

January 15¢

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with **MUSIC**
by *Roger Torrey*

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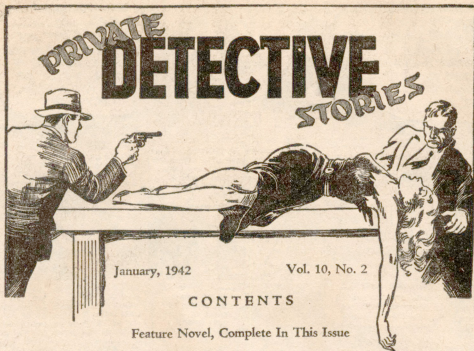
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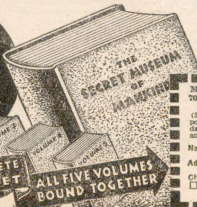
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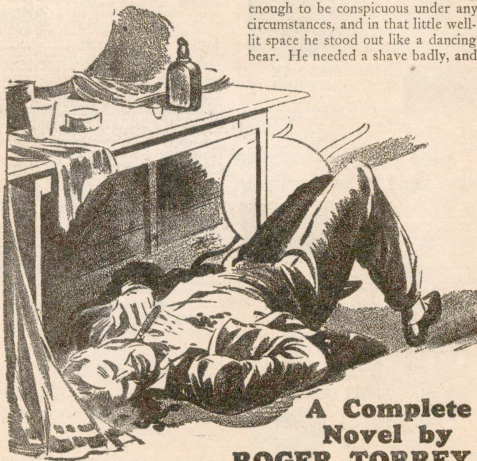
It looked like an ordinary checkroom racket at first; then too many people started getting killed. And the best proof of a girl's innocence was her murder . . .



THE band was in the middle of "Liebestraum" when I went into the Calico Cat and to a booth at the side. Dick Haley was making a nice job of it, with the saxes carrying the melody and with the brass in a staccato figure above them. Of course the Calico was run for the clientele that liked

that sort of thing . . . a money crowd that liked to spend it. It was well over half full, though nobody was dancing.

The reason for this was in plain sight, sitting in the center of the small dancing floor and demanding that waiters bring him drinks. It was George Delehanty, my partner, and he was very drunk and even more disheveled than usual. He was big enough to be conspicuous under any circumstances, and in that little well-lit space he stood out like a dancing bear. He needed a shave badly, and



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Novel by
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MURDER WITH MUSIC



I got a hand on Mary's
shoulder and spun her
away from that . . .
Then I said, "You
sure you didn't hear
anything?"

a haircut even more. His hands looked as though he'd just changed a tire on a muddy road. Compared with the dinner-coated Calico Club patrons he stood out like a sore thumb on a well-manicured hand... and he apparently didn't care a whoop about it.

Dick Haley was grinning but keeping right on with "Liebestraum" in spite of Delehanty's voice roaring through it. Probably the old show must go on idea.

And then Nick Pappas, the owner, saw me and came racing over to the booth I'd picked out.

"You got to get him out of here, Mike," he said, wringing his hands with anguish. "You got to get him out. No business will I have, with him making monkey shines like that. My trade will leave. They will not come back to me. Ruin, no less, I face. You got to get him out."

I said: "To hell with him. Will you tell the waiter I drink rye and soda?"

"Will you get him out, Mike? Like a friend, I ask it."

"He's your problem, Nick," I said. "I've got enough grief with the guy during office hours. This is my time off. I don't want any part of him now. Why don't you heave him out?"

Nick admitted: "We tried. He hit Luigi on the nose. Luigi's the bouncer, Mike, and Luigi is tough, but he hit Luigi on the nose just the same."

"Where's Luigi now?"

"He went home."

It was all part of the act so I slid out of the booth and went over to the dance floor. I said: "George! You, George!"

Delehanty looked up at me and

grumbled: "'s a hell of a place, Mike! Won't serve a man a drink. I'm goin' stay right here until they serve a drink, Mike, and nobody's goin' to say me nay. Say me nay... say me nay! Like poetry, hey, Mike?"

Nick Pappas had followed me over, and I said to him: "Give the big clown a drink and he'll get away from here. He won't until you do. Of course you can call cops and have them take him away, but you're taking a chance on that. He's liable to come back and wreck the spot when they turn him loose."

"No cops, Mike! No, no! The drinks, yes."

He hurried away, and I said loudly enough for everybody around to hear it: "You're going to get your drinks, George. Then why don't you come over and sit with me? I'll wait for you."

He spoke even louder and made it sound even more convincing. "You're a louse and a rat and a no-good heel, Callahan. And I'll be damned if I sit with you. I wouldn't go to a dog fight with you. I wouldn't go to a lynching with you, unless the rope was around your neck and I was helping haul on the other end of it. Now say me nay! Say me nay! Poetry, hey?"

I FIGURED that was good enough and went back to my booth. Nick Pappas, himself, brought Delehanty the drink he wanted on a tray. Delehanty managed to get the drink down, knock the tray out of Pappas' hands, and then rise from the floor and bow to the people around. And then he staggered from the dance floor and weaved to the door and out of the club. Pappas came over to

me again, wiping his forehead and wailing like a lost child.

"Mike, Mike, what should I be doing? He comes in like this, so often as not. Always he is drunk, though never, I think, as drunk as now. Always, he makes the trouble. What should I be doing?"

"Tell him he's hurting your business," I suggested. "Of course the reason he's doing it is because he knows I'm doing some private work for you and some other guys and he thinks he's getting even about it."

"Tell him! I tell him that lots. He calls me names, then."

I thought of all the fun Delehanty must have been having and wanted to grin, but held it to the thought. I said: "I'll tell you, Nick. It's simple. You make him a partner. See? Then it'll be *his* business he's hurting and he'll keep away and haunt the other joints. That'll kill your competition."

Pappas shrugged angrily and left . . . and Dick Haley slid in across the booth table in his place. He was wearing the same professional grin he did on the band stand, and he said:

"That partner of yours has got my dizzy boss so steamed up I thought the little guy would blow his whistle. It'd cost a man at least twenty-seven dollars to get as drunk as that."

I figured Haley might help in spreading the news, so I went to town with the story. I said Delehanty's drunk had been going on for a month and that I was sick and tired of it. And that as soon as Delehanty sobered up enough to know what was going on I was going to dissolve partnership with him. That I was doing all the work and he was spending all

the proceeds. I said that I didn't mind a man taking an occasional drink or even, occasionally, taking too many of them. But that when a man got and stayed lousy drunk for a month it was carrying things too far.

I made it good. I made it sound as though Delehanty and I weren't working together on a thing . . . and I wanted it that way because of Haley running around with the crowd he did. I knew he was too good a friend to spread a story against me, and good enough friend to resent anybody abusing me.

And, because of that, I relied on him telling the world what a heel Delehanty was and how we were separated on the work.

It was then he gave me something to worry about that was personal.

"It's Madge," he said. "She's quitting me, Mike. She moved out four days ago. And a guy's following me around all the time. Every place I go."

"What's the matter with Madge?"

"She claims I've been cheating. You know I haven't been cheating. Sure! I get chances. Anybody in this business gets chances, but I've been looking the other way. And a guy knocked hell out of me the other night . . . the night before last. He just came up to me and asked if I was Haley, and when I said I was, he let one go. You can see."

I COULD see all right, and what I saw didn't look natural on Haley. We were the same age and we'd grown up together, and because we were both Irish we'd sort of hung together then and afterward. But I looked Shanty Irish and Haley's dark skin and little mustache gave him a

Spanish air. He fitted a dinner coat and I didn't, but he was soft and I was hard where it counted, and that's through the belly. The signs of what he'd be from his soft life and easy living were already showing on him.

Now he showed signs of battle. Even the make-up man who'd evidently just worked him over wouldn't let him stand close scrutiny. One eye was blacked and this showed through flesh paint. One cheek was swollen, giving him a lop-sided look. He'd been hit on the nose and showed it by a scratch on the bridge and by reddened nostrils.

I looked this evidence of wreckage over and snickered about it. "It isn't like you, Dickie," I said, "to go cream-puff on me and howl for help. I can remember one time when you were about eight, and I had to take a brick away from you to keep you from slugging a kid named Seitz with it. Remember the Seitz kid? He lived in the next block, two houses from the corner. You'd have killed the little punk, and that's what you wanted to do. You've gone society, that's what's the matter with you."

He swore viciously and not in any society way. "It isn't that, Mike! But I've got to stand up in front of the band and wave the stick and look pretty for the customers. I can't do that when I'm carrying a mess of black eyes. All I did was hurt my hands on the guy; he was too big for me to take without percentage."

"Why'd the guy pass at you?"

"He didn't say. He just started swinging."

"What about this guy you say is tagging you around?"

"He's here now. Don't look now, but he's at the third table from the

right, past the booths on the other side of the room. He's got me dizzy. There's no reason why anybody should be following me."

I looked over at the table he mentioned and decided that it was my lucky day. I said: "Is this guy a hairless monkey with eyes and mouth like a fish? Does he all the time open and close his mouth without saying anything, like a fish does when it's out of water?"

"That's him?"

"That's not the guy that beat you up?"

"Lord, no! This is the one that's been following me. The other guy was big . . . plenty big."

"I know *this* guy."

"Who is he?"

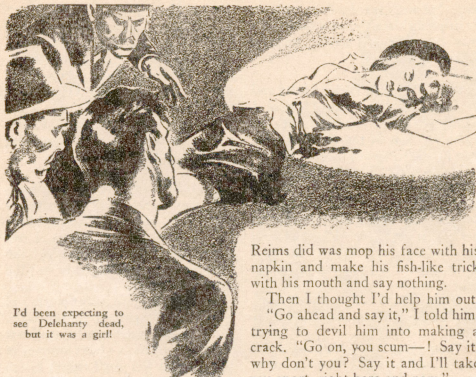
"Never you mind. I know him and I hate his guts. So does George Dehanty, if it comes to that. So you just sit tight and I'll take care of everything."

CHAPTER II

Knock Down, Drag Out



HE man at the third table was Harry Reims, of REIMS — INVESTIGATIONS. And a heel if there ever was one. He was thoroughly disliked by the men he occasionally hired to help him out with something too big to work out alone. He paid them less than the going wage and they sometimes had to slap him up to get even that. He was disliked by his competition, which included me, because he cut rates to get business. He was disliked by the cops because of his business methods . . . which were only bounded by what he thought he could get away with.



I'd been expecting to
see Delehanty dead,
but it was a girl!

I sat across from him and he said: "Well, Mike! I see you're stepping out."

He looked worried and he had a little piping voice that sounded the same.

I reached across and tipped his full water glass over in his lap. I didn't say anything about why. He stood up and brushed the water from him and then sat back down and looked at me as if he wanted to be anywhere else.

He had a full glass of whiskey waiting by a glass of soda and I got this on the next reach and smelled of it. It smelled like fairly good hootch, so I drank it and got the soda. I didn't want that so I snapped it into his face. It wasn't a thing you do unless you're looking for trouble, but it didn't work out that way. All

Reims did was mop his face with his napkin and make his fish-like trick with his mouth and say nothing.

Then I thought I'd help him out. "Go ahead and say it," I told him, trying to devil him into making a crack. "Go on, you scum—! Say it, why don't you? Say it and I'll take you apart, right here and now."

"I don't want any trouble with you, Mike," he said. "I'm just on a job. After all, we're in the same racket, ain't we?"

"You working?"

"Well, yes."

"Who hired you and to do what?"

"I can't tell you that, Mike. *You* know I can't. It ain't ethical to talk about clients."

I had a date with Delehanty and I wanted to keep it. I was already late for it and I figured this Reims thing would keep. I said: "I'll be up and see you tomorrow, Reims. Now look! I went to school with Dickie Haley and Dickie's wife. I'm not going to see him tangled up with any louse outfit like the one you run. Now you get the hell out of here now. I'll be up and see you tomorrow."

"Sure, Mike," he said in a hurried

way. He went for the door with his tie dripping black dye on a shirt front that had lost all starch, and he seemed glad to go.

I WENT back to Dickie Haley and said: "It's a heel named Reims. I told him to lay off you and that I'd be up to see him in the morning. He won't bother you any more, Dickie."

Haley said: "Thanks, pal!" And then he got red in the face. "Look, Mike! Will you go and see Madge and find out what's the matter with her? You can tell her I haven't been cheating . . . and honest, Mike, I haven't been. I just can't make her believe me."

"I can talk to her but that's about all. It's her business and yours. Not mine."

"You always have stepped in for me, Mike," he said. "I don't know. Maybe she'll believe you where she won't believe me."

I said it was worth a try, and then looked up and saw Nathan Feldman bearing down on me. Joe Morrison was with him, but Morrison hung back. Dickie went back to the bandstand and Feldman stood alongside and said: "I saw that business you had with Reims, Callahan. It didn't look good. Are you working for us or are you in here for a brawl?"

I said: "I'm working for you and so is George Delehanty. I've got a date to meet him, down the street, and I'm late now. I'll take this up with you and the others, when I meet you tomorrow. I'm in a hurry now."

And then somebody said, from behind me: "You certainly are, Callahan. You're in a hurry to go down the street and see what Delehanty

has got himself into. So come on."

I thought I knew the voice before I turned and made sure of it. And of course I was right. It was First-grade Detective Olson, who worked out of the Homicide Office. He grinned at me and said:

"That's right. It's me. White, who's my side-kick now, is waiting for us with the body."

WHITE was there and Delehanty was there, along with about a dozen cops, but about all I could see for a minute was the body. I *did* notice that Delehanty didn't look the least bit tight, but the body was the main attraction.

In the first place it was a girl and I had been expecting to see Delehanty dead, instead. In the next place the girl hadn't been much over sixteen, and you don't expect to see a kid that age shot to death. And she'd been shot to death and no mistake. The Medical Examiner had her dress cut down to her hip line and you could see the three little holes in her belly.

It was in an alley not over half a block down from the Calico Cat. The police had run a car with extra spot lights on it in there and they were using these to help the photographer and the M. E. do their stuff.

I moved over to Delehanty, who looked sober as a judge but sick.

"This is hell, Mike," he said. "I went back to see you, the way we'd planned, and the kid walked along easy, waiting for me to catch up. Look what I caught up with."

"That the one you had the date with?"

"Yeah, sure."

White, who was another first-

grade detective, moved closer and said: "It looks like you're for it, Delehanty. What I want to know is what you did with the gun."

Delehanty said to me: "The kid was shot with what they think was a twenty-two or maybe a twenty-five. A little gun. They got mine, but it's a thirty-eight and it ain't been fired."

"You could have had two," White told him.

"Didn't you hear it?" I asked.

Delehanty looked miserable and said: "That's the hell of it. I guess I did. I guess I saw the guy that did it, but I didn't know what had happened. I come out of the bar up the street and started down this way and I thought I heard a gun, but it sounded funny. They're contact wounds, Mike, they've found that for sure. The gun was held right against her and the guy pulled the trigger three times. I heard this but I didn't think anything of it, and I saw a guy walk out of this alley. I came up to it and didn't see the kid walking ahead of me, down the street, and I just happened to look in. I could see a flash of white so I went in, and there she was. When she fell she must have sort of slid, because her clothes were up around her waist, hiding where she'd been shot. It was her legs I saw . . . they showed white in what little light there was."

"And then what?"

"I saw she was dead, first, and then I went back to the bar where I was to meet you. I called the cops and went back to the alley and waited for them."

"And now he's going down to the nice jail house and answer questions," said White. "His story stinks.

He was drunk, we found that out. He made a pass at the kid and she wouldn't go for it and so he went nuts and killed her. What gets me is that she was nothing but a baby. A check stand girl, is what she was. Nothing but a kid, and why a grown man wants to run around with kids like that for is something I'll never know. That's something the jury won't understand, either."

DELEHANTY was in a spot, all right, but I wasn't going to crack all I knew until it was absolutely necessary. He'd have a bad night of it at the station but I couldn't see where there was enough against him for a charge to stand up. The police don't charge you with murder just on suspicion, and that's all they had on him right then. He'd been with the girl and admitted it, but his story about going back for a bottle was something that could be proved. Going out with a kid that age looked bad . . . but he had a reason for it, even if I didn't want it to come out right then.

"Go along with him, George," I said. "I'll see that the lawyer's down there with you, so you won't take it on the chin too much. Get it?"

He said: "Sure. I'll keep it hushed unless I have to spill it."

"What's that?" asked White. "You'll keep *what* hushed?"

Delehanty said: "It's something private, mister. Why don't you start checking up on me, so that we both get this over with?"

White snarled something back, and they were bickering like that when I left. I couldn't see any reason for sticking around and I could see a reason for getting our lawyer on the

job before they started getting tough with George.

And besides that I wanted to go home and think up some reason for Nathan Feldman getting himself all concerned about my little argument with Harry Reims. It hadn't been any knock down and drag out brawl . . . and I couldn't see what business of his it was just what I did for amusement or to help a friend. I was working for him, along with some others, but I still kept a right to work out my own arguments!

And picking on Reims was my idea of a fine clean sport.

HIS office door was lettered REIMS—INVESTIGATIONS, and he was waiting for me the next morning. He opened and closed his little mouth a couple of times without speaking, and then came out with:

"I been thinking, Callahan. You got no right to butt in my business. I could go to court and get a restraining order against you."

"You'd be right back in court swearing out a warrant against me for assault and battery," I told him, sitting facing him where he was behind his desk. "You could just keep right on doing that. They charge you a fine of twenty-five bucks, and I figure I can pay that much for amusement any day."

"You're going to be mean, eh, Mike?"

"That's right. You hit it right on the nose, you bald headed little—"

He got up and went to the wash stand in the corner of the office. He whined out: "Now, now, now! You know that ain't any way to talk, Mike. A man gets no place, calling another man names."

He ran a glass of water, dropped two pills in it and drank the result. He made a face and explained it all.

"It's indigestion! It raises hell with me."

"A smack downstairs might do you a lot of good. Who hired you to tag after Haley?"

"You know yourself, Callahan, I can't give out information like that. It wouldn't be playing fair with my client."

I said: "Make it easy on yourself. I can give out some information and play fair with the cops, if that's the way you want me to play it with you. I can tell them about a deal that was made over the stuff taken from the Arlington house. Stuff that the insurance was paid on after you'd bought it back from the thieves and returned it to the Arlingtons. Of course it might put you in jail for helping defraud the insurance company and it might put you in jail for making a deal with the crooks, instead of turning them in to the cops, but what the hell. I play it the way it's played with me."

Reims gulped, and it wasn't from the two pills he'd taken. "A man named Regan hired me," he said. "A man named Regan. That's all I know about it."

"Go on. Keep on with it. Regan is Dick Haley's brother-in-law, in case you don't know."

"It was just usual," Reims said. "He wanted to know where Haley went and who he saw. As soon as I got something on it, I took it that Regan was going to step in and catch Haley cold. Just the usual divorce thing, Callahan. And I'll lay off it, if you make a point of it."

I said: "I make a point of it.

Haley's a friend of mine. So is his wife. Let 'em settle their own affairs."

Reims looked sadly at me and asked: "What you got against me, anyway, Mike? Every time you get a chance at me you make trouble for me. What have I ever done to you?"

"Not one thing. But you caught George Delehanty drunk one night and you took him for over a hundred bucks, rolling high dice. George was so blind he couldn't tell whether it came up aces or sixes."

"I thought you and Delehanty weren't getting along so good."

"We're not. We're not getting along at all. But he's still my partner, isn't he? You wouldn't understand that, though, you little heel."

Reims said: "Again more names. And again it don't make you a thing."

"Look at the fun it gives me," I told him. "If I think you're a dirty little—, why shouldn't I say so?"

He waved a hand at me as I went out the door, and I swear he looked as though he'd had the best of the argument. And that gave me more things to think about."

CHAPTER III

Murder Doubled



I'D CALLED the lawyer before seeing Reims that morning and he'd told me they'd turned Delehanty loose, so I expected he'd be at the office when I got there. But not so . . . nobody was there but Jo Willets, a girl who worked for us.

I said: "That dope George! His job is to go out and get himself plastered . . . or to drink enough to look

that way, at least. So what does he do? He takes a little girl out and she gets killed, and he doesn't show up here the next day to tell me about it. He probably started to *really* get drunk, after the cops turned him loose this morning."

She wasn't listening, because she missed what I said about the little girl. She flew up about George though, like she always does.

"You're just sore because he got that end of it," she said. "One of you was supposed to go out and lush around, and you and George cut cards for it and you lost. Was he very drunk last night?"

"He was looping. He was so tight they were going to throw him out of the Calico Club."

"Did they?"

"Well, no. But they would have, if he hadn't bounced the bouncer. That was before his date with this little girl that got killed."

She heard it then, and got white in the face and put a hand up to her throat. She said: "*Mike!* You mean a girl was killed over this business you're working on?"

"It looks that way. George had a date with her and he was planning on feeding the girl a few drinks so she'd open up and talk. She got killed before that happened."

"And you come in here laughing about it! Or just the same as laughing about it! Complaining because George isn't down yet! That's the most horrible thing I've ever heard of."

I said: "I'm trying to take it that way on purpose, kid. If I think how a little girl that age got killed over this thing, I go nuts. I've got to go out now . . . will you tell George,

when he comes in, that I've gone to talk to Dick Haley's wife?"

"Is it something about this same killing thing?"

I told her I didn't see how . . . that it looked like just an ordinary little battle between mama and papa. But that settling it might help to take my mind away from what had happened the night before.

But that was something I didn't believe myself. I knew I wasn't going to forget seeing that little girl lying dead in that alley for some little time to come.

MADGE HALEY wasn't in the apartment she'd left her husband's bed and board for . . . so I ate a quiet little lunch. I had two drinks of rye before it and a quart of ale with it and the combination made me more than a little sleepy. Probably because of being awake half the night before, trying to dope out answers to things. So, for a moment, I thought I was seeing things when I went back to the office and walked in on Detectives Olson and White, both talking to Jo Willets. I couldn't see just why they'd be there, because the lawyer had told me George had been turned loose with a clear bill of health.

The three were grouped by the typewriter desk with Jo the center of attraction, and I heard enough while I was going through the door to gather that White was trying to date her, while his brother officer was trying to show her pictures of the latest Olson kid.

"Break it up," I said.

All of them turned; White with a look of guilt on his face. That wasn't necessary because I didn't blame him.

Jo's a good looking girl or we wouldn't have hired her.

Olson jerked his head toward the inner office and said: "We got something to tell you, Mike. Inside, eh?"

I said: "Sure! That is, if White can manage to tear himself away."

Jo Willets let out a nice little giggle and White looked as if he wanted to get sore about it.

Inside, Olson said: "We didn't tell her, Callahan. We just came from George Delehanty's hotel. We thought of something else. We wanted to ask him about whether this girl that was killed had any pals that might know something about it."

"If he wasn't there, he'll be in pretty soon."

"He was there," White said. "I guess you don't get it. He'd just been killed."

"That's a hell of a joke. What did you do . . . pick him up again?"

"It's no joke, Mike. It had just happened."

Olson said, meaningly: "You and Delehanty ain't been getting on so good, lately. You've been out. It might be a good idea for you to tell us just where you was. You were out of here about when it happened."

I TOLD them where I'd lunched and waited until they'd phoned and checked it. It was a sure alibi . . . it was a place where I spend lots of time and too much money.

And then I asked: "How'd it happen? It'll tie in with what happened last night, of course."

Olson said: "We got a call there was a shooting in the King James, and it was sort of funny because we was on our way there when it came in on the radio. We went fast, then and

got there just the same time as the dolly car in that district did. It was a dead heat. We all went in together. George had been shot four times, and any one of the four would have killed him. Just like the girl last night it was. Contact wounds. Looked like the same size gun, only we ain't sure. The M. E. was still checking when he left to come down here. George had his gun in his hand and he'd shot it once. Whoever plugged him went down the back way in the service elevator . . . we found somebody that saw a man get out of the service elevator and go out the back entrance. Nobody at the desk saw the killer; he wasn't announced or anything like that. He must have known George's room number and just gone up cold. So that's it."

White said: "What's the trouble been between you and George? You better tell us, Mike. We've heard talk. It's common gossip."

At least that showed that George and I had been doing all right with our act. I said: "This don't want to go any farther. I'm telling you because it's the answer to why George and that girl were killed. He was on something . . . something the girl was going to tell him . . . and they got her first and him today, before he could tell me what it was. This last month George and I have been working on a racket that's being played in the check rooms. There's a syndicate that owns nine out of ten of the check rooms in the big places, and they hired us. There's been a lot of dough knocked down and a lot of funny business, besides that. Stuff has been lost and stuff has been damaged. There's been a lot of money paid out to settle the arguments. So George



She waved a glass and said,
"I can make things plenty
hot for him, and don't think
I can't!"

and I figured to act like we weren't getting along. He was to pretend he was putting on a big drunk, so he could hang around and act like a dope. We figured he could pick up stuff that way we couldn't by just

asking questions, because people in hot spots don't pay much attention to just another lush. That's all . . . we were just doing a job. We were good friends."

White raised an eyebrow at Olson, and I said: "Don't believe *me*. Ask the girl, outside. She'll tell you the same thing."

White started for the door, and I called after him: "And ask her what you're supposed to ask her. Don't ask her what she's doing next Thursday night, for instance."

He turned and leered and told me: "I don't *have* to ask her what she's doing next Thursday night, Mike. I've already *got* a date for that night with her."

GEORGE DELEHANTY had lived in the King James for a long time and his room showed it. The walls were covered with pictures autographed to him. The bulk of them were from show girls and prize fighters. He had his own bookcase, and this was filled with books on geology and mining. For some reason I never could understand, this stuff had always fascinated George, though to my certain knowledge he'd never done anything but read about it. His closets were filled with clothes, some of which he hadn't worn during the five years we'd been partners. But his radio was big and brand new and the portable bar he had looked like a tea wagon and was jammed with supplies.

They'd taken him away in the wicker basket they use for that purpose, and the whole room smelled of flashlight powder burned by the police photographer.

I was there with White and Olson,

and I was by the tea wagon effect and pouring out drinks.

"It would be all right with George," I said. "George was always one to want his friends to enjoy themselves. It was always the first thing he'd offer when you walked in his place."

White and Olson had been going through George's personal effects and getting exactly nowhere by the going through. Olson took his drink and said: "It boils down to this then, you think, Callahan? That he was killed because he found out something about this check room business you were working on."

"And you don't know what it was?"

"I do not."

"Who would know that?"

"That I don't know either."

"You said you had a date with him last night."

"I was going to talk to him for a minute, down in that same bar he went back to buy the bottle in. He left the girl to go back there, you see. All it was, he was going to give me her address and name, so I could check with Nathan Feldman about her."

"So you knew he had the date with her?"

"Sure. He'd made it the night before."

"Why didn't you ask this Feldman about it before, then?"

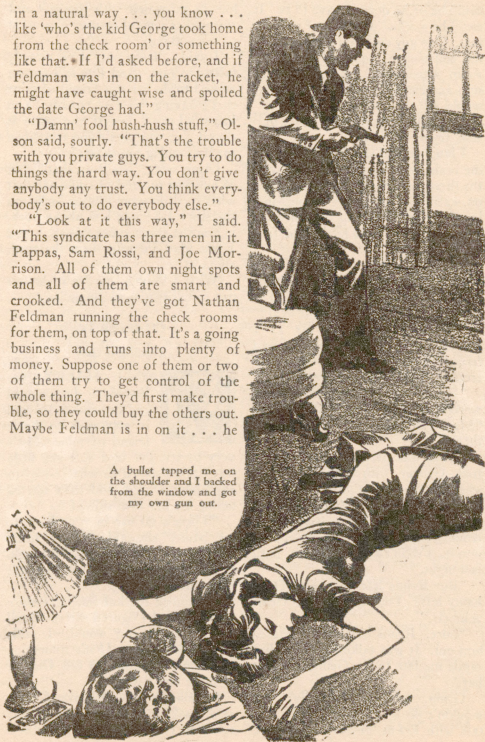
I SAID: "Don't be a dope. Feldman is in charge of the syndicate's check rooms. He isn't above suspicion himself. If the girl had known anything, we figured on getting her away and keeping her out of sight. I wanted to ask Feldman about her

in a natural way . . . you know . . . like 'who's the kid George took home from the check room' or something like that. If I'd asked before, and if Feldman was in on the racket, he might have caught wise and spoiled the date George had."

"Damn' fool hush-hush stuff," Olson said, sourly. "That's the trouble with you private guys. You try to do things the hard way. You don't give anybody any trust. You think everybody's out to do everybody else."

"Look at it this way," I said. "This syndicate has three men in it. Pappas, Sam Rossi, and Joe Morrison. All of them own night spots and all of them are smart and crooked. And they've got Nathan Feldman running the check rooms for them, on top of that. It's a going business and runs into plenty of money. Suppose one of them or two of them try to get control of the whole thing. They'd first make trouble, so they could buy the others out. Maybe Feldman is in on it . . . he

A bullet tapped me on the shoulder and I backed from the window and got my own gun out.



could be or he doesn't have to be. It could be worked with him or without him. One guy could do it alone, with the collusion of some of the check room attendants. Enough damage suits and enough trouble, and the rest would sell their shares cheap."

"It could be somebody from outside, trying to cut in."

I laughed and said it could be, but the odds were against it. That with the three owners and the manager all on watch for any signs of muscling in, something would have turned up. That it was an inside job, on the face of it.

Then Olson said: "You had a little trouble yourself, last night, we hear. With Harry Reims. Now would it be that Harry Reims is in the deal?"

"That's personal, as far as I know," I said. "He was picking on a friend of mine who's having wife trouble. I told him to lay off."

"Reims and George Delehanty weren't friends, either," White said. "Maybe we could work out an angle there."

"That was personal, too. Reims took George with high dice, once when George was tight. That was all it was. George didn't even know about this friend of mine having wife trouble, so that couldn't have entered into it. I didn't know it myself, until last night."

"But Reims left just after Delehanty left? You've made that clear, yourself."

"Sure. Reims left when I chased him out. It was talking to him that made me late to see George, in that bar."

Olson said thoughtfully: "It wouldn't do us any harm to have a talk with Reims, anyway. I always

like to raise hell with the guy and this makes a good excuse. You want to come along?"

I said: "I do not. I've already talked to him. And I've still got an errand to do for this friend of mine that's having the wife trouble. You know where I live if the office is closed . . . why don't you telephone me if anything comes up?"

Olson said: "We'll do that!" but White just snorted. I could see that what he'd do would be to look into the story I'd given him about working on the check room thing . . . and I was glad I'd told them the truth about it.

With a double murder it doesn't pay to tell stories to the police.

CHAPTER IV

The Right Gun



MARGE HALEY, *nee* Regan, is brown-eyed and brown-headed and is supposed to be a friend of mine. She's very pretty, but in a soft shy little way. She listened to what I had to say about Dickie, and then started telling me her own side of it.

"There's no use in your lying to me, Mike," she said. "Or in Dickie sending you to me. I'm all through. If you knew all about it, you wouldn't blame me."

I'd known the kid since she wore rompers, and I figured she could tell me the truth and would. I said: "Spit it out, then. If it's something you don't want me to tell Dick, I promise you I won't."

"I talked to the girl myself," she said, looking as if she was getting ready to cry. "There's no mistake.

I . . . I don't believe in divorce . . . you know, Mike, that I'm still in the Church . . . but I've got to do it. She's . . . well, she's going to have a child. Dickie's child."

"There's some mistake. Dickie's no tramp. And he *told* me he hadn't been cheating."

"There's no mistake." She put out her chin then and showed some Irish. It looked as stubborn as the back end of a mule. "There's no mistake. I tell you I talked to the girl. So did my brother. He watched there one night and saw Dickie going in. He was across the street, but he said it was Dickie, for sure. I'm going to divorce Dickie so he can marry her. I've got to, on account of the baby that's coming."

"But Dickie doesn't *want* a divorce."

That was the wrong thing to say and I found it out. It put her into a wrath. "What kind of a girl do you think I am, Mike Callahan? D'ya think I'd let that baby come into the world with no father? Would that be decent? Would that be right? I tell you it's the only thing I can do."

"Got this girl's address?"

"Of course. Her name is Carlotta Arditi. She's a good girl, only she's just weak, I guess. She doesn't want to marry Dickie, but she'll do it on account of the baby that's coming. That's what's important, Mike, that baby. You can see that for yourself."

"Where's she live?"

Madge said at the Hampstead Apartments.

I couldn't see where anything would be gained by any more talk, but I was sick about the whole thing. First, the night before, the little check room girl was killed. Then



She saw the handkerchief and said, "Why, it's blood!"

George Delehanty got it. And then, for a capper, here was a good friend's marriage going on the rocks, with neither husband or wife wanting it.

"It's been a hell of a day for me, kid," I said. "My partner just got himself killed, and I don't know who did it. Then I come up here to make you see a little sense and you go wacky on me. You start this talk about divorcing Dickie when you know damn' well you're crazy about the guy. When you know you don't want a divorce any more than *he* does."

"I've got to do it, Mike," Madge said. "I talked it over with the family, and they think the same thing. My brother says it's the only thing to do."

I said: "I'll go and talk with this girl tomorrow. And if I meet that flannel-mouthed brother of yours I'm going to give him a nice sweet punch on the nose just for minding other people's business."

Madge was loyal . . . I'll give her that.

"I bet he punches you right back," said she, glaring. "And what are you doing, Mike Callahan, but butting in other people's business, yourself?"

Which was something I hadn't thought about until then.

I WAS in the bathroom when Reims knocked on the door the next morning. I came out with a towel draped around me, and opened the door before I'd found out who it was. If I'd known who it was I'd have kept on with the shower I was taking.

"It's a wonder the house cop let you up," I told him.

Reims said: "I guess I just sneaked past him without him seeing me. Heard from the cops yet?"

"What about?"

"Well, about Delehanty and this Dick Haley, that's a band leader. I hear he's a friend of yours."

I got hold of the front of his coat but had to drop the towel to do it. Some old sister that lived down the hall from me picked that time to go to the elevator, and when she saw me standing there *sans* towel she stopped and looked pleased. I dragged Reims back into the room and got the door closed, and I knocked him half over the davenport with the first cuff I gave him. He went the rest of the way by himself and stood there half crouched, with his hands up in front of his face and saying "Don't hit

me! Don't hit me!" over and over again.

"You little louse!" I said. "Do you think you can come up here in my own apartment and give me the run around? I'll beat your brains out."

"I . . . I thought I'd . . . I thought I'd do you a favor, Mike," he said, taking his hands down as soon as he saw I wasn't planning on taking another swing at him. "I heard something, and thought I'd give it to you."

"Give me what?"

"Well, the cops have checked on the slugs they took from that girl that was killed with Delehanty. From a Twenty-two Colt Woodsman, they were. Delehanty was killed with the same gun."

"Go on."

"They tell me you've got one."

"I have. With a permit. I shoot targets with it."

"They tell me Dickie Haley's got one, too. That's why I started to rib . . . I thought you'd see I was doing you and Haley a favor, by tipping you off about what they think."

"What have the cops got to do with Haley? Did you tell them you were tagging him?"

"I had to. They asked me, so I told them. They asked me about Delehanty, so I had to tell 'em about Haley, to clear myself. Then they told me about the gun business. They called up the permit bureau from my office, and told me about Haley having the right kind of gun for the killings."

I raised my hand and he ducked back. "Talk sense, you little—," I said. "What's Haley got to do with the killings?"

"The cops think he was sore at Delehanty, because Delehanty beat

him up. You saw Haley, you saw how he was worked over. Well, Delehanty did it. I saw it. You know how I was following Haley, because of being hired to tag him, and I saw Delehanty give him the going over."

"You lying—"

He looked sad and said: "That's what I get for doing you a favor. I knew you and Haley were friends, because you told me to lay off him. I thought maybe I'd give you the tip and show you I was trying to get along with you."

I said: "You get the hell out of here now. And don't you ever come back."

HE SCUTTLED out the door and I went back to my shower, with something to think about. I knew that Delehanty hadn't been the one that had taken a swing at Haley. Haley knew Delehanty well, and if it had been him, Haley would have told me. Delehanty would have told me about it, for that matter. I had to try and dope out a reason for Reims laying the blame on poor dead George, and that was hard to do, with George not being able to tell his side of it.

As far as Haley having the same kind of gun that had been used against the girl and Delehanty, that didn't mean a thing. If it *was* the gun, the cops could prove it when they found it. Their ballistics department would merely shoot the gun into cotton waste and compare the markings on the slug they got with those on any of the murder bullets. That sort of gun is common . . . it's probably the most popular .22 pistol sold today.

Of course Haley could have

slipped away from the bandstand and ducked down the street and killed the girl.

That was possible. And he knew where Delehanty lived and could have gone up unannounced and shot him, too. But there'd have to be a reason for all this, and the reason would have to be mixed up in the checkstand racket. Haley, with his band leader job, could well have known something about it, of course, but Dickie wasn't the murdering type. That is, if there's such a thing as that type.

It was all wrong . . . and the wrongest thing about it was Reims coming up to me and offering information. About the time I was through shaving I decided the best thing to do was see Haley about it . . . and then I thought I'd see the girl he was accused of having the affair with first, so that I'd have some information for him, in turn.

And then came the pay-off. Just as I was getting ready to leave there was a gentle little knock on the door and I opened it to see the old biddy who lived down the hall and who'd seen me without the bath towel around me. She stood there simpering, and when she spoke it was in a coy little voice.

"I'm having a little party tonight, Mr. Callahan," said she. "I was wondering if you wouldn't like to drop in?"

I was thinking about Reims and Haley and my dead partner, and I didn't have my guard up.

"Who'll be there?" I asked.

She said: "Well . . . he-he-he . . . nobody but you and me, if you like. I'm sure we could have a *lot* of fun."

I said: "Lady, there's a word for

that and it don't fit me. But I thank you for the compliment."

She tittered again and went on down the hall . . . but she kept looking back and smiling. It was the first funny thing that had happened since we'd taken the check room business on.

CHAPTER V

Rat Stuff



ARLOTTA ARDITI looked slim and sort of wistful with the first look . . . and it took at least another three to realize just how hard boiled she was behind it. I took the three while she held the door against me and asked me my business. The light was above her but in spite of that she showed too many years of too hard drinking, with the lines by her nose and the corners of her eyes giving her years full value. She had a fretful pouting mouth and a fretful pouting way of talking . . . and she wasn't wearing as many clothes as a nice girl should when she opens the door to a strange man.

At that, I could see how Madge Haley had been fooled. This girl, dressed quietly, would look worn and tired and worried. That would go along with her story as well as the truth, which was that late hours and too many parties were causing the wear and tear. Madge had never hung around the night clubs where Dickie had his band, and so she wouldn't know the night club type. This girl was smart and hard, behind her wistful look, and Madge was soft and sympathetic all through. Madge was of the believing type . . . and this

smart wench had given her a story easy to believe.

I said: "All right, sister! You might as well let me in. It's about the Haley beef."

"You a cop?"

"Private. But I've got friends, if I've got to use them. If you know what I mean."

"You from him or her?"

"We can talk about it down at the station, instead of here in the hall," I told her. "All I'll do is get on the phone and call a friend down there and you can ride down in the wagon."

"What charge can you make?"

"I can start with attempted extortion."

"You'd have it to prove."

"Witnesses in my racket come a dime a dozen, if you want to make it tough. Pick your own shot, sister."

She stepped back, grudgingly, and I followed her in. She as grudgingly proposed us having a drink and I said nothing would suit me better.

I said: "Why sure! Why not? Treat *me* nice and I'll treat *you* nice."

She thought this over and then went out for the drinks. Over the rim of her highball glass she looked at me and said: "Well, start it, hot shot. Does he want to buy out? Or does *she* want to buy out? Or do I go through with it?"

"Can you?"

She waved her glass and said: "I can sue Dick Haley from Hell to breakfast and he'll lose more than I do, even if he wins the case. If I don't get a dime on it, he'll be where he'll never be able to make one. I can stand the publicity and he can't."

"Where'd you meet Haley?"

"Ask him."

"I have. He says he never even heard of you, much less met you."

The girl swore and said: "The lying—! He was here just night before last, and I can prove it. I can prove he's been here lots of times. I can prove I met him at a party at Doll Renner's place, three months ago. I've got friends, too, mister hot shot. They've been here when Dickie was here. They can tell you plenty things."

I'D FINISHED my drink, so I wandered over to where an enlarged snapshot held the place of honor on a big console radio and phonograph.

"Take a look at that, mister," she said. "Look at that and then tell me he never met me. One Monday . . . that's the night the band don't play . . . we had a brawl here and all went down to the beach to sober up on Tuesday morning. Take a look at it and you'll see Dickie and me right in the center."

I could see a blurred Dickie Haley with his arm around a blurred Carlotta Arditi, with the two of them surrounded by half a dozen other blurred figures, none of which I recognized. I kept looking at it and she got up and went to the kitchen and came back with more drinks . . . and I could see where she'd been at 'em before I came.

"It looks like Haley, all right," I said. "Well, how much d'ya want? If you make the guy marry you, you'll end up with what the little boy shot at, and that's nothing. I'll see to that myself. You'd probably tramp on him, but even if you did play straight with him I'd frame you tight enough for any jury in the land. Just



"I didn't know anything about it—until I found this girl dead."

between you and me, that's a promise I'm making you."

"You're that kind of a rat," said Miss Arditi, starting to get a little bit thick-tongued. "I had you picked for the kind of heel that'd take advantage of a girl, right from the minute you came in the door. I'd get *something* out of it, that way."

"Not much . . . maybe child support. If I've got to frame you, I'll do a job. I'll make damn' well sure you don't get a thing for yourself."

"I want ten thousand bucks. And don't tell me he can't dig that much up. If he hasn't got it now, he can borrow it ahead on his band con-

tracts. He's been in the dough for years . . . he's probably got more than that in the bank right now."

It was a lousy blackmailing set-up, but I was trying to think what was best for Haley and Madge. I knew he had the money . . . that he could pay off ten thousand dollars and not be hurt. I thought of that and how he'd lied to me and decided it would be okay with me if he did. I thought of Madge, and how it would save her marriage . . . and I thought of a safe and sure way to put the thing across. So I went over and sat down next to the girl.

"It'll take doing," I said. "It'll take both of us, working together, to put it across. But you remember what I said awhile ago?"

"What, big shot?"

She'd already picked up the working together cue, and was leaning back against my shoulder.

"About you treat me nice and I'll treat you nice?"

"I remember," she said, leaning a little harder.

"I'll be in and out while we're working the thing," I said. "I'll have to proposition him and make him see it's the thing to do. It's going to take a lot of work, baby."

She said: "I'll . . . I'll make up for it some way, hot shot. You see if I don't."

SHE started in to show me how she planned on making up for the trouble she was going to cause me, and that went along very nicely. She'd decided I was on her side and going to help her get the money . . . and I'd decided the same thing, but for another reason. It must have been two hours and four drinks later

before I put on my coat and said to her:

"I'll get hold of Haley and talk to him about it. I'll tell him what I think he'd better do, and then come back and tell you what goes on. You be good while I'm gone, honey."

"Just while you're gone, hot shot," she said, trying to act as if I was the only man in her life who counted. "I just *can't* be good while you're here. And look! We want to make sure, now. When you're talking to him, you'd better remind him how he always told me he wasn't married. I can prove *that*, too. I told that nicey-nicey woman he's married to about that . . . and she told me she didn't think that Dickie would have lied about it. Well, I've got friends that heard him say it, and if it comes up in court, I will."

She was working herself into a rage, just talking about it, and this after I thought I had her all calmed down.

I said: "Okay, okay, honey."

I left, wondering why I'd believed Haley. The only answer I could think of was that he was trying to brazen it out . . . and that he was a fool to do that with a picture like I'd seen against him. And with a girl like this Arditi wench, who'd been around as long as she had. I knew she'd have plenty of friends who'd testify to anything, for just a little piece of ten thousand dollars, and that Dick Haley must have known them all and what they were.

All in all, the Dick Haley stock had dropped in my market.

And then I thought of something else. I thought of being propositioned by the old sister in my apartment house about a party that night

... and I thought of this Arditi business I'd just gone through. Of course I'd taken that out because of Madge ... but that was partly excuse and I knew it myself, even if I wouldn't admit it to myself. It was just that the Arditi wench was better looking than the old sister and that was the truth.

I ended by thinking of the word the Greeks had for it ... and deciding it fitted me to perfection.

THE rest of the afternoon went very peacefully, because I didn't go down to the office. I phoned in, and Jo Willets said:

"Those policemen were here, just a few minutes ago. They want to see you, I think."

"What did they want?"

"They wanted to know if your twenty-two pistol was here or at your apartment, and when I showed it to them, they took it away. I told them they shouldn't, but they said it would be all right with you. They said it was just a routine check-up."

That was all it was and I knew my little gun was in the clear, but it made me sore. I gave 'em credit for brains enough to know I wouldn't keep a murder gun around handy like that, if I'd had one.

I said: "I'll take it up with them."

"And they wanted to know why George Delehanty was mad at Dick Haley."

"What did you tell them about that?"

"I said George didn't have an enemy in the world, and they asked why it was that he was killed."

I told her she might as well close up the office and go on home, and I spent the rest of the time in a picture

show. I didn't think I wanted to talk to Olson and White until I knew more about what was going on ... and I wanted to catch Dick Haley on the job and not at his place. I didn't want Olson and White thinking I was in cahoots with Haley on any murder frame ... and I had more than a good idea that Reims might tip them that I was.

That was one thing that was making it so tough ... I couldn't yet figure Reims in the mess in any way.

THE band was hushing along on "Night and Day", with Mary Miles, the vocalist, singing it and with Haley holding the stick as though his mind was miles away. Mary was a pretty little girl with a tiny little voice, but she had so much sex appeal she could have put over hymns and given them a dirty little edge. One of those cute little things that everybody wants to make a pet of ... and at least half the town had, if the stories about her were true. The band itself was so well trained that the head waiter could have led them through any standard number, so Haley's inattention probably didn't register with anybody but me.

I nodded at him as I went by the stand, and after the band took a change of pace and swung into the old Johnson Rag, he stepped down and came over to my table.

He said: "Well, did you see her?"

"I saw Madge. Madge gave me this girl's address, and I saw her, too."

"Now d'ya believe me?"

"I don't."

Haley looked startled. He said: "Madge told me the woman's name, and I tell you I never even talked to

anybody named Carlotta Arditi in my life. I swear it on the Book."

I said: "I did more than talk to her. Listen, Dickie, I've known you since we were kids. I've known Madge that long, too. You're giving her a rotten deal and you're giving me a rotten deal when you sit there and lie to me about this. Come out with it, why don't you? You stepped out and you're nailed for it, so why don't you take it on the chin? You're going to take it, anyway, so you might just as well tell the truth about it."

"I'm telling the truth, Mike."

"And I'm telling you I saw a picture of you with this bum."

"You couldn't have. I don't know her."

"Stick to it, then," I said. "She wants ten grand or she's going to blow you out of the music business. I don't know whether she's going to have a child or not, like she told Madge she was, but she's probably not bluffing. If it was me, I'd give her the dough, but I'd do it in such a way you can stick her for blackmail if there's anything more heard about it."

"You can work that out . . . you can have your lawyer make out some kind of an agreement. I'll see she signs it . . . I'm working on her side, or so she thinks. I'm not proud of my part on that, but I played it the way that seemed best at the time for Madge. I had to make the gal think I was leveling and wanting something for my cut on it from her, or she wouldn't believe me."

Haley got red in the face and said: "It sounds a little like rat stuff to me, Mike, even if you put it like that. Why should I pay a girl I've never

seen ten thousand dollars? Why, I ask you?"

I said: "You do as you think best. I'd say to hell with you, if it wasn't for the way Madge feels about it. I don't like to be lied to."

"I haven't lied to you, Mike."

I got my check from the waiter and said: "When you get ready to kick loose with the ten grand, why, call me up. Until then, I won't be seeing you, Dickie."

He was staring after me when I walked away, and some ways I felt like a heel about it. But I couldn't see any sense in his lying to me, after what I knew about the mess. I hadn't even asked him whether the cops had been talking to him . . . and I figured he could work out of that mess by himself, too. Right along with the other one.

CHAPTER VI

Hard Guys



HE syndicate that owned the bulk of the check room concessions in town was composed of three men, all of them in show business. There was Nick Pappas, who owned the Calico Club and who had an interest in the Gaucho and the Old Timers. Pappas had a reputation of being a money maker and a smart club man . . . and of being as crooked as a dog's hind leg.

Sam Rossi owned the Penzance, which required full dress, had a ten dollar cover charge, and not enough space to accommodate half the people who wanted to be seen in that swank atmosphere. He was supposed to be a square shooter, but he'd come up during bootlegging days and I don't

trust anybody with that background. They learned too much and they learned it the hard way.

Joe Morrison was the other member and he went in for dime-a-dance palaces in all forms and variations. In some of them Forty-Count-Them-Beautiful-Girls danced with the customers. In others, genteel instruction in the dance was given by ladies who were that only in name. He played all angles, did Joe. In others, a sandwich, a soft drink, and an entire evening of dancing could be acquired for sixty-not-one-cent-more cents. Of course the customer bought more than soft drinks before the evening was over. Morrison was the money man in the syndicate, owning fifty-one of the hundred shares, and I liked him but didn't trust him any farther than I did the others.

They were just three crooks in business together.

None of them appeared as owners, but covered under the name of Check Stands Inc., with a smart young man named Nathan Feldman as front and manager. Feldman had grown up in the check stand business and I thought, personally, that he should have been able to find out what was going wrong with those in his charge, but he'd apparently fallen down.

THE four of them were waiting for me at ten the next morning, and I walked in knowing what to expect.

And I got it immediately.

Pappas said: "Well, what you got? It is time, now. Every day it goes from bad to more bad."

Morrison grouched: "The take in the Gaucho dropped to less than sixty-five bucks last night. It should

have gone to a hundred and a half. There was a crowd. Nick should have been there himself, keeping an eye on things."

"I can't be at the Calico and the Gaucho and the Old Timers all at the once," Pappas snapped back. "For why do we have the manager?"

Feldman defended himself with: "I've got forty-two places, no more, no less, to check. I can't cover 'em all. I step out of one place and we get rooked there the rest of the night. It goes all right as long as I'm there leaning on the counter, and it goes all wrong when I turn my back."

"And Callahan," Rossi said to me, sadly, "Last night, in my own place, the Penzance, there's a claim made. A fur wrap which the woman claims costs her twenty-four hundred dollars. It is ruined . . . acid is spilled on it. The hair on it comes out when you rub it. We have to pay for it."

"I'd fire the check room attendants there," Morrison said.

I said: "I wouldn't. I'd keep 'em on and try to get a line on them."

"I fired 'em already," Feldman told us. "I did it last night. Maybe I shouldn't have, but when Sam told me about the wrap getting ruined I went nuts."

"Got their names and addresses?"

"Why, sure."

"I'll go see 'em," I said. "Now look! Delchanty stumbled onto something about this and he got killed for it. The girl that was going to tell him something was killed before she could tell him much but he must have got a hint. He never had time to tell me what it was, but it was big enough to make somebody think murder would pay."

"But what?" Rossi asked.

I said I didn't know . . . but that I had every intention of finding out.

Morrison said: "Well, it's big enough for murder. We were taking in near twenty grand a month and we were clearing a share of it. Now we're taking in less than half of that and we're not breaking even. We're taking it on the chin, instead of taking it to the bank."

"You could fire everybody and start with all new help," I suggested.

Feldman explained why they couldn't. He looked pained and said: "Look, Mr. Callahan. I take my time and I teach the dopes how to make something of the job, so's we make something out of it. It's more than just taking a cloak, say, and handing out a tag and then taking the tag back and giving up the cloak. See? That way works, but it don't work for tips. It takes time to teach 'em to make something out of the business."

"I still say you'd do better to start all fresh."

"We got forty-two places. We got more'n five hundred boys and girls working for us. It'd take too long . . . it wouldn't work out."

I said: "Okay, okay. It was just an idea. Now give me the names of the people working the check room at the Penzance last night, and where they live."

I got two names and addresses from Feldman, and he said: "It wasn't now maybe the girl's fault, but, like I say, I let 'em go anyway."

"Maybe they saw something," I said. "And gentlemen! When I found out what Delehanty knew, I'll probably have the answer to everything."

Morrison looked at Pappas, who

said: "You'd better, maybe. And fast, you'd better find out. Joe and I have been talking this over. You're not the only man in your business."

"Been talking to Reims, eh? *He's* been cutting in?"

"Well, yes. It's no secret."

I said: "Someday I'm going to slap that little heel into the middle of next week, and I've got a notion that that sometime ain't so far away."

That put Reims into the thing some more, and it made me like it even less.

CHAPTER VII

A Murder Too Late



COMPARED the number on the card Feldman had given me with the number on the house and then knocked. The sign that read FURNISHED ROOMS was shabby as was the front of the place, and the woman that opened the door fitted right in with the sign and the place itself.

"I'd like to see Miss Mary Allen," I said.

"I run a decent place."

"So-o-o-o."

"A girl that stays in my place don't have company in her room. Not unless the door's left open."

I said: "Look, lady! I want to talk to the girl on business."

"And I know what kind of business."

I folded a dollar bill lengthwise and held it within her reach and she took it like a dog does a bone. I found out what Delehanty knew, I'll floor. And mister!"

"Yeah!"

"No noise, now, mind."

The lights in the stairwell were dim, but still bright enough to show the dirty dingy carpet covering the stair treads. I caught a heel in a tear in this and almost went on my nose, and the banister that saved me felt dirty and sticky. Somebody was boiling cabbage for lunch and somebody else was frying onions, and the two smells fought each other viciously. Two radios cut through this, both turned too loud and on different stages.

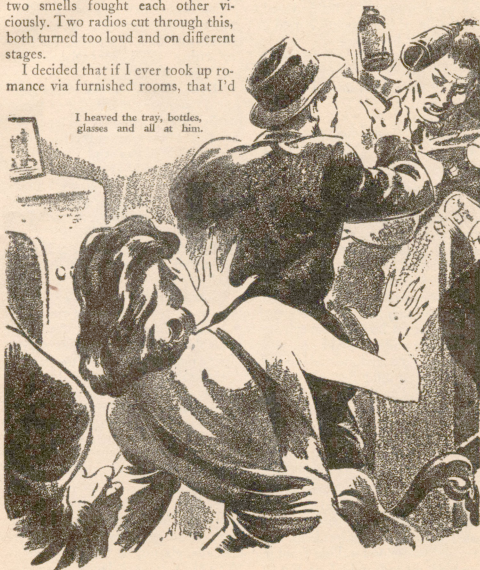
I decided that if I ever took up romance via furnished rooms, that I'd

wait until an indecent hour at night for it, and turned down toward the third floor front. The door to this was slightly ajar and it was so warped it swung open when I knocked.

And then I said: "My good God!"

It had to be the Allen girl. She had on a faded wrapper, and she was on her side, curled like a kitten

I heaved the tray, bottles,
glasses and all at him.



with her head on one arm. She might have been sleeping. There wasn't a mark of violence on her except for a bruise on the side of her chin, but she was dead and no question about it. The color had faded from her cheeks and the rouge there stood out in spots. Her mouth was slightly open and it showed a pinkish gray instead of a healthy tint. Her eyes were open and a little glazed, and the tip of her tongue showed in the corner of her mouth.

I held the back of my hand against her cheek and it felt cold and damp. I figured she'd been dead for probably an hour.

A TABLE radio behind me jingled and I turned my head. Then something tapped me on the shoulder and the tap left pain behind it. About then I realized what was going on, and I went down on my hands and knees and scuttled over to the side of the room out of line with the window. The cloth of my coat had closed over the hole the bullet had made, but blood was already staining through it.

I let that go for then but got my own gun out and sneaked to the side of the window and peered out. I was facing a solid line of brown-stone fronts, like the house I was in, and I had a choice of a dozen windows as the one I'd been fired on from. I watched until my coat was soggy with blood and then figured the shooter had taken the only chance he'd allowed himself, and then I shucked my coat and shirt and found a crease across the flat of my shoulder about four inches long, and there still was blood welling from it. I padded a handkerchief on top of

this and went out in the hall in my bloody undershirt and bawled down the stairwell to the landlady.

"Hey, you! Where's the phone?"

She shouted back to me from three floors down. "On the hall wall, where it should be. And I haven't got any nickels, mister. If you haven't got any change, you got to go out after it."

I swore at her and got a nickel from my pocket and then the Central Station and then Homicide. I asked for either White or Olson, and finally got the latter.

"Look, Olson," I said. "I've just found another murder. I think maybe there's going to be another one, too, unless you get there in time to stop it. Will you send a cruiser to 4926 Mason and have 'em look up a girl named Doris Williams? In a hurry?"

"Why does somebody want to kill a girl named Doris Williams?"

"I haven't got time to tell you. Get action on that or it'll be too late."

"Sure. Are you ribbing about having a murder? Where are you?"

I said: "I'm not ribbing. And I'm not ribbing about this Williams girl. Hurry man, or you'll be too late."

He said, in an altered tone: "Okay, okay. I'll put it on the air for the car in that Mason Street district and go and see about it myself. You going to stay where you are now? And where is it?"

I gave him the address and said: "If I'm not here, I'll be across the street from here. And hurry, Olson."

He said he'd hurry and I turned away from the phone to find the landlady glaring at me. She said: "You can't use such language to me

in my own place, mister, and you can't run around the hall in your underclothes, either. You—"

And then she saw the bloody handkerchief I was holding to my shoulder and squealed: "Why, it's blood!"

THEN she fainted and I left her there on the floor and went back in Mary Allen's room and put on my coat, leaving the handkerchief in place, padded on my shoulder. I didn't bother with a shirt, but went downstairs and across the street with my gun and one hand hidden under the coat and holding it closed with the other. I rang the bell of the house directly across and when this didn't get me action as soon as I thought it should, I rapped the glass on the door with the muzzle of my gun. I was excited, I guess, and rapped too hard, because the glass in the door crashed into the hall inside just as a woman who might have been a twin to the one across the street came in sight.

She said shrilly: "You broke my door."

I said: "Yeah, lady! I'll pay for it. What about your front rooms on the third floor?"

"What about 'em?"

"They rented?"

"Certainly. You pay me for that glass or I'll call the police. Right now."

"I'm a cop. Who's got those rooms?"

"Mr. Corbin's got one and Mr. Sills has got the other. What about them?"

"They in?"

"They are not. They work."

I started to turn away and she saw

the bloody shoulder of my coat and the gun that was still in sight.

"You a cop?" she asked.

"I said I was."

"Then maybe it's after the two men that I just chased from my place you're here for?"

I'd planned on making inquiries up and down the street, but here was pay dirt.

"What's that?" I said.

"I was making up a room on the second floor and I heard a noise on the third and here was two guys just coming out of Mr. Sills' room. I asked 'em what they were doing there and they said for me to mind my business and I told them to get out before I called the police. They went downstairs."

"You got a back way?"

"Of course. And I've got fire-escapes, just like the law says. They're approved, young man, so you can't make me any trouble over that."

I started away and she screamed: "I want my money for that glass you broke."

I paid her and went back across the street to wait for Olson. Too much time had elapsed between then and the time the shots had been fired at me to make a back alley search effective.

And also, for the first time I wondered whether the original landlady was still in a faint. I hoped she would be but I was afraid she'd be on her feet and asking questions and giving me the answers.

She was waiting for me as I climbed the steps and either seeing her or my torn shoulder started me feeling a little sick. Anyway, I went on past her and up to the third floor

... and I had trouble making that last flight of stairs.

CHAPTER VIII

New Kill



OLSON stared accusingly and said: "She was dead, Callahan. She'd been dead for at least an hour, the surgeon said. Why didn't you tell us about it before?"

White was swabbing at my shoulder with cotton and iodine from the police cars first aid kit. He hurt me and that didn't make me feel any happier than Olson's talk did. I said: "I didn't know anything about it, I tell you. Not until I found *this* girl dead."

White padded the cotton into place and taped it there. He said: "What gets me is what killed this girl here. There's not a mark on her, except on her chin, and that ain't nothing at all. That was just a smack on the chops, I'd say, for getting out of line. Maybe she died from heart failure, or something."

"Maybe," I said. "But she's dead, ain't she? And the other one's dead, too. I didn't even see the other one."

"Her head was bashed in," Olson told me. "Done with a milk bottle. It was the same kind of light house keeping place this one is." He waved an arm around. "You know. A sink and a cupboard and a shelf for dishes and a two-burner plate."

I got into my bloody shirt and said: "Thanks, Whitey, that'll do until I get it fixed by a regular doctor. It means one thing, anyway. I mean these two killings."

"What?" asked Olson.

"It means these two girl's weren't in the crooked business in the check rooms."

"How d'ya figure?"

I said: "If they were, they wouldn't have had to live in dumps like these. They'd have been getting a little cut in the gravy and they'd have been spending some of it."

"You don't know that's the reason they were killed."

"What other reason could there be? This ties up with that other girl and Delehanty getting it. She was killed so she couldn't talk and Delehanty was killed for the same reason. These girls were killed before they could tell me anything."

Olson looked troubled. "I didn't want to tell you, Mike," he said, "but when I was down talking to this landlady here, while Whitey was patching you up, I got the same story I got where the Williams girl was killed. That is, it's something the same."

"A guy called on the Williams girl this morning. Just one guy . . . that'd be the guy that killed her. I got a fair description of him there. Downstairs, now, I hear there was two guys called here. A guy that fits the description of the guy that called on the Williams girl. Right to the dot . . . this old girl downstairs did everything but call him by name. And the guy that was with him . . . well, Mike, I'm sorry to say it sounded like Haley. She had him to a T. And furthermore, this last guy's been here before. Several times."

"It couldn't have been Haley."

"The description fits him. If you've got to know, I sent one of the boys down to the Calico Cat for a press picture of him. When I get it

back, I'll show it to her and we'll know for sure."

"It couldn't be Dickie."

"Why not?"

"Well, you asked and I'll tell you," I said. Dickie's wife has left him over another girl. Now I ask you? Would he be playing around that one and this one, too?"

WHITE said: "Why not? And the next thing you'll be telling us is that the orchestra boys don't go out with the check stand girls. We've been going into that angle, too, Mike, and we've found out plenty."

I said: "I don't give a damn what the orchestra boys do or don't do. I'm just telling you what Dick Haley does."

Olson said: "Let's wait for the picture and see what the old girl downstairs says about it. And while we're waiting, Mike, you might think about this. We asked Haley to give us a look at that twenty-two pistol he's got a permit for. He told us it was stolen, and he didn't know just when it had happened. We let it slide for then but we put a tag on him. Right after you talked to him at the Calico Cat he ditched the tag and he's out of sight *since* then. It wouldn't be, now would it, Mike, that you told him to disappear for awhile? Now would it? It wouldn't be that Haley owned the twenty-two that killed that first little girl and that killed Delehanty, now would it? And that slit across your shoulder looks like something a twenty-two would do . . . and it wasn't a gun much bigger than that or there'd been enough noise that somebody would have heard it and called in about it. That could be the

same gun. Mike, and Haley could have been on the business end of it."

"You guys are crazy."

Olson said: "Sure, like all cops. But you figure it. He had a chance to do all this and his description fits a guy that's been around this last girl here, and he was handy to where that first girl was killed there by the Calico Cat. And we know that he and Delehanty had trouble."

"All you've got is Harry Reims' word for that."

"Reims hasn't lied to us yet, as far as we know. Or maybe you know something we don't about it."

I said I didn't know anything about it.

I GOT to the Calico Cat during intermission and I was glooming over a glass of whiskey when I heard the scream. It came from Mary Miles, and if she had a little baby singing voice her scream had the tone and power of a fire siren. I was halfway down the stairs that led to the dressing rooms before her first shriek was over and I fell down the rest of the way as she started into her second.

And even so the aisle between the dressing rooms was jammed.

Nick Pappas used four acts in his show and he provided six dressing rooms for them, as well as the big musician's room at the end of the corridor. Dick Haley's dressing room, where I'd often been, was at the right and the first at the foot of the stairs, and Mary Miles was at the door of this. She looked as though she was in the middle of changing her costume, because she had on a make-up slip. She was into her second scream, but she wasn't

making so much noise with it because of having a muffling hand up to her mouth.

The acts were out of their rooms and in the hall, and the orchestra boys were boiling out of their own place at the end and trying to force through them.

I said: "What the hell's the matter?"

Mary Miles said: "L-l-l-look! I don't mean look at me, you fool. I mean look inside."

Then she picked up her screaming, right where she'd left off.

I looked and for a moment thought I was seeing Dick Haley. This in spite of knowing Haley couldn't possibly be there. It was because of the way the body I was seeing was contorted and because of a resemblance to Haley that I noticed for the first time. It was Dell Walters, the first sax man in the band and the guy that waved the stick when Haley took a rest. He had a knife jammed in his throat and he had both hands clutching it. Both of his knees were brought up into his middle, and his white shirt was covered with blood from the hole in his neck and from his mouth. His eyes were wide open and they held a staring pop-eyed look that might have been funny under other circumstances. He was half under the dressing table Haley ordinarily used, as if he'd tried to get under this to get away from the guy who'd used the knife, but I figured involuntary muscular reaction had put him there after the wound had been received.

I GOT a hand on Mary Miles' shoulder and spun her away, and her slip spun with her. She was built

like a grown woman, all right, but just tiny. What she had on didn't cover her any. I got in the door so nobody could get past me and said:

"Anybody hear anything?"

Willie Morris, who played first trumpet and who I knew, said: "We had a heart game going and the boys were clowning some, besides that. There was a lot of noise. Dell went in to get an arrangement for Mary . . . she wanted to switch her second number."

Mary Miles said: "Ugh . . . that's right. That "Moonlight" thing I've been doing stinks in spades. I was going back to an oldie . . . to "Love For Sale."

"Did the title have anything to do with you following Walters in here?"

She got red in the face and didn't answer. She was a bum and I knew it and she knew I knew it. I figured she'd tagged Walters during the intermission.

A girl I faintly remembered as seeing in the floor show, said: "I . . . I heard a funny noise but I didn't think anything about it. About five minutes ago, I guess. I was changing and I didn't bother to look."

She looked like a high yellow to me and I saw her glance over toward one of the other boys in the trumpet section, so I figured maybe she'd been changing the guy's luck.

"I . . . I thought I'd come in and help Dell find the orchestration," Mary Miles said. "We had a . . . Dell and I had a date tonight. I knocked and then opened the door and there he was. I guess I just screamed."

"I guess you did," I said.

Nick Pappas came down the stairs



then, with his voice preceding him. He was talking about noise coming up from the dressing rooms and declaring he'd have a new band and new acts unless it was stopped. He was a fat and nervous little guy, anyway, who acted as if the cares of the world rested on his shoulders at all times, and he was famous for crying real tears any time he was forced to discuss salary raises with anybody in his organization. He saw me in the door of the dressing room and blinked his near-sighted eyes at me, and complained:

"You, Callahan! Ain't it enough

I said, hoping I was right: "You haven't got the guts to shoot!"

that it sounds like it is wild Indians, maybe, that I got in my basement, without I find you? Ain't it enough that Haley takes a powder on me, and mind you, without one word to me, he takes a powder, that you come down and help these dopes make noise that my customers hear all the way upstairs? You, Callahan! You ain't drunk now, Callahan, and down here in one of the

rooms with Mary Miles, now? Is it why she screamed, now? If she says she don't want you, why don't you leave your hands off her?"

Mary Miles looked startled at this new thought, and I wondered what would have happened if Nick had made a good guess instead of a bad one. This seeing her with the make-up slip loose had given me some thoughts I hadn't ever had before.

I said: "You'd better call the cops, Nick! You'd better ask for White and Olson, because they know what it's all about. Somebody just killed Dell Walters."

HE WAS keeping on with what amounted to a monologue and paying no attention to what I was saying. It seemed he'd long suspected me of an interest in Mary Miles, but all of a sudden it dawned on him what I'd said. He dropped his lower jaw and almost screamed.

"You say *what*?"

"Somebody just killed Dell Walters. He's right here."

He screamed a bunch of Greek oaths that sounded like fire crackers and finished with: "But why! But why? Who done it? I ask you, Callahan?"

"Probably somebody thought he was Haley," I said. "He was in Haley's room and I just noticed he looked something like Haley. He's got a little mustache like Dickie's, and he's about the same size and coloring. You'd better get the cops and in a hurry, Nick, and you'd better tell the customers the band will be a little late. Because I'm certainly holding everybody that's here now right here where they are, until the

cops take over. I can't do anything else."

"But the customers! I *advertise* the band."

"To hell with the customers."

"But, Callahan! Who is it that tells who? Do you work for me or do I work for you?"

I said: "Go on and telephone, Nick, before I get sore and cut you down. I've taken just about all that I'm going to stand." I turned to the crowd in the hall and told them: "You folks had better go back in your rooms and stay there until the cops take charge. They'll most likely let the band go on to save fuss, but they'll have a cop there to see that nobody skips. Same for the acts."

"But, Callahan!" said Pappas, making motions with his hands. "These are all good boys and girls. They never done this thing. Let 'em go up and go on, so's the customers don't get mad at me."

I said: "Nick, one more crack out of you and I'll slap it back down your neck. I mean it. Get the hell to a phone and call the station and ask for White and Olson. I'm the nearest thing there is to a law officer here, and I say that everybody waits for the cops. I'm in bad enough already."

"What's the matter? Is it more stuff now?"

"The cops think I told Haley to duck," I said. "I didn't, but it looks like he saved himself something by ducking."

"He was smart," said Pappas, scuttling up the stairs and proving he was no fool himself for doing it. If he'd stayed there and chattered at me for another minute, I'd have swung on him just out of wanting to

do something. This last killing made five, and all over something I wasn't getting even to first base toward an answer. I was going slightly nuts over the mess.

CHAPTER IX

Too Much Why



OLSON had authority behind him and the will to use it. He got on the telephone in Pappas' office and he had fifty plainclothes men looking for Dick Haley within five minutes after he walked into the Calico Cat. He talked over the phone but he held it in such a way he could glare at me.

"You!" he said. "You tip off Haley to get out of the way, and this happens. A guy that ain't done a thing gets it by mistake. It's a hell of a note."

"I didn't say I tipped off Haley. He just took a night off, as far as I know."

"Yeah! It's funny that he took *this* night off. And that he hasn't been home, or anyplace else that we can lay hands on him. I'm telling you, Callahan! I was going to ask him questions. That was all. Now I'm going to charge him with suspicion of murder. I'm going to sign the complaint myself. When I get my hands on him I'll keep him. I'm telling you."

"Why tell me?"

"You know where he is. You can tell him what I say. If he comes in fast, maybe I'll change my mind."

"If I see him, I'll certainly tell him," I said. I'd been expecting pressure over Haley's disappearance and wasn't particularly worried

about Olson's stand on the thing. I went from Pappas' office and there, directly outside the door, were Nathan Feldman and Harry Reims. Reims was his usual unpleasant grinning little self and Feldman started playing his big executive part for Reims' benefit.

"What's doing now, Callahan?" he asked.

I said: "They're trying to solve a murder. Or maybe it's three or four or five murders, all in a bunch. They don't know."

Reims said blankly: "Five!" and then started opening and closing his fish mouth while he waited for an answer.

"You count 'em," I said, ticking them off on my fingers. "First, there's the little girl my partner, Delehanty, was taking home. Then there was Delehanty. Then there were two more hat check girls. And now there's Dell Walters. That makes five. You can count 'em."

"Walters was running along with the Allen girl," Feldman offered. "That's the one you found today. I saw 'em together a couple of times. This morning, when I saw him, I told him the kid had been fired."

"When was this?"

Feldman waved a hand. "Oh, after we talked to you in the office, this morning. I just happened to run into him."

"Where?"

"What's the idea where? What the hell is it to you? Whose business is it where? Is it your business?"

Reims said: "Keep your shirts on, boys."

He was grinning. Any trouble between Feldman and me made it that

much better for his chances for a job, and he was loving this.

I said to Feldman: "If I was you, I'd tell the cops about seeing Walters this morning. It might make a difference to them."

"Why should it?"

"It's just an idea I've got. But let it go . . . they'll find it out for themselves."

He said, in an easier tone: "It don't make any difference about him seeing the Allen girl, anyway, Callahan. He was running around with plenty more. She didn't make but another notch on his stick. He was out with a different one all the time. All the time he wasn't on the stand he was chasing women. Any of the orchestra boys can tell you that."

"You seem to know a lot about him."

"Why shouldn't I?" he said, showing signs of temper again. "My business takes me around the clubs, don't it? If Walters was running around, and I happened to see him running around, why what about it?"

Reims said: "You going my way, Callahan? I just happened to be going by and ran into Nat and he told me about this new trouble. So I just stopped in."

"Which way you going?" I asked.

He pointed and said: "Down the street that way. Why?"

I said: "Because that's the reason I'm picking the other way. Catch on, you—"

DICK HALEY was wearing a top coat and a hat pulled far enough down to shade his face. He slid into the seat alongside of me without speaking and I put the car

in gear and coasted along until I was well away from the meeting place.

I said: "The cops had a tag on me but I lost it. They want to talk to you bad, Dick. They want to know why you ducked out and they want to know why somebody is gunning for you. I had a notion that you'd tell Madge where she could get in touch with you and I was right."

"She called me," Haley said. "I told her where I was, so she wouldn't worry if she heard anything. I got panicky, Mike. First, it was the cops, asking me about the gun and telling me it was Delehanty that had smacked me around. I told 'em the gun had been stolen but I could see they didn't believe me. Then there was another guy following me, and I got scared and decided I'd better duck until this mess is over."

"That was a cop on your tail."

"Well, how did I know that? I thought maybe it was somebody else like that Reims."

"Why would somebody be trying to kill you?"

"It's got me," he said. "I couldn't see his face, but he sounded like he was telling the truth. I haven't been in any trouble, outside of this business with Madge. And, outside of her family, I can't see it's anybody else's business."

"The cops think it's a phony about this strange man smacking you. They think it was Delehanty."

"It wasn't George. It was a guy that I never saw before."

"What about this Dell Walters?"

Haley thought about this and answered slowly. "The guy was all

right, as far as I know. He was a good sax man and I used him for a leader when I wanted time off. He wasn't a bad looking guy and he'd had a louse band of his own once, so he knew how to hold the stick. That's all. I never pal with the boys, like you know, Mike. You can't tell 'em what to do and have 'em do it, if you do."

"Don't know anything about him, then?"

"I remember I loaned him a hundred bucks. But that was three or four months ago and I haven't heard any more about it. I took a bite out of each week's check until I got it back. Where we going?"

I settled back and told him: "Just driving."

THE Hampstead Apartments were small but noisy, and a good part of the last was coming from Carlotta Arditi's apartment. I knocked, watching Haley, and he was staring around the hall as if he'd never seen the place before. And then some man opened the door and held it against us. He wore a happy beaming smile and he was in shirt sleeves and acted right at home.

"What you boys want?" he asked.

"In," I said.

"You been asked?"

"Nope."

He considered this, beaming the while. And then said: "I guess you ain't coming in then, are you?"

I stiffened my fingers and pushed him in the chest with the ends of them and I got an immediate reaction. The guy was holding a half full highball glass in his hand and he threw glass and all at my face. I expected it and ducked and slammed

at his jaw, and he sat down, saying nothing and rubbing his face where I'd landed.

I said: "I guess we *are* going in, friend. You made a mistake on that. Any time you heave a glass like that you want to follow it up fast. If you don't, the other guy's liable to."

"I'll remember that," he said, acting as though he wasn't sore about a thing. So I told Dickie to come along and stepped around him and went on in.

It was a honey of a party, I could see that right away. Carlotta Arditi was in the middle of the front room, with her skirts held up daintily and with her very pretty knees showing. Somebody was playing the piano and she was doing a solo dance like nothing I'd ever seen. She looked up and saw me and said, "Hiya, sugar pie!" but didn't stop.

I said: "Hiya, honey! We came to your party."

She gave a last little wiggle that was out of place in the middle of the floor and let her skirt fall in place. She came over, took a look at Haley and passed him up to say to me:

"Look, hot shot! Like I told you, you hadn't ought to come until late and not then until you phone first. Suppose you'd walked in on something. You'd have wrecked the detail."

"It's in the line of business, this time, honey," I said. "Know this guy with me?"

"My God, no, hot shot, and will you get him out of here. Suppose my ten thousand dollar baby walks in and sees you and a pal? He'll *know* you're double-crossing him."

"Know her?" I asked Haley.

Haley shook his head.

I pointed to the picture I'd noticed on my first visit and said: "Go take a look at that."

And then got ready to repel boarders.

THE man I'd upset in the hall was back in the room, still wearing his broad smile and still uncowed. There were two other men, both of them

now on their feet, and two other girls. Even as I looked over the force opposed to us, another man came from the kitchen, saying:

"What gives?"

This last man was wearing a little tiny kitchen apron, like maids wear, and he was carrying a tray covered with glasses, ice, and water.

I backed up until I could reach an



empty beer bottle that was standing on an end table, and said: "Know who that is, Dickie?"

Haley said: "Sure! Dell Walters. It's funny; I never noticed before that he looked like me. He does, in this picture."

"They're crashing the party, Bud. 'At's what they're doing. Crashing the party."

I said: "This is Dick Haley, honey. The guy you thought was Dick Haley wasn't. He was a guy named Dell Walters. He was just

Three shots took him in the belly and he went down, dead before he hit the floor.



Carlotta Arditi was drunk but not too drunk not to catch the thought. She said, tentatively: "Dickie! Dickie! Now what the hell does that mean, Dickie? What d'ya mean about the picture?"

The man who'd opened the door to us said to the man in the apron:

trying to big time you . . . he was telling you he was Dick Haley so you'd think he was something he wasn't. Get it?"

Miss Arditi said: "You——!"

The first man said: "Let's take 'em, Bud. You with me?"

I saw it coming and said to him: "You'll never learn, will you?"

It happened fast, then. I decided I wouldn't need the beer bottle and I didn't want to crack anybody's head, anyway, so I reached out and took the tray from the man named Bud. Bud plainly didn't know what it was

all about, as yet. I took the tray, glasses, ice, water and all, and heaved it at the man in the doorway, and then shouted:

"Come on, Dickie!"

ONE of the men by Haley reached out to stop him but he straight-armed him and came after me. I was already in the hall and past the man who'd been there, and the poor guy was again on the floor, and still with his smile, though this was now a little dazed.

I called: "Goodby, folks! Be seeing you, honey!" and then we were in the outside hall, with Haley starting to get the picture.

"I think I'm beginning to get it, Mike," Haley said, panting along after me. "Dell Walters put on an act with the girl and said he was me. She thought she saw a chance for heavy money and went to town on it. And on me, only it wasn't me. And Madge thought it was me in the mess."

"That's right. Now all you've got to do is tell Madge what happened, and I'm there to back up the story."

"I never noticed Walters looked like me before."

I admitted: "Neither did I. Not until I saw him dead, there in your dressing room. He was about the same size and he was dark, like you are. And he wore the same sort of a mustache. That's about all . . . but it was enough. The picture was so dim I didn't see the difference."

"I'll always have you to thank for clearing it up for me, Mike. Now I'm okay."

"Like hell you are," I said. "The cops are looking for you and if they don't find you damn' quick they'll

charge you. With obstructing justice, at the least . . . and they may tack a murder charge on you, even if it won't hold up. You've got a lot of things to explain, Dickie boy, and you are going to have one hell of a time explaining them. Like why this strange guy took a pass at you and why Walters was killed in your dressing room. They want to talk to you about whether this strange man wasn't Delehanty . . . they still believe Reims' story that it was him instead of a stranger. Like hell you're not in trouble."

Haley said: "You'll clear me on it," and sounded confident.

I told him I could try, but that it was going to take more than just a try to help him.

CHAPTER X

Back to the Racket



OWILLETS came in the inner office and I looked up from the morning batch of bills and said:

"Whoever it is, tell 'em I'll try and pay something on it before the end of the month. Tell 'em I'm waiting for a check, toots. Go on now."

"It's that Reims man," said Jo, softly. "He's right outside. I told him you were busy."

"That was right. I'm always busy, when it's Reims."

"He said he'd wait."

"Let him. I'll go out the back way."

Reims said, from the doorway: "No, Mikel; No, no! That ain't being friendly."

He was leaning against the casing, having opened the door just enough

to slip through it. Jo had depended on the hall between the two rooms for privacy and hadn't latched the door between her office and the hall.

I mentioned this. I said: "Look, Jo! See what I've been telling you. You leave that door open and rats get in here at me. Here's one of the rats right now, in person."

And then I said to Reims: "And you, you bald-headed little—, I mean you, get out. You smell up the place."

"Names, names, names," said Reims. "I've told you, Mike, before, that it don't do any good to call names. A man gets no place calling another man names."

"Get out."

"We're all getting out," he said. He raised his voice a little and said: "Billy! Hal!"

And then he brought a gun out of his pocket, and he was the last man in the world I'd have ever figured for gunplay.

It startled me so I didn't say anything, but Jo Willets made up for it. She giggled, from hysteria I think, and said: "My, my! Like Wild West!"

I said: "Shut up, kid! The dope means it. He's blown his cork."

Reims was sweating and I figured that meant he was serious. He used the back of his free hand to mop at his forehead, then stepped to the side to let two other men past him. The first was tall and thin, with a beak of a nose set in a lop-sided way in a long sad face. The nose had been badly broken and badly set, and pointed toward one corner of his thin mouth. His eyes were soft, and sad like his face, but he pulled a black-jack out of his pocket as he sidled

past Reims and to the side and out of the line of possible fire. The second one was hardly more than a boy and a fat boy at that. He had a complexion like a girl's and a silly vacuous expression on his face, but he stopped besides Reims and asked: "We cool 'em off here?"

I said to Jo Willets: "I told you that bald-headed little — wasn't fooling."

Reims said: "Names, names, names!" and the fat boy said: "Let's get it done with."

"No, no, Hal," said Reims. "Not here. Not any place near here and not now. We just hold 'em for now. Just in case."

"Just in case of what?"

"Never mind. We just hold 'em for now."

"Where?"

THE man with the trick nose said: "Now, Hal! Not all the time questions, Hal." His voice was as sad as his face and eyes. "When the time comes they get it, Hal. Not until then do they get it. See."

Hal said: "Okay, okay, Billy! But it's a hell of a way to handle any kind of stuff like this. I say it right out."

"But you're just screwy, Hal," said Billy. "That's all. You're not the brains."

I said, and I made it sound as nasty as I could make it: "As soon as you boys get through with your tea party, maybe you'll tell me what it's all about."

Reims said: "Look, Callahan. Call names. I don't care if you call me names. Only be nice, outside of that. That's all I ask you. You be nice and I promise you there'll be no

trouble. You just come along nice. You and the pretty young lady."

"Come along where?"

"I got a place all picked."

"What if we don't want to go?"

The man with the funny nose hefted his sap, thoughtfully, and Reims raised the tip of his gun barrel. Hal, the fat boy, started to breathe a little noisily, and I noticed one arm was tightening to where he had a hand in his side coat pocket.

I said to Reims: "You bald-headed—! "You haven't got the guts to shoot and you know it." I started to stand up, and the fat boy whipped a gun from that side pocket and lined it on me with the same motion.

Billy cried out: "*No! No! Hal!*"

Reims said: "Maybe I ain't got the nerve, but Hal has."

I sat back down again and said: "He hasn't got better sense. Give it to me slow, you heel. What's it about?"

REIMS picked his words carefully. "You're in somebody's hair, Mike. It's nothing to do with me, you understand. It's just a job. I'm supposed to take you out of town for a few days. I got a nice place all fixed for you and the young lady. Nice. On a little lake, up country. It'll be just like a little vacation."

"With that guy guarding us?" I asked, nodding toward Hal.

"With him and Billy both. Billy can take care of Hal."

"Why lie about it? Why not come out with it? Why not say you intend to get us out of here to some place it's quiet and then knock us off?"

"Now, Mike."

"And why drag the girl in it?

Why couldn't you have picked me off the street?"

Reims said: "Now, Mike! Maybe you might have been, well now, intimate with this girl, and maybe you could have told her things. What must be, must be."

I said: "Sure!" and tipped my desk over.

It landed level with the fat boy's knees and slid down his shins before he could step back. As it hit him, I started grabbing for the gun I had under my coat. The fat boy shot at me once, point blank like that, but the desk had knocked him off center and he missed somehow. I shot him three times in the belly, as fast as I could shoot. I was really afraid of him.

He went down in a heap and I'll always think he was dead before he hit the floor, and then I swung the gun to cover the one called Billy. He was on one side of me and Reims was on the other, and I took a chance on Reims being as yellow as I thought him.

Then Jo Willets screamed out: "Mike! He's running!"

The four shots had blended into one roaring echo and I could barely hear her through this. I turned my head away from Billy long enough to see that Reims was gone from the doorway . . . and turned it back just in time to stop Billy and his blackjack.

"Keep away," I said. "Or so help me, I'll do it again."

Billy dropped the blackjack and said, in a calm flat voice: "I *knew* this was a louse job. I *told* Hal it was a louse job."

Jo Willets just realized she'd seen a man shot down in front of her. She

quavered: "Oh, Mike! You killed him."

"Yeah!"

"And Mr. Reims ran away."

"He won't run far."

She said, in a tiny voice: "I think I'm going to faint!" and I turned toward her, thinking that Billy, without his blackjack, would be safe. This was a mistake, because he stooped and got a desk set that held two pens and a built-in inkwell, and swung this at me. I dodged most of it but it caught me a glancing blow on my already hurt shoulder, but I was swinging with the gun at Billy's head and his dodge didn't work at all. The gun barrel landed with a crunching sound, just as Jo Willets made a little moan and collapsed on the floor, and I looked at her and then at Billy.

I decided I'd better call a doctor for Jo, but that it would take more than a doctor to do any good for Billy. I'd caught him on the temple where the bone is thin, and he was all through.

OLSON sat on his heels between Hal and Billy. Jo Willets was in the outside office with the police doctor looking after her and with Detective White in close attendance. And Olson recognized this last.

"That damn' Whitey," he said, in a complaining voice. "Put him next to a girl and he goes nuts. He's just like a banty rooster with a bunch of hens. He can't keep his mind on his business, that's all. Though I don't blame him for backing away on this. . . . It don't make sense."

"It makes sense to me," I said. "I've got it figured out, now."

Olson laughed sourly. "Sure!

You tell me Reims came in and made a play . . . and if that ties in with the rest of the hell that's been going on, I fail to see it."

"It ties in. Haley's out of it, for one thing."

"Like hell."

"You can't hold him long and you know it, Olson."

"He ain't clear, even if he does play dummy with us. I'll let him go when I'm sure he's clear and not before. You just made some money, Callahan."

I said that was nice and wanted to know why."

"One of these guys is Billy Wise. From St. Louis. So is his pal from there. Hal Orion. Orion was bad . . . he was nuts. He was in a goofy house, some place out there, and he broke out. He killed a guard. There'll be a reward on both of them, for sure."

"I can use the money. I haven't got anything out of this so far except trouble. And I won't get anything out of it, either."

"Why not?"

"There's reasons."

Olson stared up at me and tried to figure that out. He said: "The whole thing's screwy. I don't see how the check stand racket ties in with that saxophone player getting killed by mistake for Haley. Though I don't see why it should be against the law for anybody killing saxophone players. . . . I'm in favor of it and always have been. I don't see how Reims comes into the thing. I don't see Haley's part, though for two cents, right now, I'd charge him with killing Delehanty and take a chance on getting proof later. We know from what Reims said that they had

trouble. Also Haley might have killed that saxophone player. You tell us the guy was impersonating him, and that might have been the reason."

"I suppose you figure Haley killed the girls, too?"

"We know he was with the guy that killed 'em, anyway. At least he was at the place where the Allen girl was killed. The landlady there identified his press pictures, didn't she?"

I SAID: "Now look, Olson, and use your head. I've got proof that Walters, that sax player, was impersonating Haley at one place. So here's how it figures for me. Walters was the guy with the killer, instead of it being Haley. That's why Walters was killed. The killer knew we'd eventually find that out and he took Walters out of the way to keep him quiet. Haley's out of it . . . he's been out of it right along. He was just unlucky enough to be dragged into something he knew nothing about. If it hadn't been for him having trouble with his wife, and if it hadn't been for that goofy sax player claiming to be him, he'd never have been in it."

"What about that beating up he took from somebody he claimed was a stranger?"

"That'll be more of Walters' impersonating gone wrong. The guy'll turn out to be the sweetie of some girl Walters lied to. He took a pass at Haley because of something Walters did."

"Haley claims the same thing," Olson admitted. "But I don't see the answers to anything yet. Maybe it'll be different when we find Reims and get Reims to talk . . . but we ain't got

him yet. And outside of this dizzy story of yours, Mike, we've got no reason to be looking for him. We've got nothing to show he's tied in with these killings, have we? Show me, Mike, if we have."

"Look, Olson," I said. "Reims was around after Haley, trying to dig up divorce evidence against him. He was in the Calico Cat a lot. He must've seen something. So did Delehanty. The killer knocked off the girl Delehanty was with and then knocked off Delehanty. Now maybe Reims saw something that gave him a line on the killer, and those killings were tied in with this check stand racket. That runs into big money, so Reims probably figured to cut in on it. That's the only answer. Reims got wise to something and tried to dish up some of the gravy . . . and he's on the side that's doing all this killing. Those two little girls that got fired from the Penzance saw something crooked, and they got killed because of it. It all goes back to the racket."

"Then why did this saxophone player get killed?" Olson asked stubbornly. "You've got the rest all figured, but the thing that throws it all out of line is Walters getting killed. That puts Haley in the thing, and you've left him out."

"IT'S more impersonation trouble that came home to roost," I said. "It has to be. You and I both figured Walters was killed by mistake. I don't, now. I think the guy was killed by somebody that meant to do it. Now look! Put a couple of the boys at checking the Allen girl's other friends. It'll be a job, because I think the kid was doing a little

hustling on the side. But she might have had a steady boy friend. Put another couple men checking on the friends of this Carlotta Arditi . . . and if they find out anything about me, you tell 'em to keep it quiet. It was business with me, or I'll always claim it was. She was a mean wench . . . she might have had something to do with Walters getting killed. You'll probably find something at one of those two places, and that'll take the Walters thing out of it. That'll leave just the check stand racket standing alone, with Reims and who he's working with."

Olson said: "I can try it, Mike. By myself."

"That way, I can depend on what I find out."

"You can't do it."

"And why can't I? That is, if I can get that damn' Whitey away from your office girl long enough to give me a hand."

I said: "I'm going to need you to help me get Reims. He's going to be out of town, and I'm going to need you to fix it with the local cops about the arrest."

"What local cops?"

"I don't know 'em yet," I admitted. "I've got to find them. But Reims will head out of town, and he'll have to get in touch with who he's been working with. He has to . . . he's got to have help, as hot as he is now, and the only place he'll get it is from who he's been working with. And there we'll be. All ready to step in and take 'em."

Olson said: "The way Whitey's going, it'll be just you and me there. Whitey'll stay here and nurse this girl of yours."

But I noticed he didn't argue

about anything . . . and that meant he believed the same as I did.

CHAPTER XI

Burning Rap



HAD to search the tax records for four hours before I dug up what I wanted . . . and then I didn't believe it. I'd looked for property listed under the name of Reims, in the upper part of the state, basing this search because Reims had mentioned 'A little lake up country'. There was nothing there, and for that matter, Harry Reims had never struck me as being the kind who'd spend money for a country place.

Joe Morrison, of Check Stands Inc., was my next bet, and I drew another blank. As I did with Nick Pappas. Then I looked for something under the name of Sam Rossi, not expecting to find it. I figured Rossi as the best one of the three partners, though that wasn't giving him any compliment.

And there it was. Rossi owned one hundred and eighty acres and improvements on Bell Lake, a hundred miles upstate. I called Olson and said:

"I got it. All you've got to do is get authority to make an arrest in Chester County. Then we're through."

"We've got something down here," Olson said. "I've been calling your office for you. I sent a couple of the boys where you said and we got the Arditi woman down here and talked to her. She told us all about it. She had a party at her house and she got on a crying jag and told all

about Dick Haley doing her wrong.

"One brave boy there offered to go down and beat hell out of Haley. That was the last she'd seen of him, but she remembered his name and we sent out and got him. He says he went down there and saw who he thought was Haley and started to beat him up. He says that Haley, only we know it was Walters, picked up a knife and made for him with it. He says he took it away and stuck Walters with it. He kept calling Walters Haley. Then he went home and prayed the whole thing hadn't happened, I guess.

"He's still too drunk to know he killed the right man by mistake, or how you'd say it. It puts the Arditi girl out of it . . . her story checks. The guy was there with a party and trying to make a one night stand with Arditi, and he thought he might get over if he played hero for her. Walters' playing around came back at him."

"Then that clears the Walters thing and clears Haley?"

"Right."

"Then we go up to Chester County?"

"We do. Who do I get warrants for?"

"Reims and for Sam Rossi."

"You're wrong, Mike," Olson said firmly. "It isn't Rossi. It could be Pappas or it could be Morrison, but it couldn't be Rossi. I know the guy."

"I'm telling you," I said. "I didn't think so, either, but that's the way it is."

"I'll get 'em in blank," said Olson. "We'll pick you up in a few minutes at your office."

The Rossi place was named Idle-

wild and was very nice for anybody that liked the country in a city way. It was past a little resort town, sitting by itself, and there was a gate over the road turning in and a sign reading **KEEP OUT—THIS MEANS YOU**. Olson said, to the deputy-sheriff we'd commandeered:

"Know anything about the place?"

The deputy was a long thin man who chewed tobacco like a school girl chews gum. He spat solemnly at a rock, scoring a hit, and nodded and said:

"She's a hotsy-totsy place, mister. See, the main house is by itself. Then, there's a caretaker's place, right down at the edge of the lake by the boathouse."

"Any chance of anybody making a break out of it as we go up?"

"Not if one of us sort of stays behind, mister. So's they can watch the back door, sort of."

Olson made plans as we walked down the road. He and I went up to the front of the house, leaving White and the deputy at the back and out of sight. Olson knocked, with me standing out of line of the door . . . and nothing happened and he knocked again.

Then there was a racketing roar from the edge of the lake and we both spun around, and Olson cried out:

"It's them! In a boat! They're getting away on the lake."

There were three men in a small boat powered with an outboard motor and this last was popping away merrily with the three men crouched low in the boat. We couldn't see anything but their backs. Olson shouted at them once and then pulled his gun.

I said: "They're too far. They'll get away."

Olson snapped: "Watch this, dope! What d'ya think I go to the police range twice a month for?"

He leaned against the porch rail, left side against it for steadiness, and he brought the gun up in his other hand and shot almost as it came in line. Water splashed by the boat and so close to it I barely saw it was a miss.

Olson said: "Lousy! I pulled to the right on that one."

He tried again and scored another miss, but on the third shot the beat of the kicker stopped and one of the men in the boat screamed out against the sudden silence. White and the deputy came storming around the house, and the deputy said:

"They must've been in the caretaker's. They must've ducked next door into the boathouse, when they seen us. Hey! They're starting to row."

Olson said: "The damn' fools!" and shouted. "Drop those oars or I'll shoot."

The three in the boat, still with their backs to us, stopped paddling and let the oars drop. White and the deputy started running toward the water's edge, with Olson and me behind them. It didn't look right to me, and I called to White:

"Hold up! You're running into something."

THEN the three in the boat turned as if by plan, and the man in the back by the motor threw up a rifle that had been concealed below the gunwale. His first shot put White on the ground and, with the second one, the deputy started running to the



He shot her with a gun he swiped from Haley's dressing room."

side, putting a hand up to his shoulder. I was shooting, aiming my shots but not sure of them at that distance, but Olson was standing by me as calmly as if he was on a target range and taking as much time about firing. His gun roared in my ear and the man with the rifle dropped it and

tried, unsuccessfully, to pick it up. The man past him reached for it and got it, and Olson's second bullet took him out of the boat and into the water. The third man stood, holding his hands at shoulder height, and he managed to keep this pose until the man in the water got a hand on the edge of the boat and rocked it, whereupon he joined the man in the water.

Olson said to me: "Bring 'em in, Callahan, but watch 'em. I got to see about Whitey. I think he took a bad one."

"I called out: 'Keep hold of the boat and paddle it into shore. And you in the boat there, keep your hands where I can see them.'"

The man in the boat was Harry Reims but I still couldn't see who the two in the water were. They were in the shadow of the boat.

WHITE was shot through the hip, a bad wound but not fatal. The deputy had a shoulder touched by the rifle slug, but it was hardly more than a scratch. Though to hear him talk, he was teetering on the edge of the grave. The two men with Reims were Joe Morrison and Nathan Feldman, and Morrison had a slug from Olson's service gun still in his shoulder and Reims had a broken arm from where the bullet that had hit the motor had glanced up.

Feldman was the third man in the boat, the one who'd fallen overside, and he was hurt. And Joe Morrison was speaking bitterly of this.

"Look!" he said to Olson. "I'll admit I had something to do with it. Feldman told me he could dynamite the business and make it look so bad

that Rossi and Pappas would be glad to sell out cheap. I told him to go ahead. I admit I did. But that's *all* I did. I didn't tell him to do what he did. He started out killing people that found out what he was doing, and he dragged me into his damn' killings. And I get shot and he gets out without a scratch. It ain't right."

"It was Feldman's idea, eh?" asked Olson.

Morrison said: "Yeah! Of course, he propositioned me and I went for it, but that was just business. It was just running the business down so I could buy out my partners cheap. I knew I'd have to cut Feldman in, but just for a little bite. The thing was making money . . . plenty of money."

Then he went nuts when that girl Delehanty had a date with saw him working over a coat. He shot her with a gun he'd swiped out of Haley's dressing room. He had a notion she might have told Delehanty what she'd seen, so he went up to Delehanty's room and killed him, too. He was in deep by that time . . . he was just about nuts."

"He told you about this, eh?"

"Well, sure. He didn't tell me until after he'd done it, though. Then he fired those two girls and got Reims to kill first one and then the other, so Callahan couldn't talk to them. They'd seen something, too. He'd told them he'd look after the check room while they went to the ladies' room, but they got back in time to see him putting acid on that coat."

"How'd Reims do the job?"

"WELL, Reims had seen Feldman kill the girl that Delehanty was out with, and he figured

that Feldman had killed Delehanty. So he cut in on the thing. He'd been following Haley and he'd spotted that something was wrong with the check rooms, and he knew there was a lot of dough mixed up in the deal. Feldman figured he'd better be doing something to pay his way, so he made him kill the two little girls for it. Walters was just leaving the Allen girl's place when Reims got there, and Reims gave him a song and dance and got him to go back inside with him. Reims knew that the cops thought Haley was mixed up in the thing because he'd already given them a bum steer about Delehanty beating up Haley."

"Why was that?" I asked.

"Well, he knew that they were already suspicious of Haley, and he figured they'd think it was Haley that did for Delehanty and take the heat off Feldman. See?"

"I figured it that way," I said.

"And Reims knew that Walters was passing himself off as Haley, so he thought that taking Walters back into the Allen girl's place would mix things up more and make it look worse for Haley. It did, too."

"Then he killed Walters, eh?"

"He did not. Somebody else did that. We don't know who."

Olson said to me: "That checks. That checks with what we know."

"And then what?" I asked Morrison.

"And then that's all. Reims and Feldman got goofy, because they figured you were getting too close to them, and Reims hired a couple of thugs and planned on getting you out of the way. Another two killings on top of what already had happened didn't make any difference, they

thought. Then it backfired. Reims knew Rossi had this place up here so he came up here and phoned Feldman, and like a fool I came up with Feldman to see what we could figure out. You can see it was Feldman that was back of it . . . that it wasn't me."

I said: "You damn' fool! D'ya think that'll hold? D'ya think that'll stand up in front of a jury?"

"Why not? It's the truth. What makes me sore is that I get shot and Feldman don't get a scratch, and it's him that's responsible."

I SAID: "Well, don't let it fret you. When you sit in the chair, you'll forget all about being shot. Your story sounds all right except for one thing, and that'll burn you. You tell us that Reims cut in. Well, it was your business and Reims couldn't cut in unless you cut him in. Feldman couldn't cut him in . . . it wasn't Feldman's business. So that puts you in the mess as one of the leaders. You and Reims and Feldman can all go to the chair together and be company for each other."

Olson said: "Shall we let the doctor have him now? He's told us all we need. We can get enough stuff from Reims and Feldman to cinch it up."

I said we might as well, and then we could see that White was comfortable in the hospital and then go back to town. And then I thought of something else.

"Look, Olson," I said. "It's all explained but one thing. Who the devil was it that took the swing at Haley? The guy he said he didn't know."

Olson laughed and said: "That

came out, too. That was another boy friend of the Arditi gal. That was from another crying jag she was on. She told us about it . . . she thought it was funny, Haley getting smacked for something Walters had done."

That cleared everything up and I was glad of it. And the way it cleared meant that I'd get a fee from Rossi and Pappas, for clearing it . . . and that didn't make me feel any the worse.

I said: "Let's get going," and Olson asked me why all the rush.

There was a reason, all right, and by that time we were good enough friends for me to tell him.

"I've got a date to go to dinner with the Haleys," I said. "And Dickie's supposed to have been trying to make a date for me with little Mary Miles, his singer. She'll be

there, too. I'm interested there, ever since . . ."

Then I stopped. I couldn't very well tell him just when I began to take that interest.

He said: "You dope! You don't think she'd have anything to do with a clown like you, do you?"

I said that if report was right, she'd gone for both better and worse. And then I gave him my ace in the hole.

I said: "And if the little devil can't see me, I've still got Carlotta Arditi's apartment number and phone number."

"You wouldn't go for that, after all that's happened, would you?" he asked.

He was being silly, then, and I told him so. What did I have to lose that I hadn't already lost?

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACTS OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AND MARCH 3, 1933, OF PRIVATE DETECTIVE STORIES, published monthly at New York for October 1, 1941.

STATE OF NEW YORK. } ss.
COUNTY OF NEW YORK. }

Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Frank Armer, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of PRIVATE DETECTIVE STORIES, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business manager are: Publisher, Trojan Publishing Corp., 125 E. 46th Street, New York City, N. Y.; Editor, Kenneth Hutchinson, 125 E. 46th Street, New York City, N. Y.; Managing Editor, Kenneth Hutchinson, 125 E. 46th Street, New York City, N. Y.; Business Manager, Frank Armer, 125 E. 46th Street, New York City, N. Y.

2. That the owner is: Trojan Publishing Corp., 125 E. 46th St., New York, N. Y.; Frank Armer, 125 E. 46th St., New York City, N. Y.; Michael Estrov, 125 E. 49th St., New York City, N. Y.; G. Dennenfeld, 125 E. 46th St., New York City, N. Y.; J. E. Wasserman, 302 Harries Bldg., Dayton, Ohio.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, 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, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing 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; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

FRANK ARMER, Business Manager.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 30th day of September, 1941. Alfred B. Yaffe, Notary Public, Kings County Clerk's No. 8, Reg. No. 2006, N. Y. Co. Clerk's No. 16; Reg. No. 2-Y-9. My commission expires March 30, 1942.

DEATH BEHIND SCENES

By RANDOLPH BARR



ON CLINTON could not afford to hire a detective, so he did the next best thing: he went on the prowl himself. And he had the advantage of not looking like a shamus. Clinton was just another sandy-haired young fellow with a pleasant smile and the coat of tan everyone gets in New Orleans, except maybe the house men in the Jefferson Parish gambling joints. But just as the clock of Saint Louis Cathedral sounded off the tenth stroke, Clinton's tan deepened to the color of—well, say about the same rich red of the Boukhara rug on which the girl across the street had planted her million-dollar figure.

No, the girl across the street wasn't sitting on the curbing. She was decently indoors, but Royal Street is so narrow you can spit across it, and Don Clinton had a pair of eight power Zeiss binoculars, and

the supposedly heavy window drapes were treacherous. Clinton had attended to that—which indicated that while he was an amateur, he was no dub. Getting phoney drapes installed in the room of Hudson Blaine was no mean feat.

Clinton caught his breath, corrected the focus of the left eyepiece, and felt like a perfect rat. Then he remembered that business is business. The gorgeous brunette on the rug-draped couch was not Mrs. Hudson Blaine: and that gets us to the reason for Clinton's peeping.

ALITA BLAINE for the last several years had received only food, clothing, and a Cadillac; and she was too young and lovely to be side-tracked by the bums Hudson Blaine entertained in his party apartment in the *Vieux Carré*, which a lot of people call the Old French Quarter of New Orleans. And Blaine was too much dog in the manger to give

If it hadn't been that he loved the girl, he would never have been mixed up in the case of her husband's murder. Now that he was in it, it almost turned out to be his own murder!

Alita a divorce; he didn't want her, but he didn't want anyone else to have her. Finally, Alita had been raised old-fashioned—though she didn't look it—and wouldn't keep her accounts in two banks.

Which explains Don Clinton and the Zeiss binoculars. While he at times lost patience with Alita's odd morals, he was sort of glad she was that way; and finally he was getting some worthwhile dirt on Hudson Blaine. And Blaine's taste in sweethearts was as good as his taste in wives.

He shifted the glasses, and didn't blame Blaine, really. Blaine was ruddy, square jawed, and iron gray.

One witness to Hudson Blaine's escapade would not suffice, according to the *Code Napoléon* on which Louisiana law is based—and certainly not if that lone witness were an admirer of Alita Blaine. Clinton thrust the binoculars into their case, stepped out of the furnished room and descended to the street. Justice, he felt, demanded that Alita witness what she had never been able to prove. Clinton stepped into Ceratti's place, dropped a nickel, and called the bric-a-brac palace where Blaine received his mail and kept his wife, and at odd moments paused to dine. But Alita was not in. In order to be certain that there would be no slips, Clinton had taken no chances by telling her of his detective work.

He glanced along Ceratti's bar, and then stepped into the back room. There, peering over the edge of a poker hand sat Red Howard, of the *Telegram*.

"Hi, Don!" Howard greeted, jerking his chair aside. "Sit in on the next."

"Hell, no, Red!" said Clinton. "Play your hand and break away, quick!"

He breathlessly poured the words out; and effects of his recent eyeful still marked his face. Red Howard quizzically regarded him, slanted a shrewd eye at three deuces, snapped the fanned pasteboards together and checked out.

"Sall right, Don," he said. "Making a monkey of me tonight anyway. Now what's gnawing at you? You look like you'd seen something."

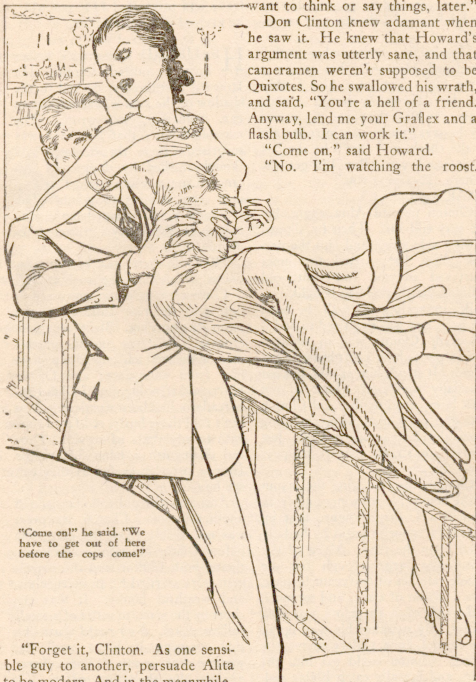
Clinton fairly dragged him past the bar and toward the curbing. Clinton explained, and concluded "You've got to be a witness, Red. This is the big scene Alita and I have been waiting for since—"

"She told you positively she wouldn't—"

"Shut up or I'll sock you!" growled Clinton. But you had to hate Red Howard a lot to make good on that. Clinton caught his grin, relaxed, and continued, "Let's go. And maybe you'd better get your camera. That'll clinch it. Boy, it's a pushover!"

BUT Red Howard froze. He shook his head.

"Nothing doing, Don! I need my job. I admit a picture of Hudson Blaine with another woman is interesting, but it ain't news, not unless the jane was La Gioconda or the Begum of Swat. Blaine's got too damn much drag in this man's town. The reason Alita Blaine hasn't nailed him before now is because no agency in town will monkey with him. I'm all for you and Alita, but I'd get my elbow into a sling just like that!"



"Come on!" he said. "We have to get out of here before the cops come!"

"Forget it, Clinton. As one sensible guy to another, persuade Alita to be modern. And in the meanwhile, that old louse can't live forever, and you're both of you young and well-liked enough to not make anyone

want to think or say things, later."

Don Clinton knew adamant when he saw it. He knew that Howard's argument was utterly sane, and that cameramen weren't supposed to be Quixotes. So he swallowed his wrath, and said, "You're a hell of a friend. Anyway, lend me your Graflex and a flash bulb. I can work it."

"Come on," said Howard.

"No. I'm watching the roost.

Bring it up to that furnished room I got across the street from Blaine's place. In the meanwhile I'll be

prowling around to get the lay of the land before I do any gate crashing."

"You're free, white and so forth," countered Howard, "but you're a damn fool. You know how Louisiana law favors a house owner. Blaine can blast the pants off you and say he was running an intruder out of the shack, and that'll be the last of it—and you. But I'll get the camera. Be seeing you."

"All right, Red."

Clinton phoned Alita again, but she was still out. Then he slipped down a side street and into the narrow alley that skirted the inner courtyard of the two-century-old building that Blaine had bought.

Before scaling the wall, he tried the gate, and was surprised to find it unlocked. Clinton was an amateur and forgot to look a gift horse in the mouth. It struck him as odd, but not especially significant. That is, not until later. And neither did Clinton note the patrolman who, emerging from the Embarcadero Club, just across the street, paused to peer down the alley.

Clinton was reviewing the layout of the house: its two wings and front formed a U-shaped figure that inclosed the moorish patio he had entered from the rear. Much of the house was large enough for the Creole families of two centuries past, plus a swarm of slaves and servants, and much of it therefore was now vacant. By working his way up to the second floor gallery above the arcade, Clinton could get into the front and literally catch Blaine red-handed. Clinton after listening a moment for sounds that might filter from the second floor, turned to

leave and meet Red Howard when he arrived with the Graflex.

HE HEARD a woman's voice, then a muffled scream. He frowned perplexedly, ducked to the shadow of the arcade, and cocked an ear. Something was wrong. The masculine voice that he heard was surprised, then threatening; and though muffled by doors and distance, Clinton was certain that two men were coming to points. The feminine voice cropped up again, only to be silenced by a brusque command. . . .

"By God, there must be two men, unless Blaine's talking to himself."

Clinton was now too engrossed to note that the rear entrance to the patio was opening. Blaine was generous at Christmas, and the patrolman on the beat undertook to protect him from annoyance; and Officer Harrigan, stepping out of Club Embarcadero, had been wondering. You can't fool those burly, red-faced cops with twenty years of service. They can distinguish a bona fide visitor from a prowler as far as they can see him.

And thus the old colloquy gained another listener. Clinton, however, was not visible from the gate; but before Officer Harrigan could investigate, both Clinton and the patrolman were startled by an inarticulate and wrathful outcry. It was cut short by the staccato rattle of a small caliber pistol. *B-r-r-r-rip!* Just like that—pouring it home until the weapon was empty. Clinton froze against the sheltering pillar. To Harrigan's professional ear those sounds meant murder.

"Faith and be Jaysus, I mighta

known that scut didn't belong here—" He bounded up stairs that led to the second floor gallery. A woman screamed. She was trying to form words, but terror was at her throat.

Clinton, despite his chance to leave, stood listening. He had never been so close to violent death, and he was rooted by horrified fascination.

"All right, sister!" barked Harrigan from above as he kicked a door open, "What'd you pop him for—stand fast, or—"

A strangled cry told Clinton that Harrigan's beefy hand had jerked the woman to a halt. Then Clinton clutched the pillar for support. His blood frosted in his veins.

"But I didn't kill him!" was the hysterical outcry. "I didn't—I just—"

The voice was unmistakably Alita Blaine's. Horror clutched at Clinton's throat. She was now a self-made widow. They would not hang her; but she was too lovely to escape the headlines. She'd never be the same when she emerged from it.

Clinton was thinking fast. He knew that the crackle of the small caliber weapon would not have been heard on noisy Royal Street, where square-wheeled street cars clanked over pretzel-shaped rails. And the patrolman on the beat would not recognize Alita Blaine.

That terrible instant had burned him to the heart, and his pleasant face became a desperate mask pierced by narrowed, hard blue eyes. His hand closed on the heavy brass sprinkling-nozzle of the gardener's hose; and then like a stalking panther he slipped swiftly up the stairs.

He heard Alita's incoherent protestations.

"Thank God she's not given him her name!" Clinton gasped as he reached the gallery. He heard the patrolman take down the receiver, flip the dial once—

CLINTON was standing at the threshold of tragedy. Alita, paper white, wide-eyed, and ready to collapse, had a handcuff on one slender wrist. Harrigan, his bulk jammed into a boudoir chair, was hunched up to the phone. And Hudson Blaine, his heavy body a welter of blood, lay where he had dropped, a grotesquely sprawled heap. Near him was a .25 Colt automatic with an ivory grip. A single, split-instant glance photographed it on Clinton's brain; and then as Harrigan cleared his throat, Clinton lunged, smashing home with the glittering weapon.

Harrigan toppled out of his chair, groaned once, and lay twitching.

"Oh God, Don, you've killed him!" Alita's voice was a gasping whisper; but a new, strange light burned in her hazel eyes, and the color returned to her cheeks as she wondered at the savagery of the pleasant young fellow who had vainly loved her for several unhappy years. Then she saw him replace the receiver, and understood. Without a word he took her arm, fairly jerked her down the stairs, and into the patio.

"Cop's not dead," muttered Clinton. "Cap broke the blow. Can't kill an Irishman. Oughtn't to hit him. But I went crazy, seeing you—"

Her hand closed on his arm, and Clinton knew that Alita was awakening to things she had never suspected.

He hurried her to the further end of the alley.

"Hide your wrist," he whispered. "And act natural."

He thrust a key ring into her hand.

"My apartment. Six twenty-eight Saint Anne. Get the hell out of sight—"

"Oh, Don, don't leave me—"

"Beat it. Got to head off Howard before—" And Clinton was on his way. Glancing over his shoulder, he saw Alita hurrying down Bourbon Street, her trim figure alternately lost in gloom, and emblazoned by the mellow glow of the recently installed Eighteenth Century electroliers. No one but a close acquaintance meeting her face to face could ever certainly identify her by that providentially soft light. And Alita was strictly "uptown"; the Bohemian *Vieux Carré* to her was as far off as China.

"The cop didn't recognize her," muttered Clinton as he hoofed briskly up Royal Street, "but he might describe her."

He caught Red Howard at the entrance of the rooming house that faced the late Hudson Blaine's playground. You find anything set next to anything else in the *Vieux Carré*. Howard's Graflex was slung from his shoulder. His eyes narrowed as he saw that Clinton was wearing a new face, and not from watching a middle-aged man with a brunette beauty.

But before he could comment, a siren screamed.

Clinton relaxed and sighed. Officer Harrigan was not dead. And that was proved the next instant when they heard his profane, crack-

ling brogue shaking the tiles of Blaine's palace.

"For the love of Pete, Don, what'd you do that for?" demanded Howard.

"I didn't kill him!" blurted Clinton, recoiling. Howard's face changed. He had suspected no more than a hasty exit, and Blaine adorned with a pair of rapidly closing eyes.

"You didn't kill him," said Howard. "Then who—"

He stopped short, seeing Clinton's sudden pallor.

"Don't tell me a thing, Don," said Howard quickly. "Did anyone recognize you—was there anyone—"

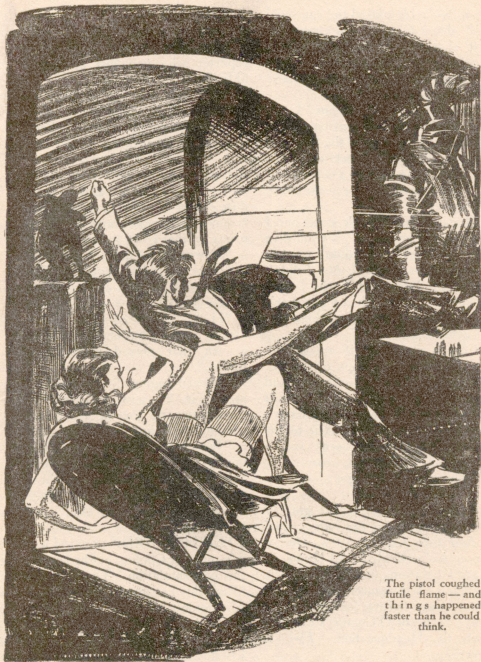
"Hell, no!"

Howard seized Clinton's arm. "I'm taking pictures. You're a news—reporter. My press card will do it. No chance of your running out—that'll hang it on you. Suck in your guts, boy! I'm your alibi—five minutes error will do it—and your going in may pull you clear."

Clinton followed. The paving bil-
lowed beneath his feet, but he was unnaturally calm. He plucked a cigar from Howard's pocket and struck light. His hand scarcely trembled.

THEY followed the police in through the Royal Street entrance. Howard was a popular pest, and after the usual growls, the homicide squad decided to put up with him and his companion. Howard waited for a clear block for his camera. As his eyes roved about the spacious room, he kept up a running fire of comment to assure Clinton that one finally gets used to seeing lead-riddled corpses.

"Sure, an' she'd just dropped her



The pistol coughed
futile flame — and
things happened
faster than he could
think.

honeymoon pistol and I nailed her as she was checkin' out," said Harrigan to lean, hatched-faced Sergeant O'Connor. "What did she look like?

Why, she looked like she'd just got her man—be Jaysus, Sergeant, didn't I tell you I'd barely got a look at her when someone sapped me across the

nut wit'—” He patted the egg-sized knob above his ear, and continued, “wit’ that nozzle. And now will ye be askin’ me what he looked like—”

“How do you know it was a man? Maybe she—”

“Nuts!” flared Harrigan “I had the bracelets on her, having caught her dead to rights, and the woman’s not born that could knock me off my feet even if she used an axe!”

“How come you were in the court, Harrigan?”

“I was across the side street and I saw a young squirt in a gray suit dive down the alley like he didn’t want to be seen. I investigated. No, I didn’t get a clear look—that’s why I went in, but he’d faded when I got there. And before I could search the court, the pistol cracked off.”

Clinton wondered if anyone noticed him lick his dry lips, or saw the sweat crop out on his forehead. And then he forgot all about himself when he saw Sergeant O’Connor’s unpleasantly sharp eyes shift to the pistol. The sergeant sank to his knees, stared a moment, arose.

“That woman that got away from you,” said the sergeant “was Alita Blaine—Blaine’s wife. It’s got her name engraved on the ivory grip.”

And then Clinton knew what it was to feel sick. He heard Howard’s sharp inhalation, and felt his clutching hand. It reassured him, but the room swam before his eyes as he heard Sergeant O’Connor’s crisp report to Headquarters. *Fini la guerre!*

The sergeant broke into the work of the police photographer and fingerprint man, silently eyed the exhibits, and surveyed the room with his merciless eyes.

“Some jane was here with Blaine,” the sergeant at last said.

“It wasn’t his wife!” guffawed the reporter who had just broken in. “Hi, Red!”

“And that seems to be why she killed him,” continued the sergeant. “Only, something’s screwy. There’s a man’s fingerprint on that phone, and it’s neither Harrigan’s nor Blaine’s. And the open door of that wall safe looks odd. Duval, see if dust marks show something’s been removed. Barton, how about the prints on that ivory pistol grip?”

“A woman’s—small hand,” said the expert. “And not the same woman that planted her mudhooks on the vanity.”

“Hell,” chuckled a reporter, “you’ll have a job rounding up all the women that played around with Blaine.”

Howard popped a flashbulb, racked in his lens, and jerked a thumb toward the door. Clinton tried not to follow too hastily.

“Jeez, boy, this is rotten,” he complained as they crossed Royal Street. “Who’d ever think she’d kill that old goat? But anyhow, she’s a widow—you’re a lucky guy?”

RED HOWARD’S practical mind puzzled Clinton, but he accepted the congratulation. Then he said, “Red, this has got to be cleared up. Alita didn’t kill him. The jane he was with did—”

“Uhuh. Borrowed Alita’s pistol. Listen, son, they do that in the movies. But I bet you didn’t know Alita had a gun like that.”

“I didn’t. Or I’d have picked it up myself.”

“Then how would dark eyes with

the million dollar legs know?" countered Howard.

"That," was Clinton's even reply, "is what I'm going after. You newspaper fellows have a morgue, or something, don't you? I want to see things. Fix me up."

Having studied her lovely face with binoculars, Clinton gave a good description.

"And she's proud of her legs. You can tell by the way she fed Blaine an eyeful. And she makes an odd, affected gesture with her left hand. Like that—"

His imitation was ludicrous, but it registered.

"Let's go," said Howard. "I got a hunch. And that open safe is crying at me, only I can't quite make it, yet."

An hour later, Clinton was back on the trail. Million-Dollar-Legs—Sirène Latour—had been identified, not in the morgue, but in a private collection of snappy poses cherished by one of Howard's friends. She had finally abandoned modelling for enterprises where her perfect equipment brought much heavier gate receipts. Sirène lived at the Montalban Court, on Toulouse Street.

Thus far as nearly as Howard had been able to determine from inside pressroom gossip, the police were not looking for Clinton. Gray suits were too common in New Orleans, and his fingerprints were not at Headquarters. The peril lay in the chance that the Homicide Bureau might learn that Sirène Latour had been with Blaine before he was killed; and that would make her apartment far from a good place for Clinton.

He passed Toulouse and turned

down to Saint Anne. He wanted to see Alita, and he needed her story; but the former was much the most important.

Clinton's eyes widened as he snapped on the lights and saw that Alita had slipped out of her dress and into his lounge robe.

"You're gorgeous, Alita," he said, taking courage from the smiling hazel eyes. Her amorous, clinging warmth, and the perfumed exhalation of her body dizzied him. Then he remembered the dead man who had lain grotesquely in his own blood. They both shuddered. He drew her to his knee, and as she snuggled her *châtain* curls against his shoulder, he noted the bruise that marred her cheek. He stroked her hair, and wondered what had struck her head.

"That was my pistol," she said. "I went up there to kill him."

"God!" muttered Clinton, and his caressing hand suddenly closed on her soft flesh until she winced. "Then—good God, Alita—let's get out of here—in my car—you can curl up in the rumble—"

He poured the words in jerky spurts. Alita's smile was an intoxicating revelation.

"I knew you'd stick. I saw myself tied up to him forever, and I couldn't stand it. So I went up there. But I didn't kill him, Don."

He believed her, and sighed from his ankles.

"I HAD my pistol out of my hand bag. I was waiting. For that woman to leave. By the side door they *all* use. She was beginning to dress. Then I heard something stir behind me. I started—turned—I

couldn't see his face. He snatched my wrist. Struck me—here. I fell in a heap. Crashed against the moulding. Everything went black. I heard voices. His—Hudson's—hers—and then nothing—until I picked myself up. It couldn't have been over a minute. Then I saw Hudson, dead. As he would have been if someone hadn't taken my pistol. I must have screamed. And then I ran into the policeman who was charging up the stairs."

She slid from Clinton's knee as he jerked to his feet, and jammed his hat down to his ears.

"I begin to get the drift of this," he said as his intent frown relaxed. "Sirène Latour—that's the girl—and someone else left while you were out cold. One of them killed him. Only, I can't tell the police. They'd never believe us. But I'm seeing Latour. Now."

"Oh—Don, don't go. You'll get tangled in this. Hiding me this way is bad enough—"

"Hell," growled Clinton, "I guess I shouldn't hide you. Wait till I find Latour."

His eyes were wrathful, and his kiss was hasty. It was not until he reached the corner of Royal Street that it occurred to him that he had passed up the last chance he'd have in years—if the police found Alita.

Sirène Latour was in. And as he ascended the stairs, Clinton told himself that she could not afford to be away. Flight would be damning. Her connection with Blaine could not be secret. He was surprised to find that she regarded him with interest rather than forced calm.

"I'm Clinton, of the *Telegram*," he announced.

Her red wanton lips smiled, and so did her magnificent, imperious dark eyes.

"You mean," she said in a soft voice that would do things to any man's heart, "that you're Mrs. Blaine's boy friend. Hudson often spoke of you."

That sunk Clinton. He felt too foolish to resent the casual, friendly laugh.

"Come in," Sirène invited, "and tell me about yourself."

She led the way through a living room, and into a boudoir. She had nothing that was an utter novelty to Clinton, but the light from the bedroom beyond did wonders to the chiffon negligée that caressed her faultless figure and clung to the million-dollar-legs which he was certain had lured Hudson Blaine to his death. She sank back among the cushions of a *chaise longue*, and smiled as Clinton's treacherous eyes were dazzled by her silk-clad fortune. . . .

"You're not so stupid," Sirène murmured as she snapped on the radio. And before she could continue, the instrument crackled to life. The police call nailed Clinton. They were looking for Alita. Sirène flicked the switch, and then resumed, "Don't be foolish enough to try to hang anything on me. I'd have been an idiot to kill Hudson. He was awfully good to me. And besides, I didn't know him long enough for a quarrel. Better save your energy to getting Alita out of a jam, when they find her."

She stretched her splendid body in the faintest suggestion of a yawn. She was a gleaming, sleek line of silk and ivory from her chin to her blue *lamé* mules; and her lips and dark

eyes were friendly. Clinton forced himself to look at her eyes.

"Who was the man that came up there?" demanded Clinton.

As Alita fired, he struck aside the man's weapon and drove home with his right.



SIRENE'S eyes flickered. For a moment Clinton knew that he had scored. Then she shrugged, and he wondered.

"You might tell me a few things," she murmured. "You're all worried. I don't blame you. So am I . . . maybe more than I show . . . let's be comfortable and talk awhile. . . ." Her voice trembled perceptibly as she added, "I don't know who I can trust. But you look—well, regular."

Clinton had loved Alita Blaine for years; but Clinton was human, and that was more than enough, even if he had not been using Zeiss binoculars. His inquiry about that unknown man had shaken Sirene. Clinton

needed information. Sirène was troubled, and she might talk . . . later.

The last few hours had been a succession of dazes. This was but another. He ignored the drink she poured. As his eyes wandered about the spacious room, he noted the pattern of the heavy damask drapes that masked French windows which opened on the balcony overhanging Toulouse Street. His legs seemed detached from his body, and he wondered if he could walk to the silken curves that invited him.

Her lips moved, but soundlessly. Things had gone beyond speech. Her breast quivered—but her embracing arms did not enclose him, and her amorous body suddenly became tense. Clinton did not hear the door swing open, but he felt a firm hand clutch his shoulder as something hard and cold jammed against the small of his back. Passion fled as Clinton recognized the muzzle of a pistol, and heard someone snarl, "Too bad, Mac. The fun's over. We're going places."

Police—that was Clinton's first thought. They had followed him; but he knew otherwise when Sirène was not alarmed; her slow smile was regretful and her dark eyes dropped just for an instant before she said, "Sorry, Don. But it's you or us. She couldn't crack our story, alone. But you—"

"Shut up!" growled the voice behind Clinton. "Get those drape cords and tie him—"

"But you can't, Phil—it's dangerous," began Sirène.

"Nuts!" snapped Phil. "Car's in the parking court. No one'll see me dump him in. We can make it to the lake. Take that dough out of the

dresser. Just in case we can't come back. Lucky I grabbed her pistol. Who'd thought that old buzzard'd reach for a gun along with his roll—"

The pistol muzzle bored into Clinton's back. He knew from Sirène's pallor that she had not foreseen a one way ride for him. Her accomplice had planned while she had been trying to side-track him. Clinton's lips were dry, and though he was suddenly chilled to the core, he was wet with perspiration. A glimpse in the vanity mirror told him that the narrow-eyed, sleek man behind the gun would blast him at the first move. Phil preferred to stage the execution elsewhere; but with the thick walls of the *Vieux Carré*, and the noises of Royal Street, just around the corner, a single shot would be unnoticed. He dared not risk a move—there was still a chance of escape along the road. Sirène looked sick. She was a scavenger, not a deliberate killer, and something in her eyes—

"Gag him first," directed Phil. "Adhesive tape. In the bathroom. Hurry, for the love of Pete! Hurry! Steady, fellow! One yap and you take it without prayer!"

SIRENE was returning from the bathroom. Good God . . . just for one second's wavering of that pistol. And then Clinton saw the French window swing softly in from the balcony. His heart stopped. Sirène choked a cry of dismay. Phil started—and Clinton flung himself aside.

Brief as that instant was, it sufficed to throw him clear of the pistol blast. Flame seared his side. Phil whirled

as Sirène screamed; but before he could jerk his gun back into line, Clinton struck aside the weapon and drove home with his right.

Then things happened faster than Clinton could register. Phil's pistol coughed futile flame; but it was another weapon that rattled like a riveting hammer. Phil's pistol dropped from his hand and he collapsed, throwing Clinton off balance.

"Oh, good God—I!" screamed a familiar voice. "Don—Oh—did I hit you—"

Alita, wide-eyed, white-faced, stood in the French window. The pistol in her hand still fumed. She had fired as Phil whirled to follow Clinton, and had riddled Phil's back. He lay twitching, and coughing a red froth on the Chinese rug.

"How the blazes, Alita—no, you didn't hit me—"

Then a police whistle shrilled. The open window had released the screams and firing. Heavy feet pounded up the stairs, and then a pistol butt hammered at the door. Clinton admitted Officer Harrigan.

"Holy Mother!" he roared, recognizing Alita. "Again?"

"Get his statement!" snapped Clinton.

"Don't bother. He's checked out," interposed Sirène in a weary voice. She was right. She continued, "It was the old badger game. They all fall for it. But Blaine pulled the shakedown money from his safe. I didn't like the look in his eye. I slipped out the side door and didn't see what happened; but I heard a gun emptied—just like Phil got his

—he said Blaine pulled a gun from the dresser. So Phil used the one he grabbed out of Mrs. Blaine's hand—and made it. He took Hudson's gun and left hers. That's it, on the floor."

Then Alita explained her end of it, and both stories were repeated when the Homicide Squad arrived. Sergeant O'Connor was convinced. Clinton remembered something, and stepped to Sirène's vanity. He dug out a packet of bills, still encircled by a paper band and bearing the teller's date stamp.

"From the Fourth National. Hudson's bank," said Alita. "He following the races, and was drawing to plunge."

Sergeant O'Connor jerked his thumb toward the door.

"Mrs. Blaine, you'd better go home and pull yourself together. Popping this bird here is a clear case of self-defense."

CLINTON followed Alita to the stairs.

"How the devil—" he began as they reached the curbing, "did you happen to—"

Alita laughed shakily and explained, "I tried to warn you, but you wouldn't listen. So I phoned Red Howard and had him bring me a pistol. And getting from the balcony of the vacant apartment to Sirène Latour's balcony was easy."

Clinton was afraid to wonder how long Alita had been watching, and how much she had seen. So he finally said, "Let's go over to Gretna. Right now. The J. P. works all night—"

Whispering Joe was a wrong guy, and even if I had liked him I wouldn't have wanted any part of his proposition. But if I didn't take the case, somebody else would—and frame his wife



BECAUSE it was Whispering Joe's proposition, I knew it was wrong. Anything that had anything to do with Joe just had to be wrong, if his past record meant a thing. He'd done time for everything between armed robbery on a highway to forgery, and now that he was in the gambling business he didn't smell any better. He was nothing I wanted any part of in any way.

"Look, Joe," I said. "I don't mix up in any off-color stuff. Even if I liked you, I wouldn't mix up in any off-color stuff. And I don't like you or the racket you're in."

"It's nothing about the spot," he told me, without blinking his pale eyes. "I'll handle that. It's about the old lady . . . and don't tell me you don't handle divorce cases."

"I pick and choose those I do, Joe. And I don't frame any of 'em."

She opened her bag and took out a shiny little revolver. She said: "Leave that phone alone."

HE WHISPERED OF MURDER

By JOHN RYAN

He started counting out money, grudgingly. He got up to seventy-five dollars and stopped there, and I said: "It'll be more than that," almost automatically.

He added twenty-five and said: "It's my old lady, Ryan. She's stepping out and I want proof of it. I know it now, see, but I can't prove it. And what burns me, is the louse she's stepping out with."

"Who?"

"Sammy Doyle."

"What's wrong with Doyle?"

Joe looked hurt and said: "He



took me for damn near four hundred in the spot, night before last. It ain't bad enough that he takes me for dough, but he spends the dough on my old lady, after he bites *me* for it. It ain't fair."

I said it was certainly adding insult to injury and he asked: "D'ya want to check into it for me? Or don't you?"

I said it sounded like straight business and that I'd get in touch with him as soon as I had something to report. I didn't know his wife and so that didn't mean a thing to me . . . and I looked ahead to spending Whispering Joe's money. Outside of taking it away from him with a gun, I knew it was the only chance I'd ever have at getting any of it.

Joe was that tight.

HE WAS called that because some unsatisfied customer had, at some time, taken a poke at him and caught him in the Adam's apple. It had done things to it . . . so much so that Joe could only talk in a husky whisper. His place was on Boyce Avenue and was fairly nice . . . though I always had a notion his wheels were rigged and that some of his dice didn't have any sevens on them. His blackjack game was crooked for a cinch but I didn't think anything about that because nine out of ten of them are at any place.

Sammy Doyle was different people. He'd come out of some small town a couple of years before then and he'd gone through the town like shot through a goose. He was a young, good looking guy, and he was smart enough to pick his shots. He wouldn't go into anything unless he knew how he was going to come out

. . . and he usually came out at the big end of the horn.

He'd beaten the races; he didn't go on hunches but picked 'em by riders and past performance. He beat the card games; he went in when there were bigger suckers sitting there than he was, and he won some off the suckers while the house was winning less from him. He'd go against bad dice by taking the house side against the man with the dice, and the dice, of course, worked with him.

And he was a nice guy, right along with his cuteness. I liked him . . . and I'd been up to the Albemarle Apartments, where he lived.

So that's where I headed, figuring to tell him about Whispering Joe being wise to him giving the little woman a play . . . and figuring, to be honest, that Sammy might possibly cross the palm with silver for the tip. It was double crossing Joe, in a way, but I never figured just how you could cross a double crosser and get hurt.

I went upstairs without bothering to phone, and had my hand raised knocking on the door when the gal spoke from behind me. I hadn't even noticed her riding up with me . . . but that was only because I was planning on the best way to break the news to Sammy.

She said: "Oh-h! Why, you're . . . you're calling on my brother."

"You mean Sammy?" I asked.

"Why, yes."

I said I didn't know Sammy had a sister and knocked again . . . and we didn't hear a thing. By and by she said:

"I think maybe I could get the operator elevator to let us in. I

wrote Sammy that I was on the way . . . it seems funny that he didn't meet me. Or at least wait for me at home."

I figured Sammy was probably in a game some place that was too good to leave, but didn't say so. I didn't know what story he'd left at home . . . and I thought it might be a shock to the sister if she found he was a booster. Even if the dough he was making out of it would cushion the shock. We rang for the car and propositioned the boy . . . and after she'd showed him a letter from Sammy which identified her, we got a key.

And then we went in and found Mrs. Whispering Joe . . . though we weren't sure who she was for a little while.

THERE was no question about her being dead, even if there was about just who she was. She was just awfully dead, in fact. She'd just about been cut to pieces and the knife that had done the cutting was still sticking upright in her throat. A cheap kitchen knife it was, with about an eight-inch blade and wooden handle . . . and the handle was clean of prints. Even at a distance I could see where it had been wiped carefully.

The woman had nine stabs wounds in her breast, and her face was slashed horribly. Beside the one the knife was in, there were three other chops in her neck. There were two more in her stomach. Her hair was loose and had straggled down over her face . . . and was matted with blood. Her mouth was open and her tongue showed marks where she'd closed on it with her

teeth while dying. She was in the middle of the front room floor, in a pool of blood . . . and she was just about the ugliest, nastiest thing I'd yet seen.

I said to Sammy's sister: "Keep back! Don't look!"

She said: "E-c-e-e-eeh!" and started to faint and when I caught her, even with what was on the floor, I was surprised to notice how solid she felt in my arms. She'd looked slim and slight, but she didn't feel at all that way. I took her in Sammy's bedroom and put her down on the bed, and she opened her eyes and looked up at me and said:

"Sammy! He murdered her!"

"Murdered who?"

"It's Mrs. Williamson," she said. "Sammy wrote me about her. She's been making trouble for him, he said."

That checked. Whispering Joe's real name was Joseph Williamson, or it read like that in police records.

I went in the bathroom, to see if I could find anything like ammonia, to make Sammy's sister feel any better . . . and couldn't. Then I went in the kitchenette and compromised with a bottle of bourbon . . . and made myself feel better too. While she was drinking hers, I looked around and found clothes and a handbag with the name of Mona Williamson on a driver's license and about forty dollars besides some silver.

I said: "That's about right. What did Sammy say about this wench?"

We were still in the bedroom because neither of us wanted to look at what was on the floor in the main room. The phone was on a stand

table by the bed, and I headed for it as the girl said:

"Just that she was making him trouble. Following him around and like that." Then she saw me pick up the phone and asked:

"What are you going to do?"

"Call the cops," I told her.

"Without waiting for Sammy?"

I said: "Look! The first thing to do is to tell the cops about this. That's the law."

Then the girl opened her bag and took out a shiny little revolver, that looked as though it should have been sold in some dime store, and said:

"Leave the phone alone."

I let the phone alone. I was beginning to get interested in this girl. She looked like the original farmer's daughter . . . but she acted half-way smart.

SAMMY came in before we were through talking. We heard his key in the lock and heard him say, while he was still in the hall:

"Hey! Mary!"

Mary was the sister's name . . . she'd told me that. Along with some other things. I was sitting there watching her, waiting for a chance to get my hands on her little gun before she hurt somebody with it . . . and Sammy coming in was a welcome diversion.

We heard him stop and choke when he saw Mona Williamson's body on the front room floor. Then he cried out, almost frantically:

"Mary!"

Mary said: "In here, Sammy."

He came in and saw us and the gun . . . and looked as if he didn't believe it. He said: "Hello, Johnny!" to me, and to Mary:

"Why did you do it?"

"Do what?"

"Kill Mona. Tell me, kid! I'll stick by you."

"I didn't do it."

Sammy looked at me . . . and then at the gun. He thought Mary had caught me in the act and was holding me for the cops—that was written all over his face.

I said: "Not me, either, Sammy. Mary and I came in together."

"We thought you did it, Sammy," Mary told him.

"What are you doing here?"

"I came after Dorothy. I was just telling Mr. Ryan."

"What about Dorothy?"

I could see it was going to take some time for him to get the story straight . . . and in the meantime I thought the cops should be told about Mona Williamson. There was going to be enough hell raised anyway, about the delay in reporting to them.

I said: "Your little sister is in town and in trouble. Mary's here to get her out of it. That's all. Now tell me. Have you got an out for the last three or four hours?"

"Sure. I was in a game, over to the Palace."

"Can you prove it?"

"Why, sure."

I said: "Then we call the cops. If the medical examiner gets here right soon, he can tell definitely that Mrs. Williamson was killed while you were at the Palace, and that'll let you out."

"I see that," Sammy said.

Then Mary said: "But it won't let us out, Mr. Ryan. You see when we first saw her I couldn't help but look at her. And I could see she'd been dead only a very few minutes. The

I made the mistake of
thinking a city slicker
could move right in—and
that's where I got my face
slapped.



police will blame us for the murder . . . she couldn't have been dead for over five minutes before we came in."

"How d'ya figure?" I asked.

She said: "Blood was still oozing out from some of the cuts. I've read enough to know that means she hadn't been dead very long."

Which was a point I'd missed entirely.

I hadn't stopped downstairs at the desk so I was in a better spot than the girl was. She'd asked the elevator operator for a key to her brother's apartment . . . and he'd remember that. I said to Sammy:

"Look! You'd better phone whoever was in that game at the Palace, and make sure they're with you on the time you were in it and the time you left. That will clear you, if you get the cops and the M. E. right soon. And I'll take your sister and keep her out of the way until we get some answers to this mess."

SHE said stubbornly: "I can't hide. I've got to find Dorothy. I just know something's wrong with her."

"How?" asked Sammy.

"She was supposed to be staying here with you, but I know she wasn't. She didn't say anything about you . . . and you didn't say anything about her. And you know what a nut she's always been."

Sammy said to me: "The kid sister is goofy about show business. We'll find her dancing in some louse spot . . . but it will take a little time to do it. Where are you going to take Mary?"

I said I didn't know . . . and we decided my apartment would be safe enough, finally. As we left, Sammy was calling up his card partners and

making sure they'd remember the time he'd spent with them . . . and I was thinking how lucky it was that he'd been in a game that had run all night and most of the following day. It was a break . . . and that gave me another thought. It was a break that somebody hadn't planned on . . . the somebody that had knocked off Mona Williamson, figuring Sammy would take the blame.

MARY DOYLE made my place look very homelike. Sort of a modern farm house with a modern farmer's daughter looking after it . . . and all with strict home atmosphere. She had those rosy cheeks that don't come out of jars and bottles . . . and the kind of way that went along with them. Not coy, exactly, but sort of believing.

So I made the mistake of thinking she was dumb and that a city slicker could move right in. That was when I got my face slapped . . . and country gals can put power behind their punches I found out.

She said: "Now look! I'm staying here until this business is straightened out. But I don't want any foolishness until then."

I said I hadn't meant any foolishness. That I'd been right up on my toes and pitching. I tried to pass it off as a joke and she didn't have any . . . but it finally simmered down to where I had her admitting she might play around . . . oh, in a nice way, of course . . . after little sister Dorothy was found. It wasn't a promise but it was the best I could get . . . and that was a lot because I wasn't anticipating any trouble in locating Dorothy. I knew too many people for that to bother much, I thought.

And I was right . . . the kid was dancing at a joint clear on the edge of town, and a joint it was. I was actually sorry I'd taken Mary along with me, though I'd figured that would make gathering in the kid a certainty. We went in and sat down and had a couple of drinks, while waiting for the floor show . . . and then a M. C. came out and told two dirty jokes and introduced the chorus.

Mary pointed out Dorothy to me . . . and I saw why she'd been hired; she was as country as Mary, but didn't look as smart. Just a push-over for the pack of wolves that play those little clubs . . . and that's what the club owners hire 'em for lots of times.

We had a little argument getting her away. The club owner decided she could stay if she wanted to stay . . . and she certainly wanted to stay. She'd realized life's ambition . . . she was dancing in a honest to goodness chorus and why worry about what a joint it was? Then I talked to the owner a little, on the side, and he fired the kid so fast it made her dizzy. All I did was explain to him how I'd make a particular point of getting him in bad with the cops, and that I'd go beyond the boys he was squaring in his own precinct. It meant some of the vice squad boys would hang around and keep an eye on things . . . and that meant profits would go out the window, so he saw reason.

We took the kid and her clothes home with us . . . and that gave me my own apartment with two women in it instead of none. It certainly looked as if I wasn't doing things just halfway.

SAMMY called me the next morning . . . and I'd put in one awful night. The kid sister had cried almost all night, over losing her spot in the sun . . . and I'd had to listen to it. When she'd finally gone to sleep . . . I'll always think it was from plain exhaustion . . . I tried to get better acquainted with Mary, and found I was going to have a long row to hoe unless I found a way to soften her up that I hadn't tried . . . and I'd tried all that I could think of at the time. We were sitting up, waiting for kid sister to quiet down . . . and having a drink or two to pass the time away.

That's another thing that fooled me . . . Mary turned out to have hollow legs; she put 'em down, one after another, and didn't show a sign of 'em outside of getting a little red in the face.

What was bothering her then, she said, was the jam Sammy was in . . . and I found he was in a jam for sure when he phoned.

His alibi hadn't stood up . . . that was all. He'd been in a game with a couple of guys that were a little wrong, according to law, and the two guys wouldn't back up his story. They swung enough weight to take the rest of the boys along with them, so the story was there was no game at all. Sammy had no place he could say he'd been during the time Mona Williamson had been killed . . . because he'd already given the cops the real story and they wouldn't take another.

I didn't blame 'em on that . . . it looked like he was just making guesses, trying to find a place they'd believe he'd been . . . and they had a cast iron case against him, the way it stood.

He'd been playing around with the woman, or she'd been playing around after him, and she'd been married. That's a made to order situation as far as cops are concerned.

If there's trouble the lover's the patsy . . . and when the trouble happens in his apartment, after he's been trying to break away from the gal . . . and it was easy enough to prove he'd been doing just that . . . why it's a cinch case for any jury.

So they had Sammy down at the jail and he'd had a bad time even getting to a phone to call me. As far as they were concerned, he was just the same as hung . . . and why do favors for a dead man.

I said: "I'll look around, Sammy. I'll see what I can do. D'ya want me to get you a lawyer?"

HE SAID he didn't see what good a lawyer could do him . . . that about the only thing that could save him was a confession from the man who'd really killed Mona Williamson. That was clear thinking and showed he hadn't gone panicky . . . but I said:

"I'll get a lawyer down to you, kid. And I'll look around."

Then I told him I'd found his kid sister, by asking questions from show people I knew and by getting a couple of them that owed me favors to use the phone and ask questions about her from people *they* knew. He acted like I'd done a real job of detecting, which was a laugh . . . and asked where the kid sister was. I told him at my place, and he held the phone without saying anything while he thought it over.

Then he said: "Look, Johnny! No playing around with the kid. It's

different with Mary . . . she's three times seven. But lay off the kid, will you?"

"I don't get that, Sam," I said. "Why tell me a thing like that? You know *me*."

"That's why I said it," he said. "She's just a kid."

The kid sister was eighteen and of age, and if I was any judge, was considerably more than a child. I'd seen that much the night before, when she was in what was supposed to be a chorus costume. But I didn't argue with him about it. . . . I figured he had enough on his mind.

I TOLD the girls what I had in mind and who was concerned . . . and started out. I had a damned good notion who'd killed Mona Williamson and none in the world about how I could prove it . . . and I told them that, which was a mistake. The less you tell women the better . . . the less they know the less they've got to throw back at you and the less chance they have to get you in trouble. It's first principles, but I ignored it and spilled what I was going to try . . . and, of course, regretted it the minute I did it, because it didn't work out the way I hoped.

It was all too easy. Joe Williamson was too easy to see, in the first place. He lived over his club, and he was up and awake and seeing people, when by all rights he should have been in retirement. And he was alone, without the usual hoodlums he kept around, and that showed he felt safe. He opened the door for me and said:

"Why, Ryan! I was going down to see you today."

"Why?" I asked.

He looked surprised and said, in his husky little whisper: "Why, to get back some of that good dough I paid you. What in hell *would* I be seeing you for? You don't think I'm going to pay you to check on the old lady now, do you? I know where she is . . . she's laid out on a slab, waiting for a ride to the cemetery. So I want my dough back . . . or at least most of it."

"You'll play hell getting it."

He gave me an argument . . . and it was a phony. It was just talk. He knew he had no chance of getting a dime back and knew I knew it. It was an act, supposed to show me how hard-boiled he was. He didn't pretend to be anything but glad his wife was dead, because that would have been *too* raw . . . but his hard-boiled business didn't go over any better.

I said: "Look, Joe. Sammy Doyle's in the can, charged with that. We both know he didn't do it."

"I don't know that," Joe said. "And the cops don't. Not that I blame the guy . . . that woman was poison to any man. I told the cops that when they told me about finding her murdered."

"Little helper," I said, going to the door. "You knew that would make it that much tougher for Sammy."

"Well, you know what I think about Sammy, too."

I said: "You know what I think about you, too," and left. I didn't want to stick around and listen to him because I knew I'd smack him and pay a fine for it. And that I'd probably have to dodge some of his pet thugs for a month afterward . . . because he'd be a cinch to send them after me to beat me up in return.

It didn't seem worth it . . . and it wouldn't help Sammy a bit. As near as I could see, about the only thing that would help Sammy was a miracle.

So I went back to the apartment and found Mary there . . . and didn't worry about where the kid sister was at all. I was worrying too much about Sammy and what would happen to him unless I got an idea right fast.

THE lawyer I'd picked for Sammy came up about four that afternoon, and he didn't act any happier about the mess than we were. After he'd told us he couldn't see any hope for Sammy, at all, he looked around and asked:

"But isn't there another sister? Mr. Doyle told me, I thought, that there was a younger girl?"

That brought Dorothy back to mind. Neither Mary or I said anything, but I know I began to think, and the minute the lawyer left, I found that Mary had the same thought.

"She's gone back after that fool job," Mary said. "I could break her little neck . . . making trouble for us at a time like this. Just when we've got everything else to worry about."

I said: "Don't worry . . . I'll get her. I'll take that joint apart, if she's back there after what I told them."

This time I left Mary home . . . figuring there'd be trouble. There wasn't . . . but it was only because she wasn't there. The owner told me with tears in his eyes that she wasn't there and wouldn't be there.

That left just one other spot to look . . . and if I'd remembered at

first I'd have gone there without bothering her cheap ex-job. I should have had brains enough to figure what a dopey romantic kid would do, but I gave her a little credit for brains. And it put me in a spot for fair . . . because if she was where I thought she was, she'd gone there willingly and she was of age.

It was then I figured I might as well go whole hog or none and add house-breaking to assault, and possibly assault with intent to kill. I knew I'd have some such charge earned before I was through with it. Instead of going in the front I parked a block away and went around to the back of the place. Whispering Joe's place, of course. It had to be the right spot, figuring what a goofy girl would be trying to do to clear her brother from a faked-up charge.

I got there just at dusk, which was a break. It was too early for even the help to be on deck . . . and it was dark enough for me to go up the fire-escape at the back of the place without too much notice from the neighbors. I could see a light above me; Joe's living quarters were on the third floor and he wouldn't bother with pulling window blinds at a distance above the ground like that . . . and I was hoping they'd be in the lighted room. I went up to it, swearing at myself for being chump enough to tell the fool kid about thinking Joe was the one who'd put the frame on her brother and about him being a chump for women, but when I got to the top of the 'scape and peeked in I forgot to be mad.

It was too funny. It was like something out of an old-time movie. The kid sister was putting on what she thought was a vamp act and it

was going over, if I was any judge. And to make sure that I was a judge, I squatted on that fire-escape for at least ten minutes and watched the show.

SHE'D found some clothes that had belonged to Joe's wife, that was certain. Joe's wife had been the long slinky type and the kid was short and chubby, but she was wearing the outfit just the same. It was a black arrangement with a lot of lace and it was trimmed with monkey-fur. It covered her if she was careful with it, but she was carefully not being careful.

She'd adopted a sort of swishy walk that went with the clothes . . . a sort of slow motion hula action that was wonderful. She'd left on her tiny garments under the negligee. . . . I knew it because I kept seeing them. And if I was seeing them through the window, you can imagine what Whispering Joe was seeing from inside.

He was sitting back in a big chair like a Sultan on his throne, and the kid was waiting on him like she was an up and coming slave girl. She was really putting it on. She'd bring him a drink and he'd insist on her drinking part of it before he'd touch it. She wasn't drunk but she was teetering on the edge of it. He was drunker than a coon.

He was so drunk that she still could fend him off when he'd try to pull her down on his lap . . . but he certainly did raise hell with that negligee every time he tried! For that matter, the kid was in no danger . . . he was way past the dangerous stage.

It was like that when I opened the

I took out my gun and said:
"That's right, kid. Scream
loud—good and loud, so the
neighbors can hear."



window and stepped in and said: "So-o-o-o! So I've got you."

The kid was over by the table where the liquor was and I managed to wink at her. She didn't know what the play was going to be but she didn't spoil it, I'll say that.

I said to Joe: "So it's this, is it? I look all over town for her and I find her here."

He was talking with his hands. He said: "She came up here of her own accord, Riley. I swear it. I didn't know you knew her."

"Know her, hell!" I said. "We're brother and sister."

I took a chance on that, but I thought the girl must have had more sense than to tell him she was Sammy Doyle's sister.

He said again: "I didn't know. Honest, Riley, I didn't know."

I said to the girl: "Okay, kid! Get on your clothes. I want you dressed. In your own clothes."

I waited and watched Whispering Joe while the girl went in the other room and changed. He was getting soberer by the minute, but he had too much of a load to yet think straight when she finally came out.

I said to her: "Come over here," and when she did, I reached up and ripped her dress clear down to her waist and she gave a little scream and jerked away.

I took out my gun and said: "That's right, kid! Now scream good! As loud as you can. So the neighbors will be sure to hear you."

"My God, no!" said Joe. "What are you going to do?"

I said: "I'm going to do two jobs in one, you dope. I'm going to shoot you in the middle, when the kid screams. You've been looking over

at the drawer, over in the table, so I know there's a gun in it. I'm going to put it handy. When the cops come, I'm going to tell 'em I broke in while you were attacking the kid . . . and that you confessed to killing your wife while you were dying.

"That's why I'm going to shoot you in the belly, you heel. I want it to look good. I want the cops to realize it took you time to die, and that it hurt enough to make you tell the truth while you were going out."

"That's m-murder," he said. "Cold-blooded murder."

"Sure. Like you killed your wife. You knew I'd be on it . . . you knew I'd be up to Sammy's apartment. Sooner or later, you knew it. You knew that if I found the body I'd tell the cops and tell them you'd hired me to prove Sammy had been playing around with her. You knew that if he found her first he'd call them, but that I'd have to testify you'd hired me to prove her cheating with him. You knew that with her being found up there he'd go up for it. You knew the cops would figure you were trying to get rid of her in a legal way, instead of the way you did. That was murder and so will this be . . . and what in hell's the difference."

THEN I turned to the kid and said: "Get ready, kid. Make it loud. Make it about three of them and then I'll let go."

"You'll hang for it," said Joe. He was having more trouble making himself heard even than usual. His whisper was clear down his throat and he was white and shaking.

I said: "They won't hang me for protecting my sister against a murderer. And don't forget, you'll have

confessed to killing your wife before the cops get here. Or they'll think you have, which adds up the same. Start it now, kid."

I don't know whether the kid thought I was going through with it or not and I'll *never* know. The thing is she screamed and made a job of it. It scared me and I was expecting it . . . and what it did to Whispering Joe was plenty. I raised my gun and lined it on him, and he went down on his knees off the chair and husked out:

"God, no! I'll talk."

He talked. Right then. He was putting his name on what he told us by the time the neighbors were knocking on the door and asking what was wrong, and at that I didn't blame him. If I'd gone through with it and shot him the frame would have stood up. He'd have died right then and for sure . . . and he always had a chance of beating the law and getting a life sentence on his wife killing rap alone. He could prove she'd tramped around on him, and a good lawyer had a chance of proving temporary insanity for him and at least saving his life, even if he wouldn't go clear.

It was really a pleasure turning him over to the cops.

I HAD trouble with the kid on the way home. Just as we stopped in front of my apartment house she tried to crawl on my lap, saying:

"You were wonderful, Mr. Ryan. I'm not going back home, like Mary

says for me to do. I'm going to stay here in town. I'm going to get a job in a show . . . a better show than the one I was in . . . and you'll come and see me. I know you will."

"I said: "No, no. You're going back home."

"I won't," she told me.

I figured the only thing to do was give her home truths, even if I wasn't sure whether they were truth or not. After all, Sammy was a friend.

"I said: "Look, kid! It's out. If it wasn't for your sister, I might not say it, but it wouldn't work out. I couldn't cheat on Mary with her own sister, now could I?"

She said: "I don't see why not."

"I couldn't do it," I said, trying to look as noble as I could.

The dashlight was on and I watched her look me over to see if I meant what I'd said. She finally said:

"If it doesn't bother me, it should not bother you. But let it go, Johnny. I'll go home for now but pretty soon I'll come back. And then we'll see what happens."

We left it at that and I went in to see if I could persuade Mary to stick around a little while . . . and I didn't find it too hard to do. And the kid is now starting to write letters to me; but she's sending them to the office. I'm really beginning to think she meant what she said about coming back and running competition with Mary, so help me I do.

And the funny part is that I'm sort of looking ahead to it.



TOP DOG

By MAX NEILSON



THOR JENSEN knew he was drunk, even before he opened his eyes. He rolled over with a groan, blindly, and fell off the bed. Landing on his knees, he stayed there, like a huge dog, trying to shake the dull roaring out of his head.

Presently he maneuvered to his feet, staggered to the window, and curled his fingers over the sill while he tried to focus puffy eyes. He must have been out a long time; all day. For the sun had dropped low enough to push the massed shadow of the orchard trees almost to the farm house.

The wedding! That was it—he must have passed out right after the ceremony and that had been early this morning, just at dawn.

Thor remembered more now: they had started out late last night; he and his brother Lafe and the girl called Linda, who was their housekeeper; it had been a wild hayride party, starting when a dozen young rowdies from the surrounding hill farms had driven up in a hayrack with four horses and yelled invitations.

There had been singing and plenty of white corn liquor, and brooding jealousy as he had watched Lafe making love to Linda . . . hugging her close . . . kissing her while she squirmed and giggled. Kissing her as he, Thor, had wanted to do—

and had done plenty times before, during the weeks since Linda had come to keep house for them in answer to their ad in the Springfield paper.

AND finally, last night, he must have somehow taken Linda away from Lafe again, for the next thing he remembered—after jumbled memories of warm kisses and the feel of her flaxen hair against his face—was the wedding. The whole dozen and more of them, liquored high, crowded into the parlor of the country justice. He and Linda, side by side—he remembered that; and Lafe had been there, too, on the other side of Linda, eaten by jealousy.

Then a hurried ritual of which he recalled nothing now except the words “. . . I pronounce you man and wife . . .” Right after that, Linda had been shoved into his arms by—it must have been Lafe—with the jeering question, “Hey, stupid, ain’t you gonna kiss the bride?”

The bride! Thor licked his swollen lips now as he thought of Linda. She was his at last, after all these weeks during which she had flirted recklessly and impartially with both him and Lafe . . . after she had learned that they owned the neat little farm jointly. The minx! Thor’s lip curled; she wouldn’t know how her cheapness was going to play into his hand!

He had waited a long time for the chance to kill his brother—and now he could win a girl at the same time! But when it came to the killing, there were some details that stumped him

All he had wanted was to make Linda his own wife and then throw her and Lafe together; just give them a chance.

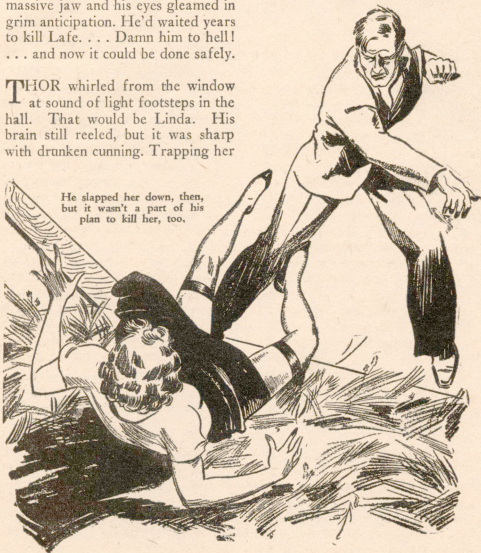
He fingered the stubble on his massive jaw and his eyes gleamed in grim anticipation. He'd waited years to kill Lafe. . . . Damn him to hell! . . . and now it could be done safely.

THOR whirled from the window at sound of light footsteps in the hall. That would be Linda. His brain still reeled, but it was sharp with drunken cunning. Trapping her

with Lafe would come soon enough; that would be easy.

But now—now she was his wife, and he couldn't overlook that!

He managed to cross the room



He slapped her down, then, but it wasn't a part of his plan to kill her, too.

without lurching. He called softly, "Linda." And when the steps halted outside the door, he reached out and pulled her into the room.

She tried to jerk away. "You're still crazy drunk, Thor. Leave me alone."

"Not on your life, baby." Thor leered into her face as he held her. Linda was small, helpless against the strength of his great bulk. His knotty, calloused hands were scratchy on her smooth forearms.

Then he clasped her in his arms, and still she fought to escape.

"Whassa' matter, honey—don't you like me?" Thor grinned at her helplessness.

"I don't!" She tried to twist away. "I—hate you."

"Like hell! I can tell you more'n once when you liked me—plenty."

"I don't like you when you're drunk," she said sullenly.

Thor stared at her. More than ever now, he liked his idea; ever since Linda had come here, it had itched in his mind. It was so simple it was perfect; but it required his marrying her. Then all he had to do was to throw her and Lafe together at the right time, wait for the inevitable result—and burst in and shoot Lafe.

Thor was thinking of a recent murder case in the county in which the defendant had murdered his wife's lover, and then had been swiftly acquitted under the "unwritten law."

BUT first, Linda had certain obligations to Thor . . . whether she would or not! He crushed her in his thick-thewed arms, mashed his mouth over hers, and laughed as she

shrank from his alcoholic breath and writhed to escape.

"Please, Thor," Linda begged. "Please! Lafe will see us!"

But her breath was sweet against his mouth, and Thor jeered, "What then, sweetheart? Bashful? Ah, well . . . little doves are always afraid. But what if Lafe does see us?" A jealous dart stung him. "Where is Lafe?"

"He—he just went over to the back pasture after the Holstein. She got through the fence."

"Then—what the hell?" Thor shrugged his disappointment; far from being shy, he had hoped to pique his brother's jealousy by making his mastery over Linda as blatant as possible.

Suddenly Linda broke free and staggered away from him; but Thor shot out a rough hand and dragged her back. Again he kissed her forcefully.

"Listen, honey; better be nice," he advised gruffly. "That's the best way."

The best, Linda pondered—and the easiest. . . . She threw her arms abruptly about his thick neck and kissed.

IT STUNNED Thor—and even angered him—when his brother and Linda played right into his hands so quickly. Angered him because it bruised his vanity that they carried on so openly. He had expected to spy on them, to catch them unawares, when they thought he was away from the house.

But when, later that evening, Thor again hauled himself out of his stupor, almost completely sober this time, he came upon Linda in

Lafe's arms, in the dining room. They broke apart, but made no apology. Lafe only leered at him, and Linda had the grace, or the embarrassment, to blush.

"Don't mind me," Thor invited sarcastically. "I just live here."

"Well, there's no help for that." Lafe showed powerful white teeth that he would have liked to sink in his brother's throat. "Not jealous, are you?"

Remembering this afternoon, Linda went white, looking from one man to the other. But Thor only growled and strode up the stairs.

It was really amazing—the frankness with which they made love openly. But this moment had not been the one to get tough; not if he wanted to be tougher. But he could see that he was going to have an early chance—possibly this very night—to put his plan into execution.

Thor went to his room and examined the old thirty-thirty army rifle which they had bought last year for sixteen dollars. He took a cartridge from the dresser drawer and slipped it into the breech and closed the bolt.

Killing Lafe with the rifle somehow seemed to bespeak less cold-blooded planning than doing it with a pistol. They used the rifle for rabbit hunting and it would be logical to have it handy and loaded. A man in suddenly aroused jealous anger could get it quickly before he had time to cool off.

Thor descended the stairs and, without looking into the living room, called out his intention of saddling the horse and riding into town. There was no answer.

From the barn Thor doubled back and stole again to the house. He

peeped in the front window. They hadn't waited long!

Already, Linda was in Lafe's arms. Thor swore softly. This was what he had wanted to discover; yet it burned him up to see this girl in his brother's arms. Well, that would be his defense!

But he had to wait a little longer . . . biting his lip he held himself motionless by the window, while Lafe slid a hand under the girl's knees, lifted her high, cradled her tightly in his arms—and all this almost under Thor's outraged eyes!

Outside the window, for it was open a little, Thor's teeth ground; he was afraid they would hear his stertorous breathing. What a pleasure it was going to be to kill Lafe!

LAFE and Linda were so enveloped in each other that he was sure they would pay no attention to the slight sound he might make entering. Thor tiptoed in the front door and up the stairs.

When he stole down again the thirty-thirty was cocked and at the ready in his eager hands.

"Break, you damn' cheaters!" He yelled harshly.

Lafe twisted away from the girl and ordered angrily, "Put that gun down, you crazy fool!"

Thor grinned wolfishly. He dropped the gun; but first he brought it up and sighted as carefully as if Lafe were a cottontail rabbit perched on the edge of a prairie dog hole. He shot him between the eyes.

Lafe fell straight forward with his eyes open and Linda screamed twice before he hit the floor.

Thor sprang forward and slapped her with a whip-snap of his big

hand. It wasn't part of his plan to kill her too. He'd need her as a witness—of course she'd confess under pressure! And he also anticipated pleasure in the submissive role she would have to play afterward. Then *he* would be top dog.

So he merely stepped over his brother's body and socked her.

AT FIRST the jury was undecided; should Thor Jensen end up in an asylum or on the gallows? There wasn't much doubt that he was crazy, in a way. Shooting his brother and attacking his brother's bride of a day! Crazy-jealous because *he* hadn't won her, that must have been it.

And Thor? Out in the courtroom, without looking at Linda, he was still wagging his great head stupidly and resigning himself. Of course he had learned almost at once

that his neatly laid plot had one important defect: that is, Linda wasn't his wife at all; she was Lafe's—or rather, Lafe's widow.

And Thor kept trying to remember that wedding; it seemed simple now, the way he'd remembered things as he had wished them to be rather than as they were! Of course he had stood next to Linda, while his brother stood on the other side and married her! Naturally, he had heard the justice say, "I pronounce you man and wife."

And of course Lafe had asked him jeeringly if he was going to kiss the bride! What was more natural?

Nothing, Thor decided; except for the jury to agree that he had merely committed a jealousy conceived murder for which he deserved hanging.

And that was just what the jury did decide. . . .

"MURDER ENOUGH"

by Robert A. Garron



coming

next month!

KILLING IS EASY

By RALPH CARLE



SCREAM — a shrill, high-pitched scream that cut through the air like a steel-cold stiletto—broke the stillness of the old Defoe mansion, bouncing off the wainscotted oak walls and echoing along the surface of towering, frescoed ceilings.

Like a frozen image of a man, Lumpy Benson, sometime pick-pocket and sneak thief extraordinary, paused in his examination of the room an inviting open window had led him to. He held his breath while the fearsome reverberations of the scream melted into the darkness.

To all appearances, the ancient, rambling house was empty. From the rear flower garden, Lumpy had counted nineteen dark windows, all with shades drawn. That is, all but the ground floor window that had gained him admittance.

He listened attentively for any

sound or sign of habitation. All was silent. Could it be his ears were playing tricks with him? Had it been a real scream or just the ghost of one?

He took one step forward, only to stop dead in his tracks as another scream, louder and more charged with deathly fear, rang through the ancient place. This time, however, there was more than a frenzied outcry. Lumpy could hear a girl protesting hysterically.

"Stop it! Please! Stop it!"

Attuned to detecting the direction from which sound emanates, Lumpy set his lynx eyes on the massive door separating the room he was in from another part of the house. There was no question in Lumpy's mind that a girl was in trouble in the next room. The only question in Lumpy's mind was whether it was any of his damned business. After all, burglary was one thing and chivalry was an-

For years they'd chased him as a pick-pocket but could never get the goods on him. Now they had him on a murder charge—all because he tried to play Sir Launcelot to a damsel in distress!

other! Supposing he did bust in? What would it get him except maybe a pinch and a little stretch up the river?

He turned to beat a hasty retreat through the open window. But agonized sobs stopped him. Treading softly, with all the padded agility of a panther, Lumpy approached the door and listened.

A scuffle was going on inside. Something creaked and then the pleading voice of a girl dominated the mixture of sounds.

"Please! Stop it! Oh, God!"

LUMPHY set his jaw hard. The little respect for womanhood he possessed, welled up in his chest and burned with an all-consuming fire. Lumpy had never read the story of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table, and as he reached out to turn the knob of the door, he knew he was making a mistake, but with true Sir Launcelot courage, pushed the door in and stepped across the threshold.

It was just as dark in one room as it was in the other, but Lumpy could make out the dim outlines of an overstuffed chair. He saw a flash of white and a towering lump of black. He heard a girl crying and a man's hoarse, panting exhalations. Lumpy's hand went into his right jacket pocket and came out with a midget flashlight. A motion of his thumb and a silver beacon of light gapped the ten feet of intervening darkness and caught a man and a girl in a solid halo of daylight brilliance.

Leaning over the girl, both hands gripping her, was a tall, heavy-set man, slightly gray at the temples.

His eyes, as they turned into the full force of the light, were filled with anger. Lumpy could see the pin-points of his contracted pupils, bits of glittering onyx in a pale blue sea.

Lumpy hardly expected the man's next move. He stood erect, shot his hand behind him, and the next moment brought it forth again, a sinister, blunt-nosed automatic cradled in his palm.

CLICK! The room went dark as Lumpy snapped the light off; side-stepped agilely and threw his slim body in the direction of the attacker. He brought his knee up hard as his hands clutched the other's arms, but missed the groin by inches. Lumpy's one thought was to pin his adversary's gun hand down and squeeze the ugly instrument of death from his fingers. He tried to trip him, but it was no go. The man was too light on his feet despite his weight.

For long, gasping moments they grappled in the dark. Once, Lumpy felt the cold pressure of the gun barrel on his neck. It sent icy shivers up and down his spine. With almost super-human effort he backed the man across the room, buried his fist in a face he could not see and throwing all precaution to the winds, reached for the hand that held the gun. His fingers tightened about the wrist and applied pressure.

The hand shot up, almost breaking Lumpy's grip. The blood vessels of his neck were swollen and hot. He could feel his sweating fingers slipping . . . slipping . . .

Suddenly, like a bolt out of the blue, a light flashed and a gun boomed. Lumpy lurched, carrying



Lumpy could see the anger in the man's eyes, the pinpoints of his contracted pupils.

his antagonist with him. The light went out. The sting of burnt powder irritated Lumpy's nostrils. He strengthened his grip on the man's wrist, but the flesh felt weak and inert beneath his fingers. Dumfounded, he stood there, as the bulky body slid through his arms and dropped like a sack of flour to the floor.

There was moisture on the fingers of Lumpy's right hand. Hot, wet, sticky moisture. He rubbed it between his thumb and forefinger. It felt like . . . like . . . ! It was *blood! BLOOD!* Warm, oily human blood! All over his fingers . . . underneath his nails. Slowly coagulating, growing hard! He took one step to the door, groaned softly as

something cracked his skull, and slumped to the floor. All the rest was darkness.

LUMPY opened his eyes to look into the face of Detective Joe King. A thousand devils with a thousand steel hammers were beating a rapid tattoo on his aching head, but he smiled wanly and lifted one limp hand in greeting.

"Hello, Flatfoot!"

King nodded. "A little bit out of your line of work, isn't it, Lumpy?" he queried softly.

Lumpy grinned. "Got me where you want me now, huh, Big Boy?"

"Dead to rights, Lumpy. Birds like you ought to stick to their own trades. Bumping people off is no job for a pickpocket."

"I ain't lifted a leather in six months, King, honest to God I ain't," Lumpy protested. "That's how come you ain't seen me around."

"That's not how come, Lumpy. I'm on the Homicide Squad; have been for almost a year. Funny to chase you from subway to subway for two years trying to get you with the goods and then get called in on a killing and find you in the shadow of the hot seat. Funny world, huh, Lumpy?"

Lumpy pushed himself erect. "Killing? Hot seat?" His eyes bulged. "What am I gettin', King, the works?"

The detective smiled sardonically. "No, Lumpy, we won't need the works this time." He pointed to a rug-covered heap on the floor. "That's all we'll need, Lumpy. George C. Defoe with a bullet through his back, cold as a potato."

Lumpy's eyes followed King's

pointing finger. His lower jaw drooped and he stared at the inert thing on the floor with horror written all over his face.

"You—you don't think I wiped—wiped him out, King, do you?" he pleaded.

"Think? I'm sure of it, Lumpy. So sure, that you and I'll take a trot right down to Headquarters. Ready?"

Lumpy licked his dry lips. "Wait a minute," he gasped. "You ain't railroadin' me into any killings. I didn't kill that guy and I can prove it. I came in the window to frisk the joint and—"

King nodded wearily. "Yes, I know, Lumpy. And Defoe busted in on your little tea party so you gave it to him." He picked up a handkerchief, covered the automatic and held it out for Lumpy to see. "Since when do you pack a gat, Lumpy?"

"It ain't my gat," belligerently. "It's —it's his," pointing to the body on the floor. "Listen, King, you can't hop me up now 'cause I won't let you. I got a head like a balloon and it feels like it's full of dynamite. Someone hit me a crack on the conk and then the lights went out."

"But before they went out, Lumpy, before Defoe hit you with the candlestick"— He motioned to a wrought iron candlestick on the floor—"you shot him, didn't you? Sure you did! He lifted the candlestick to lay you out and you blazed away, didn't you? But he had strength enough to smack you one before he keeled over, didn't he? Come on, Lumpy, give it to me straight!"

Lumpy shook his head like a toy

poodle. He couldn't remember when it had ever ached like it ached now.

"I'll give it to you straight, King," he said, "but where's the dame?"

"Dame? What dame?"

LUMPY snarled. "Come on, you can't frame me. Where's the dame? There was a dame in this room when I barged in. She was sprawled out on this chair with everything but her vaccination showing."

He nodded his head towards the corpse. "That guy was getting rough with her. She screamed twice and hollered for him to stop. I was in the other room, gettin' ready to clean the place out when I heard her yodel. I came in, flashed my light and there they was. I grappled with him after he pulled a rod. I had my fingers on his wrist squeezin' like hell, when suddenly a light goes on and I hear a shot and this guy—this guy buckles under and drops. Then I see blood on my hands and—"

"Was the light on?"

"Naw, it went out after the shot."

"Then how did you see blood on your hands in the dark?"

Lumpy sneered. "Aw, nuts. I didn't see it, I felt it. I took a step to the door when *bam*, down comes a load of bricks on my conk and I'm out. That's givin' it to you straight, King."

The detective's lips narrowed. Lumpy and he were no strangers to each other. For two long years while attached to the Pickpocket Squad, he had tried unsuccessfully to pin the wily petty thief with the goods, but Lumpy always managed to slip through unscathed. Finding him with

all evidence against him at the scene of a murder was almost ironic.

"Sounds swell, Lumpy," he said, "but save it for the story-telling hour up at the Big House. The boys love yarns like that. But it won't go here, Lumpy. I got an eye witness to the murder! I got the guy who *saw you* croak Defoe!"

Lumpy clenched his hands. "Like hell you have!" he spat.

King walked to the door. "Hennesey!" he called.

A tall, broad-shouldered individual with red hair walked into the room, closing the door behind him.

"Tell this mug what you saw, Hennesey," King directed.

A freckled hand came out and pointed at Lumpy. "I saw him come in the window. He walked into this room. He killed Mr. Defoe!"

Lumpy was on his feet in a flash. "You stinkin' liar!" he screamed, hurtling himself at the red face confronting him and beating it with his fists. King stepped into the breach and pulled them apart. Lumpy was panting and his eyes shot fire. "I'll kill the son-of-a—!" he snarled.

THE detective drew him aside. "Hold on, Lumpy, take it easy," he cautioned. "Hennesey didn't say he *saw you* kill Defoe. That's what he thinks. He says he followed you in the window. You came in the window, didn't you?"

"Yeah, what of it?"

King shrugged. "Nothing, except that Hennesey's story sounds plenty all right to me." He produced a pair of handcuffs. "Anything else you've got to say you can spill at Headquarters. Come on."

"Take it easy, King, I ain't

through yet, "Lumpy retorted. "Where's that dame?"

"What dame?"

"The dame that screamed. She knows I didn't bump this guy."

"There were only two women in the house, Lumpy. Mrs. Defoe and the maid."

"Lemme lamp 'em. I'll pick her out."

King went to the door. "Mrs. Defoe, please," he called.

Lumpy shook his head negatively as a tall, dark woman entered the room. She was garbed in a flimsy negligee, not intended to hide any of the curves of her sensual, voluptuous figure. She had been crying and the black mascara of her eyelashes rolled down her cheeks.

"That ain't the dame," Lumpy said, comparing Aileen Defoe's mature development to the young-breasted charm of the girl he had seen being forcibly assaulted. "This dame was smaller."

King turned to Mrs. Defoe. "You say you heard no shots, Mrs. Defoe?" he questioned. "No noise at all?"

Aileen Defoe squared her shoulders.

"I—I told you I was in the shower at the time," she replied. "Naturally, I wouldn't hear anything with the water running."

King looked at her lips. They were full and bee-stung and red. They reminded him of blood.

"Did you know Mr. Defoe was in the house?"

"No, I didn't. He was staying at the Club for the summer."

"And you were here alone?"

"No. I just came in for the day. I'm living at our summer bungalow

at Bradley. I had to do a little shopping so—"

The detective nodded. "That's quite all right. By the way, who told you your precious husband had been killed?"

SHE turned to Hennesey. "Mr. Hennesey did."

"All right, Mrs. Defoe, that'll be all."

Lumpy followed the gentle swing of her slightly plump hips as she walked from the room. "Well, bring the other dame in," he said.

Hennesey scowled. "I can't see what all this nonsense is for, Mr. King," he muttered. "This fellow's a known criminal and it's an open and shut case."

Lumpy saw red. "Why, you damned—!" he screamed, leaping for the detective. Again King stepped between them.

"Lay off, Lumpy," he warned, "or I'll run you down now. I agree with Hennesey. The whole thing is a farce. You're guilty as hell!" He walked to the door. "But I'll satisfy you anyway. Send the maid in, please," he called.

Lumpy's accusing finger leveled itself immediately as a short, auburn-tressed girl entered the room. She was dressed in a regulation serving uniform; gray and white. Despite the severity of the garment, the graceful curves of her body announced their presence without camouflage. Her eyes were almost midnight blue, the irises flecked with brown.

"That's the dame!" Lumpy shouted. "She was—"

King held up a restraining hand. "Wait a minute, Lumpy." He ad-

dressed the girl. "Your name is Marion Dunkirk?"

Her cupid's-bow lips shaped the answer. It came softly. "Yes."

"Where were you when Mr. De-foe was murdered?"

"In my room on the third floor."

"She's a liar!" Lumpy screamed. "She was on this chair! The dead bloke was pawin' all over her!"

The maid's cheeks went crimson. She drew in her breath sharply. "I was in my room," she repeated quietly.

King watched the girl's lips quiver. They were nice lips, firm and well-shaped. Her body was nice, too. Young and fresh.

"You heard no shot, Miss Dunkirk?" he continued.

"None at all. I came down when I heard Mr. Hennesey shout."

"All right, that'll be all." The detective turned to Lumpy. "Okay, mug, let's go."

Lumpy chewed at his upper lip.

LUMPY gulped. The aspect of prison, conviction, and death by electrocution was not appealing, but more than that did he resent the manner in which he was being framed.

"All right, King, I'll go," he said, "but I got one favor to ask."

"What is it?"

Lumpy thumbed in Hennesey's direction. "Get him out."

King nodded. "Okay."

When the redhead was gone, Lumpy waxed eloquent. "I admit you got me in a hole, King," he said, "but I think I can get out."

The detective nodded. "Yeah, you can get out of a one-inch iron pipe."

"I'm on the level this time, Cop-

per," Lumpy insisted. "Just be a sport and gimme a break and I'll give you the killer."

"I've got the killer, Lumpy."

The pickpocket shrugged. "Well, if that's how you feel, let's get goin'. I thought maybe you was white, but—"

Something in Lumpy's voice caught Joe King. It was an indefinable something, a little poignant twist that smacked of sincerity. He rubbed his chin.

"All right, Lumpy, what is it?"

Lumpy's eyes brightened. "You gonna play with me? You gonna gimme a break?"

King nodded. "Go ahead, Lumpy."

The pickpocket walked to the body an iridescent diamond against ing. "In the first place, that hole in his back was made with a big slug—probably a forty-four." He pointed to the gunmetal automatic on the table. "That's a thirty-two." He paused and looked about the room, searching the walls and ceilings. Suddenly his face beamed. "There!" he shouted, pointing to an almost invisible break in the wall wood. "You'll find the thirty-two bullet in that wall. When I grappled with the guy, his gun must have gone off, but not in him. He was shot with another rod."

King listened, his eyes focused on the little pool of blood at the dead man's side. It was red—bright red—like his wife's lips.

"Follow me, Copper?" Lumpy queried breathlessly.

The detective looked up. "Yes, go ahead."

"That's as far as I go now," Lumpy said. "The rest I gotta prove on my own."

King's brow wrinkled. "Your own? You mean you want me to let you go free?"

"Yes."

The detective smiled. "I admire your nerve, Lumpy, but—"

"All right, let's go. I didn't expect you'd—"

A strange hunch actuated the detective. "I'll gamble on you, Lumpy," he said slowly. "You get twenty-four hours of freedom. I'll expect you at Headquarters"—He looked at his wrist-watch—"at ten-thirty tomorrow night. Is it a promise?"

Lumpy's hand shot out. "Dead or alive, Copper! Just walk me through the room like you was taking me in. When we get a few blocks away I'll duck." He pulled the rug back over the dead man. "How soon'll they get this stiff out?"

"Any minute now. I called the coroner and the wagon."

"Swell." He held his hands out for the cuffs. "Come on, snap 'em on and let's go!"

IT WAS long after midnight when Lumpy stole carefully through the rear garden of the Defoe estate. He was smiling as he jimmied a lower floor window, slid it silently open and stepped into the same room he had started in hours back. This time, however, he was less cautious. If his guess was right, Hennessy wouldn't bother him on this trip. At least, not until the time was ripe. Joe King certainly had been white to play ball with him this way.

Hell, what was to stop him from taking it on the lam? Leaving the detective holding the bag? He dismissed the thought, palmed his flashlight and shot it about the room.

The curved stairway leading to the second floor loomed in front of him. He started up, one step at a time, slowly and carefully.

On the thickly carpeted upper landing he paused, held his breath and listened. Shivers of light came from beneath a closed door, breaking the darkness far down the hall. Lumpy crept toward it.

Down on his knees before the door, Lumpy peered through the huge, ancient keyhole, an *open sesame* to the interior of the room. An expression of surprise crossed his face. He was seeing something he had expected, and yet, the physical vision of it was amazing.

On a large day bed, her white clad body an iridescent diamond against an old rose covering, was Aileen Defoe! And she wasn't alone!

Lumpy shifted, trying to place his keyhole eye in a position where he could ascertain the identity of the woman's companion, but it was impossible. All he saw was a reaching hand.

The mystery was beginning to clear in Lumpy's mind. He could see it all now. A love triangle, a killing to remove the unwanted husband, and now, freedom for the woman.

He glued his eye to the keyhole again. The light went out! Lumpy stole back down the hall, searching for the stairs to the third floor.

Minutes later he was deciding which of the three doors was the right one. He was certain the maid had said her room was on the third floor. Stealthily he approached one door, turning the knob carefully. The door whimpered on its hinges. Lumpy cursed it mentally. He cradled his flashlight in both hands and

pushed the control button. Illumination seeped through his fingers, enough to show him he had picked right the first time. He could see a girl, fast asleep. One white arm was curled above her head.

LUMPY licked his lips, stepped inside the room and closed the door behind him. If she was a light sleeper the jig would be up before it started. His flash picked out a lamp on a low table next to the bed. In one step he was at the table, his fingers searching for the lamp switch. The next moment it clicked and the room was flooded with light.

The girl stirred as Lumpy sat down beside her. Her eyelids flickered. Lumpy held his hand out, palm down, in the event she decided to scream. Annoyed by the light, she twisted her head, opened her eyes and looked up into Lumpy's face.

Momentarily she was petrified. The blue of her eyes shone green with inarticulate fright.

"Don't make a sound," Lumpy commanded hoarsely, "or it'll go bad with you!" He reached out and enclosed her soft upper arms in his hands. "I'm a friend of yours, see, and I ain't gonna hurt you."

"I thought—I thought they took you away!" she gasped.

Lumpy grinned. "Yeah, but I bumped the flatfoot and scrambled. Nobody holds on to Lumpy Benson long." He slid his hands up and down her soft arms. "Know what I came back for, baby?" he questioned.

She shook her head. "N-n-no, I—I don't."

Lumpy leaned over. "First thing I came back for is to rub out anybody who saw me give Defoe the

works." He paused to let the warning sink in. "The second thing I came back for is you, cutie. Your name's Marion, isn't it?"

She nodded, lips quivering.

"You're a nice little gal, Marion," Lumpy complimented. "No wonder Defoe went for you big. I could go myself."

She tried to pull away, but Lumpy's grip on her other arm tightened. "Take it easy, baby," he advised. "Two guys are in the morgue on account of me and I wouldn't have no objections to have them joined by a lady, see? If you don't—" He smirked suggestively.

SHE lay still, her body shuddering. Lumpy's eyes burned strangely as he pointed to a blue mark on her right shoulder.

"Defoe did that, didn't he?" he shot. "Before I came in, huh?"

She trembled like an aspen leaf in the breeze. Lumpy could see the damp, inside surface of her lips as she panted.

"Come on, kid, spill it!" he directed. "You know damned well I came in and saved your hide. You saw me fight with Defoe. You know he pulled a gun. Stick with me and we'll go away together, huh? I could use a dame like you. If you stick here, they'll pin the killing on you." He squeezed her wrist until her face contorted with pain. "Who hit me with the candlestick?"

"Please!" she pleaded. "You're hurting me! I—I don't know! I don't know!"

Lumpy rose. "Oke by me, baby, but you're in for trouble now. King'll find your fingerprints on the candlestick. The blood on the candlestick

comes from my bean. He'll put two and two together and then—" He walked to the door. "But if it's all right with you it's all right with me." He flung the door open, wheeled suddenly and hands outstretched approached her again. "But just for safety sake, I think, I'll wipe you out," he muttered, moving taloned fingers ominously.

Marion sat up in bed, cringed against the wooden posts.

"No! No! NO!" she cried hysterically.

Lumpy moved forward. "You're through, babe," he whispered. "Say your prayers!"

She was speechless; petrified. Her face went greenish white as Lumpy's clutching fingers drew nearer.

"Go ahead," he urged. "scream! Yell your pretty head off! Scream like you did when Defoe was hanging over you! Scream!"

The suggestion was enough. An ear-splitting scream broke through the night. Lumpy halted. He leered like a maniac. Again she screamed, louder than the first time. Lumpy heard footsteps on the stairs. He ducked behind the door, body tensed. A man rushed into the room, slid to a stop. Lumpy stared in amazement.

"King!" he gasped.

Joe King spun on his heel, a service revolver leveled from his hip. "Stick 'em up!" he barked. "So you *were* doublecrossing me, you rat! Trying to rub out this girl because she knew something! I heard every word you said. You admitted you gave Defoe the works! You wanted this girl to run away with you!" His lips spread. "One move and I'll plug you!"

Lumpy shrugged. "So you didn't

trust me, did you, Copper? I should have known no flatfoot could take a chance. Well, call in the rest of the boys. Tell 'em they'll find Hennesey in Mrs. Defoe's room . . . dead!"

The maid started. "You—you killed him?" she gasped.

Lumpy nodded. "Sure, why not? Didn't he say I bumped Defoe?" He grinned. "Now you can tell Mister Wise Guy here what happened." He jerked his head in Joe King's direction. "It don't matter 'cause your boy-friend's dead. He was with Mrs. Defoe when I shot him!"

The girl's head slumped. Then her fingers clutched the bed clothes and she squared her shoulders. "Yes, I'll tell," she said.

Lumpy moved before the last word was out of her mouth, but he was a fraction of a second too late. A gun barked from the dark hall, the bullet whizzing over the maid's head and imbedding itself in the wall. The girl fainted.

King started for the hall but Lumpy was ahead of him. Down the stairs he flew, piling up in a heap on the second floor landing. He could see the dim outline of a figure crouching along the side of the wall. Flame spat from the middle of the outline and Lumpy heard the dull thud of soft-nosed lead in the wall behind his ear.

Suddenly he sprang up, charged. The figure ducked as Lumpy's outstretched hands brushed across its face. Lumpy slipped and fell. Something came down hard on top of him. He heard the crack of steel against his head. He fought to throw off the throbbing pain. The next thing he knew, King and Hennesey were bending over him.

"The woman!" Lumpy cried. "Get her! In her room!" He tried to rise, but the pain in his throbbing head made him faintly dizzy. He sank back.

THERE were millions of uniformed cops in the large downstairs parlor when Lumpy, his head swathed in bandages, opened his eyes and stirred restlessly on an over-stuffed couch. Joe King and a white-coated interne were standing beside the couch.

"The old bean can sure take it, huh, Copper?" Lumpy said ruefully. "Boy, what a shellacking I took in the last five hours."

The interne helped him sit erect. Across the room Hennesey, Mrs. Defoe and Marion Dunkirk, the maid, were watching him with white-faced fear.

"Now that we're all here," the detective began, "I'd like to clear up a few things." He looked at the maid. "Do you know who shot at you, Miss Dunkirk?"

The girl shook her head negatively. "No, I don't."

Lumpy studied the balls of his fingers. He rubbed his thumb and forefinger together, sniffed at them.

"Where did you find Mrs. Defoe, King?" he asked.

The detective turned. "In her room. Why?"

"I think she shot at the maid!"

Aileen Defoe paled. Beneath a flimsy wrapper, her body seemed to creep with gooseflesh.

Lumpy held up his fingers. "I chased whoever fired the shot down the stairs. I tried to catch the skunk but all I did was run my hand across its face. Something came off on my

fingers." He shrugged. "It feels and tastes like . . . like *lipstick!*"

A burly policeman restrained Mrs. Defoe, held her tight in a chair. Joe King's brow wrinkled. "Lipstick!" he repeated hollowly. He remembered his first impression of Aileen Defoe's incarnadined lips. The red lips and her dead husband's red blood.

"Did you shoot at Miss Dunkirk, Mrs. Defoe?" he questioned.

The woman slumped. "Yes," she said weakly.

"Why?"

"Her lips quivered. "Because—because I—I—"

Lumpy shouted a warning but nobody was fast enough to heed it. Hennesey was out of his chair, dashing up the steps before a cop could move. Somebody pulled a gun and fired but the shot went wild. A shock of red hair disappeared around the balustrade. Two uniformed men scrambled after it.

There was silence in the room, broken only by the pounding of feet on the upper stairs. The dull crack of a gun echoed through the house. Seconds later one of the cops thundered downstairs.

"He jumped!" he shouted. "Come on, Doc!"

The interne followed him out. No one spoke. When the interne returned, he nodded slowly in King's direction. "Dead," he said laconically. His head hit the concrete walk."

Marion Dunkirk moaned softly. Aileen Defoe's hands went to her face.

"All right, Miss Dunkirk, you can talk now," the detective said. "Hennesey is really dead this time."

She spoke slowly with a catch in her voice. "He—he promised to marry me," she said. "That's why I—I didn't tell." She pointed to Lumpy. "This—this man's story is true. Mr. Defoe was attacking me when he came in. They fought in the dark. Mr. Defoe had a gun. Suddenly someone put the lights on. I heard a shot. I saw a head. It had red hair on it. It was—it was Bill Hennesey, standing behind the portieres. The lights went out. I picked up the candlestick and hit this—this man over the head. I—I ran to my room."

King nodded. "Why did Hennesey kill your husband, Mrs. Defoe?" he asked, turning to the almost prostrate woman.

"He said—he said we'd go to France," she sobbed. "He told me he loved me. He was in my room when the maid screamed. He ran downstairs. When he came up, he said my—my husband was dead."

"Then you weren't taking a shower when the shot was fired?"

"No. He told me to say that."

"And why did you attempt to kill Miss Dunkirk?"

"He told me to do that. He was listening to the conversation in her room all the time. He thought—he thought this man"—pointing to Lumpy—"was going to kill her. When you went up and he heard what was happening he was afraid she would confess. He sent me up with his gun. He said to run down as soon as I fired. If anyone came after me he promised to kill them."

* Lumpy patted his bandaged head. "Not far from it," he interjected.

"I don't think I'll hold either of you women," the detective an-

nounced. "Evidently you were just pawns in the game. As for you, Lumpy, you can take your headache home anytime you feel like it and many thanks."

Lumpy grinned. "Can I take something else, Copper?"

"What?"

He jerked his head in the direction of Marion Dunkirk. "The little blonde?"

King grinned. "That's up to her, Lumpy."

Lumpy swung his feet off the couch. "Well, if you mugs'll clear out it'll be up to me, and Lumpy Benson never fails!"

The detective motioned to his men. "Come on, boys, this isn't homicide any more, it's love!" He paused at the door. "Say, by the way, Lumpy, there's one more thing. How the hell did you know that Hennesey was sweet on both these women?"

Lumpy winked. "Well I saw a couple of red hairs on the blonde's shoulder. Red hairs don't come out of anything but red heads, do they?"

"What about Mrs. Defoe?"

"That was a cinch. When I smacked Hennesey in the mouth after he said he saw me come in the window and knew I shot Defoe, I hurt my knuckles. Later, when I licked 'em off they tasted sweet and smelled from perfume. It was lipstick, see, and guys don't get lipstick unless they been kissin' a babe. Since blondie here didn't have any on there was only one other guess and I took it."

King smiled appreciatively. "Great figuring, Lumpy," he complimented.

"Nuts, Copper," was the retort.

*Dan Turner
Hollywood
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by ROBERT LESLIE
BELLEM

DEATH'S



ALSTEAD straightened his tie, and ran his hand down over his blue serge coat to be sure that his shoulder holster did not bulge; then he rang the bell in front of the apartment door and waited.

He was nervous and his heart beat furiously anxious. The memory of Jeffra's voice on the phone was in his mind. "I have some things to talk with you about." He couldn't forget for an instant the way she had said that, she, big Sam Gorman's daughter, the girl he had intended to marry. Her father had made her take this apartment by herself because of the dangerous nature of his profession.

The door opened and she was there. He saw her all in one glance and a pulse quickened in his throat. She stood firm and straight in a short white bolero jacket and a thin blue linen skirt.

He could see clearly that her legs were round and firm. The heels of her shoes were a blue that matched her skirt. She was slim, almost a baby . . . nineteen. Yet there was a budding, almost intangible maturity about her; the gentle swell

of her bosom, the supple curves of her hips. . . .

In the fraction of a second in which he had seen all this, his eyes had been coming up, so that now he saw her face, the hair that was gold across her shoulders, and her expression of anger, deep anger. . . .

"Come in, Hall," she said.

He stepped inside, his hat in his hand. He threw the hat to a chair and half turned. She was standing at the door, her back to it. He laughed, though nervously, and put his cigarette into an ash tray. He kneeled on the divan with his arms over the back of it so he faced her.

"Come on, kitten," he coaxed, "why all the—?"

"Why do you want to marry me?" she snapped, breaking in on him.

"Because I—well, isn't it obvious? I love you."

She laughed . . . harshly and bitterly. "Yes, it's obvious. For three months you've been working in the private detective agency my father has spent a lifetime in building up, and now you want to be half owner . . . you want to be partner."

He said: "Cut that. It's not true!"

"No?" Her thin eyebrows raised

He'd been framed, sent up the river for more years than he cared to think about. Now all he lived for was vengeance, though even in his bitterest moments he couldn't quite dismiss the girl from his mind

LOUDSPEAKER

By MAXWELL HALL



Sneering, he watched her being man-handled. "These babes who try to fool us. . . ." he said.

a fraction of an inch, and the unsteady rise and fall of her bosom was apparent as she found breathing more difficult.

"No," Halstead repeated, "and I'd like to know who gave you such a notion."

She moved away from the door, walking past him. He saw her clasp her hands and thought it was a gesture of nervousness. But when she sat down on the divan he discovered that she had pulled off the diamond ring he had given her. She threw it into his lap.

"It's all off . . . everything is off."

He laughed again. "Why . . . baby. Who's been—?"

"No one told me that. About you wanting half of dad's agency. I figured that out myself after discovering the rest about you."

"The rest?" he asked.

"Yes . . . That you play the game—the private cop game—rather recklessly. That you play both ends against the middle. That you take a case and collect from both client and victim. That you kill without thinking twice. That you take bribes and—"

"Sam seems to be satisfied with me," Hall cut in harshly. "Sam—your father, is satisfied!"

"Is he? Then you *do* admit—?"

"I don't admit anything except that what you say is nonsense!"

"Oh, no," she shook her head. "No. I have proof. I have the word of—"

"Of whom?"

"I can't tell you that," she whispered, "all I can say is that everything is off between us. Definitely!"

HE SAT there for a moment, stunned. Nor was it until this moment that he began to realize how much she meant to him. How much he had included her in the every day, every night, every hour scheme of things in his otherwise sorry life as ace investigator in the Sam Gorman

agency. Of course he was honest. He was as straight as any private cop came. But she had gotten this notion. Nothing could shake it. He was going to lose her. . . . No, he couldn't lose her. . . . He . . .

He moved suddenly to where she was sitting and took her chin in his hand and tilted back her head, pressed a searching kiss to the carmine of her soft lips. She did not move, yet she was cold. He kissed her hair, her face, the burning skin of her young face. She said:

"No, Hall. Don't. It's all—"

He pushed her back against the divan and held her helpless in his arms and kissed the hollow of her throat. He felt a sob pulling convulsively deep within himself, and his fingers seemed to tingle with a strange power that was in them. She struggled against him now, and as she drew up her knee, her dress dropped back, exposing the smoothly moulded shape of her right leg . . . then her left. She beat her fists against him, writhed furiously with her body, making a wreck of her dress . . .

Her legs were flailing desperately, she tried to tear her arms free, but he maneuvered to hold her, and to keep kissing her, for there was somehow something savage in the impending danger of his loss that brought anxiety and love to a mad climax so that he scarcely knew what he was doing.

"Baby," he breathed, "you're all wrong. . . . You know that you are wrong. . . . That you love me, and I love you. I don't know who has been talking about me but—"

"No. No, Hall. . . . Let me go. . . ."

She struggled even more, but his arms were like steel . . . inflexible, urgent and he kept whispering.

"Darling . . . you haven't forgotten all those hours. . . . When life was so wonderful, so sweet. . . . Surely you don't believe. . . ."

Suddenly all the tense resistance went out of her and she was limp in his embrace. Then her arms were about him, and she was kissing him, hugging him, as though she would never stop. . . . He heard her hard, jerky breathing . . . felt the quivering of her slim body. . . .

SHE slipped free of him, neatly, quickly. . . . He was scarcely aware of her doing it and afterward did not know how she had accomplished it. He just knew she was gone. And when he looked up, she was standing across the room smoothing her dress, with a cigarette between her lips, and she was saying:

"All right. . . . But that's the end, Hall. I don't want to see you any more. We are through."

He stumbled to his feet. "But—"

She held up her hand. "No. That was the finish. Can't a finish be graceful? Must we make a scene? I said we were through. That's all. I don't want to talk about it any more!"

He nodded, though dumbly, and he felt the room swirling around him. He was conscious of moving toward the door, his hat in his hand. . . . And then he was on the street walking. Walking. . . .

He went into the first bar he came to. He stood at the counter, said: "Rye . . . and soda."

Hours later his voice was thick, and there was fog before his eyes

and in his mind, and he was saying again, still saying: "Rye . . . and soda. . . ."

FOUR days later bartenders were pointing him out: "That's Hall Halstead. . . . Used to be a crack private cop. Now he's the happy drunk. Mickey says he's consumed enough rye to float a navy. . . ."

Four days later. . . . Night. Walking. Walking on the street through slush . . . staggering. He still couldn't get her out of his mind. . . . Climbing steps to a porch. . . . Key fumbling in the lock of an apartment building. . . . Moving, weaving down the hall. . . . Key to apartment door. . . . His own apartment.

He flopped down on the day couch and lay there in a half stupor.

He lay there vaguely aware of sounds. . . . Of hearing people walk in the hall. But let them walk. What the hell did he care what they did? He smiled . . . a stupid half smile, and swatted at a fly that was on his cheek.

He looked up through the darkness and saw the blurred vision of two figures. He heard a thud on the floor. He stirred, but as he staggered to his feet something cold and hard was pressed into his hand. One figure had gone out, only one remained. The one that had put this *something* in his hand. He grasped at it. But now this figure opened the door and went out through it. The door slammed shut. The slim figure who had put the *thing* in his hand was gone. He stumbled toward the light switch, turned the lights up. Illumination rushed into the room.

Hall stared groggily down at what was in his hand. A gun. He

was holding a gun. He brushed back a lock of his hair, looked farther. There was a corpse on the floor. Slowly, through the blur that was his mind, realization came. He turned, opened the door and staggered out into the hall.

"Hey," he said, "hey, look whash come to shee me. . . ! Look at the dead guy thash come to shee me. . . !"

BLINDING white lights were turned into Hall's eyes. Everywhere, in a big circle around him, there were detectives. Voices cracked at him. Water was put to his lips and snatched away. . . . His hands were cracked with rubber clubs when he reached for an offered cigarette. . . . Voices. . . .

"We've heard of you, Halstead. . . . Private cop, eh. . . . Well this time you went too far. . . . So you won't tell who the guy is you killed, eh? Do you think that'll do you any good?"

"I tell you I never saw him before!"

"Aw, can that kind of chatter! Sure you saw him! Why did you kill him?"

"I tell you—"

"Come on now, Hall. You were a hard private cop . . . a helluva hard one. Did you get loop-legged and snag this poor sucker from the street and take him in and shoot him in your apartment?"

"It was a frame! Won't you listen to me? It was a frame!"

"In a pig's eye it was! How long ago had you shot him before you came running out yelling about it?"

"He was dead when they brought him in!"

"Who?"

"The—the people. I was drunk, I tell you, and—"

"Yeah. The slim guy that stayed longer than the other one. Nuts, Hall! Being drunk will get you off on second degree if Sam Gorman gets that lawyer he promised for you, but—"

"Listen, you guys, it was a frame—"



WO months later in a court corridor. Sam Gorman, tall, gray-haired, standing erect. Hall Halstead standing before him, handcuffed to a detective.

"Thanks, Sam. You did your best. Second degree murder, though. . . . The jury wouldn't see it any other way. It's all over now but the train ride to Ossining."

"Well, Hall, you'll get out in six years. On a ten years to life term you can get out after six years if you've been a good boy."

"But six years. . . . Throwing six years of my life away." His eyes came up. "Seen—Jeffra?"

"Yeah."

"She wasn't around at the trial," said Hall, and his voice was like an echo. The detective, beside him nudged him.

"Well, so long," said Sam.

"So long," whispered Hall, "good-by for six years, Sam. But I want you to do me a favor. Try to get a line on the guy that framed me. Six years isn't forever, you know, and I *will* be back. I *will* be back, and then . . ."

"Sure, fella, you look me up when you get out. I'll have a line on the guy for you."

Halstead was led away.

HATRED lived with Hall Halstead on the Hudson for six long years; then the gates opened, and a train pulled out of Ossining. . . .

He got off at Grand Central and walked from the train not fast, nor slow, but with a steady even step; he felt the push and hustle of the crowd. Then he was in the main waiting room and he stopped, and now his face lifted and he gazed about him. He saw the information booth, and the clock. He was aware of the tile floor, and the rushing crowds, and the man behind the magazine counter, and the red caps who sprinted with grips. He saw commuters, and the newsboys, and the late passengers for the subway shuttle.

He saw these things and these people in the main waiting room of Grand Central Station, and he knew that he was back. He knew that it was not a dream this time, but that he had actually lived to see the day.

But he did not feel the lift and the surge of happiness a man coming back after six years should feel. He stood there as though he were dead, nostalgia choking in him, because he had loved New York and every part of New York, and this station too. But now that he was here he could not smile upon it. He could not think of its vastness or its fun, past and future. He could think only that he hated a man and that he was going to kill him.

This thought weighed on him so that when he walked again he walked slower, and when he came out of the swinging doors and onto Forty-second Street he stopped again, not sure of his direction—rather, the direc-



"Get your hands off me!" Her voice rose in a high, terrified pitch.

tion that he wished at this moment to take.

He stood there, shivering with cold because he had no coat, and there was slush on the street, and winter wind in the air. Cabs swished by, and people bundled in furs and slickers passed him; and he kept standing in the flickering light that came from within the station.

HE KNEW where he was going. He was going to Sam's office first. Because already he knew the name of the man he was going to kill, and only Sam Gorman could

give him a lead. The man's name was Johnny Quin. Prison grapevine had told him that. He was an outlaw, a phantom crook. He was the kind who would and could frame men. And he was clever and elusive. But Sam would know where to find him. Sam would know, and Hall would kill Johnny Quin.

He lit a cigarette now and started forward.

He crossed to the other side of the street, veered to the left, and entered the doorway of a building. He rang for the night elevator and waited impatiently for it. The cigarette burned short in his mouth and the smoke swirled up around his face. He dropped the cigarette, stepped on it carefully.

The elevator came and he got in. The night man looked at him to ask what business he had in the building, and then the man's mouth opened and for a moment he stared.

"Halstead," he said.

"Hello, Mike."

"It's you—Halstead! How are you, kid?"

"I'm all right, Mike."

"Hall Halstead," repeated the night man. "When did you get out?"

Hall did not answer, and the night man suddenly realizing what he had said, nervously closed the door of the elevator and started upward. When they were on the tenth floor, he said:

"You'll find the office in the same place."

"Things don't change much, do they, Mike?" said Hall.

He stepped out of the car and swung down the corridor, stopping at a door marked: *SAM GORMAN*—*Detective Agency*. There was a

light beyond the door. Hall fumbled with another cigarette and lit it.

He turned his hand on the knob now, and by the time the door was open there was sweat on his palm, and sweat on his white forehead. He stepped into the office, letting the door swing closed behind him. The lighted outer office was empty. Halstead moved in the direction of the private office.

He moved into it rapidly, for he wanted his homecoming to be a complete surprise.

But it was he who was surprised.

JEFFRA stood on the other side of the desk. Other than herself she was the sole occupant of the room. She was looking at him steadily and there was a gun in her right hand. But as she stared, the gun hand faltered. She put the weapon on the table. She kept staring, leaning over the desk, then:

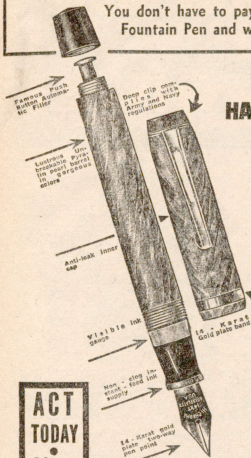
"Hall!"

"Yeah," he said, "me."

He didn't know what else to say, and he stood looking at her, seeing that she had not changed unless it was that she had matured; unless the full-breasted mould of her tight green velvet dress meant that she was a woman now, not a girl. No, she hadn't changed, he thought, unless her hips were rounder, and firmer, unless the slim waist coming down onto those hips was more supple. There was a proud stance in her legs; stance and poise in her high-heeled shoes, and he noticed this right away because where he had been, there hadn't been much chance to notice that sort of thing. That was why he remembered how she used to be. That was why he could

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appreciate fully the change that made the lusciousness of her stir his pulse.

Her face had matured too, though her hair was the same. It was fine spun gold on her shoulders. Her eyes were green and wide set; her nose was delicate, small; and her mouth was a smear of crimson against the pale beauty of her skin.

"Hall!" she said again.

"I just got out, Jeffra," he whispered, but his gaze did not waver from hers.

"Yes," she said.

He could feel the old love surging up in him. The love for her that had never died. But she was probably married. Probably married and had a family.

"How have you been?" he went on.

"All right," she said, and she came toward him, then stopped and sat down on the leather divan, crossing her legs.

He walked to a window, his back to her. Somehow he wished that he hadn't found her here. He knew that he must concentrate on finding the man who had framed him. Johnny Quin. That he must find him and kill him. Yet, even now, with these thoughts there was a lightness lifting the oppression from his mind. He turned around and looked at her and saw that sleek curve of her leg that filled the sheer tan of her hose; saw the gentle swell of her bosom beneath the green material of her dress.

"Where's your father?" he asked hoarsely.

"I'm waiting for him now." Jeffra said. "That's why I am here. Because I know he'll return soon. And

because I knew that you were getting out of Sing Sing and would come here first. There is to be a show-down."

"Show-down?" he echoed.

SHE nodded, and tears sprang suddenly into her eyes. "Oh, Hall, six years staying away from you, not even writing you, believing those things about you—yet loving you.

"Six years of that! You'll never understand how I felt! Then when I knew it must be time for you to get out, I began wondering how I could see you. I began wondering if you had changed and—well, on a hunch I came up here in dad's absence and began going through old files and—"

"And—?" he asked.

"Sam lied to me," she said. "Because he wanted to gain personal ends, because he was afraid to have you too close to the business and the cases he handled himself, he told me those things about you. Oh, I wanted then to doubt him! But how could I? He was so emphatic. And he was—is my father and—"

"It was Sam then who turned you against me?" Halstead's voice died.

Jeffra nodded. "He was a false friend to you. And I took his word. I've been so unjust to you, Hall, I've—"

Halstead held up his hand. "All right." There was something crushing in the way he said that. "All right. Sam and I will have it out. I'm sorry to learn it. I never dreamed—We always got along so well—but—but that's not what the important thing is. The important thing is for me to find Johnny Quin. Ever hear of him? The papers used

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to carry stories about him. Phantom crook."

"What about him?" she asked.

"It was he who framed me. Planted the corpse in my apartment."

"How do you know?"

He shrugged. "How does one know anything? Grapevine, of course. You hear things in prison. He got in a jam, killed a guy, and framed me. I'm going to kill him as soon as I find him—with his own gun."

"His own gun?"

Halstead nodded grimly. "He left it behind on one of his jobs. Played a dirty trick on a local gangster, got away with it, but left his gun. The gangster who got it in the neck from Quin could never get a lead on him. Sam Gorman wouldn't give him a lead, nobody would. So the gun was put away and saved for me. Sort of a sentimental thing. They knew I'd want to kill Johnny Quin and maybe I could do it with his own gun. Maybe I might even be able to make it look like suicide. The gun was licensed to him—to someone in that name. Mail order. It's in my pocket now. Oiled up, and loaded."

Her eyes were wide.

"And so I'm going to kill him, with his own gun. Sam will give me a lead on where he is and—" His voice suddenly ran out of him for he was looking at her. He kept looking at her, and there was a strange silence in the room. Then he moved toward the divan: "Mind if I—?"

HE SAT down beside her, although not too close. Six years, he thought. Six years in prison. It was hard for him to sit that way, so close to her. Perhaps if it wasn't for

the fact that he loved her—and he *did* love her—perhaps. . . . But he did not touch her, he sat staring ahead of him. Then suddenly he felt a warm arm on his shoulder.

"Hall, look at me."

He turned, and caught his breath, Leaning forward like that, she was so close to him that he could feel her breath on his face. He looked up at her eyes an inch away.

"You still love me," she said.

He let his head fall, as though in defeat, and she leaned closer so that his forehead rested lightly on her soft shoulder. The fragrance of her assailed his nostrils, overpoweringly. "Yes," he said.

"You don't want to commit murder," she went on softly.

"But I do! I do!"

"No," she said, and with her hand under his chin she lifted his head. He saw her face and the crimson of her lips; and then because he could control himself no longer; because he was unable to deny his love, he pressed his hands under her elbows and brought her over to him. He kissed her lips. Warm lips. Throbbing lips.

He kissed her, hugged her with such force that she half lost her balance. He crushed kisses onto her mouth. Her arms were about him now, and she was saying: Hall . . . Hall. . . . I've missed you so. . . !"



AGUELY, he was aware of sounds in the outside office, and now he heard footsteps. He slid his feet, his hand going into the pocket where he kept the gun. He glanced back at her, saw her standing,

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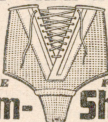
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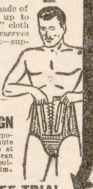
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smoothing her skirt. He waited. There were voices.

Then the door opened and he saw two men with guns. He had never seen them before in his life. They opened fire.

Hall leaped back, swept the girl to the floor, and returned the shots.

And his eyes widened as, simultaneously, Sam Gorman's figure appeared in the doorway. . . . Three shots screamed out and blotches appeared on Gorman's chest and stomach. The older man pitched forward. Footsteps raced through the outer office.

For a moment Halstead was too stunned to move. Then he leaped the figure of the old man, ran through the outer office and into the hall. He was in time to see the elevator door closing. He rang the bell furiously, waited. Ran to the fire-escape. It was ten stories and he knew he could never get down before they escaped.

Doggedly, he returned to the office, into Gorman's private office.

Jeffra was bending over the figure of her father with tears in her eyes. As Hall came in, she laid the old man's head down and got slowly to her feet. She choked with a sob that was deep in her throat and then she turned and walked to the window. The room was ghastly with silence. Halstead bent, felt the old man's forehead, knew he was dead. He went over to the window and stood behind Jeffra.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I haven't been up on things. I don't know what's going on in town. If I'd known Sam expected trouble. . . ."

"It's not your fault," she said. "He not only expected trouble, he

went out after it. He was taking bets on Broadway. Had to do something with his money, he said. And betting became an obsession with him. Those other two men were welshers. They owed Sam a hundred thousand dollars and. . . ."

"I see," said Hall, "it was either they paid up, or Sam was going to—. So they were out to get him first."

Jeffra's hand was at her throat. "Yes. Morally, they killed him. But they took the rotten way of doing it. They must have known about you, that you were getting out of Sing Sing, and that you would come here to this office first. News about you has been grapevining for days. That's why I was here. Because I didn't know what train you'd come in on, and thought if I were here, I'd be first to see you. . . ."

As she spoke Hall went back to the body. Again he stooped.

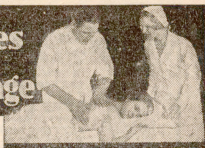
SHE went on: "Well, they knew you were coming here, and that with one murder rap on you they could easily frame another. Make it look as though you did it for revenge on your first night out. So when they saw you come in, they brought Sam up . . . then they attracted your fire like that, and when you shot—as you just did—they put Sam there. . . . They put Sam there so that he got your bullets instead of them. . . ."

"That's what they did all right," Halstead echoed. "It was neat. Only—there's a gash across your father's head, Jeffra. No coroner would ever say so, but you know what *that* means and so do I. Sam was dead before they brought him up. They probably slugged the ele-

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vator man to get the elevator, and slugged Sam to death on the way up. The bullets I shot into him only—"

"—Only make you a cinch for murder again," she whispered, tears on her cheeks.

Hall Halstead rose. "Oh, no. . . ." His eyes gleamed brightly in the pallor of his skin. "Not this time, honey. They don't work that gag on me again." He took the gun from his pocket—and laid it on the desk. "This stays here," he went on. "It stays here for the cops to find. Nobody knows we were here. And those killers can't open their mouth without putting both feet in the electric chair. If they bumped the night elevator op too, as I think they have, there absolutely no witnesses!"

"You mean—?"

"I mean, honey, that papa Hall isn't going up for murder again. His own or anyone else's. Catch? I mean this gun stays here . . . and we leave. . . ." He picked up the weapon and wiped his prints from it, then said:

"Come on."

She nodded, her eyes still questioning his motive. She started out then, but bent again over her father and kissed the dead face. Presently they were in the hall . . . then on the stairs. . . . They found the elevator operator with his throat cut. He was on the second floor in front of the lift doors. They left him there.

WHEN they were on the street again, she said: "You must be cold."

He snapped: "Never mind that, sweetheart. That doesn't matter. I've got to phone, then we're going to see those welshers. You must know where they are. There's a score to settle there—for Sam. After

that—" His voice trailed off into a blur, and he abruptly darted into a cigar store telephone booth.

He dialed the police, disguised his voice and reported the murders. Concluding, he said:

"This is the killer. . . . I just thought you'd like to know. This is the killer. . . . Johnny Quin." Then he hung up and got out of the booth quickly.

Jeffra was waiting for him, and they began once more to walk.

THEY walked, and his feet became soggy with the slush that was on the streets of New York. So soggy that there was a *squish* of water from the creases of the leather each time he stepped; his clothes, his suit, became soaked so that the underwear beneath was soaked too and stuck to his skin and put a chill down his spine. He shivered, and his teeth were set tight against chattering. . . . His eyes were on the lights . . . the millions of lights he had missed so. This was New York again, he told himself, and Jeffra was beside him.

Jeffra was beside him, and he was again in the middle of a case, just like old times, like the times he had almost grown too old to remember. Sam Gorman was dead . . . and there was a pang in his heart because of this . . . and yet, his mind skirted it, as it had skirted over tragedy in the past, and would in the future . . . he felt the warm exhilaration of things gone that are returned.

And this feeling heightened his hatred and contempt for Johnny Quin. . . . Johnny Quin . . . and revenge . . . revenge. But suddenly he became alert. Jeffra was talking.

"I said, Hall, you'd never have a chance in the bar where those

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welshers hang out. Someone'd spot you, know you for who you are, and that would be the end of you. You've got to give this ghost up, Hall. Sam was my father, and it's up to me—"

"No," he said hoarsely, and he was aware of a rumbling in his chest and throat that was the beginning of a nasty cold. "Sam was my friend. . . I know how to deal with those rats. Besides, you're a woman. Jeffra, I'd never forgive you if. . ."

"Look," she said, "I'll flirt with them, get them away from that bar. You wait for me in the lobby of the Belwood Hotel and I'll call you there when I find out where we're going. . . See, you do that, Hall and. . ."

"No," he snapped, "what do you think I am? Think I'm going to let you bait a couple of killers with your—your body? Jeffra, you belong to me!"

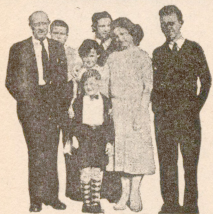
She pressed his wrist, and then suddenly she had lunged across the sidewalk past him and into a taxi cab.

Hall dashed after her, heard Jeffra say: "Get me away from here. . . away from him. . ."

He jerked at the handle of the door, but the cab swished out from the curb, threaded into the traffic. He tried to hail another, but it was too late now. Hall stood there on the corner, shivering visibly now in the cold, feeling sleet beat against his hot cheeks, and watching with fever in his eyes as the cab vanished from his view.

He stood there for a moment, his chest rasping painfully with the cold as he sucked air into his lungs; and then he tried to light a cigarette—but it was too wet. . . and he had to walk along the street toward the lights. . . like a moth going toward

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a candle . . . with a wet cigarette dangling from the corner of his mouth.

He didn't know where the bar was. He couldn't follow her. Jeffra had tricked him, and he would have to go to the Belwood and wait for her call.

HE WAS sitting in an easy chair in the lobby of the Belwood and two bellboys and a house detective were walking around and around him in wide yet conspicuous circles mentally debating whether such a wet and bedraggled young man should occupy one of their chairs . . . when her call came. A bellboy shrieked:

"Mr. . . . Halstead. . . Mr. Halstead. . . Telephone for Mr.—"

"I got it, kid."

Hall went to the telephone and picked it up tensely, said: "Yes?"

"It's me . . . Jeffra," she whispered, "hurry—" and she gave him the address of a swank hotel apartment. "They don't know me," she went on, "the gag worked. They're arguing about which one has a date with me. They think I'm a pick-up. . . . But they are tough babies . . . so hurry!"

He left the Belwood with the address and suite number and grabbed a taxi.

A few moments later he was moving through the lobby of the hotel apartment. He rode an elevator to the fifth floor, got out, the elevator man staring after him uncertainly. Hall walked, nervously, until he heard the elevator doors closing, and then he turned and hurried back in the other direction.

He stopped in front of the door marked by the number she had given him. He heard voices now,

Jeffra's rising above the others: "Don't . . ." and he tried the knob, his shoulder against the door panel. The door was oak . . . thick. . . . The lock was on, and it sounded as though there was a bolt across the inside.

He waited a moment, knew that he could never break it down, that no ruse could get him into the room. He could get the police, but because of the set-up, this was one case where it was impossible to work with police.

The faculties which had once made him an ace private detective were returning. He looked around, like an animal on the scent for a kill.

Then he saw it. . . . He had used one such place for entrance before. There was a little door, a dog sized door, that came from the kitchen of the apartment. You left your garbage and waste basket there and a hallman picked them up every morning. This, except for the locked door, was the only entrance to the suite.

Quickly, noiselessly, he got down on his hands and knees before it. He looked up and down the corridor and saw no one. Jeffra's gun which he had taken from Sam's office he now palmed.

He opened the little door and pulled the waste basket and garbage pail outside into the hall. Then he crawled in, stooping, twisting to get his shoulders through, and gave the inner door of the compartment a push. It opened easily. Halstead crawled through, the gun tight in his fist; crawled on his hands and knees.

SUDDENLY a foot mashed down across his gun wrist. A hand reached down while he was pinned

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there helplessly. The gun was snatched from him.

He looked up, saw another weapon, pointed into his face. Past the weapon stood a tall, red-haired man—one of the two he had seen earlier tonight, before the killing. The man said:

"You were a give-away, buddy. We heard you trying to crash the door. . . . Get up!"

Weaponless now, Hall rose. He heard Jeffra's voice rising in a high, terrified pitch from the living room.

"Get your hands off me!"

The red-haired man with the gun said: "Go on . . . go on in there and get a look at her. But don't try no funny stuff, mister, because the minute you do, you're going to get a slug right through that thick neck of yours. The babe thought she was putting one over on us. She thought because you had knocked her down when we came into the office that we hadn't seen her and wouldn't recognize her. . . . But hell, we knew her from before. . . . We knew she was Sam's daughter. . . ."

The voice droning in his ears, Halstead moved into the living room. The gun pressed harder against his neck as he stopped dead still, his lips curling, his eyes blazing.

The other killer, squat and kinky-haired, his fat face greasy with sweat, the shirt half torn off his back, had Jeffra pinned in a corner, tatters of her clothes scattered all over the room.

Halstead stood, the gun on his neck, unable to move, and stared at the woman he loved. He saw the cringing white flesh through the rents in her garments, saw the contempt on her carmine lips, but saw that all her bravery could not keep fear from her eyes.

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But the kinky-haired man grabbed her up and drew her limp form against him.

Halstead had held himself in check, waiting for the interest of this spectacle to grow so in the breast of the man who held the gun on his neck that he would for a moment be off guard. Now, in the heavy breathing, the nervous shifting of the other, he sensed that this was the moment. He ducked suddenly, whirled around . . . grabbed out instinctively. . .

Hall had the man's gun wrist gripped in a vise-like fist. He bent it over his knee and the gun dropped from nerveless fingers into the palm of Hall's left hand.

The kinky-haired man saw all this, but a moment too late. He turned around, letting Jeffra crumple to the floor, jerked out an automatic. . .

Meanwhile, the red-haired killer rushed at Hall. He ducked, let the redhead stumble over him, got up holding him as a shield in front of him. It all happened in less than a second. And in the next second the shots of the man with the kinky hair came roaring across the room.

The redhead took them in the chest, buckled, sagged. Halstead saw the horror on the kinky-haired-man's face; saw him point his weapon again. Quickly, Hall fired, once . . . twice. . . Whining bullets.

The man with the kinky hair dropped, dead before his body slumped across the floor. Halstead watched coldly, breathing quietly. He wiped his own prints from the murder gun . . . fixed it in the red-haired man's hand. It had been the welsher's own weapon, and now . . . the two welshers, facing each other like this on the floor, guns clutched in their hands . . . bullets from those guns in each other's bodies. . .

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"A pretty sight for the cops," he muttered, "and after all that shooting, cops will be here any minute. It'll be obvious to them that these two lugs had an argument and killed each other. . . . That is, it will be if we're not here when they arrive."

He went to a closet, got one of the men's coats, and put it around Jeffra's limp form.

He carried her down the back stairs and by the time he reached the street with her she was conscious and able to climb shakily into a taxi.

HALSTEAD came into Jeffra's apartment the next morning with a half smile on his white face. He put a newspaper on the table.

"Skip the story about those two welshers killing each other," he said, "and read this." He pointed out an item. It read:

PHANTOM CROOK REAPPEARS

Unheard From for Several Weeks Johnny Quin Kills Detective Sam Gorman

Brags to Police "I Did It" on Telephone... But Makes First Fatal Error. . . Leaves His Gun on Crime Scene.

NEW YORK.—Private Detective Sam Gorman was found dead in his office last night after a call from a man who said, "I'm Johnny Quin. A phantom crook long wanted by police and unheard from for several weeks, made the first fatal mistake of his vivid career last night when he left his murder gun behind him. The gun, licensed to a "J. Quin" several years ago, was found in the office with the corpse. Police are searching for Quin now and say when he is captured this evidence will send him to the electric chair. . . .

Jeffra looked up, her eyes wide. "See," said Hall. "Johnny Quin framed me for a murder. Now, he didn't do this, those welshers did and you and I know it. But we're the *only* ones who know it. I've paid Quin back. I've fixed it so that he's framed. You remember I



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explained that I had his gun. . . ."
"But you're going to leave it like that?"

"I should. But I won't. Today I'm going to start talk down the grapevine that if Johnny Quin wants the truth about Sam Gorman's murder made known to the police, that I'll tell the cops the truth . . . exactly how it happened, for one thing: for a confession clearing me of the murder for which I served time. Get it? Then Quin serves for the crime he actually committed. And I'll be cleared. My name will be cleared. The state will owe me money."

"But—"

Light blazed in his dilated eyes. "He framed me," he went on, "he framed me, and six years up there in Sing Sing I've been waiting to get even with the guy who framed me. I want that confession more than anything else and . . ."

Jeffra faced him suddenly. "All right. All right, Hall," she said. "I confess."

"You—what—"

"I said: I confess. I'm not Johnny Quin. But I framed you. Sam was Johnny Quin. That's why he lied to me about you. He was playing that role in addition to running his agency and he was afraid you were getting wise. He was going to try and prove you were Johnny Quin if anything came up. Oh, it was rotten. I couldn't believe it when I first found out—and that was only yesterday—but—it was that way. Sam played his game that way."

Hall was incredulous. "But the murder frame-up—"

"There was a shooting near Sam's house. I happened to be near be-

cause I was on my way to see him. Well, there was this shooting, in the darkness, late at night. When I got there, I saw a corpse in the back seat of a taxi. Sam—dad was going after one of the other men and I remember shouting: *who did this?* and he said that you had. You weren't anywhere around, but he said that you had done it, and I believed it, like everything else he had told me. The cab driver had been scared off. He was gone.

"I COULD only think of getting even with you. I found the cab driver's hat and drove off in the cab before a crowd gathered. I drove off with the corpse in the back seat and went to your apartment. When I got there, I asked a passerby to help me with a 'drunk' who was in the back seat. The passerby who helped me never turned up again, luckily, probably never read of the murder. He helped me dump the dead man in your apartment, then left. I stayed.

"When I saw that you were home, I was terrified. I hadn't expected that. But I knew I would have to see it through and in the darkness I jammed the gun in your hand. I had thought you had come home to duck. I didn't know you were so drunk although it had occurred to me you might have been drinking. Sam had said that you were, earlier that evening. Well, I put the gun in your hand and got out. I thought you were guilty and that Sam would be blamed unless it was made plain like this to the police that you had killed the man. Sam never knew what I did, and I guess when he found that the corpse had been

found in your apartment he thought the best thing he could do was to keep his mouth shut and say that he was helping you, which he did.

"I meant to tell you that last night, Hall, all of it, when Sam came in. But then Sam was murdered and . . ." her voice trailed. "Well, there's your confession. I'm the one who framed you. I'll write it out if you wish—"

He shook his head, moved across the room to her. "Kid," he said, "honey—" Then he choked, and a wetness came into the corners of his eyes.

"God, kitten," he breathed, "if every man could do a little stint like six years and get a girl like you when he got out . . . why . . . why hell . . . everybody would be making a rush for Sing Sing!"

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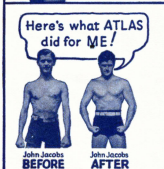
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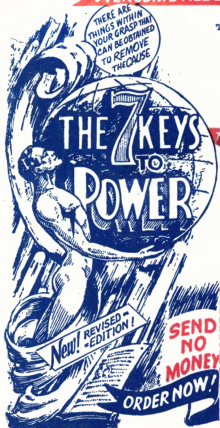
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