnny. You're letting this thing get you."

Kline sucked in his breath sharply. "How would you like to burn in hell-fire?"

"Well—I wouldn't," Mason admitted. He shuddered slightly. "No, I wouldn't. But the whole thing's a rib. I tell you. The guy's nothing but a crank."

The office was large. A three-bladed, high-speed fan gave an illusion of coolness.

Price sat drumming on his desk with his fingers. He wanted to catch the one-ten for Fox Lake if he could and let murder go hang for the week-end. He didn't like Kline and made no attempt to hide his impatience as the other man came in.

Kline said fawningly, "You picked him up, Lieutenant?"

"Yes. And I'm letting him go!" Price nodded. He told Larry Jordan. "Go up and get Swanson, Larry. Bring him back here, but sign him out at the desk and let him pick up his junk. There ain't any use of him sitting in the tank over the week-end."

Kline almost swallowed his soggy cigar. "You're letting him go, the man who threatens my life, who tells me, Johnny Kline, that I'm going to burn in hell-fire?"

"Maybe you should," Price said. "I wouldn't know." His lips were thin and compressed. So much a man could take, no more. "I got orders to play ball with you. I did. I had the boys pick up this Swanson and I ran him through the mill. The man is a nut, but he isn't a killer. He preaches this hell-fire stuff every night to a mission full of bums. And if you want him kept in back of bars you pulled your wires into the wrong department. The thing for you to do," he pointed out, "is to go over to Maxwell Street Station and have him put under a peace bond."

Bugs Mason scoffed. "That would look swell. The papers would eat that up. I can see the headlines now. 'Johnny Kline has West Madison Street come-to-glory preacher put under peace bond for threatening his life.'"

Price shook his head. "That's up to Johnny. But Swanson hasn't threatened his life. He's merely said that Johnny would burn in hell-fire."

JORDAN came in with Swanson. The man's hands and pockets were filled with slightly dog-eared religious tracts. A white-haired, fanatic-eyed man in shabby but im-

maculate blue serge, he preferred to be called Paul the Prophet.

Kline shivered when he saw him.

Swanson pointed an accusing finger. "That's your conscience. You are a wicked man." His voice rose to a shrill pulpit pitch. "By a man's works shall the godly know him. And thou shalt burn in hell-fire."

Kline mopped his perspiring face. "Stop saying that. You're nuts. I never done you a thing. Look—in a city of four million people, why should you pick on me?"

Swanson didn't hear him. He was pleading earnestly with Jordan. "Are you saved? Why don't you open up your heart unto the Lord? Why—"

Price banged on his desk, annoyed. "You, Swanson. Get out of here. Get back over on West Madison Street where you belong and stay there." He added for emphasis, "And I don't want to hear of you going south of Roosevelt Road again. If you do, I'll throw the book at you. You understand?"

The self-appointed prophet said he did and stalked out of the office without even looking at Kline again. Price leveled his eyes on Kline.

"And you tell me this much, Johnny. What's in back of all this? Who in hell are you really afraid of? Who's whetting his knife for you?"

Kline chewed morosely on his soggy cigar. "A lot of guys don't like me," he admitted. He nodded to the door that Swanson had just closed. "And when a guy comes into my bar and leaves a lot of religious books and tells me that I'm going to burn in hell-fire, how do you suppose I feel?"

"Like you're getting a preview, I suppose," Price told him dryly.

"And besides, I don't feel so good," Kline admitted. He patted his podgy stomach. "I got pains. I'm hearing things at night. I—"

"Come on Johnny," Mason cut him short.

He glowered at Lieutenant Price. "There ain't nothing for us here. If he can't stop that old nut from bothering you from here in, I can."

The homicide man got up from his desk and took the former jockey by the coat lapels. "One more crack like that out of you, and Johnny is going to have to bail you out. You leave the old man alone. Just let me get word of your beating him up and I'll have you in the jug before you can yell 'Mayor Kelly.'" He repeated, "What's eating you, Johnny? What are you afraid of?"

"It's a hunch," the racketeer admitted. "That old man don't mean no good. He wants that I should die."

Disgusted, Price waved them from the office. "Now if Herman was here," he told Jordan, "he'd make a murder out of that one if he had to kill Johnny himself."

The younger detective grinned. "I'm glad that he isn't here."

Price picked up his hat from his desk and advised, "Don't buy any Cadillacs. Herman's been in jams before. He'll be in them again. But he always rides back to his job in a blaze of murder." He added, not unfondly, "That son-of-a-gun can pull them out of his hat."

The large, dim lobby was cool. Out on the walk in front of the Bureau, Price could see Kline and Mason standing by Kline's car. He paused a moment to talk to Tucker to give them time to drive away.

As he stopped, Paul the Prophet passed him and handed a tract to Tucker, his lips mumbling tonelessly as he passed his message on.

"Open your heart to the Lord, brother. Ye shall not be born again lest ye be saved. Oh, brother, are you saved?"

He passed on without seeming to recognize Lieutenant Price.

The bail bond broker glanced idly at the tract. It read:

When did you last write mother?
Mother and God both love you.

"The guy's a nut," Tucker said.

SWANSON walked through the swinging door to the two men at the car, and handed Kline a tract. Deep in conversation with his bodyguard, he took it before he noticed what it was. He glanced at it idly, then winced. The bull bellow that had given him his nickname was plain even in the lobby.

"Yet another one he gives me. He's trying to drive me nuts!" The pudgy racketeer struck a match and tried to light his shredded cigar with trembling fingers. "He wants I should go crazy. Somebody's paying him to—"

It was then that the incredible happened. Mason stepped back swiftly, yelling insanely, and beating frantically at his employer's clothes.

Johnny Kline had burst into flame. His sweat-soggy suit, his hair, his flesh, were a blaze of light-blue flame. He writhed in anguish, bellowed once, sucked in a lungful of flame, then dropped groveling on the walk, making heart-rending animal sounds as his death agony increased.

Several men tried to roll him on the walk and beat at him with their coats. Someone shouted for a blanket. A uniformed patrolman shouldered Price aside and ran through the swinging doors with a hand fire-extinguisher. All of them were too late. His swarthy flesh burned from head to foot. Johnny Kline was dead.

Mason turned from the horror, sobbing. "He's dead. Johnny died in hell-fire just like the old man said he would."

Price knelt beside the corpse. There was no doubting that Kline was dead, that he had died in flames. But there had been nothing inflammable on the man. Price tore loose a piece of charred cloth and sniffed it suspiciously. It smelled of fire. The silk suit had been drenched with sweat, not with a combustible.

The corpse still clutched in one charred hand the tract that Paul the Prophet had given him. Price pried open the fingers

gingerly. The tract read in bold type:

Psalms 101, Verse 8: I will destroy all the wicked of the land; that I may cut off all wicked doers from the City of the Lord.

Lieutenant Price got to his feet and put the tract in his wallet, his eyes searching the crowd for Swanson. The Prophet had disappeared, and he had made a mistake—a bad one. This wasn't a run-of-the-mill murder. This was a headline affair. He wished that Herman were still with the squad instead of directing traffic. He had a feeling that he was going to need him.

CHAPTER TWO

Gun Invitation

HEAT shimmers rose from the pavement in waves. The air was foul with carbon monoxide and spent gases. The pert young thing in the bright blue coupe was too apologetic.

"I am *so* sorry, officer," she trilled. "But I thought the light was green."

Herman Stone waved her on. What difference did it make? What difference did anything make? His feet were screaming in protest under his solid two hundred pounds. Sweat beaded in his G.I. haircut and seeped under the leather sweatband of his uniform cap. It wilted the collar of his blue chambray shirt, already turned black with perspiration where it was stretched taut across his shoulders.

For three days cars had been shooting at him out of Wacker Drive. When he stepped back to avoid them, the light in the tower changed and the cars roared across the Michigan Avenue Bridge to take part in the sport. He had reached the point where he almost hoped that one would hit him.

"A Four-F, me!" He scowled at the tall white spire that chewing gum had built. He loosened his gun belt a notch and opened the top button of his too-tight uniform pants that smelled of moth balls. "A Four-F, me,"

he repeated to the *Tribune* Building. "Those damn fool Army doctors should be examining mules."

Still, the fact remained that they had turned him down. That, after he had banged on Inspector Grady's desk for two solid months and made himself so obnoxious that the inspector had cleared him with his draft board as being no longer essential to the force. Now Grady was proving it to him.

"And if I hear of you butting your nose into even one murder case for the next six months," the irate inspector had warned him, "you'll stay on the traffic detail for life. Now take your G.I. haircut and get out of my office."

Herman (The Great) Stone, so named by the Chicago newspapers for his ability to pick murders out of thin air, took off his uniform cap and ran his fingers through the bristle. It was all that remained of his Army career. Life wasn't fair. He had told all the boys good-by, bought all the bartenders in all of his favorite bars a drink, almost quarreled with Connie who didn't want him to go to war, and had marched bravely with thirty puny little lads down to his draft board to be inducted. And every pic man in town had recorded the event for posterity. But Camp Grant had been as far as he got. They had inducted the thirty puny little lads and had rejected him.

Morgan, the tour sergeant, paused briefly in a rounds car. "Come on. Keep 'em moving, Stone," he ordered. "You're creating a bottleneck. You may have been the pride of the homicide squad but you're a pain to me."

Stone clenched his fists against murder. He had Connie to think of now. It would have been all right for her to have been a hero's widow, but he didn't want to shame her by going to the chair.

Morgan glowered at him and drove on.

A deep horn blasted behind him and Stone jumped. "Where the hell—" he began, then stopped.

His fat jowls hanging in dewlaps over the silk collar of his sport shirt, Marty Phillips, the former city sealer, and present state representative, grinned at him good-naturedly from behind the wheel of his low-slung, convertible car. "Hi-ya, Herman! How's the Army?"

Stone waved him on but the big car didn't move.

The smile had left Phillips' face. He looked like a pig deep in thought. "This is a business proposition," he told Stone. "How would you like to get back on the gravy squad, Herman?" He rubbed his fat forefinger and thumb together. "I think that for about two grand in the right hands—"

"They won't be your hands," Stone said.

Phillips looked at him sharply, then shrugged. "Okay. I just thought that you might like to know."

Stone stared after the car. The former south-side vice-monger was getting bold to proposition him so openly. Still, he held a club over the City Hall. He controlled a lot of votes on the south side, and voted them as he pleased. Stone glanced wearily at his watch. It was twelve-thirty. This was his short day and it was time for his relief. He wanted to get out of uniform, into something cool. He wanted a tall iced julep at Ricketts'. He wanted Connie to tell him she loved him if he was a traffic cop. It couldn't last forever.

Murphy, his relief, showed up ten minutes late. "Don't bother reporting back to the station," he told Stone. "You grab a car and beat it right down to Central Bureau. Lieutenant Harry Price just called up and asked for you. He wants your master mind to solve a murder."

Stone said, "I'll bet," grimly.

The kidding had been worst of all. He was growing accustomed to it.

"No kidding," Murphy said. "It seems some guy just burned in hell-fire."

Stone showed him the back of his hand in parting.

"The same to you," he told the Irishman.

There was a crowd of uniformed men around the desk as Stone signed out.

"Murphy gave you my message?" the sergeant demanded.

Stone grinned and walked on into the locker room to change his clothes. "Sure," he called back over his shoulder. "And I've cracked the case already. I called up Central Bureau and told them to throw water on the corpse."

He changed clothes quickly and left by the back door. He liked the boys. The boys liked him. They didn't mean any harm by their ribbing, but he had enough on his mind without their crude practical jokes.

Here, on lower level of Wacker Drive, only a few feet above the river, it was cool. A dim, murky shadow stretched for blocks. Stone unlocked the door of his car, admiring the long, sleek lines. He had bought it when he had been on the gravy squad and in the money. His salary as a traffic cop wouldn't pay the gas bill.

"Me, a Four-F," he grunted. "And I'd never even have known it if it hadn't been for a guy named Joe."

He started to slide in behind the wheel, felt the gun in his back and stopped. "My wallet's in my left-hand pocket," he said evenly.

"So what?" a thin voice demanded. "You are Herman Stone?"

Stone admitted that he was.

A second thin voice told him, "Then you're the palooka we're after. Go on. Get in. You ride in the front seat. I'll—"

Stone was big, but fast. He whirled and slapped the gun in his back to the pavement with one hand, while he drew his own gun with the other. Then he paused one fatal second to stare into the two faces.

The two men were identical twins. Their faces were ruddy and glowing. Each had a bridge of huge freckles across his nose. Both were dressed in white linen suits with huge purple ties in which twin horseshoes

glittered glassily. Twin cheap panamas were tugged over twin blue eyes.

THE next Stone knew was the even swaying of a car. His head felt like a rotten cantaloupe that someone had dropped on a South Water Street cobblestone. Half blind with pain, he opened his eyes. It hadn't been an optical illusion. One of the twins was driving his car. The other sat on the seat beside him.

"You ain't so fast." The youth beside him shook his head. "I seen just what was coming and as you slapped Spud's gun I tapped you with a sap."

Spud grinned back over his shoulder. "We thought maybe Bud had killed you."

Stone sat up on the seat and fumbled for his cigarettes. "Okay. So what's it all about?"

The driver shook his head. "We wouldn't know. All we was told was to go and fetch you."

Stone looked out the window of the car. They were headed south on Michigan. At Twenty-second Street the car turned east to Indiana and south on Indiana for two blocks. In front of the long-closed Midnight Frolics the driver swung into the curb, and parked.

"This is as far as we go," he said. "You want us to carry you in or will you walk?"

Stone studied the building. The affair was beginning to make sense. Polish Sam owned the Frolics. And Polish Sam was back in Chicago, his long years as a Wisconsin gentleman farmer at an end. The lure of the easy money had drawn him back into the web. He had announced the reopening of his Midnight Frolics the week before.

Stone said, "I'll walk."

A colored doorman in street clothes opened the door of the car and grinned. "I sure am glad to see yuh, Mr. Stone," he said. "Been a long, long time."

"A long time," Stone agreed.

He strode into the musty-smelling foyer of the cafe. The shrouded tables had been

stacked against the wall. Only a worklight was burning. A fat man, almost as fat as Phillips, but with solid flesh, waddled out of an office to greet him. He said, "I'm glad to see you, Herman."

Stone shook hands mechanically. "Hello, Sam. What's the idea of the gunmen? I'd have dropped in without being slugged."

"Slugged!" the fat man yipped. He made a swipe at the nearest twin. "Why, you damn fools! I told you just to bring Mr. Stone."

One of the twins handed Stone back his gun. "Okay, okay," he mumbled. "You didn't say how to bring him. How was we to know, Mr. Hovack?"

Sam was all apologies. He ordered drinks. He offered Stone a chair. "They're farm boys," he explained. "I brung 'em down with me from Wisconsin. And right away they got to act like big shot Chicago torpedoes."

Stone accepted the drink and sat down. "So?"

He studied the other man's face as Polish Sam hesitated. Sam had been one of the least obnoxious of the old crowd. He had lived through the hectic liquor wars and made money while the O'Donnells, the Genas, the Dion O'Banions, and the Capone adherents had died. Reputed to be worth a fortune, he had retired some time after repeal.

"It's hard to explain," Sam said. He told Stone that a lot of his money had been put into Polish bonds. He had grown bored with being a farmer. What with one thing and another he had decided to get back into harness again. "Nothing crooked, you understand. Maybe a bookie joint or two, a little gambling. I'm opening up the Frolics—" He paused dramatically. "And then this old white-haired guy walks into my joint."

One of the twins offered, "He calls himself Paul the Prophet."

The other said, "He's got a mission over on West Madison Street where all the bums

hang out. You never seen such a joint."

Stone had never heard of him, and said so. "What about him?"

Sam took a folded tract from his pocket. "He doesn't seem to like me."

The tract read:

St. Matthew 18, Verse 9: And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell-fire. . . .

"It's from the Bible," one of the twins explained.

Stone shook his head. "I don't get it, Sam. Why bring me out here to show me this?"

"I want protection," Hovack told him frankly. "I'm willing to pay good dough. I ain't afraid of no torpedo living." His voice was a trifle uncertain. "But I don't want to burn in no hell-fire."

Stone handed back the tract. "You're nuts. Besides, I'm not on the squad any more. They've got me directing traffic."

Sam said, "I think I can fix that, Herman. Look—this is a serious matter. I'm afraid."

Herman the Great got up and yawned. "You're nuts, Sam. And even if you weren't, I couldn't do anything for you. Grady said that he'd keep me on traffic for life if I even stuck my nose in a murder case for the next six months." He added bitterly, "And the old goat is a man of his word."

He walked out, leaving Sam standing in the center of the dance floor, staring after him with worried eyes.

TWO blocks down the street Stone slowed down for a brewery van, then turned on to Twenty-second. Sam was getting childish in his old age, Stone thought. There had been a time when—

"Wuxtra! Wuxtra!" a leather-lunged newsie on the corner bellowed. "Read all about it. Johnny Kline burns this noon in hell-fire!"

Stone almost stalled his car. He pulled into the curb and handed the boy a quarter.

"What the hell are you talking about?"

The boy traced a grimy finger across the headline. "It's all right there, in black and white, mister."

Stone cut his motor and read. The headline screamed:

**BIBLICAL WARNING COMES TRUE
JOHNNY KLINE WHO SCOFFED
AT WARNING DIES IN AGONY**

Johnny Kline, the notorious south-side policy king who was questioned this spring by the police *re* the murder of the Brown brothers to whose throne he succeeded, died at twelve-thirty this noon in what appeared to be hell-fire, or a reasonable facsimile thereof. . . .

Stone skimmed through the story quickly. Paul the Prophet had disappeared. Lieutenant Harry Price of Homicide said that an arrest was to be expected soon. It was all old, familiar stuff to Stone, and so much twaddle. He could read between the lines. The boys were up a tree. They didn't have one damn thing to work on. They didn't even know the exact manner of Kline's death.

No wonder Murphy had kidded him. Grady would have loved it if he had shown up all hot and panting.

Stone sighed and started his car. He had better not even go back to Sam's. He might be tempted to muscle in. Still—his face brightened at a sudden thought. He was only a block or two from the bar that Kline had run, and there had been nothing in Grady's warning about drinking a glass of beer. He could at least *think* about the case.

Mason and the bartender were alone in the long bar. Mason was standing at one end warily eyeing the door. He looked as frightened as Kline had been. His face, weazened and small to begin with, was peaked with strain. His skin was drawn taut across his cheekbones.

He seemed relieved to see Stone.

Stone ordered a beer, then changed it to a julep. "What with the heat on the south side, this is just like old times," he told Mason.

The former jockey shook his head. "I wouldn't know. I was riding the bangtails then. I wish I still was."

Stone offered to buy him a julep. "You were there when he died?"

Mason shivered slightly. "I'll never forget it," he said. He showed Stone his bandaged hands. "I tried to put Johnny out. But it wasn't a regular flame. It was just like that old devil said that it would be—hell-fire."

Stone sipped at his julep. "The paper said that you got a warning."

"Two of 'em," Mason admitted. "One said that I'll die in hell-fire just like Johnny did. The other was something about if one of my hands offend me, I should cut it off."

"What's your guess?" Stone asked. "This old man, Paul the Prophet, or what's left of the Brown brothers' gang?"

"I wouldn't know," Mason admitted. "But I'm betting on the old man. A hood wouldn't kill that way." He sucked at a piece of ice. "I hear even Polish Sam got a warning."

Stone ordered a second julep. Johnny Kline's reputed policy take had been thousand dollars a week. In a year that ran into money, money enough to bring even a man like Polish Sam out of self-imposed retirement. And if his memory served him correctly, the Brown brothers had got their start in the rackets running beer for Sam.

Mason grew suddenly suspicious. "What's your interest in the case?"

"Me?" Stone lied. "I haven't any. I'm just a traffic cop on his afternoon off. Who takes over Johnny's racket?"

The former jockey shook his head. "I wouldn't know. I get the bar. I saw that in his will."

A side door that led up to Kline's former living quarters opened and a slim-hipped,

sultry-eyed brunette walked up to the two men. Her lips were too full and moist. She had been drinking. "I'm lonely," she told Mason.

"Mrs. Kline, Officer Stone," Mason introduced them. "Herman used to be a big shot in Homicide," he told the girl, "but they busted him back to uniform because he tried to get into the Army."

The girl said, "Pleased to meetcha."

Stone finished his second julep and slid off the stool.

"I thought I'd just stop by," he told Mason. "If you're ever down at Wacker and Michigan, toot your horn and I'll give you a green light."

He reached for his wallet and the former jockey shook his head. "Those were on the house. You go upstairs," he told the girl. "I'll be back in a minute." He took Stone's arm and walked him to the door. "No, sir. You don't pay for drinks in this place," he repeated. "You're still Herman the Great to me."

The day hadn't grown any cooler. Stone took off his hat, mopped his forehead.

Mason hesitated. "And—don't misunderstand about Mrs. Kline. She's out of her mind about Johnny."

Stone nodded soberly. "I wouldn't be surprised."

The truck was on them before they saw it. It was a shiny black-panel, half-ton one with SOUTHSORE DELIVERY printed in gold on the sides. As it drew even it braked to a stop, the back panel opened abruptly, and a short, stocky man with a sub-machine gun got out.

Stone threw himself flat on the sidewalk. Mason screamed and dove into the doorway. The man with the gun swept the walk and the plate glass with lead, then backed into the truck. The panel closed and the truck pulled away.

Mason was swearing profanely in the bar. "The damn dirty killers," he raved. "Why pick on me for something Johnny did?"

Herman the Great got to his feet and brushed at his light tan suit just as a uniformed cop panted up, emitting toots on his whistle at every bound.

"You," he bellowed at Stone. "What was that all about? Why was that guy shooting at you?"

The former homicide ace slipped in back of the wheel of his car. He didn't want to be there when the local squad car arrived. Inspector Grady might misconstrue his presence.

"I really wouldn't know," he said. "Maybe he didn't like me."

The beat cop looked after him uncertainly, then turned into the bar.

CHAPTER THREE

An Eye for an Eye

WEST MADISON STREET was staying in town for the Fourth. What was more, it was staying on Madison Street, or in the adjacent gutters. Stone parked his car in the no parking zone in front of the Star and Garter and called Connie from the drugstore on the corner of Ashland.

"I'll be home in an hour," he told her.

She pointed out that he was already two hours late, that he had promised to take her to the beach, and demanded suspiciously, "You aren't getting mixed up in that murder, are you, honey? That one that's in the Extra?"

"Of course not, sweetheart," he soothed her. "Do you think that I want to stay a traffic cop all my life?"

"I'm not so certain, but I want you to," she said. "At least that way I'll know whom to sue when you're killed."

He hung up and bought a coke and walked slowly west on Madison. The street hadn't changed. Unwashed vagrants clustered on the curbs and in front of the two-bit hotels. Cheap restaurants elbowed cheap-John stores. They, in turn, elbowed even cheaper bars that advertised sixteen

ounces of beer for a nickel and two shots of whiskey for twenty-one cents.

He saw the Prophet's mission a half block down the street and stayed on the same side. The stake-out was easy to spot.

No one but a blind man could have missed them. They stood in the window of a bar across the street, staring at the mission door. Stone knew it was wishful thinking. If Paul the Prophet intended to return, he wouldn't walk in the front door.

He walked on to the next corner, then down the side street to the alley. *I shouldn't do this*, he told himself. But he did.

He walked down the refuse-littered alley, consoling himself with the thought that if he should find out anything definite that would tie in with his suspicions, he could always phone Harry and tell his former chief that one of his former stool pigeons had volunteered the information.

THE back door of the mission had been propped open for ventilation. The dingy, grey-painted interior smelled of antiseptic and slow decay. Stone hesitated briefly and walked in.

The walls were hung with Scriptural admonitions. Worn benches marched back from the small, raised dais almost to the black-painted windows. Rough board tables ran the full length of one side of the room. A feeble yellow light burned in a side room.

A ferret-faced man thrust his head out of the room with the yellow light, and demanded, "Who the hell are you?"

Stone considered his lie. "I'm from the health department. I'm looking for an old man about sixty. He wears a grizzled beard and the last time he was seen he was wearing overalls, a white shirt, and a blue serge coat. He calls himself Jones, and he's quite a heavy drinker."

The ferret-faced man grinned. "Come again, mister. I can pick you out twenty men in a block that will answer that description."

Stone took a five-dollar bill from his wallet and laid it on the pulpit. "All right," he admitted. "I'm a skip trace for Associated Credit. I saw this Swanson's name and picture in the paper and I think he's a man we're looking for. What's your name?"

"Mavis," the other man said. "You may have heard of me. I used to be a well-known handicapper before I hit the booze. Now all I do is keep this joint clean, for my board, and beat the drum."

"What kind of handicapper?"

"Horse," Mavis said. He picked up the bill and folded it. "And I don't believe in Santa Claus. What do you want for this?"

"I want to know where Swanson is."

Mavis shook his head. "I haven't the least idea. I haven't seen him since the cops picked him up just before breakfast this morning."

"You're positive?"

"I'm sure. Why? What's it to you?"

Stone took another five from his pocket and laid it on the pulpit. "You see, it's this way. I'm really a newspaper reporter and I'd like to get his story. And there's ten more just like that one if you can tell me where he's holed up."

Mavis mated the two bills. "I'm sorry. But I haven't the least idea. I just work for the old man." He wet his lips and looked at the front door. "And if that's all you want me for—"

"Go ahead" Stone said. "Go ahead and get drunk."

"I intend to," Mavis told him. He unlocked the front door. "And you go right ahead and enjoy yourself, copper. But you won't find a thing. The precinct cops fine-combed the joint."

He banged the front door and locked it. Stone walked to the windows and peered out through a scratch in the paint. The stake-out had split up. One man was following Mavis. The other was still staring from the window.

He turned back and searched the mission. There was nothing in the room that Mavis

had come out of but a bed, a table, and a chair. Another side room was the kitchen. Still another held cots and sheets and blankets. He was hampered in his search by the fact that he did know himself just what he was looking for.

He fingered through a pile of tracts on a small table near the door, then went out and retraced his steps to the drugstore on the corner.

He phoned Sam Hovack.

"I thought you'd call," Sam chuckled. "Am I in a jam or not?"

"I don't know," Stone told him truthfully. "But I want to see you. I think someone's going to try to kill you, Sam. Sit tight. Don't move out of the joint until I get there."

THE outbound traffic had lessened now. There were few cars on the street. A decorator's truck was parked in front of the Frolics. Stone pulled up behind it just as it pulled out.

"Yes, suh. Going to be like old times again, Mr. Stone?" Saul, the doorman chuckled.

Stone nodded glumly.

The twins were sitting on the bar where they could watch the door. Both of them grinned at Stone.

"How's the lumps?" Bud asked.

Spud said, modestly, "You're lucky I didn't slug you."

Stone tapped their holstered guns. "If you're going to do business in Chicago, you'll have to get a permit for that hardware. And if you're going to be any protection to Sam—" he deftly slipped their guns from their holsters before they could move, jammed the barrels into their bellies, and pulled the hammers back to half cock—"you don't want to trust anyone." He lowered the hammers gently and handed back the guns. "For all you knew I might be sore about those lumps."

White-faced, they eyed him with new respect. He walked on into Sam's office.

The fat man was studying the plans that the decorator had just left. "It will be just like old times," he repeated the doorman's remark. "What with a bar and a floor show in here, a gambling room upstairs, maybe a bookie joint and—" he added glumly—"somebody wanting to kill me."

Stone asked, "You trust those twins?"

"I raised 'em."

Stone asked, "Did you get along with Johnny Kline?"

"I hardly knew him," Hovack said. "Kline was after my time."

"And you came back to town—"

The fat man looked surprised. "To make money. But not to step on anyone's feet."

Stone said, "I'm not so sure. Level with me, Sam. It wasn't you who knocked Kline off?"

"With hell-fire?" Hovack jeered. "I wouldn't know how. Me, I always use a sawed-off shotgun." He mopped his forehead, and Stone saw that his fingers were trembling. "Look. What is this, Herman? Where do you come in on this?"

"I don't," Stone said. "I haven't even been here. It could be my job if Grady found out that I'm nosing around. But somebody emptied a drum at either Bugs Mason or me. And I don't like to be shot at. I either know too much or not enough."

Hovack said nothing.

Stone continued: "Tell me more about Paul the Prophet."

Hovack shook his head. "I don't even know the man. I never even seen him before he walks in here and—"

One of the twins called in from the other room. "There's a Western Union kid with a package, Sam."

"Well, sign for it," Sam told him. He started up suddenly. "But not if the damn thing ticks."

Stone opened the office door. The Western Union boy was walking, whistling, out the outer door. "Stop that kid," he ordered.

"But it's just a bottle of liquor," Bud protested.

"Stop him," Stone repeated. "Find out who paid him to deliver it." To Sam he said, "Hold it—"

The twin hurried after the messenger. Sam stood staring at the tissue-wrapped package on the bar. A card in an envelope was attached to it by a multicolored card. He took out the card and read it.

Glad to have you back. Says,
A Pal.

Hovack tore the tissue from the package. "It's Bushmill's Irish smoke," he grinned. "He must be a pal. That stuff's getting rare."

Bud called from the door, "Don't drink that, Sam." He hurried across the dance floor. His face was so white that his freckles stood out in bas relief. "The kid told me an old, white-haired guy with funny eyes give him a buck to deliver the bottle without it going through the office."

Hovack said, "Poisoned. Why, the dirty old fiend!" He tore the revenue stamp off the neck of the bottle and examined a small hole in the glass that had been refilled with wax. "See. Just like we used to do back when—why the psalm-singing old faker! I'll make him drink it all. I'll pour it down his gullet. I'll—"

He twisted the cork from the bottle to smell it. Stone tried to stop him—too late.

The cork removed, the liquid in the bottle had geysered up into Hovack's face. "My eyes! They're on fire!" he screamed.

The fat man dug at his eyes with his fingers, screaming in agony as the acid burned into his flesh. The twins milled helplessly about. Stone tried to pull Hovack's fingers from his eyes. They came away dripping blood.

There were only two holes where his eyes had been.

Sam stopped screaming as abruptly as he had begun. He clapped one hand back to

his eyes and the other to his heart as Stone released him.

The fat man took two uncertain steps, his knees buckled and he collapsed. He fell heavily on his side, rolled over on his back, drew up his knees, and stopped breathing.

The twins looked at each other and left the office. Stone stooped and felt the fat man's heart. It had stopped beating.

There was only one thing Stone could do. He picked up the phone and dialed, calling police.

CHAPTER FOUR

Morgue Bait

"I'M CALLING from Sam Hovack's Midnight Frolics," he told the police operator. "You had better send a wagon and notify Homicide. No. A doctor won't do any good. Sam's dead."

He replaced the telephone on the desk and wiped it clean of fingerprints from force of habit. He walked into the cafe. The twins were gone. He crossed the dance floor to the street. Saul, the doorman, was talking to a colored girl down at the mouth of the alley.

"You see the twins go out?"

Saul grinned at the waiting colored girl. "No, sir, I didn't."

Stone said, "I thought they'd scam. You all right with cops, Saul?"

The doorman's eyes rolled white. "I am if they don't question me. I got a wife in Racine an' one up in Madison who like their alimony."

"You'd better beat it, then" Stone said. "Sam's dead."

The doorman gulped. "Dead finished?"

"Finished as hell," Stone told him.

Saul shook his head. "California, heah I come."

Stone started back into the cafe, then changed his mind. To hell with being questioned by some precinct hack. He was in

the thing up to his neck now and he might as well go down to the bureau and cry on Harry's shoulder. Harry might find him an out.

He whipped his car into motion and was two blocks away before he heard the first scream of a siren.

He swung north on the Outer Drive and switched his radio onto police calls.

Car 237 was wanted at Division Dearborn. . . . There was a fight on the corner of Polk and Wells. . . . A suspiciously acting man was prowling in an empty building at 2638 Western Avenue. . . . A woman was creating a disturbance in a bar on Clark and Erie. . . . Then:

Calling all cars . . . calling all cars. Herman Stone, the former homicide ace, is wanted by Central Bureau . . . Tell him to come in if you see him . . . Code 164 . . .

Stone switched off his radio. That settled that. Code 164 was murder. So the bureau wanted him, did they? Well, if they wanted him they could find him. He hadn't done a thing that the boys on the gravy squad didn't do fifty times a week. But because everyone knew how badly he wanted to get back on the squad, they were going to make an example of him. He had seen men crucified before.

"To hell with them all," Stone said.

There was only one solution to his problem. Now that he was in the thing this far, he might as well see it through. If he could hand Grady the case on a platter, he might forget his threat. He might even restore him to the squad.

He parked south of Twelfth Street Station and went in to call up Connie and tell her not to worry. It was growing dark by now.

Connie didn't answer.

Stone walked back to his car. A mounted cop was just getting off his horse to examine the license plate. He took a cab to Jerry's Bar.

"I'm under cover," he told Jerry as he

sat down in the last booth. "You haven't seen me for a week."

"I haven't seen you for a week," the man agreed.

Stone ordered a steak and a quart of rye. The more he drank the clearer the case grew in his mind and the more impossible it seemed to prove it. It was a murder chain—but how to show the connecting links?

The bar phone rang twice while he was eating.

"No, sir, Lieutenant Price," Jerry said both times. "I haven't seen him for a week. Yes, sir, I'll call you right back if he comes in." After the second call he came back and peered suspiciously into the booth. "Harry Price wants to see you, bad. Either he called your wife, or she called him. Anyway, she was crying. And she told him you were out on a toot with some chippy."

"That's libel," Stone assured him.

Jerry said, unconvinced, "You ought not to cheat on her, Herman. Connie's a damn swell kid, you know."

He went away mumbling to himself.

Stone finished the steak and made a hole in the rye before the intangible something that he sought, the link in the chain, the pin that connected murder, slipped into its proper place. He had been stupid not to think of the man before.

He paid his check and slipped the quart into his pocket.

"Now don't you get drunk," Jerry warned. "Remember, you're not on the gravy squad with all the boys to cover for you."

"Hell, no," Stone told him evenly, "I'm out on a toot."

ON THE off-chance that Harry might have set a stake-out, he left by the rear door. It had grown dark by now and a breeze was blowing from the lake. It was almost cool enough to breathe.

He had started down the alley when he heard the soft foot pad behind him. "Hold

it!" he warned the unseen man. "Who's there?"

The man ignored the warning to rush him.

Stone tugged the quart bottle from his pocket and lashed out at the oncoming figure. The bottle shattered with a muffled crash and splattered him with whiskey.

Stone cupped a match in his palms and stared down at the bloody face. The hood wasn't badly hurt. The bottle had caught him a glancing blow. He was already beginning to stir and moan. Stone knew him slightly. A petty hood, he specialized in labor sluggings.

He knuckled him to his feet and slapped him. "Who hired you this time, Charlie?"

The hood looked at him dully and wiped the blood out of his eyes. "Honest. It was a mistake, Mr. Stone," he lied. "I thought you was another guy."

"The hell you did," Stone said. He picked up the jagged heel of the broken bottle. "Come on. Start chirruring or I'll cut your face to ribbons. Who hired you to give me the business?"

The hood lied earnestly. "So help me. I never seen the guy before. I'm standing in the Clover-leaf Bar when—" He wrenched himself free and raced down the alley.

Stone's hand streaked for his gun, and came away empty. It wasn't a shooting matter. One of the gravy squad could have shot the fleeing man, but not a traffic cop. Stone continued down the alley. In a way Charlie had done him a favor. At least he knew now that Harry Price and the Department weren't the only one looking for him.

"The *Daily Chronicle* building," he told the driver of the cab he hailed.

The *Chronicle* was an evening paper. It being evening, and the next day a holiday, the huge building was almost deserted. To avoid a chance encounter with anyone who might know him, Stone climbed the service steps to the fourteenth floor. He saw a light

in the one office that he cared anything about.

"Hello, Pop," he greeted the old man. "How's chances of browsing through your morgue?"

Pop Ernst paused in the removal of his black alpaca sleeve protectors and peered over his steel-rimmed glasses. He said, "I was just shutting up shop. Whose corpse do you want to exhume?"

"Bill Dennison's," Stone told him. "Is, or isn't he, still down at Stateville?"

The old man thought a moment. "It seems to me," he said, "I did paste a clipping about him being paroled. Just a moment. I'll get his folder."

He came back with a manila envelope and emptied its contents on the counter. Stone picked up the clipping in question.

William Dennison, sentenced in 1933 to 10 years to life for the so-called "Chemical" murder of Trixie Boswell, a south-side cabaret hostess, was paroled at the expiration of his minimum term this morning when. . .

Pop Ernst squinted at the date. "That was a month ago. It do you any good?"

Stone lighted a cigarette. "I've got everything I want but Dennison's address." He looked around the tiny office. "Now if I could use your phone, Pop—"

The old man waved him into the outer office. "Use one of those out there."

Stone called several numbers in quick succession without luck, and walked back to the morgue door. "Anyway, thanks—"

Stone swallowed hard. The manila envelope was gone. Pop Ernst lay on the floor, blood streaming from his head where the heavy paperweight that lay beside him had crushed in one side of his skull. Stone started to vault the rail between them, plunged back frantically as a darker blob of black grew in the far recesses of the vault and fingers of flame stabbed at him.

His own gun was out and jamming as he fell. Lead screamed off the metal cases and smacked dully into pulp. The silence

that followed beat in tiny waves against his eardrums. There was no motion, no sound in the vault.

"All right. I've got you covered," Stone bluffed. "Come out of there. I see you."

The intense silence persisted. Stone cautiously vaulted the railing and explored. A rear door led into the service hallway. He could hear the distant pad of running feet. Here and there blobs of blood spotted the stairs.

He walked back into the office and looked down at the old man. There was nothing he could do. Pop Ernst was dead. He'd have a file of his own in the morning. His paper morgue had become a real one.

"And I'm in a spot, Pop," Stone said.

There would be no explaining this. Other feet were clacking down the hallway now. An elevator grill banged sharply. Stone retreated grimly to the door that led into the service hall. It now was a matter of time.

Stone followed the bloodstains down the steps on silent feet. He hoped he could make the sidewalk before the alarm.

CHAPTER FIVE

A Word to the Wise

THE feeling that he was being watched by unfriendly eyes persisted. Stone got up from the newspaper-littered bed and studied the street from a crack in the drawn shade of his open hotel room window.

In the small German bar next to the cab stand a drunk experimented with an anglicized version of *Ach du Liebe Augustine*.

A smell of frying hamburger was thick on the heavy air. The large clock in front of a jewelry store was scissoring its hands on midnight to cut the third day of July from time.

So far as Stone could see there was no one watching his window.

He took a drink from the bottle on the dresser and returned to the papers on the

bed. Paul the Prophet had the front page. He was also still missing. He had not been seen from the time that he had handed Johnny Kline the tract in front of Central Bureau.

Stone read an interview with Harry Price. Harry was no longer promising an early arrest. The squad was beating against a blank wall and he was showman enough to admit it. It would make the eventual solution of the crime a bigger feather in his cap.

"Of course I don't believe in the supernatural," Lieutenant Harry Price told this reporter in his office this evening. "The case can be summed up in three words, murder—as usual . . ."

Murder—as usual. Stone wished he could see the results of the laboratory tests. There were several chemicals that gave off a gas when dampened, a gas powerful enough to be ignited by a match. The whiskey bottle booby trap had been a far more clever means of murder.

He skimmed over the front page again. His own name wasn't mentioned at all. For hours a gigantic police dragnet had been seining the south-side underworld, letting the small fry escape, and bringing to the surface the lieutenant and torpedoes of the once powerful Brown brother's mob.

All denied any complicity in the two murders. Most of them had alibis, although they were still being grilled by Central Bureau in an attempt to connect them with the shooting affray in front of Kline's Bar.

Stone noted, here, with grim satisfaction, that for some reason of his own Bugs Mason hadn't mentioned his name. Bugs was reported to be holed up in fear of his life in an undisclosed south-side apartment.

The Western Union messenger who had delivered the bottle of explosive acid to the Midnight Frolics had positively identified a picture of Paul the Prophet as the man who had paid him a silver dollar to deliver the bottle to Sam Hovack, and some twenty

"I Have Earned an Average of
\$15²⁰ AN HOUR"
with Science's New Midget Miracle,
the PRESTO Fire Extinguisher

Says William F. Wydallis, Ohio.
Many Others "Cleaning Up"—So Can YOU!



Science's
New Midget
Miracle—
"PRESTO"

A MAZING new kind of fire
extinguisher. Tiny "Pres-
to" (about size of a flashlight!) does job of
bulky extinguishers that cost 4 times as much,
are 8 times as heavy. Ends fires fast as 2
seconds. Fits in palm of hand. Never corrodes.
Guaranteed for 20 years! Sells for only \$3.98!
Show it to civil defense workers, owners
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south-side racketeers, gamblers and tavern
owners had admitted receiving similar
warnings to those received by Kline, Sam
Hovack, and Bugs Mason.

Stone took another drink and summed up
the situation. It was a mess, but a cleverly
planned mess. He had never seen a ten
thousand dollar a week racket so *not*
wanted. The boys were falling all over
themselves to wash their hands. And after
the shock had worn off, Stone surmised, it
would be too late.

He had to locate Bill Dennison. He also
had to learn just how he stood. He went
through the paper again, very carefully.

He found the item that he was looking
for in column three on page five.

Police were baffled tonight by the apparent-
ly motiveless murder of Wilfred V. Ernst,
fifty-nine-year-old custodian of the *Chronicle*
newspaper morgue who had resided for the
past ten years at the Wabash Avenue Y.M.-
C.A. His body was discovered shortly after
eight o'clock this evening by employees of
the paper. Death was instantaneous and is
said to have been caused by a heavy paper-
weight that was found beside the body.

Although apparently nothing is missing
from the files entrusted to his care, T. H.
Brandon, city editor of the *Chronicle*, said
a check-up would be almost impossible as
Pop Ernst, as he was familiarly known, was
in sole charge of the morgue and clipping
department. . . .

There was no mention of the gun battle
that the employees must have heard. There
was no mention of the blood on the stairs.
That worried Stone. He knew how Homi-
cide brass worked. The more they spilled
to the papers, the less they knew. When
they started concealing clues they had their
case and were getting ready to pounce.

He brushed the paper to the floor, killed
the balance of the whiskey in the pint, and
lay still, staring at the ceiling. The way
things had broken, he was walking on
quicksand and one misstep would engulf
him. He couldn't crack this thing alone.
The smart thing for him to do was to call
in Harry Price and trust that Harry, for

old time's sake, would cover up his tracks.

He reached for the phone and it rang. He swung his feet to the floor and stared at it. No one knew where he was. He would have sworn that he hadn't been followed from the *Chronicle*.

"Yes?" he said uncertainly into the phone.

"This is a pal, Herman," an unknown voice said distinctly. "And if I were you, I'd go home. Catch on? A word to the wise is sufficient."

There was a click and the wire went dead.

Stone slipped into his coat and fitted his hat to his head. "If you've hurt Connie," he warned the guiltless phone, "so help me, I'll kill you." His big hands twitched in pain. "And it won't be with hell-fire either."

Stone stood panting, listening, beside the elevator shaft. Fifteen floors below him, toy cars crawled down the drive between twin strings of miniature lights. There was a stake-out across the street, but no one had seen him enter. He had come across the roof of the apartment building next door. Satisfied there was no one on the upper floor, he walked slowly down the stairs.

His own apartment was dark and silent. He slipped inside and closed the door, called, "Connie!"

There was no answer.

He locked the door behind him and tiptoed into the bedroom. The bed had not been slept in. Connie wasn't there. He searched the other unlighted rooms, being careful to avoid the windows, then came back to the bedroom.

A spear of moonlight stabbed the mirror of the dressing-table and broke into a shimmering silver pool. Connie's rouge and other items were scattered familiarly about as though she had made up in a hurry. Stone picked a white heap from the chair. It was the sports dress she had been wearing when he had left for work that morning. He lit a match and scrutinized the

dresses in the closet. Her new summer formal sea-green chiffon was gone. So were the shadow-flowered evening slippers she wore with it.

Puzzled, he sat down on the bed and looked around the room. There were no signs of a struggle. No one had to struggle very hard to get Connie into evening dress.

He got up and lit another match. The note was on the dressing table, pinned down by a perfume bottle. Connie had written it with a stiletto in her teeth.

Dearest:

If you *should* come home before I find you and that girl, little Connie has gone looking for you. And may God help you, you big palooka, if I find you.

Stone sighed, folded the note and put it in his wallet. This complicated matters. He couldn't call Harry Price now. There was only one thing he could do.

CHAPTER SIX

Trial and Error

THE bartender's nose smashed under the impact of Stone's fist. He screamed, "You're crazy! Somebody call the cops! He's killing me."

Stone held him by the jacket with one hand and raised his fist again.

"I tell you I don't know where she is," the bartender blubbered. "I ain't seen her since ten o'clock last night. She came in here and asked for you, and went right out again."

Stone released the man and strode out of the bar.

"We'll try the Club Egyptian next," he told the driver of his cab.

The driver meshed the cab into gear. "It's your party, Herman. You're running up the bill."

Eight blocks from the bar they had just left, the cab pulled in to the curb again. This street was well-lined with cars. The club was a remodeled, two-story former



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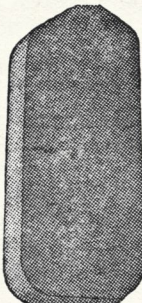
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bank. The large Gothic windows were closely shuttered to their foot-high sills. The soft strains of a band filtered through.

A husky, white-uniformed doorman stopped Stone as he tried to enter.

"Your wife ain't here," he told him. "And I've had orders to keep you out. Come back again some time when you're sober."

He pushed Stone back a step, then picked himself up off the sidewalk, retrieved his cap from the gutter, and felt his jaw. He hoped that it wasn't broken.

Just inside of the club door, Joe Dugan, the manager, stopped Stone. "Now just a minute, Herman." He nodded at the doorman glowering through the glass. "Charlie told you that we haven't any of us seen your wife."

Stone balanced himself on his toes and flexed his fists into balls, and felt his arms grasped from behind. He tried to twist free, and couldn't. "You asked for it, sucker," a voice said. "You aren't Herman the Great any more. You're just a traffic cop."

Stone said, "I want to make a deal. You guys have Connie. I—"

The swish of a sap cut him short. It landed behind his ear and the soft music became a thunder of kettledrums. A great distance away he heard a woman's drunken laughter.

The doorman grinned through the glass, then walked down the street to Stone's cab. "It's okay," he told the driver as he paid him off. "You can pull on now. Herman has found his wife."

THE basement was soundproof. It was also damp and dark. The only light was a twenty-five-watt bulb that dangled from a cord in front of the air-conditioning machine.

Stone sat up and felt his head. Neither his hands nor his feet were tied. He felt for his holstered gun. They hadn't for-

Murder—as Usual

gotten to take that. They had missed his hideaway. He could feel it pressing against the inside of his thigh. He recovered it and dropped it in his side coat pocket. So far, so good. He had found Connie.

A voice whimpered in his ear, "I'm not afraid. I'm saved—"

Stone jumped a foot. Then: "You're Paul the Prophet," he accused.

He stared at the man in the half light. So this was where the mob had kept Swanson hidden while Price had been searching the city for him. He doubted if the man had got a quarter of a block from Central Bureau before a waiting car had shanghaied him. The set-up had been clever.

"How long have you been here?" he asked.

"A long time," Swanson said sadly. He brightened somewhat. "But they told me I'm leaving in the morning."

Stone didn't doubt that in the least. What Swanson was too cracked to realize was the fact that when he left, his feet would be embedded in a tub of concrete. His death or disappearance would be the only way that they could keep their own noses clean and perpetuate the legend.

"What's Mavis to you?" he demanded.

A fanatic gleam came into the old man's eyes. "He's God's messenger," he declared. "He ferrets out the evil spots where sin is flourishing and I go threaten them with hell-fire."

"I thought that was the answer," Stone said.

The whole panorama of murder was complete. And it had been well painted. Once Harry Price had dropped the Brown herring and realized what the set-up was, he could slap hood until his fists were sore and not be able to prove a thing.

A bolt shot on a door at the head of the stairs and the ferret-faced man whom Stone had met in the Madison Street mission walked down the steps, flanked by the missing twins.

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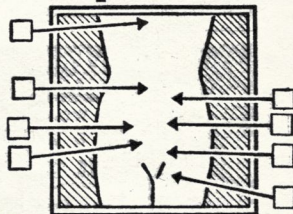
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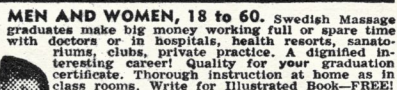
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"You'd have done better if you'd stuck to Sam," Stone told them.

Spud twisted his lips in a snarl that made him look like a freckled weasel. "We work for whoever pays us the most dough."

Bud fingered his gun uneasily.

Mavis said, "You made a big mistake. You shouldn't have come here, Stone."

Stone asked, "Why not? I seem to have hit the jackpot."

Mavis admitted: "You've put us in a spot."

Stone got to his feet. "I realize that. And I want to make a deal. You fellows keep your hands off Connie, and—"

Mavis shook his head. "There's no deal we can make with you. You know too much."

Stone dropped his hand to his pocket.
"So?"

A moment of silence followed. 'Spud licked at his dry lips. Bud looked sick. Stone nodded his head at Swanson, who was watching the scene with puzzled eyes.

"He's a witness."

"He won't be by morning," Mavis said. "You'll both go out together."

Paul the Prophet beamed at Stone. "See? What did I tell you?" He quoted, "'I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in Him will I trust.'"

Mavis thumbed the safety off his gun. "Well," he asked the twins, "what are we waiting for?"

His finger whitened on the trigger of his gun and Stone shot him through his pocket. The former handicapper, turned messenger of the Lord, stared, stupidly incredulous. Then he tiptoed two steps forward, dropped his automatic, stooped to pick it up—and scraped his face along the concrete floor for the full length of his body.

"He's got a gun! He's got a gun!" Spud squealed. He flipped an ineffectual shot at Stone and legged it for the stairs as fast as he could run. His twin was well ahead of

Murder—as Usual

him. By the time Herman the Great reached the landing, both had disappeared.

He cracked open the door and looked out into the dimly lighted lobby. Dugan was not in sight. The foyer was deserted. He wondered how many of the club employees were really in the know, and reasoned, correctly, that there wouldn't be very many. Murder was a precious secret, and the more to eat the pie, the smaller the slices would be.

HE CLOSED the door behind him and walked boldly through the foyer and up a small flight of marble steps into the even more dimly lighted night club proper.

The Club Egyptian went in for atmosphere. Spirals of incense curled out of beaten copper censers on each side of the doorway.

When his eyes had grown accustomed to the smoke and half light he saw Connie sitting in a booth on the rear wall. She was nursing a Rhine wine and seltzer, and staring moodily at an unoccupied table that displayed the sign: RESERVED FOR MR. HERMAN STONE.

He considered going over to her and trying to make her understand. But Connie had a temper. It was well whetted with Rhine wine. She might believe him. She might not. She might claim that someone had warned him to ditch the mythical bid-die he was supposed to be squiring. A scene would bring about the very thing he was trying to avoid. For the time being she was safe. They wouldn't harm her in a crowd.

Unobtrusively he moved to a door he had passed through many times on raids. It opened into a hallway where a stairway led up to the second floor. The second floor housed the office and private suites.

Stone decided against the stairs. Dugan was due to show up any moment. There undoubtedly would be a guard outside the upper door. He walked to the far end of

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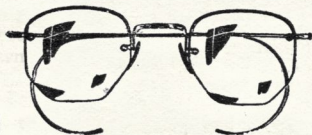
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the hall and opened the window. A rusty fire-escape crawled up the rear wall of the building.

The second floor window was open. It didn't lead into a hall. It opened into a living-room. The slim-hipped Widow Kane, no longer sultry-eyed, lay passed out on a chaise longue. Her crimson chiffon evening gown, blown by a table fan, billowed around her like a flame.

Stone stepped in through the windows and tiptoed across the room. The door led through a bedroom to a hall. He tiptoed down the hall to the far door. There was no guard outside it.

Stone smelled cigar smoke. He could distinguish at least three voices. He was disappointed not to hear a fourth.

"Mavis and the twins are down there now?" a voice demanded.

Dugan's voice answered, "Yeah. But I don't like this business. You're getting me in too deep."

"Forget it," the third voice said. "We're sitting pretty, I tell you. We'll dump him at the same time we dump Swanson."

"And his wife?"

"Don't you see," the first voice pointed out. "That's our perfect alibi. We don't touch Connie at all. She walked in of her own free will. She walks out of here the same way, after waiting for him to show since one o'clock this morning. We haven't even seen him, see? And once Herman is out of the picture, the other stuff stands as is."

Stone opened the door and stood leaning against the door jamb. "The hell you say!"

Bugs Mason gaped at him open-mouthed.

"No," Stone relieved his mind, "I'm not a ghost." He added: "But Mavis is. He picked the wrong horse this time."

His eyes wide with fear, the former jockey pleaded, "Look, Herman. Let's make a deal."

Stone quoted the dead handicapper. "There isn't any deal that you can make

Murder—as Usual

with me. I know too much." He walked a few steps into the room and the three men in it stopped breathing.

"You're not on duty," Dennison shrilled. "You don't dare to kill us!"

Stone sat straddling a chair, his gun in the open now. "Where's the big shot?"

"He's coming," Dugan admitted. "He left orders to be called when you got here." He pleaded, "But look, Herman—"

"I know," Stone cut him short. "You were only taking orders. So was Mavis." He added, "It was a pretty clever idea, Bugs. I haven't seen the lab report but I imagine that you used a white powder dusted into Johnny's suit that generated a gas when he sweated. And the powder can probably be traced right back to Swanson." He turned the gun on the white-haired Dennison. "How about it Bill? Am I right?"

The paroled convict admitted he was, and named the chemical. "I'll turn state's evidence," he offered. "I'll admit that I figured out the exploding acid bottle too—and I passed the bottle to the Western Union kid. But—I had to, I tell you. I was only taking orders."

Stone shook his head. "I never saw such a bunch of weak-willed lads." He motioned to Bugs Mason. "Start talking, Bugs. Let's start with Mrs. Kline."

"Well," Mason admitted, "I—"

"You were interested in her," Stone said. "You also wanted your cut of Johnny's ten thousand dollar a week racket. So you framed a couple of murders that you could palm off on the Prophet. Probably you only meant to kill Johnny first. Then Polish Sam came back to town and one of those would-be torpedo twins let slip that Sam intended to muscle in. So, you had to get rid of him, too."

Dennison protested, "We just wanted to frighten Sam—"

Stone said, "Your weakest spot was Dennison. That's why you had to knock off

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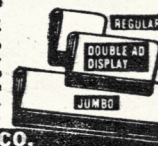
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New Detective Magazine

Pop Ernst once I had asked for Bill's file. You know Harry Price is no fool—"

"You—you've talked to Harry?" Mason asked.

Stone shook his head. "No. I'm not working on the case officially. I can't. I'm only a traffic cop. No one knows a damn thing about this but me."

"Good." The voice was soft. The barrel of the gun in the nape of Stone's neck was hard.

He said, "Hello, Marty," without turning his head. "You're a few minutes late. What detained you?"

"Drop your gun," the politician ordered. "You think you're so damn smart."

"No." Stone shook his head. "If I were smart I wouldn't have tried to join the Army. I wouldn't be here by my lonesome. I'd have a whole squad with me."

The pressure on his neck increased. He dropped the gun. Mason scooped it from the floor. His weakened face—was black with fury. "Damn you, Stone. I'm going to—"

The fat politician waddled across the room, took the gun out of his hand, and dropped his own gun into his pocket. "You're going to keep on taking orders from me." He sat down and fanned himself with his hat. "It's all over the district that Herman is drunk and out with some dame from Des Moines. If he has dropped any info no one will believe it."

"Harry Price will," Stone said.

Phillips put his hat back on his head and mopped his perspiring dewlaps. He scoffed, "You said yourself that you hadn't talked to Harry, that no one knew anything about this but yourself."

"That's right," Stone agreed. "But what the hell do you think I was doing while I was holed up at the Plaza Hotel? I wrote out everything I knew, mailed it to my lawyer, and told him to give it to Harry if I didn't show up Monday morning."

Murder—as Usual

Phillips said, not very hopefully, "You're lying."

Stone shook his head. "No. It was a good idea, Marty. But you've lost. You've been the guy in back of it all so you're sure to burn. You had Bill Denison paroled. You figured out the scheme of planting Mavis on Paul the Prophet and having him point out certain lads as deserving to die in hell-fire. You know most hoods are superstitious. You even tried to make yourself right with me by offering to get me back onto the squad. Then you turned around and had one of your boys spray a drum of lead at me and Bugs to put him in the clear and lay off the blame on the Brown boys in case the Lord let you down." He raised his voice deliberately. "Bugs has won Mrs. Kline's affection and a better job. You got Johnny's racket."

"Who got Johnny's racket?" The slim-hipped brunette in a flame-colored evening dress wove drunkenly in the doorway. "I get Johnny's racket. I'm his widow."

Bugs Mason said, "Get out of here, Claudia. This is a—"

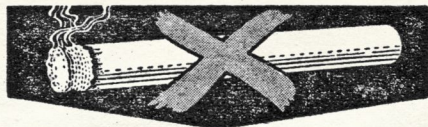
That was as far as he got.

Herman the Great half rose from his chair, scooped it up between his legs, and hurling it at Mason upset the table on Dennison and Dugan. Mason fell to the floor cursing, fumbling for his gun. Stone turned, briefly, on Phillips.

"I'll shoot!" the fat man warned.

He poked the gun at Stone's face with both hands and pulled the trigger. There was a sharp click, nothing more. He backed away screaming in terror, caught the back of his calves on the low window sill and fell shrieking through the window. He pulled the heavy drapes with him in a desperate effort to break his fall.

Mason's gun was out by now and blasting. A slug burned across Stone's chest. A second one nicked his ear. The third went into the ceiling as he wrestled with the former jockey for the gun.



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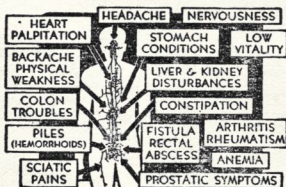
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New Detective Magazine

"Kill him, Bugs!" Dennison bellowed.

He and Dugan beat at Stone's back with chairs. Mason fought like a cornered mink, biting, clawing, squealing. The brunette was screaming madly. A block away a police whistle shrilled.

Stone ran one hand up Mason's arm and the killer's finger tightened on the trigger. The fourth shot caught Dugan in the belly. He sat down on the floor and coughed, fingers laced across the wound and a bright stain spreading between them.

Dennison sobbed. "Oh, God. I won't go back to prison!"

He broke for the doorway and ran, but Stone had the gun by then. He fired from his thigh without aiming. "That's for Pop Ernst and Polish Sam," he said.

The ex-convict missed the door completely and tried to climb the wall. He wound up writhing and clutching at the base board before he suddenly lay still.

Bugs was out the door by now, the brunette screaming after him, "Don't leave me, Bugs. You can't."

Then all was suddenly still except for a growing wail of a siren, a hubbub of voices on the street below, and the broken sobbing of the girl.

"On a platter, a silver platter," Stone breathed heavily. Then he wasn't quite so sure.

There were too many dead men in the case who couldn't talk, and he was only a traffic cop, with Inspector Grady gunning for him.

Stone took an uncertain step toward the rear fire escape—and then another.

THE morning sun was a blazing furnace. His arm and his chest both hurt. His head was a throbbing ball.

He sensed, rather than saw, the big car stop beside him. Harry Price and the squad looked cool in immaculate white linen. Inspector Grady was himself in cigar-ash-speckled blue serge.

Murder—as Usual

"Good morning, Four-F," he grunted. Stone saluted with a wince. "Good morning, sir."

"Quite a time out south last night," the grizzled inspector continued. "You may have read about it in the appers."

Stone nodded warily. "I did."

"A shame I couldn't get hold of you, Herman." Harry Price shook his head. "We sure were stumped for a while. The inspector even gave me permission to call you back on the squad. I tried to reach you everywhere. I even put out a radio call asking you to come in."

"But no, you couldn't be bothered," Inspector Grady jeered. "While your poor little wife cried her eyes out, you were out on a toot with some female."

Stone whistled a cruising cab on. He didn't trust himself to speak.

Grady explained the case to him in detail. "And we even found Paul the Prophet. The poor devil was locked up with a dead man in the basement."

Stone listened in gloomy silence.

Grady concluded, "And you know, there's only one thing that puzzles us. There was a big blond lad about your size that ran through the whole affair." The inspector's blue eyes were shrewd. "You wouldn't be knowing him, would you, Herman?"

Herman the Great shook his head. He'd quit the force. He'd open an agency of his own. He'd go to work in a shipyard. But he'd be damned if he'd stay the rest of his life in traffic.

"No, sir, I wouldn't," he said.

"You're a liar," the old man exploded. "And a hell of a looking traffic cop you are with arnica soaking through your shirt. Now get off of this corner and out of those funny pants or I'll have you run in."

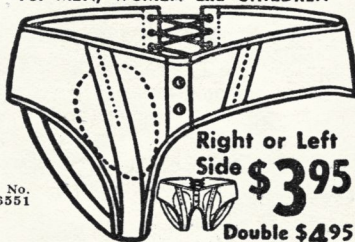
Stone gasped: "You mean—"

Harry Price opened the door of the detective squad car. "Welcome home, Herman," he grinned. ■ ■ ■

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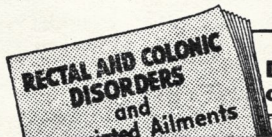
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New Detective Magazine

(Continued from page 8)

So the dope peddler phoned the wholesale drug peddler and ordered ten ounces of heroin. When the wholesaler arrived with the ten ounces of heroin, the federal men caught him with the goods and had an air-tight case against him. The wholesaler knew that he would get ten years or more in a federal prison and so he decided to be a stool pigeon. He made a bargain with the federal officers, that he would show them where the drug syndicate's warehouse and headquarters was, if the federal officers would let him go. The federal officers agreed to the bargain. Acting on information given them by the wholesaler, they raided the warehouse and arrested the boss of the syndicate and seized two hundred thousand dollars worth of heroin and raw opium.

All the prisoners were then taken to the federal detention prison.

"You are a dirty stool pigeon," the boss of the drug syndicate said to the wholesaler.

"You are a dirty stool pigeon," the wholesaler said to the dope paddler.

"You are a dirty stool pigeon," the dope peddler said to Jerry The Junkie.

Poor Jerry looked helplessly around the room until his eyes fell on the federal officer who had pushed him into the doorway. Jerry knew that he was not going to be let go. He knew that the dope peddler and the wholesaler were not going to be let go. Suddenly, his face brightened and sick as he was from not having any drugs for so long, he drew himself up and pointed his finger at the federal officer who had arrested him.

"You are a dirty doublecrosser," Jerry said.

And the moral of the story is that although one little rat has helped you to kill a thousand rats, it would be idiotic to let the little rat go and breed a thousand more rats because he squeaked at you. ■ ■ ■

The Dummy and the Death Web

(Continued from page 70)

report will cinch both murders on this bum, and lift Russel off the hook?"

Pike glared silently over the partolman's shoulder at Denny, who squatted by a tile pipe, expectantly regarding them. It was almost as if Denny's handsome face were drifting toward a smile, as if when Pike apologized, saying he guessed the young man was not so dumb after all, and possibly clapping him on the shoulder, Denny would leap up radiantly to include the big detective in the circle of his friends.

"Reiser!" Pike bellowed. "If you even think of opening your yap to the reporters, by godfrey, I'll have your badge if it's the last thing I do. Now run that drooling dummy out of here before I book him as a public nuisance."

As Denny struggled erect, Reiser winked frantically at him, signaling: Don't bother about him, don't mind what he thinks, you know and I know who is really the dummy.

Denny tried to smile. ■ ■ ■



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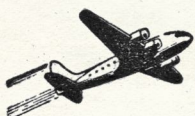
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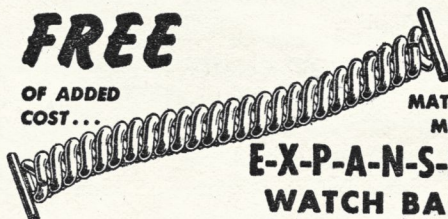
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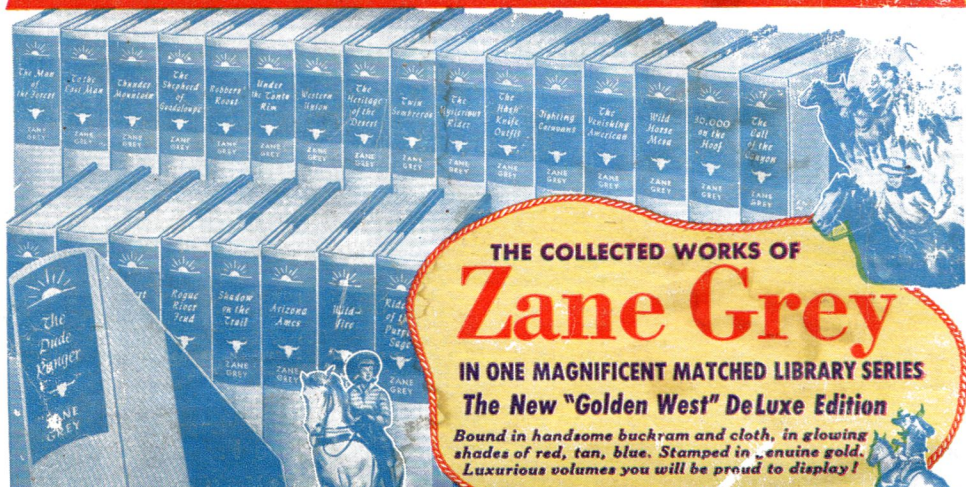
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