

June 15¢

PRIVATE

DETECTIVE

IND

STORIES

A
SPEED
MAGAZINE



FOR VICTORY
BUY WAR BONDS
AND STAMPS

EXIT WITH LEAD

by *Arthur Feldman*

Here's the Greatest BILLFOLD BARGAIN in all America

Your LODGE Emblem or ARMY or NAVY Insignia
and Name Engraved in 23K. Gold
Absolutely FREE

Special Introductory Offer

\$1.98

Rising Costs
of Leather
May Make
It Impossible
To Repeat
This Amazing
Offer!



Genuine
Highest
Quality Leather
BLACK CALFSKIN

De Luxe VAL

Your FAVORITE Emblem, NAME,
ADDRESS, and Social Security Number
Engraved in GOLD—FREE!

YOUR CHOICE OF
EMBLEMS HERE



YOUR INITIALS
HERE
FREE!



This beautiful three-color life-time Identification Plate carries your full name, address and social security or draft number.



Also FREE if you order at once we send you this beautiful Identification Key Tag and Gift Chain to match, hand engraved with your name, address, city and state. Will last a lifetime.

Men—Here, without a doubt, is positively the greatest Billfold and Pass Case Bargain that you'll be likely to see for a good many years to come. For a high quality Calfskin Billfold, beautifully engraved in gold, with your LODGE Emblem or Army or Navy Insignia and Name, you would expect to pay up to \$4.50 and consider it a marvelous buy. If you take advantage of this sensational introductory offer, you can get this superb genuine Calfskin Wallet and Pass Case for only \$1.98, and we will send you absolutely free a specially designed three color lifetime Identification Plate, which carries your Social Security Number, your Name and Address or your Army Draft Number. This fine grain calfskin Billfold must actually be seen to be fully appreciated. Besides the spacious compartment at the back which can be used for currency, checks, papers, etc., it has four pockets each protected by celluloid to prevent the soiling of your valuable membership and credit cards.

When closed, this handsome Billfold has the soft velvety feel you expect in a quality Calfskin Billfold.

match, all hand engraved with my Name, Address, City and State. After receiving your Billfold and Free Gift, you don't positively agree that this is the most outstanding bargain you have ever come across, return them to us and your money will be cheerfully refunded in full. Send your order today, without fail so you won't be disappointed.

Rush This Coupon For This Once-In-A-Lifetime Bargain!

IMPORTANT!

**ILLINOIS MERCHANDISE MART,
Dept. 286 A, 54 W. Illinois St., Chicago,**

If you want a LODGE, ARMY, NAVY, MARINE or AIR CORPS INSIGNIA, state name here gentlemen. I enclose \$1.98. Please send me a Genuine Calfskin Billfold with my name and choice of Emblems engraved in 23k gold. Include absolutely free, a life-time Identification Plate carrying my full Name and Social Security Number, or Draft Number. Also include FREE an Identification Key Tag and Gift Chain to match, all hand-engraved with my Name, Address, City and State.

My Full Name..... (Please print clearly)

Address

City..... State.....

Social Security Number..... Army Draft Number.....

Check here if you want us to ship C.O.D. for \$1.98 plus a few pennies postage and C.O.D. charges.

1-PRIVATE DET.

J. E. Devericks



J. E. SMITH
President
National Radio Institute
Established 28 Years

I WILL SEND A SAMPLE LESSON FREE to PROVE I can Train You at Home in Spare Time to BE A RADIO TECHNICIAN

I Trained These Men

**\$200 a Month
in Own Business**
"For several years I have been in business for myself making around \$200 a month. Business has steadily increased. I have N.R.I. to thank for my start in this field."
ARLIE J. FROEHNER, 800 W. Texas Ave., Goose Creek, Texas.

**\$5 to \$10 a Week
in Spare Time**
"I am engaged in spare time Radio work, and average from \$5 to \$10 a week. I often wished that I had enrolled sooner because all this extra money sure does come in handy."
THEODORE K. DUBREE, Horsham, Pa.

**Lieutenant in
Signal Corps**
"I cannot divulge any information as to my type of work, but I can say that N.R.I. training is certainly coming in mighty handy these days."
(Name and address omitted for military reasons.)

**Extra Pay
in Army,
Navy, Too**
Men likely to go into military service, soldiers, sailors, marines, should mail the Coupon Now! Learning Radio helps Service men get extra rank, extra prestige, more interesting duties, **MUCH HIGHER PAY.** Also prepares for good Radio jobs after service ends. Over 1,700 Service men now enrolled.

MALL the Coupon for a FREE lesson from my Radio Course. It shows how N.R.I. trains you for Radio at home in spare time. And with this Sample Lesson I'll send my 64-page illustrated book, **WIN RICH REWARDS IN RADIO.** It describes many fascinating jobs Radio offers, tells how you can train for them at home in spare time.

More Radio Technicians and Operators Now Make \$50 a Week Than Ever Before

There's a big shortage of capable Radio Technicians and Operators because so many have joined the Army and Navy. Fixing Radios pays better now than for years. With new Radios out of production, fixing old sets, which were formerly traded in, adds greatly to the normal number of servicing jobs.

Broadcasting Stations, Aviation and Police Radio, Ship Radio and other communications branches are scrambling for Operators and Technicians to replace men who are leaving. You may never see a time again when it will be so easy to get started in this fascinating field. The Government, too, needs hundreds of competent civilian and enlisted Radio men and women. Radio factories, with huge war orders to fill, have been advertising for trained personnel. And think of the NEW jobs: Television, Frequency Modulation, Electronics and other Radio developments will open after the war! This is the sort of opportunity you shouldn't pass up.

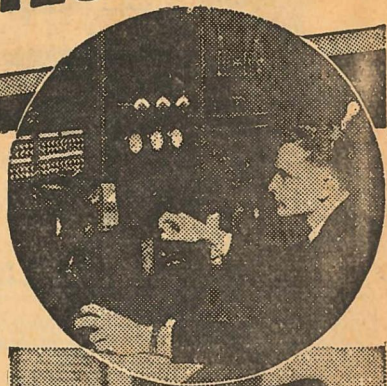
Many Beginners Soon Make \$5, \$10 a Week Extra in Spare Time

There's probably an opportunity right in your neighborhood to make money in spare time fixing Radios. I'll give you the training that has started hundreds of N.R.I. students making \$5, \$10 a week extra within a few months after enrolling. The N.R.I. Course isn't something just prepared to take advantage of the present market for technical books and courses. It has been tried, tested, developed, perfected during the 28 years we have been teaching Radio.

Find Out What N.R.I. Can Do for YOU

MAIL COUPON NOW for FREE Sample Lesson and 64-page illustrated book. You'll see the many fascinating jobs Radio offers and how YOU can train at home. If you want to *jump your pay*—*mail Coupon* at once in an envelope or paste on a penny post! **J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 3EX1, National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.**

TRAINING MEN FOR VITAL RADIO JOBS



BROADCASTING STATIONS (top illustration) employ Radio Technicians as operators, installation, maintenance men and in other fascinating, steady, well-paying technical jobs. **FIXING RADIO SETS** (bottom illustration), a booming field today, pays many Radio Technicians \$50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make \$5 to \$10 a week extra fixing Radios in spare time.

**Mail Coupon
Now!**



**This FREE BOOK has Helped Hundreds
of Men to Make More Money**

**MR. J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 3EX1
NATIONAL RADIO INSTITUTE, Washington, D. C.**

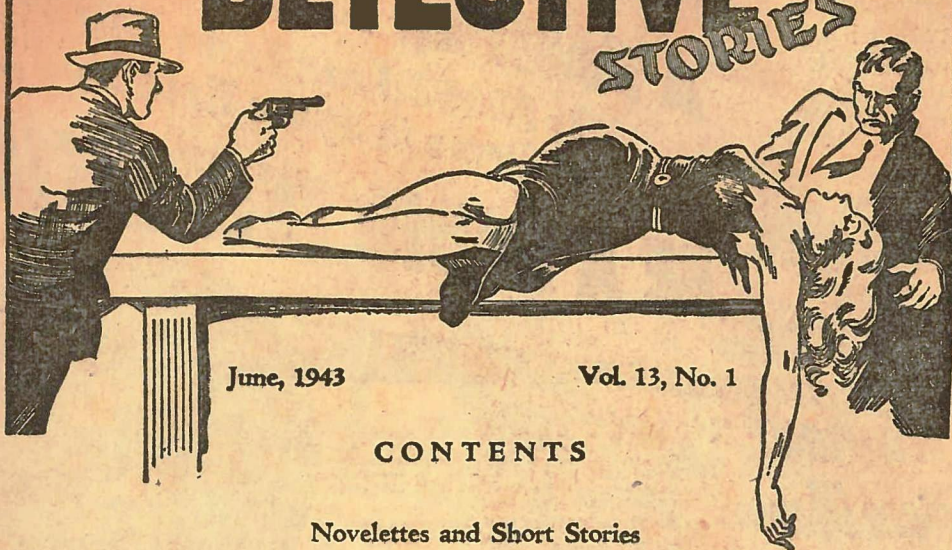
Mail me FREE, without obligation, Sample Lesson and 64-page book, "Win Rich Rewards in Radio." (No Salesman will call. Write plainly.)

Name Age.....
Address
City State 4PR-2

PRIVATE

DETECTIVE

STORIES



June, 1943

Vol. 13, No. 1

CONTENTS

Novelettes and Short Stories

- EXIT WITH LEAD**..... 6
Even with a gun in his back, he wouldn't listen to "reason."
by Arthur Feldman
- CLIP GIRL**..... 38
A story of crookedness in which the dice are honest!
by Frank Decker
- HOME IS THE HUNTER**..... 48
Because he was a national hero, he could afford to gamble.
by R. L. Bellem
- MURDER IN SWINGTIME**..... 60
Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned
By Geoffrey North
- BLACK MARKET**..... 78
Everywhere there was hot meat, and everywhere was violence
by Jerome Severs Perry
- MARRIAGE OR MURDER**..... 90
To make a little boy's dreams come true, he risks everything
by Laurence Donovan

Special Articles

- THE ESCAPE OF THE CENTURY**..... 36
- LARCENY LADS AND LASSIES**..... 58
- SOME NOTES ON THE QUEER**..... 106
- THE MAN WITH THE PHANTOM DEAD**..... 108
- SCOTLAND YARD'S FLYING SQUADRON**..... 109

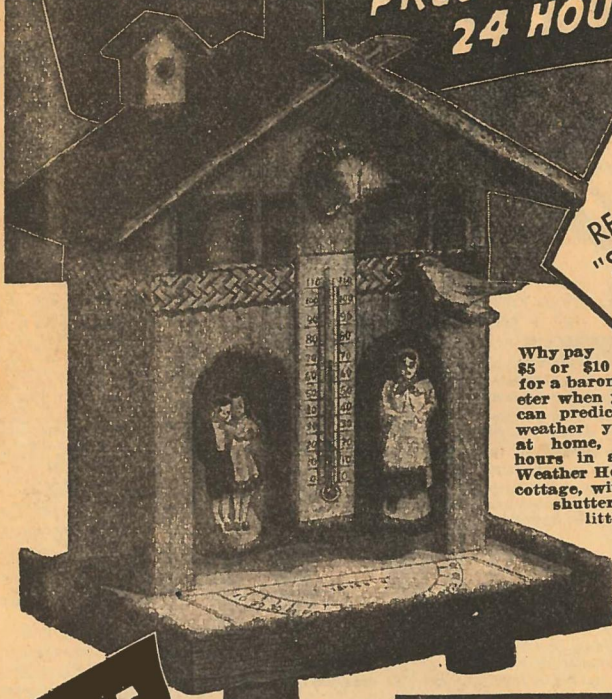
The names and descriptions of all characters appearing in this magazine are entirely fictitious. If there is any resemblance either in name or description, to any living person, it is purely a coincidence.

PRIVATE DETECTIVE STORIES is published monthly by Trojan Publishing Corp., 125 East Forty-sixth Street, New York, N. Y. Michael J. Estrow, President; Frank Armer, Secretary and Treasurer. Entered as second-class matter August 25, 1938, at the post office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 8, 1879. Subscription: Yearly, \$1.50; single copies, 15¢. Canadian and foreign postage extra. Manuscripts should be accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelopes, and are submitted at the author's risk. Copyright, 1943, by Trojan Publishing Corp. Title registered U. S. Patent Office.

OUTGUESS THE WEATHERMAN

AMAZING FORECASTER PREDICTS THE WEATHER 24 HOURS IN ADVANCE

READ ALL ABOUT THE
"SWISS" WEATHER HOUSE
AND **FREE** GIFT OFFER
IF YOU ACT AT ONCE



Why pay \$5 or \$10 for a barometer when you can predict the weather yourself, at home, 8 to 24 hours in advance, with this accurate, inexpensive Weather House forecaster? It's made like a little Swiss cottage, with a thatched green roof and small green shutters. Inside the house is an old witch and a little boy and girl. When the weather's going to be fine, the little boy and girl come out in front. But when bad weather is on the way the old witch makes an appearance. There is an easy-to-read thermometer on the front of the cottage that shows you the exact temperature. . . . Here is positively the most amazing introductory offer ever made. But you must act quickly —prices may rise.

**NOW YOU CAN
BE YOUR OWN
WEATHERMAN!**

FREE
for Prompt
Action

GOOD LUCK LEAF
Lives On Air Alone
The greatest novelty plant ever discovered! Tradition is—a person owning one of these plants will have much good luck and success. When planted in earth, it grows two feet tall and blooms beautifully.



As you receive it



As it grows



Each tiny plant produces this

Here's What Weather House Owners Say:

"My neighbors now phone me to find out what the weather is going to be. We certainly think the Weather House is marvelous." Mrs. I. S. Amsterdam, Ohio.
"Please rush 6 more Weather Houses. I want to give them away as gifts. They are wonderful." Mrs. L. F. Booth Bay, Maine.
"I saw your Weather House at a friend's home and the way they raved about it, I decided to order one for myself." Mrs. L. R., Chicago, Illinois.
"Ever since I got my Weather House I've been able to plan my affairs a day ahead. It's wonderful." Mrs. D. L. B., Shenandoah, Iowa.

SEND NO MONEY

When your Weather House arrives, just deposit through your Postman \$1.69 (your total cost), plus postage. Then test the Weather House for accuracy. Watch it closely, see how perfectly it predicts the weather in advance, then if you don't agree it's worth many dollars more than the small cost, simply return your Weather House within 10 days and get your money back promptly.

Almost every day of your life is affected in some way by the weather, and it's such a satisfaction to have a reliable indication of what the weather will be. With the "Swiss" Weather House made in the U. S. A. and easy-to-read thermometer you have an investment in comfort and convenience for years to come. The Weather House comes to you complete and ready to use. Ideal for gifts and bridge prizes. It will bring new pleasure to everyone in your family. The price is only \$1.69 C. O. D. You must act now to secure this price.

DOUBLE VALUE COUPON—MAIL TODAY

The Weather Man, Dept. S.G., 29 East Madison Street, Chicago, Illinois **10 DAY TRIAL OFFER**

Send at once (1) "Swiss" Weather House. On arrival I will pay postman \$1.69 plus postage with the understanding that the Weather House is guaranteed to work accurately. Also I can return the Weather House for any good reason within 10 days and get my money back.

Send C. O. D. I enclose \$1.69. You Pay Postage.

Name.....

Address.....

City..... State.....

Get TIGER POWER NOW It's EASY!

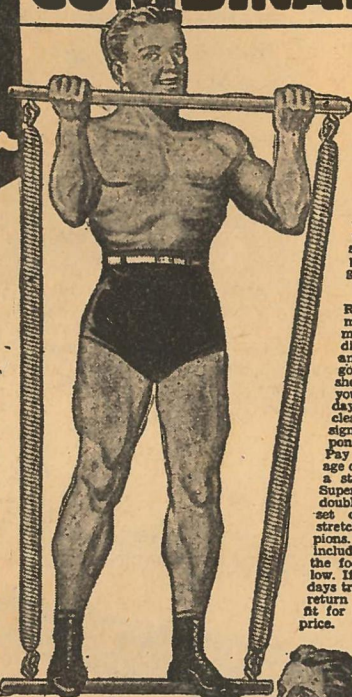
Here is your opportunity to build your body into a virile, dynamic machine of tiger strength. No room these days for weaklings. Now, more than ever, you must be STRONG to get ahead in the world. . . . you can get Herculean strength easily at home in spare time with this newly invented chest pull and bar bell combination.

GET BURSTING STRENGTH QUICKLY.

No matter if you are a weakling or no matter if you already boast of super muscles, you will find this outfit and instructions that go with it to be just what you need. The entire equipment which contains dozens of individual features are all adjustable in tension, resistance, and strength. This permits you to regulate your workouts to meet the actual resistance of your strength and to increase the power progressively as you build a body of mighty muscles. Men in training and men who have reached the top in performing strong-man feats unanimously acclaim this new progressive chest pull and bar bell combination as being a great advancement in the invention of practical equipment to quickly get strong and develop bursting strength.

The combination is complete in every detail. It contains a new kind of progressive chest pull. Not rubber which wears out and loses its resistive strength, but very heavy and strong tension springs. These tension springs are adjustable so that you may use low strength until you get stronger and terrific pulling resistance when you are muscular. In a short time you will find yourself able to easily accomplish strong man feats which now seem difficult. Included is a specially invented bar bell hook-up. This bar bell outfit permits you to do all kinds of bar bell workouts. . . . permits you to practice for weight lifting, and at the same time brings into play the muscles of your legs, chest, arms, and grip so that you build as you train. In addition to these valuable features there is a wall exerciser hook-up enabling you to do all kinds of bending and stretching exercises so necessary for speed and endurance. You also have the features of a rowing machine which is as great an abdominal builder and fat reducer. The hand grips included to help develop a mighty grip. The entire outfit is shipped to you along with pictorial and printed instructions so as to progressively enable you to get stronger day by day.

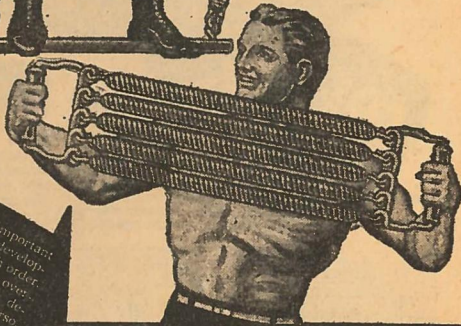
New PROGRESSIVE CHEST PULL & BAR BELL COMBINATION



Don't be bunked! Don't let anyone tell you that you can put inches on your biceps, on your chest, have a mighty back, have mighty legs, or a mighty grip, or build any part of your body by fanning the air. No indeed. You need equipment and instructions such as we offer you here. BUT. . . we not only furnish you with equipment, we also supply specially prepared pictorial charts which guide you day by day.

Send No Money

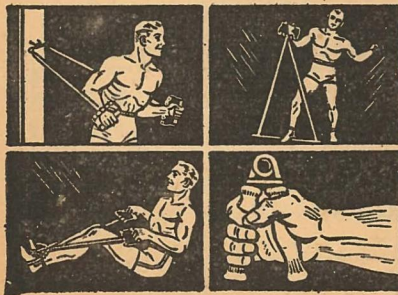
Remember this equipment is used and recommended by many physical directors, boxing champs, and strong men. It's good enough for them it should be good enough for you too. Order your set today and watch your muscles grow day by day. Just sign your name to the coupon checking outfit wanted. Pay postman price plus postage on arrival. If you can buy a stronger outfit than our Super X set we will give you double your money back. This set, defies the lifting and stretching power of champions. Act at once and we will include free with your order the foot stirrups pictured below. If not satisfied after five days trial keep the stirrups and return the balance of the outfit for full refund of purchase price.



Foot stirrups, important for feet and leg development. FREE with order. Permits intensive overhead workouts to develop a mighty torso.

FREE

You get many specially posed pictorial instructions. . . a picture method showing short cuts to mighty muscles.



MUSCLE POWER CO., Dept. 1406
P.O. Box 1, Station X, New York, N. Y.

Send me the outfit checked below on five days' approval. Also enclose special pictorial and printed instructions. I will deposit amount of set plus postage in accordance with your guarantee. Enclose the stirrups free with my order.

- Send regular strength chest pull and bar bell combination. Set \$5.95.
 - Send Super strength set at \$6.95.
- (Send cash with order and we pay postage. Same guarantee.)

Name _____
Address _____
(SPECIAL) If you are aboard ship or outside of U. S. A. please send money order in American funds at prices listed above plus 6c.

The 97 Pound Weakling

—Who became “The World’s Most Perfectly Developed Man”

“I’ll prove that YOU too can be a NEW MAN!”

— Charles Atlas

I KNOW, myself, what it means to have the kind of body that people pity! Of course, you wouldn’t know it to look at me now, but I was once a skinny weakling who weighed only 97 lbs! I was ashamed to strip for sports or undress for a swim. I was such a poor specimen of physical development that I was constantly self-conscious and embarrassed. And I felt only HALF-ALIVE.

Then I discovered “Dynamic Tension.” It gave me a body that won for me the title “World’s Most Perfectly Developed Man.”

When I say I can make you over into a man of giant power and energy, I know what I’m talking about. I’ve seen my new system, “Dynamic Tension,” transform hundreds of weak, puny men into Atlas Champions.

Only 15 Minutes a Day

Do you want big, broad shoulders—a fine, powerful chest—biceps like steel—arms and legs rippling with muscular strength—a stomach ridged with bands of sinewy muscle—and a build you can be proud of? Then just give me the opportunity to prove that “Dynamic Tension” is what you need.

No “ifs” “ands,” or “maybes.” Just tell me where you want handsome, powerful muscles. Are you fat and flabby? Or skinny and gawky? Are you short-winded, pepless? Do you hold back and let others walk off with the prettiest girls, best jobs, etc.? Then write for details about “Dynamic Tension” and learn how I can make you a healthy, confident, powerful HE-MAN.

“Dynamic Tension” is an entirely NATURAL method. Only 15 minutes of your spare time daily is enough to show amazing results—and it’s actually fun! “Dynamic Tension” does the work.

Send for FREE BOOK

Mail the coupon right now for full details and I’ll send you my illustrated book, “Everlasting Health and Strength.” Tells all about my “Dynamic Tension” method. Shows actual photos of men I’ve made into Atlas Champions. It’s a valuable book! And it’s FREE. Send for your copy today. Mail the coupon to me personally, CHARLES ATLAS, Dept 536, 115 East 23rd St., New York, N.Y.



CHARLES ATLAS
Holder of title,
“The World’s Most
Perfectly Developed
Man.”

Charles Atlas, Dept. 536
115 East 23rd St., New York, N. Y.

I want the proof that your system of “Dynamic Tension” will help make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscular development. Send me your free book, “Everlasting Health and Strength.”

Name

(Please print or write plainly.)

Address

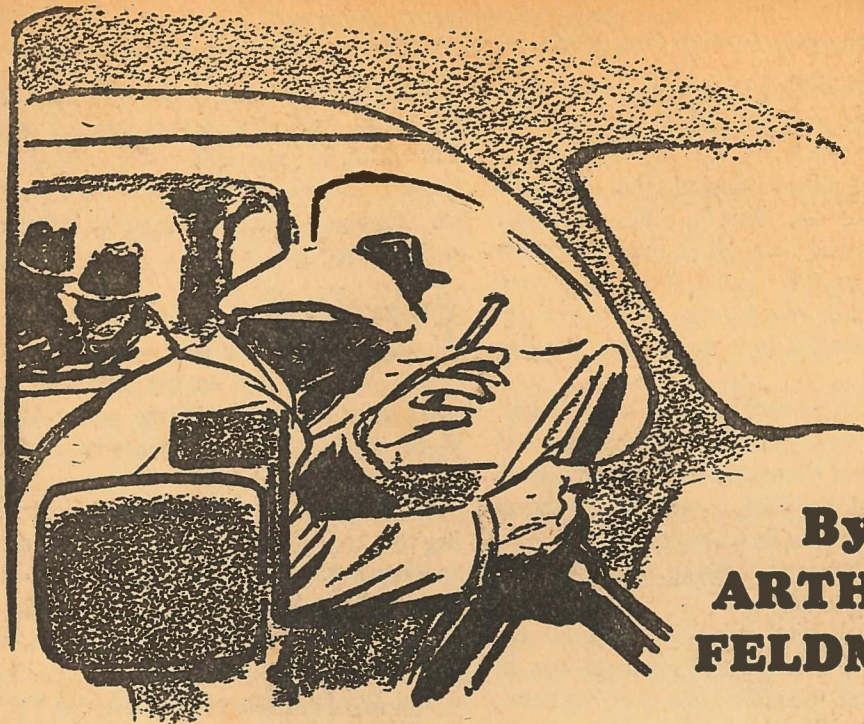
City

State.....

Check here if under 16 for Booklet A.



"Down, Mae!" he cried.
The guns went to work and
lead raked the cab.



By
**ARTHUR
FELDMAN**

Exit With Lead

Farrell was shown plenty of reasons why he should stay off the case, but somehow he couldn't see them, even with a gun in his back. He had reasons of his own for wanting to catch some rats



ARRELL came in and saw Lou Vincenti at a table with a dark-eyed blonde.

Behind the bar, a pug-nosed man quit wiping the rim of a glass. "Outside you," he said to Farrell, "we ain't open; and the boss, he's busy."

Vincenti got up. He was slim and dapper in blue serge. "Okay, Pat," he said to the bartender, and walked over to Farrell. "How's it, Tim?"

Farrell shook Vincenti's hand, nodded

toward the blonde, grinning. "It's nice, Lou. Something new?"

"I'm in a hurry, Tim. What is it?" asked Vincenti, looking up at the detective.

"Someone's been popping off to 'Big J.," said Farrell. "Phoned him up that you'd run into some lead. Thought I'd run out and see if you had."

"Thanks for the tip, Tim. Not yet. You'll be the first I'll notify." Vincenti broke off and walked toward the front door as a pot-bellied man came through.

The pot-bellied man had a thick cigar in fat lips and padded across the floor toward Vincenti.

Farrell edged behind the bar and looked for the blonde. She had left her table and was gliding up the stairs that led to the second floor of private rooms. She moved up soft-footed, inviting Farrell with a nod of her head to join her.

Farrell came within a few steps of her. Her eyes were beautiful. Black, wide and dreamy. But there was nothing soft about the rest of her face, though it was finely modeled and without make-up.

She whispered, "Bring up something to drink, please."

Farrell flipped pug-nose a dollar for a bottle of Scotch and rejoined her at the head of the stairs. She took his hand, drew him with her through a door into a small cozy room, where a radio played softly. "Thanks," she said.

"Trying to dodge someone?"

She nodded. "And I hate to be alone up here." She sat down on the couch by the radio, turned the knob. "I just love Spanish music, don't you? Tell me when the little one goes, will you?"

She cupped her hands over the middle of her dress.

"Yeah, Captain Seymour," said Farrell, producing the Scotch. "Don't mind taking it straight, this way?" He slid next to her.

"I certainly do not," she smiled. "I need this one pretty badly." She uncorked the bottle, drank and handed it back to Farrell. He took a healthy swig and handed the bottle to her. She put the bottle to her lips again, and then Farrell finished the pint.

She edged close to him. "Honestly, I believe I'm getting a little tipsy."

"What's Seymour to you?" he asked. And then they heard the shot. They ran to the door together. Then the second shot came.

Farrell turned the door-knob, but she ran back. "There's another way out, and I'm taking it," she said. She pressed his hand. "Don't say I've been up here," she answered, put her finger to her lips and swished off.

FARRELL came down into the deserted barroom. The crowd was out front, where Vincenti lay on his stomach, his head over the curb. There was a little blood on the sidewalk and a red spot was spreading over his hip.

Farrell saw pot-bellied Seymour talking to a cop, and the bartender talking to another cop. Then he slipped out a side door without being seen and went into a phone booth a block away and got the police commissioner's office.

But Big J's office told Farrell that Big J wouldn't be in for a couple of hours. Farrell went out and hopped on a Blue Island Avenue street car.

He'd been around there before, but this time he didn't like the looks of the place. It was about eight o'clock and there were a couple of lights flickering from somewhere down the street. He made out the yellow letters painted on the window:

NICK RONNICH, SLOVAK HOME

He didn't go in the front door of the place, but slunk along a dirty alley down to the side door, opened it without knocking and went in.

It was all dark inside there, except for one lamp placed on a corner table, where the silhouettes of a man and woman sat still.

Someone spoke behind Farrell:

"Don't go no further."

Farrell stopped in his tracks. Heavy weights fell on his arms. Something pressed the flesh through his coat sleeves like thick steel springs that shut off the flow of blood. A fist hit him between

the eyes, and he struck out wildly with his right hand as he went down.

WHEN Farrell woke up, the lights were on. A big man with round blue eyes in a round face stood over him.

Farrell got up on his long legs. He was the same height as the other. "What the devil!" he said. "You dumb Slovak!"

Nick Ronnich grinned sheepishly. There was a blue swelling coming up under his eye. He touched the bump tenderly.

"Pretty good, yet, Farrell! By Heaven, yes!"

Then Farrell saw the other two. They stood by the bar as if nothing had happened. Farrell recognized Jerry from the width of his shoulders. The girl's black hair fanned down over white shoulders.

"Hello, Jerry. Hello, Mae," said Farrell.

Jerry didn't turn around. Mae Ricardi waved a white hand over her beer. She said: "Next time, knock."

Nick Ronnich took Farrell in a corner and they sat down.

Ronnich said: "Sorry—but we couldn't take any chances. Why didn't you phone me you were coming?"

"Didn't have time. Had to come right away."

"Give somebody the slip?" Ronnich smiled, then lowered his voice: "You'll keep me out of it if I tell you? Forget you're *Lieutenant* Farrell, huh, Farrell?"

Farrell's gray eyes became gray film. "Sure. Whatever it is, it's not official. My word on it, Nick."

"That's good," said Ronnich.

He got up and came back with some bottles and mixed gin and orange juice and ice. After the second drink Ronnich began to talk.

"It's like this. Don't ask me who did it. I don't know. They finally got Joe Swiderski! Somebody at Headquarters, maybe it's Seymour, is trying to pin it

on me. To make me the goat! Yes, I hated his guts, same as everybody else, but I didn't pull it."

Farrell leaned back, stretched his long legs and laughed:

"We know all about that at City Hall, Nick. We're darn glad Swiderski's gone. He wasn't quite as ratty as you think, Nick, but we're glad anyway. We're not looking to tie up anybody with his killing."

"Sure?"

"Sure."

Ronnich mixed two more drinks. Farrell didn't touch his. He said:

"Now get a load of this. I left Big J's office an hour ago. When I was there, he got a phone call that Vincenti stopped some lead with his gut."

RONNICH jumped up from his chair. His blue eyes speckled with little green dots. "I left Vincenti, myself, half an hour ago! Big J got that message half an hour before *that*, you say! But Vincenti was alive when I saw him!"

"And when I first saw him today, too," said Farrell. "That was just after you'd left, I guess. But about ten minutes after that, Vincenti *was* shot."

"Dead?" asked Ronnich in a flat, toneless voice.

"Or dying," said Farrell.

Most of the color went out of Ronnich's face. "How did Big J get advance information on the killing, before it really happened?"

"You tell me that, Nick," said Farrell. "I don't know. Big J will raise the devil. Vincenti was too important in his Ogden Avenue set-up."

Ronnich's round blue eyes became glary. "Is Big J on the level?" he asked.

"He would be with me, Nick," said Farrell. "Big J's out for A-number-one, but he'll go the limit for you if he likes you. Somehow, it don't add up, Nick."

"What?"

"That phone call to Big J."

"That phone call was just a joke," said Ronnich, his lips a thin line. "And you're joking, too, about Vincenti being plugged."

Farrell smashed a piece of ice from his glass against the wall. "They got him the hard way. In the back."

Ronnich swallowed hard. "Vincenti gave me a start when I didn't own a thin dime in all South Lake." His face flushed. "Wait here!" He ducked through to an adjoining room, was back in a minute with his hat pulled over one eye and a big bulge in his right-hand pocket.

"Let's get going," he said to Farrell.

They went out of there. At Eighteenth and Blue Island they climbed into a yellow cab, got off at Halstead a little below Twelfth Street.

THERE was a crowd in Vincenti's when they got there. Vincenti's thin still body lay on a couch in the middle of some faro and black-jack tables. Farrell recognized the two cops still guarding the body.

A group of Vincenti's house men clustered in a corner, buzzing with excitement. Out of that hive of gunmen, a paunchy, stocky man, in a brown serge suit too tight around his paunch, walked toward Farrell.

"Hello, Farrell," he greeted them. "What brings you and Ronnich here?" He rubbed a thick fist under the deeply flared nostrils of his broad nose.

Farrell said: "And why not, Seymour?"

Ronnich said: "What's the matter with that, Seymour? You know Vincenti was aces with me!"

Seymour lit a cigarette from a silver case without offering the others one, spoke softly: "It's just this. Both of you. Take it from a guy who wants to be friendly. Lay off this one. I can handle it. And I like to handle my things my way. And I don't need any help."

Farrell's thin lips curled. "Don't worry

about us, *Captain Seymour*. We won't horn in on the credit for nabbing Vincenti's killer, if you do nab him. But I'm telling you right now. I'm declaring myself in. With your help or without it!"

"Whose orders are those, Farrell? And what about Ronnich?" asked Seymour.

Ronnich said: "Seymour, you can't run me out, not when it's about Vincenti."

"Nor me, either, Sam," said Farrell, smiling.

Seymour filtered smoke through his wide nose. "Have it your way, then. For a while, maybe. I was just trying to be friendly. I can't help it if you two bums want to get into a jam, can I?" he asked amiably.

Farrell said sourly: "We appreciate what you're trying to do. What's the official on it?"

"I don't know any more about it now than you do," answered Seymour. "He was found on the sidewalk, on Halstead Street, with the blood coming out of his back like a fountain. Just before he was opening for the day's play. That's all I know."

"Nobody saw him plugged?" asked Farrell.

"What do you think?" asked Seymour.

Ronnich broke in: "He must have stepped out for something. Then they let him have it. And I guess you don't know anything about Joe Swiderski, either, huh, Seymour?"

"Sure, I heard about it," said Seymour, patting his paunch. "I heard that you and Swiderski weren't exactly pals, Nick, either."

Ronnich laid a big hand on Seymour's shoulder. "And who's next, Seymour? Who's next?"

Seymour shrugged. "Your guess is as good as mine." He flicked away his butt. "Don't say I didn't give you both time to think it over. That is, if you still feel like fooling around on this."

Farrell's mouth smiled, but his eyes



"Keep moving, lug!" a voice urged him from the rear.

didn't smile. "Much obliged for that," he said. "I suppose you'll take care of the book?"

"Sure," said Seymour, "be glad to. I've put in a call for the doc to look at him."

FARRELL and Ronnich rode back in a cab and got off at the corner of the alley and Ogden Avenue that flanked the Slovak Home.

When Ronnich went down the alley alone, Farrell turned back to the street. When he heard the first shot, something kicked up the gravel gently at his feet. Something whined close to his ear. Lead ricocheted against the brick wall behind him.

Farrell darted, crouched low, down Ogden to Twenty-first, slipped into a drug store. Inside the phone booth he waited about five minutes.

He phoned up Ronnich's place.

It took a long time before he could get any answer at the other end. At last he recognized the voice that trembled: "Yes?"

Farrell said: "Listen, Mae, it's Farrell. What's happened to Nick?"

Mae's voice was a curse and a sob. "How did you know?"

He heard the receiver click.

He opened the booth softly, slipped out the side door, swung into a cab and got off at a place on Roosevelt Road. He

had a whiskey sour and tried to figure things out.

This was the sense he could make out of it:

Three killed within six hours. Joe Swiderski. Lou Vincenti. Maybe Nick Ronnich. All big shots in South Lake's rackets, with their own set-ups, and no trouble between the three.

Farrell drank another whiskey sour and went out of there.

A kid cabby with a hook nose over a smart face hailed him:

"Hiyah, Lieutenant?"

Farrell said: "Just the guy, Meyer. I want your cab for all evening."

"Let's go," said Meyer.

"Forty-seventh and Ashland," said Farrell.

II



CROSS from the stockyards, Farrell went into a small Polish restaurant and bar. He walked through the place to the back door, opened it and went into a smaller room. There were a lot of plain wooden chairs there, and he sat down in one.

A hard-looking, pasty-faced fellow with pants too short, slid through a door, shook his head, said:

"We don't want any."

Farrell nodded for him to come closer. When pasty-face got near, Farrell said: "I was a friend of Joe's."

Pasty-face leered: "Yeah! He must have had plenty."

Farrell slipped a folded five-dollar bill at him. "On the level. I knew Joe like this." He put the two big fingers of his right hand close together. "I've got to see his wife."

Pasty-face crammed the five-spot in his vest pocket: "She said she's seein' nobody."

Farrell tore out a piece of paper from

a notebook, scribbled on it: "Vincenti and Ronnich, too," and signed it, "Tim."

"Give that to her," said Farrell. "She'll see me. You come along if you want to see that everythin's regular."

"Guess you're regular all right. Only, it won't do you any good."

"Just hand her that paper."

Pasty-face pulled his lower lip with skinny fingers, took the piece of paper, shifted something to his right-hand pocket. "Maybe I can do that much for you, Mister," he said.

He came closer, felt Farrell's side. "You'll have to leave that with me."

"Okay," said Farrell, and gave him the gun.

Pasty-face went away and came back after a few minutes. "You go this way."

FARRELL followed him up a long flight of wooden stairs to a long hallway on the second floor. "Right down the end of the hall," said Pasty-face. "She's waiting for you."

Farrell turned the knob and walked into a thin blue piece of metal under his eye.

Then he heard the husky voice of a woman: "He's all right, Stan. It's Farrell."

Farrell felt the metal slide away from his cheek, saw Stan's lip lift a bit to show a gold tooth as he pocketed his rod. There was a heavy odor of black narcissus in the air, a curtain parted and Anne Swiderski came in.

She was a blonde in her early thirties, beginning to take on a little fat, but still beautiful. Her eyes were red-lidded from weeping. There were two fresh rouge spots on her white face. A blue silk night-robe swathed her blonde body, trailing lace, as she went up to Farrell.

She motioned with her eyes for Stan to leave. When the door shut she took Farrell's hand.

Farrell returned her pressure, said:

"I'm sorry, Anne," let her hand drop.

A smile of tenderness and a little contempt curled her lip.

"You coppers are all mugs," she said.

"I knew about Vincenti and Ronnich before I got your note."

Farrell nodded. "Thought maybe you would have. Then perhaps you can give me a tip? Big J's raising the devil—"

Looking up at the length of him with bitter eyes, she sneered: "That big slob! It's Big J wants this! Wants that! With all of you! Anything to keep his set-up clear. Just as long as someone else can mop up on the dirty work."

"So you do know something about Vincenti and Ronnich? What is it, Anne?"

She shook her head. "Not a thing. And if I did, I'm not a squealer."

"I'm not asking you to squeal. Give me an idea. Just an idea."

"I'm all out of ideas tonight," said Anne Swiderski huskily.

A door opened to the sound of running feet.

"It's Uncle Tim!" cried a child's voice.

A little girl in a flannelette nightgown, her flaxen curls flying, came running to Farrell. "It's Uncle Tim, Mama!" she screamed.

Farrell threw her up and caught her, kissed her fondly. "Some kid! Some Peg!"

"I don't want to go to bed, Mama! I want to stay with Uncle Tim!" cried Peg, crowing on Farrell's shoulder, putting her pink and white cheek against his stiff-bristled jaw.

Anne's eyes got a little redder. She blinked away a tear.

"Put Peg in her bed, will you, Tim?"

FARRELL took Peg into the adjoining nursery, tucked her in her crib, played with her a few minutes, came back to Anne sitting in a chair, smoking a cigarette and blinking tears.

She buried her face against Farrell's coat as he stood over her, and she wept soft and bitterly.

"That's all right," said Farrell. He loosed her gently, sat down, took one of his own cigarettes, smoked in silence. Anne cried without making any sound.

"Ever since she could talk, she called you Uncle Tim," said Anne after a while.

"Guess you didn't have much luck with Joe?" Farrell announced the words slowly.

She blew smoke slowly, dabbed at her eyes. "The first six months weren't so bad. After that it was just Hell."

"I guess it was pretty tough," said Farrell.

She took his hand. "The only happy time I've had since I was married was with you, Tim. Remember? At Atlantic City?"

Farrell nodded, played with the knot in his tie.

"That was six years ago," she said.

"Was it?" said Farrell, a far-away bleakness in his eyes.

She leaned toward him, her mouth close to his, said huskily, "If we could only live those hours over again, Tim! Could we, Tim?"

He shook his head. "Well, Anne, we might have been happy once. But you wanted the big dough. A dick who was just trying to get along couldn't give you that."

"I picked wrong, that's all," said Anne. She sighed. "I suppose it doesn't make much difference to you, now."

Farrell sat down, finished his cigarette in silence. The room became heavy with the mingled smell of tobacco and perfume. "It makes a difference all right," he said, "but it's too late for all that."

Anne spoke: "Listen, Tim, did you ever stop to think that Vincenti and Ronnich—and Joe—were all interested in the same thing?"

"Who *is she?*" asked Farrell.

"That won't be too tough for a smart copper, Tim. I won't say any more."

He stood up. She took his hand. Her eyes were soft. "So long, Tim."

Farrell crushed her hand. "So long," he said, and walked out of the room.

The gold-toothed Stan teetered on a chair at the head of the stairs, nodded to Farrell as he descended.

Down below Pasty-face gave him back his gun.

FARRELL saw Meyer's silent cab hugging the dark side of the street. Then he heard the running purr of a motor, faced around, recognized the long, light-blue Cadillac racing up Forty-seventh Street.

A niche in the brick wall back of him hugged Farrell's long body as the car sped past. When he heard the motor die down, he squirmed from his place in the wall, scraping along the sides of houses, away from the light, until he came to Forty-sixth.

He turned the corner. A beam of light stabbed his eyes. His leg brushed the running board of a long, light blue under-slung car. He heard the voice first: "Imagine finding you here, Farrell," before he saw Seymour at the wheel.

A slender, dark fellow sat next to Seymour, his left hand on the snapped-down brim of his soft gray hat, his right hand inside his coat pocket.

"Nice car, Seymour," said Farrell, stepping ahead, "and a nice night."

"Just a minute, Farrell." Seymour opened the door, easing his belly out first, lurched down, walked to the curb. "Let's talk a bit, Farrell."

The dark fellow hunched over the wheel, shoulders down, without changing the position of his hand.

Farrell twisted away a step, out of the spotlight beam.

"This is Eddie O'Dowd," said Sey-

mour, jerking his head toward the wheel.

"You know Eddie, don't you, Farrell?"

"Never had the satisfaction before," said Farrell, shifting back a step behind the telephone pole. "Certainly much obliged for the introduction."

O'Dowd's voice came soft and silky: "It's been a pleasure, Lieutenant."

Seymour advanced a step to Farrell. About Seymour there was the scent of a heavy perfume that Farrell sensed he had known somewhere.

"Let's cut the clowning," said Seymour.

"First you," said Farrell.

"All right. This is the low-down. Take it or leave it. Or stick it anywhere you want, Farrell. But lay off. Lay off of everything. And I wouldn't advise you to be calling on Anne Swiderski any more. You wouldn't want *your* friends to get hurt, would you?"

"Is that all?"

"That's all."

Farrell thumbed a cigarette from his pack without taking his eyes from Seymour, struck a match on the iron telephone pole, lighted up, laughed.

"Found it awkward to have any friends, *Captain* Seymour. But I'll tell you this. The more I look at that phiz of yours, the more I thank God it makes it easy for me to hate your guts."

Farrell gave a mock salute, nodded to O'Dowd, backed away facing them, the iron pole a thin tall shield. "Good night," he said.

Seymour climbed back in the car. "Farrell, you're asking for it!" he said.

O'Dowd's laugh was silvery: "He's a cock, all right."

The Cadillac jerked forward, roared away.

Meyer's cab eased around the corner. Farrell ran for it, leaped in.

Meyer said: "A couple of guys at the corner sizing us up."

"Okay, kid. Drive right past them."

MEYER skidded the cab around Forty-sixth Street and Tim Farrell got a glimpse of the two. A couple of flat-feet in plain clothes. Seymour's men.

Farrell said: "I just got a big laugh,

Anne blinked away a tear.
"Put Peg in her bed, will
you, Tim?"



kid. Drive back to Ogden and Eighteenth."

In front of Denmark's bar Farrell got off and told Meyer to wait for him. Inside, the clock pointed to a little past midnight. He phoned up Nick Ronnich's place. He got Mae on the wire.

She sobbed: "I'm sorry, Tim—I got you wrong before. Nick told me—before he went—it wasn't you that did it."

"He was a great guy—that Slovak," Farrell said bitterly. "Please come over to see me at once, Mae. I'm at Denmark's on Ogden Avenue."

"I know where it is," she said, "you wait."

Farrell went out and paid off Meyer with a two spot and a half dollar. "Beat it for tonight and pick me up here at halfpast eight in the morning."

Meyer grinned, winked, jammed the money in his pocket, slid at the wheel with: "It's the first million that's the toughest," bounced his cab crazily off the curb and spun around the corner."

Farrell went back in Denmark's, drank real Cognac straight.

III



SKIRT swished through a door above neat ankles. Mae swung in, her huge hazel eyes, red-rimmed, ran over to Farrell, sobbing on his shoulder. "Forgive me, Tim, for ever suspecting you! Oh, Tim! Nick was my man, and now he's gone!"

She looked at him tearfully while he touched her dark hair, then he said very gently, "I guess you need a drink."

"No, I couldn't drink a thing tonight. Was there anything you wanted to ask me about Nick, Tim?"

He drew her down to a seat and sat opposite her, holding her hand. Her fingers were warm, and her eyes were red-rimmed no longer.

Farrell said: "It's like this, Mae. What's the name of the skirt that Nick was steamed up about?"

Mae's skin blushed a fiery red. "Nick's dead now," she said in a voice barely audible. "I've got nothing to say against Nick. He was a sight better than most."

"What was her name, Mae?" asked Farrell softly.

"What do you want to know for?"

"Look here, Mae. Either you believe I was a good friend of Nick's or I was the opposite. You don't want those rats to get away with it, do you?"

Mae's hand gripped the side of her chair. The pink flesh around her nails became white from her grip. Her voice rose to a scream:

"Not those rats, I don't!"

"Then come clean. You know I always shot square with Nick!"

Mae burst into tears, buried her head in her hands. Farrell let her cry.

She quit crying, stared moodily at Farrell. "I guess you always did shoot square with Nick, Tim. And though I hated her, and still hate her, I hate being a squealer," she said stubbornly.

"No one says *she* killed Nick," replied Farrell, "so if you tell me who *she* is, you won't be doing a squeal. Just her name. One thing leads to another."

"Here it is, then. But I'm not saying she had anything to do with Nick's killing. So maybe it isn't squealing. Nick was nuts about a dame named Sophie Swoboda. You know how men go for a girl, even though she's playing 'em all, one against the other?"

"Yeah, I know. Where does she live?"

"She lives with her old man over on Chisholm Street. Just her, her father and some distant relative of her old man's from the old country. She's got plenty of what it takes, too!"

"I suppose Vincenti and Joe Swiderski were trying to make her also?"

Mae was bitter: "I told you that she

played around with all the big shots. They say Seymour is laying it on the line for her now. I've seen her twice. *They* didn't know I was around when she was there." There was a half sneer on Mae's face. "But just before she came, *they* thought I was pretty hot stuff. This Sophie dame is the kind men kill each other for. The kind every other woman hates in the bottom of her heart."

Farrell said: "There are only two kinds of women. The kind men will do anything for—and the other kind."

Mae's eyes narrowed. She leaned forward. "Well, in what class do I belong, Tim?" she coaxed.

"Oh, you're *the* kind, Mae," Farrell drawled, getting up. "Well, I'll see you some other time."

"That's a date," she said, eyeing him through slanted lids, got up and clicked out, trailing an aroma of Robe de Nuit behind her.

FARRELL had another Cognac, then he left Denmark's with a warm tingling feeling inside him, walked over to Thirteenth Street, to a little rooming house and rang the door-bell.

A light showed and a gray-haired, untidy woman opened the door. "Oh, it's you," she said hoarsely. "You ain't been around lately."

"Not much," said Farrell.

She gave him a key from her dirty apron. "The same as always?" she asked.

Farrell nodded, mounted the stairs, unlocked the door at the head of the landing, didn't turn on the light and bolted the door. Then he kicked off his shoes, stuck his gun under his pillow, put his hat on the table, lay down with his clothes on.

He dozed off right away. He dreamed he was standing on the top of a high cliff with the blue-eyed Anne Swiderski by his side. He was holding her hand when suddenly someone from behind hurled

them over the top of the bluff. He began floating off with her, 'way above the plain below. He looked down, and still holding the blue-eyed Anne by her hand, he started falling with her, and all around them shooting stars were streaming like hail-stones. He was falling with her, fast, when his head crashed into a pile of rocks.

He woke up with his heart in his mouth. Something smashed at the door. He grabbed the gun from under his pillow, slipped into his oxfords, yanked on his hat, and cat-footed over to the window, tore it open, leaped out onto the rusty fire-escape. It quivered as his feet hit it, and he heard the lock of the door snap inside the room, two orange streaks cut over the black above his head. Glass rattled to bits at his feet.

Something clean and sharp wiped across Farrell's cheek before he heard the double crack of a gun behind him. At the third step down, he fired back once from his hip. He heard a groan, then clattered on shaky iron to the street.

He dodged down a dark alley, turned in the glare of a street lamp, stopped a minute to catch his breath and felt metal at the bottom of his spine.

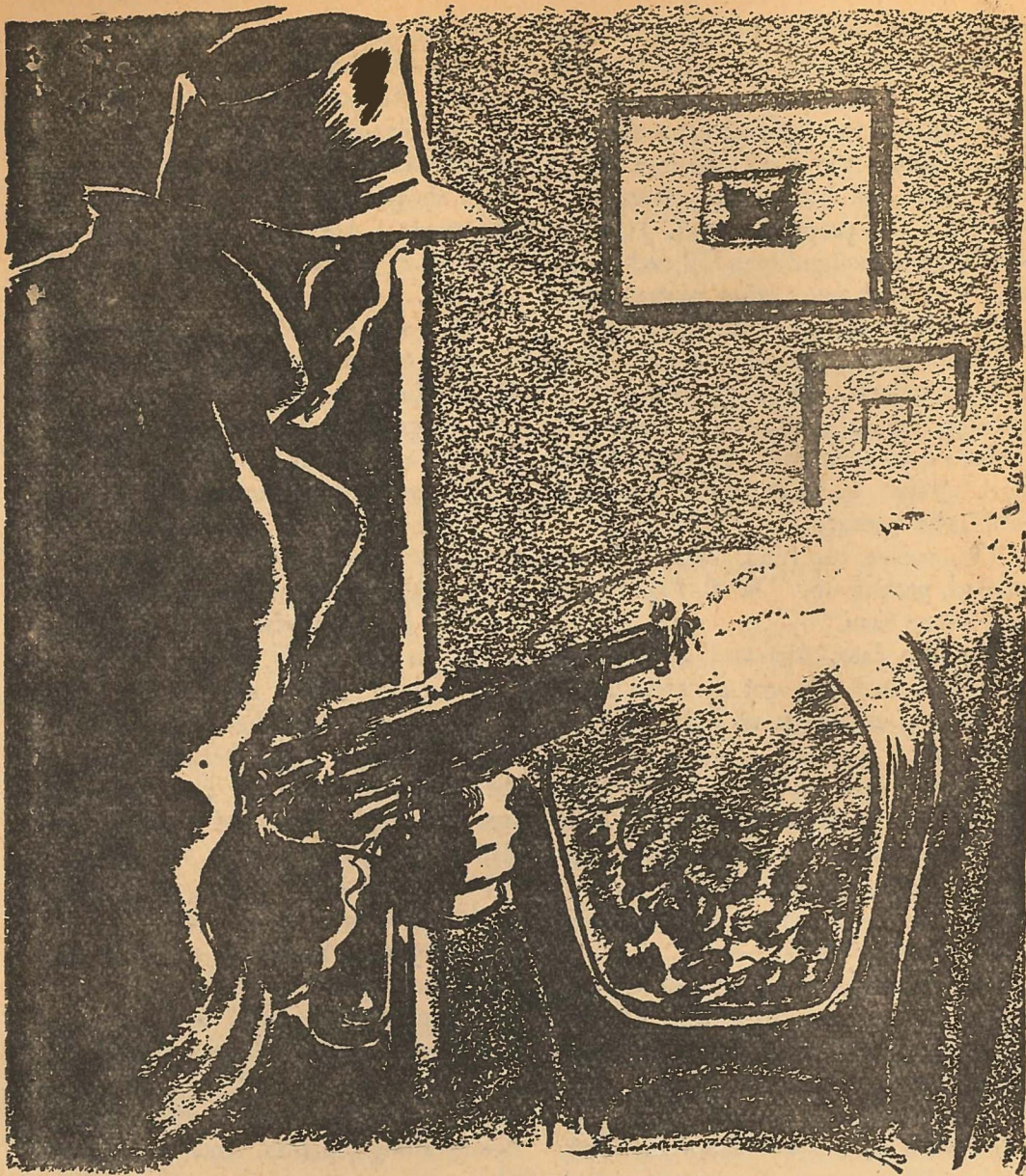
"Keep moving, lug!" a voice urged him from the rear. The gun played with his backbone. A man in a turned-up coat, a half head taller than Farrell, swung alongside him, stuck steel at his ribs.

"Hop into the heap, pal," said the tall man.

Then Farrell saw the car. It was easing along the curb. A woman in a black dress was at the wheel.

The gun at his back shoved Farrell over the sidewalk. The tall fellow tugged at Farrell's arm, hustled him into the seat, next to the black dress. Farrell smelled a familiar sweetish, heavy smell.

Anne Swiderski shot the car rapidly ahead.



"You aren't hurt, are you, Tim?" she breathed out huskily.

"Your boys scare a guy," Farrell said. "What's the angle?"

In a dark side street she brought the car to a stop, said over her shoulder: "Anybody following, Tony?"

Farrell recognized the voice of the pasty-faced one reply: "Nobody, yet. Seen anybody, Stan?"

"Nobody," said Stan.

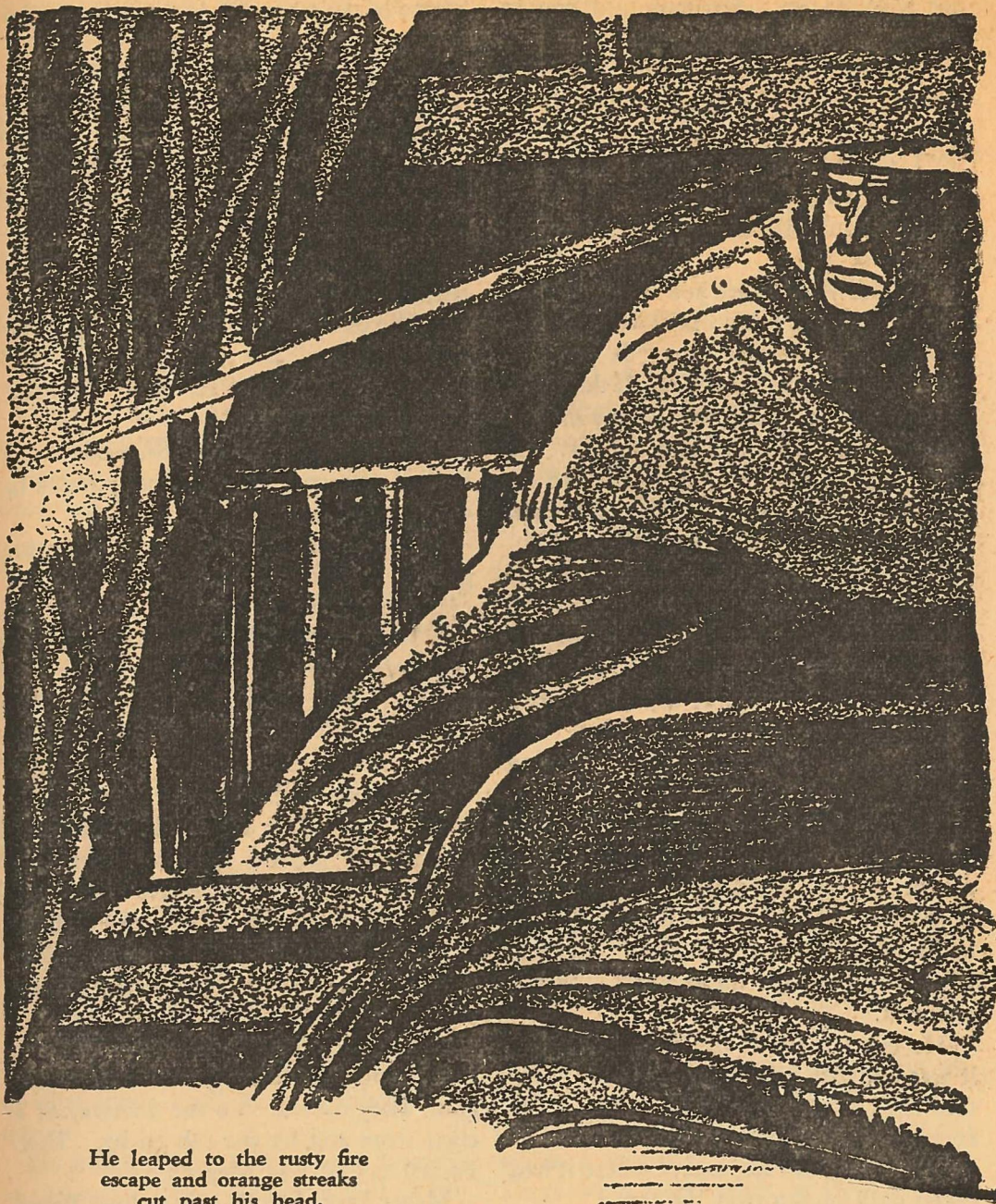
"We heard shots up there," said Anne. "What happened?"

"Not very much," answered Farrell. "How did you know?"

She laid her warm hand on his. "Never mind how, now. I didn't want you to—oh, Tim! Why don't you forget the whole mess?"

"Forget what?" asked Farrell.

"You know what I mean. About those killings. About Vincenti and Ronnich."



He leaped to the rusty fire
escape and orange streaks
cut past his head.

"And about Joe, too, Anne?"

"Yes," she whispered hoarsely, turned
and pressed her lips on his. He took
her face away.

"I got things to do," he said. But
her lips came back to his, spoke nothing.
Then he shook her off brutally. "I've

got work to do. Seymour told you to tell me to lay off, didn't he?"

"What difference does that make?" she pleaded. "Tim, I don't want you to get hurt."

"I can take care of that. What did Seymour tell you?"

"He didn't tell me anything."

"You're lying."

"I don't want to see you dead, Tim."

"Well, I don't run out! Not now! It's a matter of principle now. A *personal* matter between me and *Captain* Seymour. Sort of a game. And now it's my move."

Farrell opened the door of the car. "I'll be going to bed," he said, nodded to the two in the back seat. "Thanks for the wet nurses, Anne," and stepped out.

She grabbed his arm. "It's just that I care what happens to—"

"That smells too much of Captain Seymour," Farrell said, sniffing the aroma of her dress, stepped out of the car, bowed, heard her cry, "Your face, Tim!" He turned away from her without looking around.

He stumbled on. He heard the soft purr of the motor dying away. Somewhere a cock crowed. He walked across a field. A sparrow chirped from a bush. The sky had a bit of gleam in the East. An early Ogden Avenue car came along. Farrell got in it.

He got a room at the Warren House. It was halfpast four in the morning. He told the clerk to wake him at 7.30. Before he went to bed he washed some of the blood off his face, except where it had caked dark brown over the cut.

WHEN Farrell got up the first thing he did was to phone Mae.

She reported: "I got a visit from one of Seymour's men. Dark fellow in a green suit. Told me to talk to you about your health. Have a tight squeeze last night?"

Farrell said: "Could have been tighter. Come down right away to the Warren.

Seymour can't run all of South Lake the way he wants."

"Me neither," asserted Mae. "Be right down."

Farrell got dressed at once, had bacon and eggs in the grill, read the *Tribune* for five minutes, then walked into the lobby.

Mae was waiting there in a new black ensemble. She sat down, crossing one leg over the other. "Seymour himself got me on the phone," she said, "before I left. Said he'd make it hot for me if I handed out anything to you."

"First it was Sophie Swoboda who burned you up. Now Seymour wants to do you a favor."

Mae pressed her red lips tightly together. "That bum can't scare me."

"The first thing we do then is to see this Sophie Swoboda. You know where she lives?"

"Yes." Mae leaned close to him. Her lips pouted. "Do you like me in black, Tim?" she murmured.

"I like you in anything," said Farrell.

They got off at the Eighteenth Street stop on the Jackson "El," and then they boarded an Eighteenth Street trolley.

They alighted three blocks east of Denmark's and walked west a half block before Farrell noticed a cab trailing them on the other side of the street.

Farrell said: "Watch that Checker, Mae," and put his fist on the butt of his gun. They ducked into the doorway of a cigar store and let the cab go by. Then Farrell saw it was Meyer's.

Meyer kept the cab going slow. When he saw them, he angled over to the curb. Farrell and Mae climbed into the back. Meyer speeded north two blocks and then stopped, leaned back and said:

"Don't you know you'd have lead in your belly, if you showed up at Denmark's?"

Mae said: "Meyer's right. We're both needing our brains examined. Someone

must have spotted you making the date with the kid last night."

Farrell said: "Thanks, Meyer."

Meyer said: "First thing I heard when I got up this morning was that someone tried to plug you, Lieutenant. So then, I begin to figure out that something's screwy. So I been around here an hour trying to head you off."

"Thanks, kid," Farrell said. Meyer grinned. Mae smiled as she carminded her lips.

Farrell pulled out the Camels.

They all had a smoke for a while without saying anything.

Then Mae said: "Drive to 632 South Chisholm."

MYER shot the car west on Twenty-second Street, kept it going at forty miles crossing Leavitt. A black sedan bore down on them from the left. Two sawed-off shotguns covered the cab.

"Down, Mae!" cried Farrell, and ducked.

The guns went to work. Lead raked the cab, glass smashed. Farrell saw Mae crouched in a corner, pieces of splintered window sprayed on her black dress.

Meyer roared away from the whine of bullets, too fast for another round, as the black sedan cut in back of the cab. He skidded the cab around the corner, jammed it up to sixty over the cobble stones of Twenty-fifth Street. He kept up that speed until he hit Kedzie Avenue.

He stopped the cab in a vacant lot next to a garage. They got out to look at the damage. A pock-marked man in blue dungarees came out of the garage office, pursed his thick lips in a long whistle, shook his head and walked away.

Jagged pieces of glass stuck out where the windows had been. The upholstery in the back was riddled.

Farrell said: "Name the damage, but don't graft too much, kid."

Meyer said: "Okay. It'll be plenty."

Farrell grinned. "Don't lay it on too heavy," he said, and walked over to the garage office.

Inside, the pock-marked fellow leaned back in a swivel chair, bit off a piece of plug, eyed Farrell blankly. Farrell fingered the phone. "May I?" The other nodded.

Farrell dialed a number, got it, said:

"Put Big J on. Tell him it's Farrell."

After a good wait, a voice with a burr in it replied: "How are ye, lad?"

"Things are happening," said Farrell.

"Suppose I see you this afternoon?"

"Make it about three—exactly," said the voice of Big J.

Farrell joined Mae and Meyer at the Green Hat Bar across the street. They had a swig of rye each, then they went back to the cab.

Meyer didn't stop until he drove up to 632 South Chisholm Street.

IV



CHISHOLM STREET was a tree-shaded avenue in the Bohemian section. It had an old-world look about it with its spotlessly kept sidewalks, neat brick buildings, all with cream-colored lace curtains at every window.

Number 632 was a two-story affair of yellow brick with a triangular roof, a trimmed green lawn, down the center of which a smoothly swept pavement laid. There were rose bushes in front of the screened porch. On the porch was a hammock.

Mae got out of the car and went around the corner. Meyer stayed at the wheel. Farrell walked down the pavement in the center of the lawn, up the porch steps.

There was a quiet Sunday-like air about the place when he rang the door-bell. He rang it a good two minutes without any

answer. He glanced around. The street was deserted. Somewhere a piano played a Chopin waltz.

After a while, the lace curtains on the door parted and a face peered at him. The face had black eyes, was darkly red and had a long, sandy straggling mustache. It was a foreign-looking face.

Farrell saw lips move beneath long bristles. The face yelled at him through the glass:

"What you want?"

Farrell yelled back: "Open up and I talk."

The face turned for a minute as if parleying with someone behind. The door opened and a man stood in the doorway. He didn't invite Farrell in.

He was about sixty with grizzled gray hair. He was tall, straight and slender, like an ex-sergeant. He wore a shiny black serge suit and a dirty white shirt without a collar.

He said again: "What you want?"

Farrell said: "I came to see Sophie. Sophie Swoboda. I'm a friend." The man's black eyes had a far away look in them. They seemed to look at Farrell's head, away from him, the man said:

"Sophie not in."

"Come on, dad! I've got to see her. It's for her own good!"

"Not in."

Farrell heard steps on the stairs back of the old man and someone said:

"Say, guy, leave that old man alone. There ain't anyone here but us two."

The voice pronounced the "B" like a "P." The word "But" sounded like "Put."

"I'll stick around," bluffed Farrell. "She came in last night and she hasn't gone out yet. You may as well save time and tell her to come on out."

The voice on the stairs continued to change "B's" to "P's."

"You don't believe me! I'm a poarder here, I ought to know!"

"I'll hang around anyway," said Farrell.

"You go away," said the old man, his hand ready on the knob to close the door.

Farrell heard whispering on the stairs. Then a rich contralto spoke:

"All right, Mister. You want to see me? Who are you?"

Farrell said, "Do you know Mae Ricardi?"

He made out the flutter of a dress at the head of the stairs, heard her reply:

"Yes, I know Mae. What about it?"

"It's all right, then. Mae's a friend of mine."

The old man broke in: "Shall I tell him to come in, Sophie?"

She walked slowly down the stairs, saying, "Oh, I guess he's all right, Pa. Never mind, Willie, I'll talk to him."

The old man said, "Come this way," but Farrell didn't pay any attention to him.

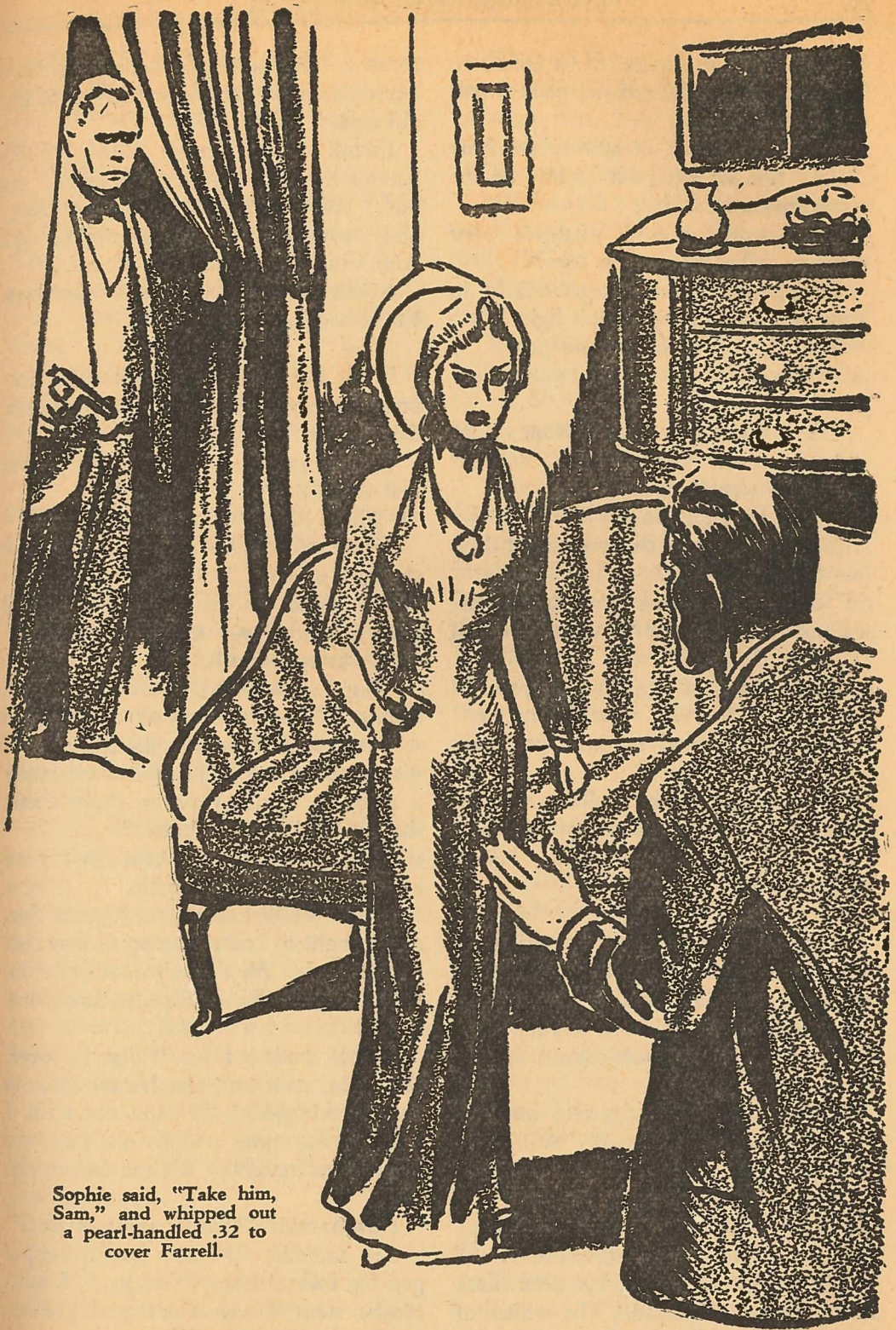
Farrell was looking at her. It was the dark-eyed blonde he'd met at Vincenti's.

SHE came down the steps in a simple black and white house dress. In the morning light her blonde hair wasn't too blonde, and her velvet dark eyes were as mysterious and alluring as when he first saw them. Eyes, dark, large and soft as black velvet now, with a wary dark look in them. Her lashes were long. She didn't have to use mascara.

She stepped to Farrell like a slim, blonde panther held in leash. She held out her hand. There was no tint on the fingers that he pressed. He couldn't keep his look away from her eyes.

She flashed a brilliant smile. "Better sit down, Mister. I hadn't expected to see you again—so soon. Sort of early to be calling. All right, Dad. You can go. Tell Willie to come out."

She led Farrell into the parlor. It was furnished with three blue overstuffed chairs, a small upright piano with a lace



Sophie said, "Take him, Sam," and whipped out a pearl-handled .32 to cover Farrell.

cover draped on its top. An imitation Chinese rug of flowered red pattern was on the floor.

Farrell sat down in one of the blue chairs. She sat alongside of him on the piano stool and said:

"And now, Mister—whatever your name is—what brings you here?"

Farrell offered her a cigarette, lit it. Took one for himself, didn't light it.

She said: "You start from here."

"No wonder they were nuts about you."

"Yes? Well, spit it out. What's your racket? I know you're a dick. So start asking me something."

"How do you know?"

"Seymour told me that you might drop in. So start asking."

"What do you know about Joe Swider-ski and the other two? About Vincenti and Nick Ronnich?"

She laughed. "I wouldn't tell you if I did know. Anyway, what's it to me?"

"They all seemed to think you were pretty swell."

"You think so? Sure. They took me places. I didn't owe them anything then. I don't owe them anything now. Square with the world. That's me."

A SLIM young fellow with a pale face, staring hard black eyes, stood underneath the drapes in the door. His double-breasted brown flannel suit was the latest cut and he wore black patent leather shoes.

Sophie flicked her cigarette into the empty fireplace. She said, "Willie, do you know this fellow?"

Willie shook his head. "No. Put I see Mae outside. I guess he's all right." The word "But," he pronounced "Put."

Willie kept smoothing his sleek black hair off a low forehead. The whites of his eyes had a yellowish tint to them. He bit his lips.

Sophie said: "Mister—whatever your

name is. This is Willie Volkmann. He's a thirty-second cousin or something of my old man."

Farrell didn't shake Willie Volkmann's hand. "My name's Farrell," he said. "Now that everybody knows everybody, why was Polack Joe knocked off? And Vincenti? And Nick Ronnich?"

Sophie said: "That's three questions. I'll answer one at a time."

"Fine."

"First question. I don't know. Second question. Ditto. Third question. Same as one and two."

Farrell got up. "So that's how you feel about it?"

"That's how," said Sophie.

Willie Volkmann said: "That's how she feels about it." He sleeked back his hair. "What do you mean, she should talk? She's told you all she knows. Anyway, who sent you here?"

"Big J's interested," said Tim Farrell evenly. "Those three had something to do with his political set-up, y'understand. If it's all aimed at Big J's lay-out or simply a personal matter between those three, that's what I want to know."

"That's a long spiel, but it don't mean a thing to me," said Sophie.

Willie Volkmann said: "I guess Seymour ought to know whether it concerns Pig J or not. He's told you what to do, hasn't he? Why don't you leave her alone?"

Sophie motioned for Willie to leave. When he went out, she leaned close to Farrell, whispered: "I can't say what I want to say here. Why not take me somewhere tonight? We can talk things over."

Farrell said: "Whose angle is that?"

She smiled. "Mine. You'll simply pay for information. You pay. I talk. Maybe what I say won't make sense. Maybe it will. Afraid?"

"Just careful." He stood up, appraised her from ankles to golden hair. He

laughed. "I said 'just careful,'" he repeated, "but not *too* careful. It's a go. The Victoria Hotel lobby tonight at 8:15."

"I'll be there," she said.

Farrell went out without seeing Willie Volkmann or the old man, got into the cab.

They picked up Mae at the corner and then drove her back to the "Slovak Home" a roundabout way.

Farrell had Meyer drive him down to the Loop, paid him off for the day. Then he spent half an hour in a store on Michigan Boulevard.

He ordered a soft gray shirt and a couple of ties sent to his North Side apartment, then walked over to City Hall.

JOHN Mc GLANAGHAN, police commissioner of the city of South Lake was six feet four and weighed two hundred and ninety pounds.

Wedged comfortably in his specially constructed easy chair, he bit on a fat Havana, studied Farrell's face with a sideways look.

Farrell, his long legs at ease, slouched in a chair opposite, wreathed in blue smoke.

McGlanaghan said: "I'm not really as bad as they paint me."

Farrell smiled. "We get along, Big J."

McGlanaghan hunched his paunch up with enormous fists, blew blue smoke under his long upper lip without removing the perfecto from his mouth.

"This is it, Tim. Why don't you change that job you are working on?" The words had a soothing burr in the tone of them.

"Is this a suggestion or an order?"

"Why don't you drop it?"

Farrell said: "Seymour's orders?"

McGlanaghan laid down his cigar, looked at Farrell like a father looks at a spoiled child. His slate-gray eyes looked tired. He said:

"Next to the mayor, I'm the big fellow in South Lake. That's what they say. Even at that, I've got to follow suggestions sometimes."

"Seymour don't like what I'm doing?"

McGlanaghan picked up his cigar, bit on it hard. "Make it that way if you want to," he said.

"Seymour tell you what happened today?"

"No. But here's what he says. Those killings don't concern my organization on the South Side. Showed me that my tie-up there is as good as ever."

"Well?"

"Then what do we care how they get killed? Maybe South Lake is better off without them. They weren't bad lads. Maybe a little bit too ambitious, perhaps." McGlanaghan looked at the top of his cigar. "Maybe we want to get rid of their kind in South Lake."

"And fill it up with skunks like Seymour and Eddie O'Dowd?"

If a face as big as McGlanaghan could wince, Farrell thought McGlanaghan winced. McGlanaghan ruffled a huge hand in his thick mousy hair, spoke calmly:

"I need the Seymours and Eddie O'Dowds for a while, Tim. For a while. Look at this town when I took it over. Everybody raising hell and nobody paying for it. Now you look at it, lad. The town's out of the red. The games are organized. Nobody gets hurt that don't want to get hurt. The town's organized. The way I want. The taxpayers are satisfied. I'll use Seymour as long as he's valuable to me. He's valuable now."

FARRELL said: "Last night Seymour sent a chopper after me at a hide-out on Thirteenth Street. Today he tried it with sawed-off guns. He's too versatile."

McGlanaghan's eyes bulged. His voice got thick and burry:

"That dirty ——! That he never told

me about! Tim, you're the one Mick of all—of all of 'em, I can depend on! I can! He did that to you, he did?"

McGlanaghan's voice grew soft. He said:

"Well, then, Tim, what do you want to do about it?"

Farrell's eyes smiled with his lips:

"Big J, he's got me sore. He's rubbed me the wrong way, and he's been rubbing me the wrong way too long! If he hadn't acted as if he had the whole South Side tied up in a bag, mebbe I'd have stayed put. I won't stay put now. It would gnaw inside of me for the rest of my life. I want to get to the bottom of those killings. No matter where it leads to. If I get the dope, then you use it if you want. Or not."

"All right, Tim. Go ahead as you want to. But for the present, you're on your own, y'understand. This isn't official."

"Farrell grinned. "Sure. Not official at all. Just between Seymour and me. That'll make it easier."

McGlanaghan laughed, bit on his cigar a minute. He said: "If you need anything in a pinch, y'understand?"

"Maybe," said Farrell, "maybe in a pinch. By the way. Wonder if you can clear up a point about this matter?"

"What?"

"Do you remember the exact words of that phone message last night? Before Vincenti took the rap?"

McGlanaghan laid down his perfecto. "If I remember," he said slowly, "this is what the voice said over the wire: 'Vincenti is bumped off' or 'pumped full of lead,' or something like that."

"Is that all?"

"And then he said something else. I asked him who it was that was talking, and the voice at the other end said he meant what he said. He said: 'This is no punk that's talking.'"

"He said 'he was no punk,'" repeated Farrell.

He got up. He grasped McGlanaghan's big paw, said: "Maybe if I need you," and walked out.

He almost collided with Seymour outside the door.

Seymour detained him, laying a hand on which sparkled a diamond ring on Farrell's sleeve. Seymour said:

"Now that we understand each other, Farrell, come over into my office. I've got something to say."

"I can hear a rat talking right here and know it's a rat," said Farrell.

Seymour's smile was undisturbed. His words were soft:

"I don't care what you call me. I've got something to show you, in my office. You're not scared, are you?"

Seymour's office was diagonally across from McGlanaghan's. Farrell followed Seymour in and Seymour closed the door.

"Let's start over," Seymour said. From his trousers pocket he fished out a fist full of greenbacks. "Maybe you can use this."

"Use it when I earn it," said Farrell.

"There's a couple of grand here. It's yours if you say so."

"That's big dough! What am I supposed to do to get it?"

"You've already earned it."

"How?"

Seymour rubbed the bottom of his fat nose with a hairy hand. His eyes were little, the whites hardly showing around the dull brown. "Didn't you agree with Big J, to—"

Farrell laughed. "Sure, we agreed, that whatever goes up must come down," he said, went out and closed the door.

V



AT THE bottom of City Hall's stone steps an underslung light blue Cadillac hugged the curb. O'Dowd in a perfectly tailored dark green suit sat at the wheel.

"By appointment," said Farrell, dragging O'Dowd into the room.



"How's tricks?" he purred as Farrell passed him.

Farrell said: "Figure this one. Why is it you look more like a rat than anything else?"

O'Dowd's lips held their smile. There was a slight flicker of his dark lashes, his eyes black and filmy. He adjusted the soft brim of his hat. He said dreamily:

"Maybe I'll match that one sometime."

"Anytime's a good time," said Farrell and turned away.

A blonde head poked out from the back of the Cadillac. "Tim, I must see you," urged Anne Swiderski's husky voice.

"Nice day for a ride," said Farrell. "Nicer than yesterday."

His long legs went past her.

"You don't understand, Tim!" she cried.

He didn't stop to listen.

At the Great Northern Theatre Farrell bought two tickets for "Say It With Song," went over to his room on the North Side and had a good nap.

He got up at six-thirty. Took a shower, shaved, dressed carefully. He unwrapped the gray shirt that had been delivered and put it on, knotted his favorite maroon tie in the collar. He donned his best suit, a gray, double-breasted model, hand-tailored.

He snapped the brim of his gray Stetson to the slant he liked, looked at himself in the mirror.

"Hello, sucker," he said, and went out.

He was in the Victoria Lobby fifteen minutes ahead of time. He had started on his third cigarette when she came in.

The palms of his hand began to get moist.

Sophie walked toward him lithely elegant. Her green silk dress flared. Her high spiked pumps clicked to meet him as he came to her.

A simple, expensive black beret set off the blonde brilliance of her hair. Her mouth was a line of red allure.

She pressed his hand, her look a blend of challenge and cajolery. Amber lights flickered in her dark eyes.

She took off her gloves. There were no rings on her slender fingers.

He said: "You look swell. We're going up to the Great Northern."

"That's stunning! We'll talk after the show."

They got in a cab in front of the hotel and drove toward the theatre.

She moved close to him. Her hands were warm in his. He crushed her in his arms.

They broke away, leaned back in their seats. Farrell said, "Now, baby, what do you know about those three? About Vincenti and Ronnich and Joe Swiderski?"

She took his offered cigarette, lighted up. "Can't you forget business for a while, when you're out with a lady?"

During the first act a lot of girls danced and sang. Farrell never remembered much of the plot. Most of the time he had his eyes on Sophie.

After the first intermission he went out to the lobby, phoned Meyer to tail him after the show. Meyer promised that he would and Farrell hung up and went out to the sidewalk for a breath of air.

He lit a cigarette, cupping the match in his hand away from the wind off the lake. He turned his head to look at the clock on the post-office tower. Something black rose up before his eyes. Something smashed down on the top of his skull.

Farrell fell to the curb. He saw a slim, unhatted, black-haired fellow kicking a leg violently. The leg belonged to Willie Volkmann. It was kicking Farrell's face.

FARRELL'S eyes opened. He struggled up, two citizens in evening clothes holding his arms. A cop took out his notebook. "Do you wish to make a complaint?" he said.

Farrell blinked, fingered something like a plum at his jaw. "Not till after the second act," he said, and slipped from

the two fellows in full dress and walked dizzily to his seat.

He slid next to Sophie as the curtain went up. She glanced at his face, said nothing, turned her gaze to the foot-lights.

When the show was over, they went outside, got into a taxi.

"Where to, now?" he asked.

"How about coming up to my place and we can talk there?"

"Over on Chisholm Street?"

"No. Over on the North Side. My own apartment. That's where I usually entertain my friends."

He managed a grin.

"If it hurts you that much, don't," she said.

Farrell saw that Meyer had picked up the cab and was following behind in a big car.

"Okay," Farrell said to her. "We'll go over to the North Side."

The cab stopped at Division and Clark. They got off there, walked south a block to a brand new, white fire-proof apartment house.

The boy whizzed them up to the third floor in a smart gilt cage. Farrell followed her into Apartment 3B.

She clicked on the lights.

They were in a large room fitted with real Chinese rugs, etchings on the wall and not too much furniture. Three chairs, a glass-topped buffet and a small server behind it.

There was a door that connected with a room that Farrell supposed was a kitchen. On the other side blue velvet drapes cut off the rest of the apartment. Near the drapes was a phone and stand.

The lights were not too bright.

He helped her off with her gloves and they sat down.

He said: "This is certainly a swell hangout."

"It's cozy," she said. "What'll you drink?"

"Anything."

"All right. Help me mix them."

They went out into the kitchen and he helped her mix two Manhattans. They went back into the big room, sat down close to each other and said: "Here's how!"

Farrell put the glasses on the server near the buffet, came back to her and said: "Well, Sophie. What's it all about?"

She laughed in a rich, deep contralto. "What's your hurry, big boy? Nervous?"

His eyes moved around the room, "Make it snappy," he said.

She stood up, smoothing down her green silk dress, looked at him with eyes that had changed to black ice.

"Want to make a deal?"

"If the terms suit me," he said.

"Fine." She smiled. Her eyes stayed hard. "Then do as Seymour says."

"And what does Seymour say?"

"He says drop it."

"Drop what?"

Her eyes flickered with contempt. "I'm not talking in riddles, and you know it! Don't be so darned interested in Vincenti and the other two."

Farrell whistled in an off key. "What's in it for me, if I do?"

She turned sideways near his chair, then stepped closer to him. "Plenty in it for you," she said. "What do you say, big boy?"

"I'm not saying 'yes' and I'm not saying 'no.'" He glanced around the room. "I'll think it over."

"Okay," she said, and clung to him. He held her for a second, then let her go.

She whispered: "Why don't you do as I say? Leave well enough alone, Seymour—"

He stood up, put his arms around her, pushed her aside: "No, Seymour's a little too much to swallow. It's no go."

She stepped back from him and showed her small even white teeth.

"You're the most unreasonable Mick I ever met. . . . Say, Sam, come on out! This guy won't talk turkey at all."

VI



FARRELL saw the velvet curtains parted in the middle by a fat hairy hand and Seymour came in, his brown serge suit a little too tight for him, a wide grin on his face.

Farrell didn't say anything.

Seymour said: "Hello, Farrell. How was the show?"

He went over to the buffet, put the glasses from the server on it, brought the server to the center of the room, placed three chairs around it. He said:

"Now that we're all here, let's talk things over like gentlemen—and ladies."

Farrell said: "Yeah," and sat down opposite Seymour. Sophie sat at Farrell's left. Farrell could see the fat of Seymour's neck by the reflection in the buffet's glass.

Seymour said: "It's like this, Farrell. I've raised the ante."

He put his hand in his pocket, pulled out a wad of greenbacks and stacked them on the table. Tens, twenties, fifties and hundreds.

Farrell said: "Always carry that much with you?"

"When I need it."

Sophie leaned forward. "Be sensible, big boy."

"Well?" said Farrell.

Seymour stacked a bunch of each denomination. He said: "Here's four grand. Count it."

Farrell said: "If you say it's four grand, it's four grand. But you can stick it in your fat mouth." He shoved his hand hard against Seymour's belly.

Sophie said: "Take him, Sam," and whipped out a pearl-handled .32. The muzzle touched Farrell between the eyes.

The smile came off Seymour's face. He put his gun at the middle of Farrell's belt buckle. "Take his rod away, Sophie," he said.

Farrell didn't move. Sophie, her gun at Farrell's head, reached her hand inside Farrell's coat. She found the gun in the holster strapped at his left shoulder. Her hand edged out of his coat.

Farrell's right hand knocked Sophie's gun away from his face, his left arm pinioned her arm inside his coat. He felt his own gun rub against his ribs as he squeezed her to him, rolled with her to the floor.

Seymour's rod wavered. He yelled: "Break away, Sophie, until I shoot!"

Farrell rolled with her to the wall, tore her away, his gun out. Leaped back to the switch, clicked it off with his left hand.

Seymour's gun spoke in the dark. Plaster splattered Farrell's coat. Farrell crouched in the corner, his back to the exit door. He spoke evenly:

"I don't care how many more of you are there, but I'm going out of here. Going out on my feet. Alone. I got six slugs that are going with me. But if anyone wants a souvenir in his gut, start rushing me."

He opened the door with his left hand, wriggled backward a step and was catapulted back in the room as a body hit him sideways.

Farrell fell against the wall, against the light switch. It clicked on.

WILLIE VOLKMANN stood in the center of the room, brandishing a gun in each hand. His black hair dangled over his wild eyes, his face flushed.

Seymour and Sophie crouched by the little server. Seymour's gun was in his hand.

"Stay down, you rats," screamed Volkmann, and fired once.

Farrell felt something sear his gun

arm, his gun clattering to the floor at Volkmann's feet.

"Seymour, throw your gun down, you ——!" cried Volkmann.

Seymour's gun slipped out of his hand, slid on the polished floor toward Farrell leaning against the wall.

Volkmann waved both guns. "I'm going to kill somebody!" he yelled.

"Don't, Willie, don't," cried Sophie, her eyes haggard.

"Why, you little cheat," Volkmann shouted. "You rotten, cheating tramp! First it's Polack Joe! Then it's Seymour! Now this one!" He kicked Farrell in the stomach.

Farrell gasped, rose up on one elbow, crawled an inch toward Volkmann.

Volkmann kept shouting:

"Seymour, I'm going to kill you—and him, too. You wanted me to get rid of him. But you're going, too, you—"

A shot rang out. Willie Volkmann pitched forward on the Chinese rug. A gun was in Farrell's hand. It was Seymour's gun.

Farrell was crouching on the floor on one elbow. He said: "I'll fan you all, if anyone makes another move." He crawled toward the phone stand near the blue hangings, his eyes on Seymour and Sophie.

Blood was coming out of Volkmann's writhing side.

Farrell managed to rise. His right arm dangled at his side. Covering the others with the gun in his left hand, with infinite slowness he worked the fingers of his right hand on the phone dial.

A hand reached through the hangings. The hand took Farrell's gun away.

"Tie this one," said O'Dowd, rubbing his gun up and down Farrell's backbone.

Farrell's fingers were working on the dials.

"No go," said O'Dowd dryly. "I've cut the wires." He kept his gun playing on Farrell's spine.

A muted trumpet wah-wahed from the night club across the street.

"Where the devil have you been?" said Seymour.

O'Dowd nodded his head toward the hangings. "I been places," he said. "I came in through the window. I heard shooting."

"How do you like it, buddy?" he said to Farrell, massaging Farrell's spine with the gun barrel.

"It's the luck of the Irish," said Farrell.

He raised his eyes. He saw his own face reflected in the glass of the buffet top. He said: "Good-bye, pal," to his face without making any sound. Then he saw Seymour's face in the glass make a grimace, saw Seymour's fat body pitch forward, sagging against the chair.

Only then he heard the shot.

FARRELL'S left leg came back fast, tripped O'Dowd's ankle. They fell to the floor, clinched. Anne Swiderski ran through the blue velvet hangings. She fired two times at Seymour's body.

"Throw your gun down, O'Dowd," she said, "or I'll drill you!"

Farrell released his left-hand hold on O'Dowd's windpipe, backed away on his knees.

O'Dowd's gun slithered on the floor.

Seymour's hand picked up O'Dowd's gun, turned it over lazily in his hand. His eyes had a puzzled look.

Seymour fired the gun three times without aim. The third bullet pierced Anne's breast.

She dropped to her knees, her face white. Her black velvet gown showed a terra-cotta stain. She spat at Seymour. Her face was like paper. She said:

"I killed one rat yesterday. I told you I'd kill another, Seymour, if you didn't leave Tim alone."

Anne shot Seymour point-blank in the mouth.

Anne stood up, swayed, coughed, fell prone, got up on her knees, began to crawl slowly to Farrell. She trailed the gun from limp fingers on the floor.

O'Dowd sat down in a chair. He didn't say anything.

Sophie ran to Willie Volkmann, bent over him.

Anne crawled to Farrell. He moved toward her. He saw something gleaming on the rug. He picked it up. It was Sophie's pearl-handled gun.

Anne stopped crawling. "Hold my hand before I die, Tim," she said.

Farrell wondered why O'Dowd sat so quietly and why Sophie was kneeling on the floor.

Then he saw the limp fingers in his hand.

O'Dowd tamped a cigarette against the arm of his chair, lit up. He said: "No use holding her hand all day. Get it over with."

"What did you say?" said Farrell.

O'Dowd said: "Get on the phone. No, I didn't cut the wires. That was a gag. Get Big J. Wind it up."

"Wind it up. That's right," said Farrell. He let Anne's limp hand slip out of his fingers. He went over to the phone. He managed to dial the number. After a while he heard the voice with a burr in it.

Farrell said: "Willie Volkmann shot me. I shot Willie Volkmann. Anne Swiderski shot Seymour. He shot her."

"That official?" asked McGlanaghan on the wire.

"That's official," said Farrell. "Isn't it, O'Dowd?"

He hung up. Then slowly, carefully he reached into his shirt, pulled out something slim and metallic. He gave one long piercing blast.

Sophie sat looking at Willie Volkmann, her white hands cupped against her white face. She bent down, pulled something from the upper pocket of his

coat. It was a broken package of cigarettes.

She selected one from the pack, tossed the rest on the floor, lit up. She wiggled the match flame out carefully.

"Yeah. One thing leads to another," she said.

Farrell watched O'Dowd blow smoke rings until the bluecoats came in.

VII



IN HIS North Side apartment, Farrell got out of bed. It was halfpast ten in the morning. His right arm strapped to his side, he dressed with leaden eyes.

He went to a closet, uncorked a bottle of three-star Hennessy with his teeth, drank a long swig, corked the bottle, uncorked it and drank again.

He tottered outside, hailed a cab, climbed in slowly.

At the German Deaconess Hospital he hunted up the head surgeon and went with him into Willie Volkmann's room. Volkmann, dark eyes buried in a face of pain, stared up at them. "Am I going to die, Doc?" he asked.

The surgeon nodded. "I guess so," he said.

Farrell bent down to the dark head. He said, "This is the pay-off, Willie. Who killed Vincent?"

The blood blubbed from Willie's mouth. "I did," he said.

Farrell walked out with the sawbones. The doc said, "We'll give him a transfusion as soon as we can match his blood."

"Try the reptile house at the zoo," said Farrell, and stepped in the elevator.

At the woman's jail he had an hour's talk with Sophie Swoboda. He promised to get her the best lawyer in South Lake. After a while he found out what he wanted.

She clung to him as he got up to go. Her face was pale, but there was no fear in it. "Get me out of this!" she pleaded.

"I don't think I'll be waiting for you when you come out of this jam." He smiled sourly. "Maybe it'll be too long a wait. You've got plenty to talk your way out of, and I'm not wishing you any hard luck while you're doing it." He left.

BIG JOHN McGLANAGHAN sat in the cozy living room of his apartment. Beside him sat Lieutenant Timothy Aloysius Farrell. The aroma of spiced apple pie wafted in from the kitchen.

McGlanaghan offered a fat cigar to Farrell, lit one for himself. They smoked in silence. McGlanaghan said: "I've about fixed up things with everybody."

"Same old stuff," said Farrell. "Up-holding the best traditions of the force, Captain Seymour was killed in the performance—"

"Just about like that, Tim," interrupted McGlanaghan. "A gambling raid looks like the best fix."

"Sure," said Farrell bitterly. "Sure. The truth would be pretty rough."

"A little too rough. Just dynamite."

They didn't say anything for a time. Then McGlanaghan spoke:

"I saw O'Dowd this morning. Have an appointment with him this afternoon. I'm glad everything's patched up between you two."

Farrell said, "We won't be bothering each other much."

"That's fine! And I'm glad the killings had nothing to do with my South Side set-up. Seymour's gone. But he got himself into his own jam. Maybe we're better off without Seymour."

"Maybe," said Farrell.

McGlanaghan asked: "But how did you get this guy Volkmann to talk?"

"That wasn't so hard. This morning before going on the operating table, he

thought he was going to die. I simply asked him if he had killed Vincenti. I knew then he would open up if he ever opened up."

"What made you suspect him in the first place?"

Farrell smiled. "If you remember far back enough, Big J., when you got that phone call, what you thought you heard was this, wasn't it? 'Vincenti was bumped off.' Well, what you really heard was this: 'Vincenti was *pumped* off.' Wasn't the word '*pumped*' used instead of '*bumped*'?"

McGlanaghan's brow wrinkled. "Come to think of it, '*pumped*' was the word. I remember thinking something about being pumped full of lead, or something like that."

"And remember when you asked him over the phone who he was, and he answered, 'This is no *punk*'?"

"Yes, I remember him saying, 'This is no *punk*.'"

"Well," explained Farrell, "what he really meant to say was: 'This is no *bunk*.' You understand this Volkmann pronounces all his 'B's' like 'P's.' So, when I actually heard him speak in the flesh, I knew at once he had plenty to do with Vincenti's death."

"Sure, that seems simple enough," said McGlanaghan.

"Of course."

McGlanaghan bit hard on his cigar. He asked:

"But why did Volkmann say over the phone that Vincenti was killed fifteen minutes before he actually was shot according to your checking up of the shooting time?"

"That was the hard part," said Farrell. "It had me guessing for a while. But I got most of the story from Sophie this morning. Got time to hear it?"

McGlanaghan looked at his watch. "Sure. O'Dowd won't be here before an hour. Go ahead."

FARRELL explained: "Here's the lay-out. This Volkmann was a distant relation of Sophie's old man. Fourth cousin or something like that. Volkmann came over here when he was ten years old and lived with them. That's why he still talks with a slight foreign accent, mixing the B's and P's."

"Go on. You told me all that before."

"I'm getting on with it. Volkmann grew up with a lot of cheap hoodlums, though up to a few days ago he had never really committed any desperate act.

"Lately he was getting to be infatuated with Sophie. You know how those things start to grow on one! Sophie always treated him as a kid brother—with amused half-contempt and friendliness. And even Seymour, who was taking up most of Sophie's time lately, got to be pretty friendly with Volkmann, in a sort of contemptuous, condescending way."

"Seymour had a yen for blondes," broke in McGlanaghan. "They tell me he was hanging around Anne Swiderski quite a bit, too, before Joe Swiderski got shot."

Farrell nodded. "To get back to Volkmann. This condescending way of treating Volkmann got Volkmann's goat. By this time, he was now head over heels in love with Sophie. Seymour, too, was now the big shot around the South Side. The punk looked up at Seymour as a sort of hero, but was jealous of him, too. So Volkmann thought he'd make a play for the admiration of the girl and Seymour both, by boasting that he's as tough as any of the toughest eggs in Seymour's district. And to prove that he was, he boasted that he would bump off one of the big shots himself."

McGlanaghan said: "Just a clear case of inferiority complex, huh, Farrell?"

"Partly that, partly jealousy," said Farrell. "Anyway, here's the rest of it. When Volkmann first boasted to them that he was going to be a killer, they must

have just laughed at him. But, Seymour—this is what Sophie told me this morning—more or less as a joke, mentioned Vincenti. Well, the punk Volkmann was in a psychological spot. He was afraid, of course. Especially of Vincenti. Seymour and Sophie kept ribbing him. Volkmann was driven by their taunts to do something he wouldn't have the nerve ordinarily to do. A time came when Seymour's taunts became unbearable. In front of them both, Volkmann in a moment of bravado, called you up and said that Vincenti had been killed. He called you before he had killed him. That put Volkmann in another bad mental spot. He just had to make good on his boast on the Vincenti kill. And so he shot him."

"Go on," said McGlanaghan.

"Seymour was both surprised and glad, too, when he heard Vincenti was killed. Vincenti was a tough egg to handle, anyway. But by this time, Volkmann and Sophie got scared. Sophie didn't want Volkmann to get into any trouble after it had happened and kept after Seymour, who tried to hush me up."

McGlanaghan laid down his cigar. He smiled. "But you wouldn't play ball. . . . But why did Volkmann go gunning last night in Sophie's apartment?"

"He just went completely screwy. After all, that murder of Vincenti's hadn't forwarded his stand-in with Sophie. He came there, insanely jealous. Jealous of Seymour. Of me. Maybe Seymour worked him up to get me. Maybe he didn't have to."

"And Nick Ronnich, too? Did Volkmann plug him?"

Farrell laughed sourly: "The bullet that hit Nick Ronnich in the back of the head was meant for me, and Volkmann didn't have anything to do with that!"

McGlanaghan stood up, laid his cigar down, put his huge hands in his cavernous pockets, teetered on his

great feet. "And we know how Joe Swiderski got—"

Farrell nodded. He didn't say anything.

A little, brisk, gray-haired woman with a cheerful face bustled into the room.

"Hello, Tim Farrell," she said. She looked at his bandaged arm. "Has that scoundrel of a husband of mine been getting you into trouble again?"

Farrell shook her hand with his left hand. "Mother McGlanaghan, it's good to see you," he said.

"Stay a while, Tim. I've baked something you like."

Farrell got up, shook his head. "I'm sorry, mother—I can't stay. I've got to tell Big J something. Alone. Then I've got to go."

Farrell imagined one of McGlanaghan's eyes blinked at the little woman.

Mrs. McGlanaghan smiled at Farrell, scowled at the big face of her husband. Then she went out with a cheerful, "All right, Tim. I'll be seeing you."

"What is it you have to say, my lad?" asked McGlanaghan.

"Just this," said Farrell. "I'm through. Through with the whole rotten mess. I'm resigning, Big J."

McGlanaghan's huge palm stroked his long jaw. "So ye want to quit, lad? The lily-white lad—the pure of heart! Ye want to quit? Well, listen to this, my lad."

McGlanaghan slipped something from under the flap of his coat pocket. "Listen to this, Tim," he said. "This is a letter I got today. It was mailed yesterday afternoon. It's from Anne Swiderski. I'll read it to you."

Farrell's face went a shade whiter. "What's it to me?" he said.

McGlanaghan read:

"Dear Mr. McGlanaghan. If anything happens to me, ask him to take care of Peg. I mean Tim Farrell. Peg loves him . . . just as I do—though he'll never

know that unless you have to read this to him. God bless you if you help Peg and Tim."

A lot of blood went out of Farrell's face. A feeling of sweetness so intense that it bordered on pain trembled through him. He sat down.

"Where is she?" said Farrell. "Is that why Anne did what she did?"

McGlanaghan nodded, called out: "Mother, bring Peg out here."

Mrs. McGlanaghan came out bearing triumphantly a waxen-haired girl in her arms.

"It's Uncle Tim!" cried Peg, putting her arms out to Farrell.

Farrell took the child, embraced it, looked long in her eyes. She clung to him. He gave Peg back to Mrs. McGlanaghan.

"I'm glad you're here, Uncle Tim," said Peg, "cause mama's gone away."

McGLANAGHAN'S big hand with surprising tenderness rolled up the sleeve of Peg's gingham dress. The upper part of her arm was a cluster of black and blue welts.

"You know, it was Joe Swiderski made those marks," whispered McGlanaghan to Farrell.

"I guess I do," said Farrell.

Mrs. McGlanaghan said:

"And let anyone try to take her away from us, eh, Tim? We'll keep her if I have to divorce that old scoundrel over there and marry you myself, Tim. I've had four boys—all big fellows. They're all in the navy now, God bless 'em." Her voice caught. "This is my first girl! Come on, Peg, we'll go in and have our lunch."

She went out laughing with the child.

"Now will you be quitting, lad?" asked McGlanaghan.

"I'm not quitting," said Farrell. "I've been a fool." He took his hat, blinked away something salty from his cheek.

"Will we have any trouble keeping her, Big J?"

McGlanaghan laughed. "Just let anyone try!" His grip on Farrell's good arm made Farrell wince.

McGlanaghan looked at his watch. "You'll come later. For supper."

Farrell nodded. "I've got to get some air," he said and went out.

On the porch he bumped into a slim fellow in a carefully pressed green suit.

O'Dowd stepped in front of him, said, "Hello, Farrell."

A happy light danced in Farrell's eyes. His left fist described a perfect arc, smashed into O'Dowd's chin.

O'Dowd fell cleanly, on his face, his trim body like a tailor's dummy.

Farrell dragged the limp flesh over the door sill, dumped it into the living room beside a sofa.

Big John McGlanaghan whirled around and almost swallowed his cigar.

"By appointment," said Farrell and closed the door as he went out.



The Escape of the Century



ONE hundred years have passed since the sensational story of John Colt's "escape" from New York City's famous Tombs was written. However, the question, "Did Colt die in a fire that immediately followed his marriage or did he escape to the outer world?" is still unanswered.

This story of John Colt, brother of Samuel Colt and inventor of the famous revolver, has baffled penologists and crime students.

Late in 1842, John Colt was found guilty of the murder of Samuel Adams, a well-to-do printer, whose hacked body was found in a labeled shipping case at

the foot of Maiden Lane. The box was traced to Colt, who admitted he had killed Adams in disagreement over publication of a book he, Colt, had written. At the trial, during which powerful pressure was brought to bear in Colt's behalf, the latter pleaded self-defense. The jury found otherwise and Colt was sentenced to die on November 18, 1842, after a trial filled with sensationalism. A woman named Caroline Henshaw sprung a sensation when she bared a romance with Colt, withholding none of the details, and claimed that a child had been born to them while the murderer was awaiting trial.

The courtyard of the Tombs was to be

the scene of execution where Colt would be hanged. His brother and friends tried frantically to save him. As the death date neared, bribery was openly resorted to. Three deputy keepers were offered \$1,000 each to allow Colt to escape, dressed in Caroline's clothes. The warden was offered \$500 to transfer Colt to a more comfortable cell where a master key would unlock it! The sheriff received \$1,000 and was promised a companion sum if he did not hang Colt. To his credit, the sheriff turned his \$1,000 over to the city.

The time of the execution was set for four o'clock in the afternoon. Colt's first visitor that day was his brother. They spent a half hour together. Shortly after that came a bombshell: Colt was going to be married before his execution! No one would believe it, but at noon Caroline Henshaw, who had figured so spectacularly during the trial, appeared with Samuel Colt and his friend, John Payne. The sheriff was a witness to the ceremony and, after it, the bride and groom were left alone for nearly an hour.

Shortly after two o'clock, Colt's brother and his friend left, taking Caroline Henshaw Colt with them.

The soon-to-be widow was weeping, and her head was bent so low no one could see her face.

At a few minutes before four, the Rev. Dr. Henry Anthon and Sheriff Hart went to get Colt for the walk to the gallows. As they entered the cell block, the cry of "Fire!" rang out, and the wooden cupola of the Tombs burst into flames. Five hundred people in the courtyard to witness the execution, became panic-stricken as did a thousand others in the street. Panic hindered the firemen, and the flames spread mightily before they got them under control.

The fire did considerable damage, but

after the excitement was all over, it was announced that Colt had committed suicide in his cell. It was said he had stabbed himself to death before the sheriff went for him.

OFFICIAL action resulted in a hurried verdict of suicide by a coroner's jury. But the newspapers refused to believe it. Hammer and tongs, they fought for the truth and put questions before the public. Why was the box containing the cadaver so hurriedly removed to a temporary vault? Why had the Colt family failed to make arrangements for the burial and why was the coffin brought into the Tombs only a short time before the execution hour? Was the coffin empty when carried in? Who gave Colt the knife?

The questions were never answered, probably never will be. A mysterious carriage which appeared before the large gate through which food was delivered at the Tombs, was brought into the questioning. And the carriage, like John Colt, was never seen again. It was argued that Colt, once freed from his cell, could easily have slipped through the frightened crowd to the carriage and freedom.

No one ever found out what became of Caroline Henshaw and her baby, and when Inspector Byrnes attempted to solve the mystery in 1897, he failed to make headway. Time had obliterated the clues and the case was getting too old for new tampering. There was evidence to support the theory that Colt had escaped and that another man's body had been smuggled into the prison cell during the confusion to establish the report of suicide. Said Byrnes: "Whether Colt went to his death that day or whether he is still living [1897] is a question about which there is no positive information."

By FRANK DECKER

Corcoran was gambling like a sucker, but he was in reality a private dick. Even the girl with him was playing an assumed part. However, when the showdown came, even the dice were honest!



CORCORAN threw snake-eyes.

An audible gasp went up from the well-dressed crowd around the crap-table. They had seen Corcoran make seven straight passes; watched him run a ten-spot up to six hundred and forty bucks. Then, since there was no limit in Spot Shelton's ultra-select gambling establishment, Corcoran had shot the works.

And lost.

Loudly the girl alongside him said: "You were foolish, honey. You should have dragged down."

Her name was Margie Zaine. She wore her blue-black hair sleekly coiffed;



CLIP GIRL

she had a Madonna face. Her figure was a poem of curves sheathed in a crimson satin evening-gown. Men had a hard time keeping their eyes away from her.

She was a capper for Spot Shelton's place. Sucker-bait.

But Corcoran was no sucker. He was a private dick. He grinned down into

her dark eyes. She was enacting her role to perfection. Nobody on Spot Shelton's staff would possibly suspect her of disloyalty to Shelton tonight. . . .

Nor could anybody guess what Corcoran was really up to. Thus far he'd



He slapped a muffling hand over her mouth.
"It's a pack of lies," the bank teller said.

played his part of a reckless sap to the hilt. But it had been a tough job trying to make the dice obey orders. Luck's a fickle jade; when a man wants to lose, he almost invariably wins. Imagine seven successive naturals before the fall-off! It was a cinch the spotted ivories were on the level. Too level to suit Corcoran. It had taken him more than ten minutes to go broke.

THE tuxedoed croupier said: "Still your dice if you want them, Mister."

Margie Zaine pressed herself closer to Corcoran. She was trembling a little.

At the far end of the table a tall, nervous young man flashed a veiled glance at the private dick; flicked his eyebrows.

Corcoran took his cue. He said to the croupier: "I'd like to keep on shooting, but I'm cleaned." He passed the cubes to the player on his right. Then he said: "Could I get a check cashed?"

Up at the end of the table, the tall young man was listening to a willowy blonde in daring décolletage. He seemed annoyed. The blonde looked sore.

The croupier beckoned an attendant. The attendant came up to Corcoran and said: "How large a check, sir?"

"Oh, about five hundred." Corcoran drew a check-book from his dinner-jacket pocket. He didn't produce the flat .25 automatic which also reposed in that pocket.

The attendant frowned dubiously. "I'm afraid I'll have to let Mr. Shelton pass on that, sir. It's more than I'm authorized to cash. I'll take you to his office."

Margie Zaine said: "Never mind. I'll show the way." She looked archly at Corcoran. "I know Spot Shelton. I'll introduce you. Come along, honey."

That was a chuckle, of course, Margie knew Shelton. She worked for him! But she wouldn't be working for him after tonight.

Corcoran slipped an arm around her waist. She led him out of the casino-

room and down a long, carpeted corridor. She knocked on a closed door.

A voice said: "Come in." It was Spot Shelton's voice, sleek and purring.

They entered. Margie said: "Hello, Spot. This is my friend, Mr. Jones. He wants a check cashed."

Shelton's eyes were heavy-lidded and crafty to match the thin gash of his avacious mouth. "Glad to accommodate you, Mr. Jones," he said affably. "How much will you need?"

Corcoran raised his ante. "A thousand will do."

Like a light turned off, Shelton's smile faded abruptly. "A thousand?" he said sharply.

Margie said: "He's good for it, Spot."

"Sure," Corcoran lied. "I've got plenty in the bank. Want proof?"

"What kind of proof?" Shelton purred. "You understand I'm not doubting you, Mr. Jones. But in a business like this, we must—"

Corcoran nodded. "That's okay. Send for Harry Greer. He's out at the dice-table. I just saw him. He's a teller at my bank. He knows the balance I carry. Call him in. Ask him."

Shelton spoke into a house-phone.

IN a moment the door opened. A tall, nervous young man came in. It was the one who had flicked his eyebrow at Corcoran a while ago.

He said: "Why, hello, Margie. Good evening, Mr. Jones," he added politely to Corcoran. Then he looked at Shelton. "You want me?"

"Yes. I—"

Corcoran said: "He wants to know how much money I've got on deposit in your bank, Harry. Tell him."

Greer cleared his throat; it was his only sign of uneasiness. "Why, more than thirty thousand dollars, roughly speaking."

"Ah," Shelton smiled apologetically to

Corcoran. "In that case I'll be delighted to cash your check, Mr. Jones." He went to the wall behind his elaborate desk, shoved aside an etching, and toyed with the dial of a counter-sunk safe. A big yellow solitaire diamond glittered on the ring finger of his right hand.

He opened the safe's circular door.

Corcoran pulled out his .25 automatic and said: "Thanks, Shelton. Now step back and sit down before I blast you."

The gambler whirled, his sallow cheeks pale. "What is this?"

"You might call it a stick-up," Corcoran said. "But I'd sooner say it's a bit of justice outside the law. I'm not a hood. Just a private shamus working for Harry Greer and Miss Zaine."

"Why, you dirty—!"

Corcoran said: "Tie him to the chair, Harry. And Margie, you grab the dough out of the box. Just thirty grand."

"Thirty grand—?" Shelton snarled an oath at the girl. "You double-crossing vixen!"

Greer slugged him in the teeth.

The gambler sagged into his chair. Greer produced a skein of picture-wire. He bound Shelton's wrists and ankles, saying: "Maybe Margie used to be a double-crosser. But not any more. She's all through capping for you, Shelton."

"Blast you—"

Margie was pulling packets of currency out of the safe, stuffing them into her beaded purse.

Greer went on: "She lured me into playing your crooked games, Shelton. But you didn't count on her falling in love with me, did you? Well, that's what happened."

"Love? That's a laugh, you dirty—"

Greer said: "I'm marrying Margie, see? That's why I hired this private dick to help me get back the thirty thousand dollars you took away from me with your loaded dice. Now I can restore what I embezzled from the bank—before the

auditor's catch up with me. And from now on, Margie and I are going straight."

The gambler squirmed helplessly. To Margie he snarled: "Don't be a sap, babe! Greer's playing you for a sucker. He won't marry you. Look what he did to Jackie Allan. Made her fall for him, then handed her the air. He'll treat you the same way! Put that dough back, baby—and I'll forget the whole thing." He added: "You can keep out five hundred if you want to. That's all Greer ever lost to me, the lousy liar. He never dropped any thirty grand!"

"I don't believe you, Spot," Margie said quietly. She snapped her purse shut. It bulged with currency.

Shelton raged: "You put that dough back in the safe or I'll get you if it's the last thing I ever do!"

"You're in no position to make threats," Corcoran butted in. "Greer's taking what belongs to him. And you won't squawk to the law. The cops haven't much love for gambling joints."

"Somebody'll taste lead for this!" Shelton grated.

Greer hit him on the jaw again. The gambler sagged against his bonds, unconscious. Greer went over to him to make sure the wires were tightly knotted. He said: "Okay. He won't get loose for a while."

THE door opened. A feminine voice said: "That's what you think."

It was the willowy blonde who had approached Greer at the crap-table. Greer said: "Jackie Allan—!" in a scared whisper.

In spite of her heavy make-up she was gorgeous. Her white evening-gown clung to her like a coating of lacquer. Her hair was spun gold. She said: "I told you I'd get even with you for handing me the gate, Harry. I warned you I'd get something on you."

Greer sputtered: "You—you—!"

"Take it easy, Harry," she said frigidly. "And put that money back where it belongs. Just remember this: Spot Shelton was plenty decent to me after you threw me over. I owe him something for that. And this is my chance to make it up to him. You put that money back, or I'll scream the place down."

Corcoran went into action. He jumped at the blonde and slapped a muffling hand over her mouth. He looked at Greer. "What about this, Harry?"

"A pack of lies!" the bank-teller said harshly, indignantly. "It's true I was sweet on her for a while. She was the one who first sucked me into playing Shelton's crooked games. When I found out she was one of Shelton's come-ons, I ditched her. Then I fell in love with Margie, here. The real thing. Margie came clean with me; promised to help me get my money back from Shelton. . . ."

"Okay. Hand me that picture-wire," Corcoran snapped. He took the skein, tripped Jackie Allan to the floor, tied her. She put up a good tussle, but the private dick was too many for her. When he got through, she was gagged with a handkerchief and trussed like a turkey.

Corcoran got up. To Greer he said: "Get your coat and hat and go home. Margie and I will phone you from her apartment, later. We'll leave shortly. It wouldn't look good for all of us to pull out together.

When Corcoran and Margie strolled casually back into the gaming-room a little later, Greer was gone.

Corcoran stopped at the roulette-table long enough to lose the fifty that Margie slipped him. That was to make everything look okay. After all, he was supposed to have cashed a check. . . .

After four wrong guesses at the wheel, he yawned. "Let's beat it, Margie. I'm tired," he said loudly.

She fastened herself to his arm. They went out; found a taxi. They headed for her apartment.

"You were swell," she said. "Now Harry and I can be married, and—"

"Could I kiss the bride?"

She gave him her lips in gratitude.

THE cab stopped in front of her apartment building. They went into the lobby. It was deserted and dimly lighted at this late hour. They made for the automatic elevator.

From a curtained alcove to the left, a hand appeared. It was a white, soft-looking hand wearing a yellow diamond solitaire and holding a revolver.

The revolver yammered: *Blam! Blam!*

Margie Zaine screamed and clutched at her breast. Blood spurted through her fingers. She dropped her handbag. She fell.

Corcoran made a grab for his automatic. He fired at the drapes. He knew he must have missed, because there was no answering fire. Maybe the unseen assailant had already escaped!

Bellowing, the private dick smashed toward the curtained alcove.

As he hit the drapes, something thunked down on his head. He was stunned. Fireworks exploded inside his brain. He reeled drunkenly; pitched to his knees.

By the time he got up again, the alcove was empty. There was a doorway leading to the alley alongside the building. The door was open. . . .

Corcoran stared stupidly at Margie Zaine's sprawled form. Death's waxen mist was on her Madonna face.

Her handbag was open and empty. The money she had taken from Spot Shelton's wall-safe was gone.

Shelton, who had threatened her . . . Shelton, who had worn a yellow solitaire diamond on the ring finger of his white, effeminate hand. . . .!

He fired at the drapes, but he knew then that he must have missed.



Corcoran snapped out of his daze. He was thinking of Harry Greer, now. Maybe the bank-teller would be next on Shelton's list of victims. Maybe it was already too late—

Sprinting out into the night, Corcoran grabbed a passing owl cab. It zipped him to Greer's apartment-house: an unpretentious three-story structure with exterior fire-escapes marring its old-fash-

ioned red brick façade. Corcoran raced up to the second floor. He reached the bank-teller's door and pounded on it. "Greer—let me in! It's me, Corcoran—and hell's to pay!"

A muffled pistol-shot answered him. Then a heavy thump, as of a body falling. And finally, silence.

Corcoran hit the door. It bruisingly rebuffed him. He backed away and smashed at it again, putting his full two hundred pounds behind the impact. This time the portal gave way. He stumbled into the room.

AN OPEN window framed the iron fire-ladder just outside. In the room's center lay Harry Greer, breathing stertorously, with his eyes closed. Thick clotted blood wept from a raw hole in his left shoulder. A thin drift of gun-powder-smoke eddied in the dull light from a table-lamp.

Corcoran ran heavily to the window; stared outward, downward. He couldn't see anybody. He returned to Greer and worked over him. At last the teller opened his eyes. "God . . . my shoulder. . . !" he groaned faintly.

"Who drilled you? Was it Shelton?"

"I . . . don't know! I was . . . getting ready to . . . start for Margie's place . . . and a shot . . . came from . . . the window. . . ." Greer sat up weakly. "What are you . . . doing here? My God . . . if Shelton shot me . . . he may go . . . gunning for Margie. . . . You should have . . . stayed with her. . . ."

"Margie's dead," Corcoran tried to break the news gently. "Take it easy while I fix this shoulder of yours."

"Margie . . . dead. . . ?" The teller pushed Corcoran away. "Do something. . . !" he cried hysterically. "Call the cops . . . trail that dirty rat . . . get him . . . kill him. . . !" His lips twisted venomously.

Corcoran said: "Yeah. Trail Shelton. That's a large order. He'll be on the lam for sure, now. He must've got loose in his office; reached Margie's place ahead of us. Then he blasted. He killed her—and thought he killed me, too. So he came here to bump you. But just as he fired at you from the window, he heard my voice out in the hall. He realized he hadn't croaked me. And now he knows he's in the soup; knows my testimony will convict him. He'll go into hiding. He'll steer clear of his usual haunts—"

"You've got to find him!" Greer sobbed. "Get going! I'll phone the cops. Move, blast you!"

Corcoran clenched his fists. "Okay. I'll do what I can," he muttered. He went out. It was going to be tough, trying to locate Spot Shelton. Corcoran didn't know where to start. Then he got an idea.

He found a drug-store and a phone book. He looked up Jackie Allan's name and found it. He made a note of her address. A taxi took him there.

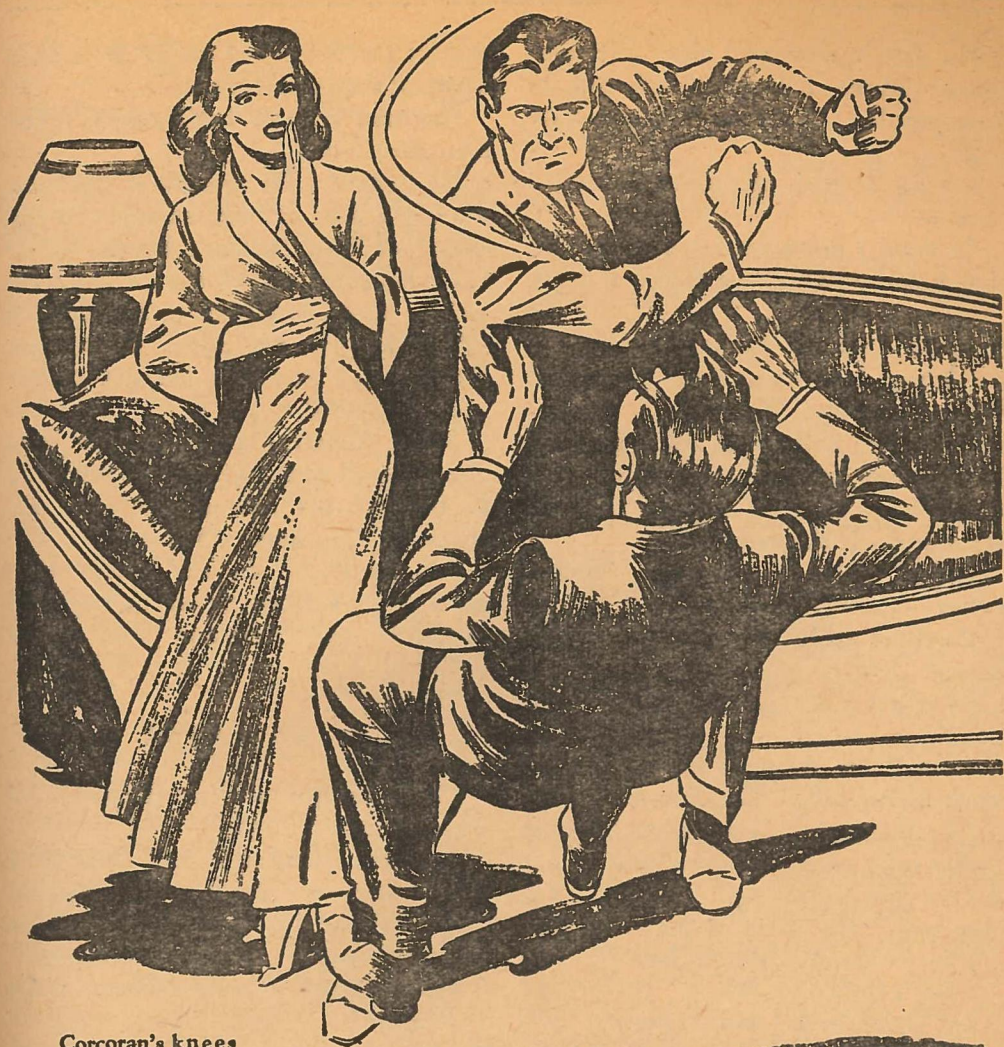
She lived in a bungalow court. He rang her bell. When she opened the door, Corcoran drew his automatic and shoved the muzzle against her. He said: "You're pinched for murder, baby."

She was wearing lounging pajamas. Her wrists were red and chafed from the wire with which she'd been trussed back in Shelton's office. There were marks on her ankles, too. The ankles themselves were slender and dainty, to match the rest of her.

She said: "Pinched . . . for murder? What do you m-mean?"

He backed her into the little living-room and kicked the door shut behind him. He pushed her onto the divan and stood over her, glowering. "What happened after I left Shelton's joint?"

"Why—why—I managed to spit that gag out of my mouth. I yelled for help.



Corcoran's knees buckled. He took the count.

People came in and untied me. Untied Shelton, too. Spot brought me home."

Corcoran said: "Straight home?"

"Yes." She seemed puzzled.

He said: "You're a liar, baby. You hated Harry Greer's guts because he ditched you. You hated Margie Zaine for taking him away from you. So you gunned the both of them, to get even." It was preposterous, of course. Corcoran knew that. But he wanted to throw a scare into Jackie Allan.

And he succeeded.

ALL the color drained from her cheeks. "I—I don't know what you're talking about!" she said.

"Margie's dead. You killed her. You tried to kill me. And you put a bullet through Harry Greer's shoulder."

"I—I didn't! My God, I wouldn't—" She reached up and grabbed his gun-arm. "D-don't point that thing at me. And you can't believe I'd—"

He looked at her, steadily. "There's just one way you can buy yourself out of this mess, baby."

She didn't understand him. She whispered: "How? I've got a family that are nice people. . . . I can't afford notoriety. . . ."

He was startled. He said: "Listen. I mean—"

"I think I know what you want," she said bitterly. Then she forced a smile.

"ALL I wanted was information," he said. "I wanted you to tell me where I can find Shelton."

From the hallway a voice growled: "That's easy, snoop. Here I am. And this thing in my hand isn't a saxophone. It's a rod. It shoots bullets."

Jackie Allan whispered: "Spot—honey—"

Corcoran said: "How did you get in here?"

"I've got a key," Shelton said. "Why not?"

"You'll be getting a key to the hot squat before long," Corcoran said.

"I gathered that. I was home listening to the radio when I heard a bleat go out for me on a murder rap. That's why I'm here now." He looked at the blond girl. "Why did you kill Margie, babe?"

"But I didn't—I didn't! That's what I was trying to tell this copper—"

"That's okay. I understand the set-up." The gambler glared at Corcoran. "You're not arresting her, snoop. I won't let you."

"No. I'm arresting you," Corcoran said.

"Wrong, Sherlock. You're taking a little snooze while I get Jackie away from here."

Shelton shifted his gun to his left hand, doubled his right. He hit Corcoran on the button. Twice. Hard.

Corcoran's knees buckled. He took the count.

When he awoke, Shelton and Jackie were gone. The house was all upset, as if a hurried job of luggage-packing

had been accomplished during the private detective's unconsciousness.

Corcoran felt his bruised jaw. The flesh wasn't cut.

He blinked. He thought of the dead Margie Zaine; of the wounded Harry Greer; of Spot Shelton's threats—

He stumbled out of the cottage. He walked four blocks before he found a cab. He gave the driver Greer's address. "And step on it—to save a guy's life!" he panted.

Seven minutes later he burst into Greer's apartment. Greer had contrived to bandage his nicked shoulder. He stared at Corcoran. "What—?"

"Shelton's still on the loose. He's got a gun. He may be on his way here to finish you!" Corcoran said. "But we'll trap him."

"H-how?"

"Have you got a roscoe? He took mine."

Greer opened a desk drawer. He brought out a revolver.

Corcoran snatched it and jammed it three inches into the bank-teller's belly. "The jig's up," he said grimly. "*You bumped Margie*. Where's the dough?"

Greer turned a pasty yellow. "Are you crazy?"

"Like a fox," Corcoran snapped. "Listen. Shelton told the truth tonight when he said you only lost five hundred to him. When he told Margie you never intended to marry her.

"You were a smart skunk, Greer. You'd never swiped any dough from your bank. That was just a stall to make Margie fall in with your schemes.

"You planned to rob Spot Shelton. He looked like an easy touch. And you did a lot of ground-work before you pulled the strings. You first tried to work through Jackie Allan; but when she wouldn't work with you, you ditched her. You took up with Margie. Margie fell for your blarney. She really fig-

ured you loved her, wanted to marry her. And she believed you when you said Shelton had bilked you of thirty grand.

"That was a lie. And besides, Shelton's dice are straight. . . . Well, after Margie agreed to help you, you hired me. I was sucker enough to swallow your baloney.

"We pulled the heist; got the dough from Shelton's safe. Shelton made threats. You saw a chance to get the money, be rid of Margie—and pin her murder on Shelton."

Greer gulped noisily. "You're all wrong—"

"Nuts. You swiped Shelton's diamond ring off his finger while he was tied to his chair, knocked out. Then you went ahead to Margie's apartment house. You waited behind that drape. *You wore Shelton's ring when you shot Margie.* All I saw was your gun-hand—and the ring.

"You didn't drill me. You wanted me alive—so that I could testify it was Shelton's hand I saw holding the murder-gun. You just conked me.

"When I came to and rushed here to your place, you fired a shot out your window, so I'd hear it. Then you fell on the floor and played possum. You wanted me to think Shelton had come here and drilled you.

"*But the wound in your shoulder was from my bullet, Greer! I winged you when I shot through that drape after you drilled Margie!*"

"No, Corcoran! You're wrong!"

Nuts! I should have guessed it right away, when I looked at your shoulder the first time. The blood had already started to clot. But I was dumb.

"I was dumb up to the time Spot Shelton slugged me on the jaw in Jackie Allan's bungalow a little while ago. Then I saw the truth."

"Wh-what do you mean?"

"Shelton poked me with his right—

but it didn't cut my cheek. *He wasn't wearing his ring!*

"That was the tip-off. Maybe somebody else had the ring. Not Jackie Allan, because her hands were smaller than the one I saw through that drape. I looked to make sure.

"And why didn't Shelton croak me in Jackie's bungalow when he had the chance? If he'd been guilty, he'd have drilled me to keep me from spilling. Instead, all he did was biff me. He just wanted a chance to get Jackie away—because he thought she was the killer. He loves her; wanted to protect her.

"Okay. Jackie wasn't guilty. *But if Shelton thought she was, it meant he was innocent himself.* Get it? So that cleared everybody but you, Greer.

"You had motive: greed. You had opportunity. And you had my bullet-hole through your shoulder. You also had a roscoe—which I just tricked away from you. Got anything to say?"

GREER snarled: "You'll never take me, Corcoran!" and swatted at the revolver in the private dick's fist.

Corcoran shot him through the other shoulder. "So you'll suffer a little before they burn you," he said. He was thinking of poor little Margie Zaine lying dead because she had loved unwisely. . . .

A search disclosed the thirty thousand dollars that Greer had taken from Margie's handbag. And Corcoran also found Shelton's diamond ring, under Greer's mattress. That was all the evidence necessary. Corcoran phoned Police Headquarters. "Come and get the guy that bumped Margie Zaine," he said.

"We've already got him. Spot Shelton. Picked him up with a blonde dame a while ago."

Corcoran said: "Turn 'em loose. They're clean. And you might tell Shelton that a dumb cluck named Corcoran would like an invite to the wedding. . . ."

HOME IS THE



HE cabby was eager to be helpful. He parked at the curb in front of the big brownstone residence, hopped out, and opened the tonneau door with a flourish: Here's the address, sir. Let me steer you up the steps."

"No, thanks. I can make out well enough," Tim Proctor's smile-softened features were drawn and haggard as if from a long illness. The scar across his forehead was broad, livid. He planted his feet on the sidewalk, squared his wide shoulders in their unfamiliar tweeds, and peered vaguely through the dusk.

"Better let me help you, Lieutenant," the cabby's voice was quietly insistent. "It

"He's gone!" she wailed
"Take me away!"



HUNTER

By R. L.
BELLEM

The Jap bullet had ruined his eyesight. He had so little to live for that it was easy for him to offer to take the rap for the woman he had loved—and lost



won't be no trouble." He added, wistfully: "I'm a Navy man myself—the last war. Too old for active service now."

Proctor frowned. "What made you call me lieutenant? I'm not in uniform."

"Your picture was in the papers this morning, sir; remember? You're the one that used to be a D.A.'s dick here in town until you joined up as a fighter pilot. You knocked off six Zeros in the Solomons

and won the Flying Cross—and I bet you'd still be out there giving them yellow babies hell if a Nip slug hadn't got you across the eyes."

"Not the eyes, exactly," Proctor touched the scar on his forehead. "The optic nerve. I can still see a little. Enough to get around."

"You don't want I should help you up the stoop, sir?"

"Thanks, I'll manage." Proctor paid the man off, waited until the cab rolled away, and then made for the front door of the brownstone house, moving slowly but without groping. It would be time enough to grope when the final blackout blotted his vision, maybe a month from now, maybe a year—or maybe tomorrow. With a nerve impingement you never knew. A thing like that was too deep for the surgeon's knife, too remote for anything except a miracle. A man might even retain a fragment of his sight from now until the day he died. And a fragment was better than no sight at all.

For Tim Proctor, the world had become a misty place of shadowy gray blurs, of movements dimly discerned as if through a veil. He was alive, though, and back in his home city. That should have been sufficient to satisfy him, he told himself.

But he wasn't satisfied.

HE MOUNTED the granite steps reluctantly, knowing he was a fool for having come. This was the one house where he didn't belong; a house he should have avoided above all others, because he bitterly hated its owner. Yet here he was, ringing the doorbell less than fifteen minutes after receiving Ellen's frantic phone call in his hotel room.

The remembered sound of her voice still thrilled, deep within his heart. It always would, he supposed. He wondered what it would be like, meeting her face to face after a year and a half of hell; seeing her, even dimly, and not being able to take her in his arms. That would be the tough part, talking to her and being close to her, and knowing she was married to someone else.

The door opened.

It wasn't Ellen who stood there. Proctor peered vaguely at a man shorter than himself by several inches, a man whose usual air of cockiness was strangely missing. In the old days, the district attorney

had always fancied himself a sort of second edition of the movie star, James Cagney—small, dapper, alert, fast-talking. But this man who opened the door seemed almost meek, as if unsure of his ground.

Proctor's eyes tried to focus on the blurry features before him. They failed. All he saw was misty outlines. "Hello, Basserman," he said.

"Beg pardon, sir," the answering voice was high-pitched, surprisingly falsetto. "District Attorney Basserman is upstairs, sir. In his study. I'm his secretary."

Proctor flushed. He would have to be on guard against mistakes like this. Pride had made him pretend to recognize the man at the threshold when he actually couldn't tell whether the fellow was light or dark, sallow or swarthy. "Sorry," he said. "Can't see, you know."

"Yes, sir. Please come in. I'll tell Mrs. Basserman. She's expecting you, sir."

Proctor waited. Then he heard a faint rustle of silk, the patter of footfalls descending a carpeted staircase; sensed an aura of fragrance—the perfume Ellen Langdon had always used even when she was only a stenographer in the D.A.'s office and couldn't afford it. Ellen had always been like that: wanting the best, and managing somehow to get it.

That applied to husbands as well as perfumes. Ellen's name wasn't Langdon now; it was Ellen Basserman. Mrs. District Attorney Basserman. She'd married the top man. Nothing inferior would ever do for Ellen. An investigator on the D.A.'s staff, like Tim Proctor, hadn't a chance when she could land the D.A. himself.

"Timmy, darling!" her voice dulcet.

Proctor damned his dim vision as he turned toward her. He saw, hazily, the golden blur of her hair and the sweet symmetry of her figure; but his eyes denied him the satisfaction of his hunger to study her lovely face.

"Hello, Ellen," he smiled. "Are you as beautiful as ever?"

"Oh, Tim . . . you mean you . . . c-can't see me?" Her hands rested lightly on his shoulders.

"I can remember. That's good enough."

She was very close to him now. "Aren't you . . . going to k-kiss me, Tim?"

He laughed. "Tell me how you are. How you've been. Whether you're happy. And why you phoned me to come."

"I've been okay. Happy?" Her voice caught. "Happiness is comparative, Tim. You get as much of it as you deserve. And I guess I deserve whatever I've got. Let's go upstairs. I want to sh-show you something. Then you'll know why I called you."

Proctor followed her carefully, feeling for each step. The upper hallway was quite dark, but this didn't bother him much. Curiously, he wasn't sure whether Ellen was guiding him or he was guiding Ellen. She faltered to a door, opened it, pulled him into an unlighted room. "Tim, darling."

"Yes?" he said patiently.

"What would you say if I told you I . . . despised the man I married?"

"I'd say you were foolish to talk that way in his own study."

"Anyway," her tone was brittle, "it's true. My husband was a crook, a thief, a forger, a man who accepted bribes. He sent innocent men to the gas chamber on murder charges he knew to be false; did it to build his own reputation. And he let guilty men go free — if they paid him enough."

PROCTOR frowned in the darkness.

"I've known those things for a long time, Ellen. I knew them when I was an investigator on his staff. Before I quit and enlisted."

"You . . . you knew?"

"Yes. I could have torn the lid off if I'd wanted to. I didn't, because you'd told me you were going to marry him. Since you preferred Basserman to me, I couldn't

bring myself to say anything. I had only my suspicions; no real proof. You might have thought I was trying to smear him because he'd won you and I'd lost. So I stepped out of the picture. I wonder if you can understand that?"

Her hands found his and pressed them, nervously. "Yes, Tim, I understand. You make me feel cheap and small."

"Why?"

"Because when I learned the truth, I wasn't woman enough to . . . take it to the proper authorities. I confronted him with it, just a little while ago. I accused him."

"And?"

"He tried to kill me, Tim. He threatened me."

"So you phoned me to come here and protect you?"

She clicked a light-switch and the room glowed brilliantly, a brilliance that registered only partially on Proctor's eyes. "No," she whispered. "I didn't want your protection. I wanted you to be . . . kind to me. To k-kiss me just once before I give myself up."

"Give yourself up?"

"Yes." She led him around a massive desk. His toe impacted on something soft, yielding that lay sprawled there. He leaned over, swiftly peering at this recumbent figure; used his sensitive fingers to explore it.

"A man," he said. "Rather a smallish man. Dead."

Ellen's choked answer was freighted with fear. "It's my husband. I shot him, Tim. I'm a murderess."

THE words came gushing from her lips in a staccato torrent. She had accused Basserman of certain things. He'd threatened her. She had gone to her boudoir, got a gun. The rest of it was fuzzy in her memory: a struggle, a shot, the sudden knowledge that the district attorney was dead. Then she'd phoned Tim Proctor, and . . . "Oh-h-h, Timmy, darling, d-do

you think they'll send me t-to the lethal chamber?"

For an instant, Proctor almost imagined the past two years vanishing; nostalgically thought of himself as a D.A.'s detective on the scene of a homicide, listening to a killer's confession and getting ready to snap the handcuffs on her. But you couldn't do that to the girl you loved. And Tim was no longer an official with power to arrest anybody. He was only a civilian, a former combat pilot whose eyes were no good.

"No, Ellen," he said gravely. "They won't convict you. They won't even indict you. Your own story will put you in the clear. Your husband threatened your life. You shot in self-defense."

She shivered against him, miserably. "You wouldn't say that if you c-could see," she whispered.

"Meaning what?"

"The b-bullet went through his spine. I shot him in the b-back, Tim. How can I claim self-defense?"

"Good God! Are you saying you deliberately—?"

"I d-don't know. I can't remember. Maybe I broke away f-from him when we struggled. Maybe he t-turned just as I pulled the trigger. But a jury wouldn't believe that."

Proctor tensed as a thought struck him. "What about the secretary, the man who let me in the house? How much does he know? Did he come upstairs when the shot sounded?"

"N-no. He was out at the time, mailing a letter. He came back after . . . this happened. He doesn't know anything . . . yet."

"He knows I'm here," Proctor said slowly.

"Of course. What of it?"

"I have a plan, Ellen. A way out for you. Before I went away, it was common knowledge around City Hall that Basserman and I weren't friendly; that we were both in love with you."

"Yes. Lots of people knew that."

"Very good. Where's the gun you used? Give it to me."

She slipped it into his outstretched hand. He hefted it, almost enjoying its cold stoeely hardness. "Tim, wh-what are you g-g-going to do?"

"Fire a shot into the corpse," he answered. "From the front."

"But—but why?"

He grinned crookedly. "Your husband's body is still warm. He hasn't been dead long. I think we can convince the police that this bullet of mine is the one that killed him."

"Tim! You—you can't let them arrest you for something I did! You can't shield me that way. I won't let you!"

Proctor groped toward her, slipped an arm about her waist. "Look, Ellen. Right now I'm a hero, a man with six Jap planes to my credit and a Flying Cross on my tunic. A hero invalided out of the service because an enemy slug partially destroyed my eyesight."

"I . . . I know all that."

"All right. So a war hero gets the breaks, even when he faces a homicide charge. A half-blind war hero gets even more sympathy. Everythin's in my favor."

"No, Timmy. No!"

HE PULLED her closer to him. "Hush and listen. We'll claim Basserman went crazy with jealousy because I called on you. We'll say he jumped me, struck me with his gun, tried to plug me."

"I d-don't understand."

"It's quite simple," Proctor explained patiently. "Imagine the public reaction. Basserman attacked a blind man; a flyer who lost his sight fighting Japs. That makes Basserman the lowest possible sort of heel."

"But—"

"So the blind man grappled with Basserman, took his gun away and shot him in self-defense. I can get away with it,

"Tim—I've hurt you!" she cried, even as she hit him.



Ellen. I've enough vision in my eyes to make it sound plausible. I fired to protect myself. They'll not only exonerate me; they'll carry me out of the courtroom on their shoulders."

"You're forgetting something, Tim. You're forgetting the bullet I put in him. In his back."

Proctor grinned. "That's easy. I'll say I fired twice. My first slug nailed him in the chest, spun him around. As he fell, I triggered again; got him through the spine."

"Do y'you really think they'll believe you, Tim?"

"I'm sure of it."

"And—and you're doing it because—"

"I'm doing it for you," he said gently. "Not that I'm running any risk of conviction. Oh, and one thing more. After I've fired, I'll hand you this gun. You're to hit me with it. Hard enough to show. I'll need a bruise to back up our story; to prove Basserman assaulted me."

"Tim, I . . . I c-can't."

"You've got to." He moved toward the dead man, peering until the outlines of the corpse made a pattern in his dulled eyes. Then he aimed, fired. The corpse now had a hole in its chest as well as its back.

Downstairs, a startled yelp sounded on the steps. "The secretary!" Proctor whispered. "Here, take this. Mace me across the head. Quickly!"

Ellen whimpered, but she obeyed. Proctor staggered a little as the gun's muzzle bludgeoned his forehead, raked it raw. He felt a trickle of blood running down his face; pain darting into his skull. Ellen choked: "Tim . . . I've hurt you. . . !"

"Shut up. Give me back that automatic. Good. Now scream. Hurry up! Yell like hell! Hysteria."

She keened out a rasping screech of what sounded like pure horror. Then she repeated it. Proctor watched her through a filmy haze of crimson, where blood was running into his eyes; saw the anxiety of her expression. Then he turned and made for the door. He went out, walking carefully.

At the head of the staircase somebody spotted him. "You, sir! Wh-what happened? That g-gun in your hand—"

Tim Proctor formed his words slowly. "Better call the police, young fellow. You aren't the district attorney's secretary any more. I just killed him."

"You—you *k-killed* him? Oh, my God!" The man pivoted; raced downstairs with clattering speed. You knew, instinctively, that he had no intention of phoning the police. He wanted to go out of the house. Right now. He craved no dealings with a half-blind man who held a loaded automatic.

Proctor took a wild gamble; catapulted downward in pursuit, oblivious to the crimson film that veiled his vision. He gained the lower entrance hall just as his quarry reached the front door. "No you don't, young fellow!" Proctor panted. He lunged, grabbed the man, spun him, jammed him against the wall. "You're staying right here. I'll be needing you."

FEAR was scrawled on the smaller man's pallid face. "No—I—you can't—"

"I said you're staying. I shot your boss because he jumped me, accused me of being too friendly with his wife. He attacked

me, understand? Me, a blind man. Or practically blind. I blasted him in self-defense. You can see where he slugged me."

"Yes—I see—but—"

"So that's why I need you. Need your testimony, rather. You'll tell the cops you saw the gash on my forehead *before* we phoned in a report. Then they'll know I didn't deal myself the bruise just to make a phony alibi."

"Really, sir, I—"

"Quiet! Maybe I'd better tie you up. That way, I'll be sure to have you when I want your corroboration." Tim Proctor was strong. A Jap bullet had pinched his optic nerve, yes; but it hadn't robbed him of the muscular power that sang and throbbled in every sinew of his tall, lean body. He used a portiere cord for a rope; a handkerchief for a gag. Presently he had his unwilling witness helplessly fettered.

Then he found a phone, dialed Headquarters. And then, just as he was hanging up, a shrill scream sounded above him. It was Ellen's scream; and this time it didn't seem faked.

Proctor leaped to the stairs, hurled himself upward, sprinted along the narrow hallway until he came to the study. At the threshold he froze, blinked stupidly.

HE SAW the licking flames, bright and leaping where they ate at the carpet and the corpse that lay on the carpet. Papers were scattered near the body, documents that blazed whitely and crackled as they burned. He smelled the acrid odor of roasting human flesh, a stink that brought back memories of Jap Zero planes going down to destruction under his own tracer bullets. The stench was even more reminiscent because it was tainted with the fumes of burning gasoline, and there was a broken glass bottle by the dead man's head.

Ellen crouched in a far corner, her golden hair an aureate frame for a face twisted

by fear. "Tim!" she wailed. "Timmy, darling—get me out of here!"

He leaped toward her, skirting the fire. "What happened, Ellen? How did it start?"

"There w-were papers in my husband's desk. Records of the cases where he was b-bribed. Details of his crookedness." She shivered into Proctor's arms. "I—I hated to think they'd be m-made public, now that he's d-dead. So I decided to burn them on the hearth. Tim, I don't know how it happened. There was a bottle of cleaning fluid. I thought the papers would burn better if I poured some of the fluid . . . oh-h-h, it was terrible!"

"What was?"

"Somehow I dropped the bottle, broke it. My lighted match set everything afire. . . ."

He freed himself from her embrace; whirled to attack the flames. The handiest thing available was a throw rug near the door. He seized this, used it as a flail. Desperately he flogged the blaze, smothering it, battling it, beating it back. The job seemed to take forever; and even as Proctor stomped out the final ember, he heard a crash downstairs. That would be the homicide cops breaking into the house because nobody answered their pounding.

"Tim . . . wh-what are we going to t-tell them?" the girl panted.

He looked at the corpse with its seared, unrecognizable face. "You can say the bottle of gasoline got broken while I was fighting with Basserman. I was smoking a cigarette at the time. The cigarette touched off the fluid.

"Th-thank you, darling. You . . . you're so clever. . . ." Her whisper died as the police burst into the study.

The homicide official in charge was a sergeant whom Tim Proctor had known in the old days, a burly, capable dick with a voice like muffled thunder. "What the—" he roared. "Proctor! Tim, boy! What is this?"

"Tell him, Ellen," Proctor said quietly.

Her poise was magnificent, her acting superlative. "Tim called on me. My husband went insane with jealousy. He pulled a gun, even though he knew Tim was partially blind. He struck Tim with it; you can see where the muzzle raked his forehead."

"Yes. I can see that."

"They struggled. Tim got the gun and fired; shot my husband in the chest. As he went down, he sort of twisted around. Tim fired again. I think the bullet hit my husband in the back—but he was already dead. It was self-defense, a sightless man fighting a man who could see."

"This is the district attorney, here?"

"That's my husband. Yes."

"You'd never be able to identify him, the way he's burned," the homicide sergeant said. "How did that happen?"

"During the fight, papers got scattered and a bottle of cleaning solvent was broken. A cigarette or something must have set it afire. . . . Isn't that right, Tim?"

Proctor shook his head. "Why, no," he answered gently. "Everything you've said has been a lie, Ellen."

She stared at him in blank amazement. The homicide sergeant thundered: "Huh? What do you mean, lie?"

"I mean the whole setup is a frame; a clever, crooked, filthy frame. This man was dead when I first came here. I didn't murder him, didn't fight with him. You can't fight with a corpse."

"Then who did bump him?" the sergeant demanded.

Ellen Basserman shrieked: "Tim! You can't do this to me! You—you promised! You can't throw me to the wolves!"

"Sorry, baby," Proctor made a bitter mouth. "That's exactly what I intend to do. I'm not accusing you of the actual kill. I'm accusing you of complicity. The real murderer is your husband."

"You're crazy! He's d-dead. Here's his body—"

"No, that's not Basserman." Proctor left the room, went downstairs; returned with the prisoner he had tied with a portiere cord a few minutes ago. "This is Basserman."

IT WAS easy enough to understand, the way Tim Proctor explained it. "Everything hinged on my blindness—and Basserman's complete crookedness. As district attorney he'd grown rich on bribery money. But his political enemies were closing in on him. They finally gathered sufficient evidence to salt him away for the rest of his life. If he stayed and faced the music, he was sunk. If he became a fugitive, the law would catch him sooner or later.

"There was just one way out. He could pretend to die. That would blow down the beef, quash the whole ugly mess.

"But Basserman couldn't pretend to be dead unless he had a substitute corpse all prepared so it could be identified as himself. And his supposed death had to be rigged so nobody could possibly doubt it. That's where I entered the picture; a partially blind man for a fall guy."

"Keep talking, Tim," the sergeant growled.

"Basserman found someone approximately his own size and appearance, brought him here to this room and killed him; shot him in the back. Then Mrs. Basserman phoned me. The newspapers had told how I was back home; had told about the condition of my eyes. I was to be the perfect stooge.

"I came here. Basserman himself let me in; made me believe he was a secretary. All he had to do was disguise his voice. His face didn't matter, because it was only a blur to me. I swallowed this. I didn't suspect anything wrong.

"Mrs. Basserman then led me up to the study, showed me a corpse she claimed was her husband. Again I was fooled. I couldn't see well enough to realize the dead

man was a complete stranger."

Ellen whimpered like a trapped animal. "Tim—!"

Proctor ignored her. "The stage was now set. Because I'd once been in love with Mrs. Basserman, she knew I would front for her if I possibly could. I agreed to confess to the shooting on a plea of self-defense, claiming Basserman had attacked me.

"To make this claim look genuine, I had Mrs. Basserman hit me across the head, hard enough to draw blood. A little after that, I realized the dead man wasn't her husband. I made a dash for the supposed secretary.

"Naturally he was trying to escape. He didn't want to be here when the police arrived, because they would recognize him the instant they saw him. If that happened, the corpse in the study would be tabbed as a substitute."

"Go ahead, Tim," the sergeant said. "I think I'm beginning to get what you're driving at."

PROCTOR nodded. "I captured Basserman, tied him up. Meanwhile his wife started a fire in this upstairs room; a deliberate fire, fed with the documents of the district attorney's crookedness and made hotter by poured gasoline. The blaze had two purposes. First, it destroyed the evidence of Basserman's thievery; and second, it mutilated the murdered man past all recognition. Now he could be identified as Basserman and nobody would question it. As soon as I interpreted this last piece of the puzzle, my case was closed. Now I give you your murderous district attorney and his equally guilty wife. Between them they killed an innocent man, tried to get me to shoulder the blame. But I—"

"Tim! Timmy, darling! Wh-why have you done this to me?" Ellen whimpered theatrically. "You used to . . . love me."

"Yes, I did. Maybe I still do, deep in my heart. I'll forget it, though, if I live

long enough. I'll keep reminding myself how you tried to trick me."

"But . . . how did you guess . . . ?"

He smiled. "I didn't guess, Ellen. I knew. When you struck me with that gun, you broke my shackles. Call it a miracle if you want to. But when you hit me, you released the pressure on my optic nerve. Something no surgery could have done. It was a lucky blow, Ellen. *It gave me back my eyesight! From that moment on, I could see normally.* One look told me the corpse on the floor wasn't your husband. And I



Proctor took a wild gamble and catapulted after the fellow.



saw you, too; saw you in your true colors—cold, mercenary—"

She shrieked an oath at him. Then the homicide cops grabbed her. Screaming, she was taken out of the house; and so was her husband. Tim Proctor's mouth twisted crookedly to mask the pain inside him. Twice he'd lost the only girl he'd ever cared for; once to a rival, when she married Basserman, and now to the law—permanently.

The homicide sergeant clapped him on the shoulder. "Easy, Tim boy. Hard work will take away the sting. Maybe you can get back as a D.A. dick, now that you can see again."

"No," Proctor said slowly. "Now that I can see again, I've a debt to pay. There's a Jap in the South Seas; a Jap in a Zero.

I'm going back after him—and the rest of his tribe."

He turned and left the room.

Larceny Lads and Lassies



VEN though old gold now commands the highest prices, it is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain. However, the racket boys have found a way to turn this shortage into gold, with the result that the Jewelers' Security Alliance found itself compelled to issue a warning to jewelers, cautioning members to be on their guard.

In the case in point, a well-dressed stranger, with perfect poise and a definitely agreeable personality, approached a gold-buying firm in the Mid-West. To the executive who interviewed him, the stranger confided that, while he wasn't in the market to sell gold, he had valuable personal connections through which he could get old gold. Producing documents and references showing that he was an experienced traveling salesman and broker, he suggested that perhaps he and the company might be able to work out a profit-sharing method.

So persuasive was the personable caller,

and so taken in by his manners was the jeweler, that the latter advanced the newcomer \$25. The salesman promptly set out to cover his route. In a couple of hours he returned with some worthwhile gold trinkets. The gold-buying executive was overjoyed. At last, he reasoned, he had someone who could seek out the yellow metal instead of waiting for it to be brought into the office.

Thus, when the new salesman suggested that, since, in the acquiring of the gold he had done a little convivial entertaining, a slightly higher advance be made, the executive readily assented.

This went on for several days, the salesman always bringing back small pieces of gold, each time a bit more than before. And although the executive didn't know it, or preferred not to notice it, the advances got a little higher each time until they reached a couple of hundred dollars.

Then the salesman forgot to come back and the gold-buying executive realized,

to his chagrin, that he had been bilked. Too late he discovered that he had paid perhaps 100 per cent more than the gold was worth! He had been taken in by a persuasive personality with a set of phony papers!

In instances of this kind, of course, the possibility of a swindler making a big take are small. But people dealing in precious gems or metal—and jewelers particularly—have frequently held the bag for large sums, as the records of the Jewelers' Security Alliance reveal.

Perhaps the cleverest racket and, from the standpoint of the criminal, the safest, is the so-called kleptomaniac swindle, which usually works this way:

AT THE door of a prosperous jewelry house stops an expensive car and from it steps a well-dressed man who enters and asks to see the owner. He identifies himself as a wealthy clubman and, in confidence, advises the jeweler that his wife is a kleptomaniac and that he has heard her say she planned to visit the store. She is an inveterate shopper, and may just gaze at the goods for hours, he tells the astonished shop owner. "However," he says, "if she should take anything without paying for it, hold her and phone me at my office. I'll come around and pay for it." He then hands an en-

graved, rich-looking business card to the astonished jeweler who promises to handle the matter discreetly.

When the wealthy clubman leaves, the jeweler tips off his clerks. He isn't sure what Mrs. Doe looks like, but he and the clerks can surely study every feminine customer. After all, aren't they always on the lookout for shoplifters of any kind?

Late in the day, Mrs. Doe arrives. By then the clerks and the owner are pretty weary. Their vigilance has relaxed, so much so that the dexterous Mrs. Doe manages to slip a goodly portion of the valuable stock into inner pockets. Then, after ascertaining that no one has connected her with the earlier visit of her confederate, she buys a small item and calmly walks out to join him.

But supposing she had been trapped? The jeweler would have called Mr. Doe, whose "office" is probably a phone booth in a big building, where he has been awaiting either his confederate or the call. The "clubman" would have paid for the articles and no arrests would have been made.

Can the racket be stopped? It has been, now that jewelers are smart enough to get a good description of Mrs. Doe. And some of them are even smarter—they insist on a photograph!

The Red Cross Needs *Your* Help

By
**GEOFFREY
NORTH**



MURDER IN SWINGTIME

*“No fury like a woman scorned . . . !”
Tim thought of that in looking for a murder
motive. But as it turned out, the dead
man had done more than scorn a woman.
and it wasn't that simple to find the killer*

He was watching their grief,
to see which was the
real thing.



TIM LANCE angled the car up the long drive in front of the white, rambling inn. The Mountain Lodge, surrounded by spacious grounds, did service also as dance-hall and gambling hangout for the summer visitors.

Lance, after admiring the morning

view over the Catskills, climbed out of his car, a long-legged man with tolerant gray eyes softening the squareness of his jaw.

He went inside to the bar and ordered a beer. A slim fellow in white pants and blue corduroy polo shirt said to him, without lifting his face from his Scotch, "How are the nags, Tim?"

Lance went over and shook hands with Jerry Munroe. They were old Broadway acquaintances. Munroe was as good a swing pianist as there was in the business. But he could never hold a job with the

big name bands. He was unreliable and quarrelsome. He drank too much and was always getting into jams over women.

But whenever Munroe needed money, he'd take time to make a few records for the big phonograph companies. Lance knew that the "Acme" outfit had him tied up on the biggest swing seller of the last two years. It was Munroe's own version of *Pop Goes the Weasel!*

Lance said to him, sourly: "The nags were okay. So was my system, until I ran out of the do, re, mi."

Munroe grinned, asked him what he'd drink. After a while Munroe confided to him that he was one-third of the trio that furnished the music for The Mountain Lodge customers.

"I need a job for the summer," Lance said, "could you put in a word for me with the owner?"

Munroe nodded, "That's easy." He went over to the house phone: "Boss, I'm sending up a friend. You ought to be able to use him somewhere."

He hung up, pointed his thumb to the stairs, "Go on up and ask for Mae," he said.

MAE ANDERS, owner of The Mountain Lodge, was no ethereal beauty, but she was handsome enough in her own style. She weighed about a hundred and forty.

She was thirty and looked it. Her eyes were hazel-brown. Not the soft, languorous hazel eyes of an easy-going woman, but the hard, cynical, look of a woman who has had to take care of herself in a man's world.

She said to Lance, "Munroe says you need a job. What can you do?"

"Most anything," he answered her. "I've been doing some private investigating lately." He didn't tell her his investigations were all concerned with the relative speed of horses and the records of jockeys.

"That's fine, I need a fellow like you. Your hours are from ten p.m. to six in the morning. Meals, drinks, and fifty bucks a week."

"What do I do?"

"Stick around the floor, mostly. Take care of things, if anybody gets tough. Or sit in the poker game for the house. There'll be plenty for you to do."

She came close to him, felt his arms, looked at him with narrowed eyes. "You seem big enough to take care of yourself. Come, let's go down and meet the gang."

They went to the table where Munroe was now sitting with two men and a slender red-haired girl. Lance had an idea he'd seen the girl somewhere before, but he couldn't quite place her. Munroe had had too much liquor, but he was able to totter up and introduce Lance to Benny Ross and Whitey Hobart.

Lance had met them before, but Munroe was too drunk to remember that.

Ross was a little, hump-backed fellow with a twisted leg, who walked with a limp. He had the tragic features of a fallen angel. But the silver notes he blew out of his trumpet made folks forget his hump and crooked limb. It was even rumored that a few women had fallen in love with him.

Hobart was a dreamy-eyed monomaniac who lived for nothing but his drums and traps.

The red-haired girl held out her hand to Lance: "I'm Wilma Trent."

Munroe said to Lance, "Right now she's got the best routine in the Catskill Mountains," then lurched down in his chair, saluting Mae, "Hello, boss." He downed the rest of his whiskey.

Trouble showed in Mae's eyes. She said to Wilma, "How's the new routine? Ready for tonight?"

"I'm sure it will be," answered Wilma, "If Jerry will only sober up long enough for the boys to go over it with me."

"Sober as a saint," asserted Munroe,

staggering up, and pawing Wilma's arm. "Come on, babe. How about a tennis game?"

Wilma shrank away from his grip. Mae stabbed a lighter at her cigarette, saying to Munroe, "I thought *we* had a swimming date?"

Munroe lurched over to Mae, put his arms around her familiarly. "Drunks can't swim, Mae." Then he made a mock salute to the others, took Wilma's hand, swaying.

She kept Munroe from falling, a look of dismay on her face, and as Munroe slid back in his seat, Hobart remarked, "I'd leave the kid alone, if I were you, Jerry."

Ross, his head almost at the level of the table-cloth, sat sipping black coffee.

Munroe laughed, slapped the hump on Ross's back. "What do you say, handsome?"

Ross didn't turn his head. He spoke gently, his limpid gaze straight ahead. "Yes, Jerry, Wilma's a good girl. Leave Wilma alone."

Munroe lurched up, grinning at Wilma. She shrank close to Lance.

"Dames are all alike," sneered Munroe.

Mae doused the dregs of a whiskey glass in his face. He blinked his eyes, grinned sheepishly, seemed to sober up. He said softly to Mae: "Sorry. Just guess I had a little too much."

Something like pain came into Mae's eyes. She poured herself some of the Scotch. "All right, gang. Now's a good time to rehearse that routine."

The three musicians and Wilma stood up, the girl asking Lance, "Going to watch us?"

Mae answered for him. "No. I'm showing him around the place after breakfast."

MAE showed Lance all around The Mountain Lodge. It was fitted up from A to Z with everything to make

suckers happy. There was an elaborate kitchen, fully equipped, and fancy prices on the menu. She showed him the enormous dance-hall and the little private booths, where the drinks were double the regular price.

She took him into the gaming room. It had everything. A couple of black-jack tables, a faro layout, two roulette wheels, a couple of bird-cages, private poker dens, and a dice game with the odds marked plain and business-like on a big billiard table.

"And what about the law?" Lance asked her.

"Oh, they're taken care of. They make periodical raids, but I'm always tipped off in time. As long as they don't get any evidence, they leave me alone."

Lance pointed to the chips piled high on gaming tables. "And what do you do with these, when the law comes?"

"Come here, I'll show you."

She took him back to the dance-floor, walked with him over to the musicians' stand in the corner, a small raised platform next to the wall.

She pressed a button on the wall, a little door swung out from the wall, and a dumb-waiter descended from somewhere and stopped at the level of the top of the piano.

"You see," she explained. "When I get a tip that the cops will be here, I convert the crap table into a billiard table. I dismantle the roulette wheels and the bird-cages, bring the parts with the chips and cards over here. I put the stuff in this dumb-waiter, press the button, and up it goes to my room upstairs. None of the law would go up there." She laughed. "Everything's done regular, as long as I sweeten the kitty every week."

LANCE was on the job on the dance-floor at ten. Jerry Munroe was already at the piano, rattling the keys. Lance could tell he was a bit tipsy, the

way he rolled his shoulders from side to side as his hands traveled up and down the keyboard. But drunk or sober, Munroe was still the best piano-pounder in the business.

Ross sat down, did some preliminary triple-tonguing on his trumpet, then Hobart slipped into his seat and slyly rattled his drum sticks. Those three were sweet to hear.

Young fellows and girls in summer finery began to float in, took tables and waited around for things to liven up. Cigarette girls in tight dress-uniforms scurried around selling things to the customers. One of the profitable little rackets, that Mae had thought up, was this:

She had bought up a lot of rubber toy novelties. Colored things with little wooden mouthpieces that were blown up like miniature balloons in the shape of alligators, cats, jitterbugs. A play for the swing fans.

Printed on the outside of these blow-ups were the words of popular songs. They sold for a dollar a piece, and the cigarette girls were doing a brisk business with them.

The young couples were blowing up their toys and laughing boisterously when the music got into the groove, and then somebody would stick the end of a lighted cigarette on one of the inflated cats or alligators, and there'd be a bang of a noise, and customers would start yelling, "Pop Goes the Weasel!"

Pretty soon Mae came on the floor, swathed in her dark blue evening gown. She nodded to Lance and went from table to table, kidding the customers, directing the waiters, arranging tables, busy as a queen bee.

When Wilma came tripping on high heels to the center of the floor, a continuous roll of hand-clapping greeted her. It was easy to see why she was a favorite with the crowd.

There was a pert, gamin-like manner

about her, an impudently spontaneous way of doing things that was infectiously funny. She came out first in a simple, tight-fitting street frock, a brown derby over her red hair, and jiggled in a tough Bowery manner. Then suddenly, as the applause mounted she pulled a zipper on the side of her dress, and a lot of little furbelows appeared, and Wilma was attired in a demure creation of the 1870's.

A little black bonnet was whisked from somewhere and set on her head, and she minced around coyly and daintily like a belle of the last century while the crowd roared.

Then the piano, trumpet and drums started a fast, slithering fox-trot and the floor began to fill up.

Lance felt a soft hand on his shoulder. "Come on, let's dance," Wilma invited him.

He began to like his job a lot. Wilma's head just fitted under his chin, and they went twice around the floor demurely enough while the boys were doing the conventional things with the music.

"Things are pretty tame now," she said. "They're waiting for twelve o'clock. That's when they really open up, for the first moonlight dance."

Lance took a look out the window. "There's no moon tonight."

"There don't have to be. They just put the lights out." They circled the floor. Munroe began to finger some hot stuff on the black keys.

"Oh, he's *good* when he's like that," said Wilma. "You've known Munroe a long time, haven't you?"

"We're not exactly pals," said Lance, "but I've known him a long time—from reputation. What's he been doing now?"

"Living up to his reputation. Mae has fallen for him in a big way."

"He's always had success with them."

"I have no use for men like that!" she exclaimed, "no matter how good-looking they are."

The dance was over, and Lance and Wilma went over to the piano and had a drink with the trio while the music rested.

Munroe attempted to pull Wilma on his lap, but she shoved him away crossly as Mae hurried over to them. Mae told Lance:

"The next is the first 'Moonlight' number. Take Wilma and go to that table near the front window. Just tone 'em down a bit, if they get to stamping too hard."

LANCE sat down with Wilma near the window, and he saw Ross and Hobart leave the floor. Munroe was alone at the piano.

The customers at the table were quiet, as if they were expecting something. Munroe was improvising pianissimo when the lights went out.

Gradually Munroe got into the groove. He started on "Pop Goes the Weasel!" It was what the crowd had been waiting for. It was pretty dark on the floor now, except for some light coming in near the window where Lance sat. But he could see there wasn't anyone left at the tables.

The couples had all gotten up and were swaying with the music. And a lot of them had their little rubber blow-ups dangling on their wrists or perched between their lips.

A fellow came shuffling by, grabbed Wilma from her seat, and danced wildly away with her.

Munroe's fingers were doing tricky arabesques in the treble, and some of the dancers were holding lighted cigarette ends close to the rubber blow-ups, laughing as the puffed-up alligators and cats danced in the air.

Someone must have let his cigarette get too close to one of the inflated balloons, as Lance heard something go, bang! and then everybody yelled, "Pop, Goes the Weasel."

The crowd was yelling and swing ran riot up and down the keyboard as Mae and Wilma threaded their way back to Lance's table.

"You're sure packing them in tonight," said Wilma.

"Pretty good mob," admitted Mae, drawing slowly on her cigarette. "Jerry's playing extra well tonight. Don't you think so, Wilma?"

"His solos are always marvelous," replied the girl, as Munroe went into his famous whistling chorus. And when he whistled, "Pop Goes the Weasel!" the crowd whistled with him, and then there was a succession of "bang-bangs!" as the cigarette ends burned holes into the toy cats and alligators.

Munroe wound up with a brilliant, jazzy run in double thirds. At the finale a jittering male dancer soloed up to Wilma and whirled her away.

The crowd clapped and yelled, "Encore, encore!"

But Munroe didn't respond. The crowd kept on clapping. Some were stamping on the floor. "Play it again! Play it again!"

"What's the matter with Jerry? Why don't he play it?" Mae asked Lance.

"Probably all liquored up and passed out," replied Lance.

"Run over and see what's holding Jerry back," she said.

Lance wound his way through a dense mob of clapping and cheering couples, and got close to the piano. Then he saw Monroe sprawled over the piano stool, his hands high up and holding on to the top of the upright piano.

Lance figured eight hours of steady drinking had gotten the best of Munroe. He went over and touched his shoulder. "Come on, Jerry, snap out of it! The mob's yelling for you!"

When Lance touched his shoulder, Munroe keeled over and Lance had to catch him from falling to the floor.

"Come out of it!" Lance urged, but Munroe's body felt as limp as a fish and Lance's heart skipped a beat as he bent over and listened at Munroe's heart.

Lance's ear brushed Munroe's shirt and got into something warm and wet. Then he knew Munroe was dead. He lowered the body gently to the floor and then ran back to Mae's table, where Wilma had rejoined her.

As soon as Lance came running to them, Wilma grabbed his arm, "Anything wrong?"

Mae was in her chair, cupping a light to a cigarette, but Lance yanked her up, took her to one side, whispered:

"Munroe's been shot. He's dead!"

"My God!" exclaimed Mae, swaying against him.

Her nails dug into his wrists as he held her up. Then she steadied herself. She said in a dry desolate voice:

"I can't believe it! I must go to him. Take care of Wilma. Don't let anyone make a scene. Get Ross and Hobart. Have them play something—anything."

She hurried off, then halfway across the floor addressed the dancers:

"Folks, something's happened to the lights. Take it easy. We'll have 'em fixed in a minute." Then she went rushing over to the piano.

Lance was aware of Wilma tugging frantically on his arm, asking, "Anything happen to Munroe?" Now Lance was conscious that she must have been repeating that phrase over and over for the last few minutes.

When he broke the news to Wilma, she cried, "How horrible! Who could have done it?" She clutched his shoulder. "Oh, poor Mae! How awful for her!"

"Yes, you better go to her," urged Lance. Wilma ran over to the piano.

Lance went through to the back room. Ross and Hobart, side by side, were playing black-jack against the dealer. Lance

told them Munroe was dead. They followed him back to the dance-floor.

Hobart, shaking his head solemnly, said, "The boy had it coming. Double-crossing, two-timing Mr. Munroe!"

"He had a way with women," said Ross. "Poor Jerry!"

THE couples at the tables were pretty quiet now, and Lance could hear a low, moaning sound coming from somewhere. What he heard was Mae crying over Munroe's body.

With the help of Ross and Hobart, he carried the dead man into the office. Mae and Wilma followed, weeping.

Someone clicked on a light. They laid Munroe on a table. The bullet had gone in right over the heart. A small circle of brown-red blood was slowly enlarging under their eyes.

Mae motioned to Ross and Hobart. "Out on the floor, boys. Wilma, give them something." Then she turned to Lance: "I'm going to see if there's any of the law out there. You stay here."

Lance wasn't long alone with Munroe before Mae came back with a blustery, broad-shouldered man.

Bowers, the sheriff of Airview County, was a frequent visitor at The Mountain Lodge, an admirer of Mae's. He now had a chance to shine for her in his official capacity.

"Who found the body?" Bowers asked Mae, and when Mae told him, he looked sourly at Lance and asked:

"Who's this man? Ever see him around here before?"

"He's okay," defended Mae. "He was a friend of Munroe's and was working on the floor for me."

Bowers hemmed and hawed half an hour, and at first wanted to hold the entire crowd for questioning, but after a while gave that idea up. He decided to place all of Mae's outfit under arrest, including the bartender and the dealers

in the backroom, the waiters and cigarette girls.

Then he searched everyone for guns, but found nothing. Finally he permitted



"Sober up, you fool!" she said. "Get back to rehearsal!"

the dance-floor guests to leave after placing two of his deputies at the door and having everybody identified before they left.

After that Bowers heard Lance explain, that Mae and Wilma had been sitting with him by the window, when Munroe was playing his last number.

Ross and Hobart also accounted for their time since they had left Munroe at

the piano. They had been playing blackjack in the backroom. Skelly, the dealer, vouched for that.

Hobart admitted though, that he had left the card table and had a drink at the

bar. The bartender couldn't recall the visit, pleading that he'd served too many people that night to keep track.

Mae told the sheriff: "This is a terrible blow to my place and myself personally. I want the killer brought to justice." She went to her safe and came back with a roll of bills. "Here's a thousand dollars. I'm offering that as a reward to anyone who catches the killer." She thrust the money in Bowers' fist. "I want you to keep it."

Bowers made out a formal record of the money transfer and left for the night.

Lance figured a murder case was something new to the sheriff and that he was waiting to get some legal advice before going ahead.

The sheriff's two deputies, however, remained on guard.

Mae arranged over the phone to have Munroe's body taken care of in the morning, and as every one was in low spirits, Lance went up to his room to sleep.

WHEN he woke up, the sun was high in the sky and streaming through his windows. He felt that he'd had a bad dream of some kind. Then he remembered sickeningly about Munroe.

He dressed and went down to breakfast and found Ross and Hobart glumly sipping coffee. He joined them, but no words were spoken. The musicians looked at him with suspicious eyes.

The house phone buzzed and Hobart answered it, came back and said to Lance: "Go on up. Mae wants to see you."

Mae looked like she'd spent a sleepless night. Her eyes were red and swollen, and there were lines in her face that Lance hadn't seen before.

She pointed to a pile of books and magazines resting on top of a small, hand-winding phonograph.

"I couldn't shut my eyes last night," she said. "I tried reading something. But I couldn't keep my mind off Jerry."

She took Lance's hand. Her eyes were a mixture of bitterness and tenderness. She asked:

"Did you know Jerry a long time?"

"A long time," Lance said, "but we weren't pals."

"In spite of his bad points, I thought a lot of Jerry Munroe." This was the first time Lance had seen a look of wistfulness on her face.

"I thought, maybe, at one time," she said, "that Munroe and I might mean something to each other." She sighed, and didn't let go Lance's hand. "Well, I guess that's all over."

Lance didn't say anything, but kept squeezing her fingers and looking into her eyes. His arm crept around her shoulder. "You'd better go now," she whispered hoarsely, "before the others come."

Lance had begun to figure something. He said: "How about a longer date? Soon?"

She flushed. "Maybe. I'll think it over," she said, and walked to her dressing table. He followed and when she turned, he picked up a key from it without her noticing."

LANCE spent the early afternoon alone, turning things over in his mind. Then he heard that Bowers would continue his investigation later.

Bowers' men were still guarding the place, and Mae was busy humoring them and taking care of the routine of the inn. Choosing a time when everyone was downstairs, Lance hurried up to the second floor, silently slipped Mae's key in her lock, and eased himself into her room.

He clicked on the light and made a fast survey. He darted to the table where the phonograph stood, opened the top of the machine, but didn't find what he wanted.

He made a thorough search of the bed and bedding. Mae's bureau and closet revealed nothing of interest.

The dumb-waiter—the apparatus that Mae used to hoist stuff from the lower floor—was minutely examined. His search was unrewarded.

Then he saw a white receptacle with an open slit, attached to the wall next the dumb-waiter. It was a chute for waste matter that led through a long hollow tube from Mae's room down to the incinerator in the cellar.

Beneath this chute, in a dark shadow made by the angle of the two walls, he saw a jagged, flat piece of something. Before picking it up, he carefully slipped a silk handkerchief over his hand, so none of his own fingerprints would be on it.

It was hard, and felt somewhat metallic, but light. It was a broken piece of a phonograph record. It included part of the smooth, blue-colored center, but around this central part there were many groovings where the needle traveled over the sound track.

Certain that the handkerchief was wrapped securely about the broken piece, he put them carefully in his pocket and hurried out of the room.

He heard the swish of a dress, heard Mae calling down the corridor after him, "Wait, wait!" But not stopping to answer, he leaped down the stairs.

He reached bottom, a small area-way adjoining the ballroom, but partly hidden from view. Three feet above Lance's head was a raised window. He leaped up and his fingers gripped the sill.

He swung his feet out into space and saw sickeningly a thirty-foot drop below. A drain-pipe hugged the wall, and Lance, with a desperate grab, tore his nails on the piping, clamping his knees together around the metal and slid to safety with the skin burned from his palms.

A clump of bushes hid him from the driveway, and he hugged close to the wall, skulking backward to the safety of a pine-studded ravine.

A HALF hour later he was inside the Airview Bazaar. It was one of those rambling country stores that carries everything—groceries, hardware, radios, phonographs, dress-goods and whatnot.

Lance bought five "Acme" phonograph records of Jerry Munroe's hit, "Pop, Goes the Weasel!" A new shipment with red-colored centers. The store's entire stock.

Then he purchased a very old, very much used record, a sample of an operatic aria, the grooves of which were pretty well leveled off, and which hardly reproduced any music at all. But that fitted his purpose exactly.

He bought a little bottle of the best glue, a small chisel, some good blue paint, and a brush.

He asked the clerk if he could use his backroom for a while. The clerk gave his consent, and Lance took his stuff in there.

Then he went to work. First he took the jagged piece of broken record that he had found in Mae's room. He handled it tenderly, covering his fingers with the silk kerchief so his prints wouldn't show. Then he laid this broken piece over the center of one of the new records, and chiseled out an identically shaped piece from this new, red-colored disc. He then painted over this new red-colored piece with blue paint to exactly match the color of the original piece.

Now he carefully wrapped up again the old original broken piece and put it back in his pocket.

The newly painted piece he now placed over the center of the old, used sample record. Then he chiseled out a space in the old record, where the newly painted piece was to be inserted.

Then, with his chisel, Lance scraped the worn groovings on the used record until it was very smooth. He fitted the newly painted piece into the niche he'd chiseled out for it, and glued it tight to the rest of the disc.

Lance went out front to the store, into one of the record-playing booths and played over the record he had just constructed. He was satisfied with his job.

It had been a lot of trouble. But it was worth it. After all, one doesn't pick up a thousand dollars every day. As thick-headed as the sheriff seemed to be, even he would have to admit how plain it all was after Lance had given his demonstration.

The four remaining new records were wrapped together with Lance's handiwork. The rest of his purchases he threw away.

BOWERS choked halfway on his cigar when Lance strode into his office.

"Who let you out?" roared the sheriff.

"I've got a slant or two on Munroe's killing," grinned Lance, "that I thought you ought to know about. So, Sheriff, with your permission, we'll go back to the Lodge."

Past the surprised guard strode Lance and the sheriff, to find Ross and Hobart drinking glumly at the bar. The four went up to Mae's room.

Mae and Wilma were sitting on the bed. They were red-eyed, as if they'd had a good cry together.

Mae looked at Lance icily, silent, hardly noticing Bowers.

Ross limped to a chair, settling his bird-like body into it. Hobart's nervous fingers beat a tattoo on the bed-post.

"Well, you've got the floor," growled the sheriff at Lance.

Lance faced them, sitting with his long legs eased in front of him, the bundle of records beside him.

Bowers twiddled with his hat impatiently.

Mae's eyes were dark with scorn. "You're through," she said to Lance, taking some money from her purse and flinging it at him. "I'm no piker. Here's a week's pay. Now get going!"

Lance pocketed the bills without counting them. He nodded to Mae. "Thanks. I'm traveling out of here this afternoon."

"Oh, no you don't!" broke in Bowers. "No one leaves here. Every one's under arrest until we find out who shot Munroe!"

Lance nodded to the sheriff. "Of course. That's why I'm leaving this afternoon. And with the thousand dollars reward."

A flush crept into Mae's face. Wilma's cheeks were white, haggard. Ross and Hobart exchanged glances.

Bowers said to Lance, "What do you mean by that?"

"I know who killed Munroe," Lance said.

"Who killed Munroe?" asked Mae hoarsely.

"Why, you did," said Lance.

Lance saw Wilma's face go pale as paper. Mae sat calm and cool. She said to Lance, "Figure *that* out for me," then turned to Bowers, "It's just a sorehead talking wild."

"All right, I'll figure it," Lance said.

"Look here," Mae broke in. "I was right with you and Wilma at the window table while Jerry was playing his last number—before he was shot. It was *you* that ran over and found the body. I've got a *perfect* alibi."

"That's it," said Lance. "Just a little too perfect."

Bowers grabbed Lance's arm. He said to Mae, "What's *he* ranting about?" The sheriff hated long-winded explanations.

Mae looked at Lance with steady eyes. "Let's hear what he's got to say, Sheriff."

Wilma's hands were little fists clutching at her dress.

Lance unwrapped his package. He laid the new records on his chair. Then he took the record with the broken piece glued into it, over to the phonograph table.

Mae got off the bed, leaned against the

wall near the door, facing Lance as he adjusted the needle on the disc.

Bowers came over to them. Wilma kept twisting the hem of her frock. Ross edged his chair closer, and Hobart moved up with the hunch-back.

LANCE wound up the machine. The disc made a low, whirring sound as it traveled round and round while no music played. That was exactly what Lance had wanted. His morning's work had been perfect. After a minute the needle reached the grooves of the inserted piece. Then there was the sound of a piano playing, and then Munroe's whistling chorus, "Pop, Goes the Weasel!"

And then, as suddenly as the music had come on, it ceased, and the needle whirled around the blank part of the disc.

That same business of the music coming on and going off repeated itself three times before the needle traveled the entire disc. And each time the music came on, Mae's face got whiter and Wilma's eyes grew wider.

"What's the meaning of this? I don't get it at all," complained Bowers.

Lance lifted off the record, and sat down in his chair. He nodded toward Mae. "You shot Munroe, because he'd jilted you. I know he had a way with some women. When they fell, they fell hard. When you saw him making a play for *her*," Lance pointed to the white-faced Wilma, "your love turned to hate. Some women are like that."

Mae laughed a brittle laugh. "Isn't it reasonable to suppose, if I was going to kill some one, I'd have shot *her*?"

Wilma shrank back from Mae's look. Lance shook his head:

"No. That's not your style, Mae. Your sense of justice, of fair play, was injured. Wilma hadn't done anything to you. Hadn't encouraged Munroe. But Munroe publicly scorned you. Your code

was outraged. You shot him. A planned and premeditated act."

Bowers broke in, "Cut out the speech and get down to facts."

"Here they are," Lance said. "Before Munroe was to play his 'moonlight' solo, Mae had lowered, by means of her dumb-waiter, that phonograph you see on the table there. Then when Ross and Hobart left, she shot Munroe with a small-bore gun. Maybe a .32. A .32 don't make much noise, and it sounds like one of those toy blow-ups exploding. When Munroe was shot, no one knew it was a gun sounding. Just another piece of rubber burning up.

"She had the phonograph record of 'Pop, Goes the Weasel!' ready in the machine. She propped Munroe's body against the piano, and in the dark it seemed like *he* was playing the piece. It was Munroe all right. But, Munroe in spirit, not in the flesh. You see, Sheriff, it was that record that did the playing, while Mae sat at the table with Wilma and myself. She had us planted there, to be certain that she'd have an alibi. Then she sent me over to discover the dead body. She made sure that *she* would not be the first to break the news."

Mae kept edging nearer to Bowers. He and Wilma kept their eyes on Lance. Ross moved his chair alongside of Hobart. They formed a semi-circle about Lance, sitting at ease, his long legs stretched out, the pile of records under his hand. He paused, waited for questions, but no one spoke.

Lance talked on: "During the confusion while the lights were out, while I was talking to Wilma, and while Ross and Hobart were off the floor, Mae got rid of the evidence. She ran to the dumb-waiter, raised the phonograph to her room, ran up the stairs to her place, took the record from the machine, broke it in pieces, and put the pieces down the waste chute, where they slid down to the in-

cinerator and were burned up.

"Unluckily for you, Mae, one of the pieces dropped to the floor, got snagged in a corner, and I found it when I searched your room this morning. Then I fitted it to this disc you just heard. . . Shall I play it again, Sheriff?"

MAE'S face was white and red by turns. "Look here, Sheriff, she choked out, "that's something he cooked up. I never had any of Munroe's records. He got them somewhere and framed the whole layout!"

Lance showed them the new records of "Pop, Goes the Weasel!"

"You can see," he explained, "that the centers of all these are red. They are on all the new records. The color of that broken piece I found is blue. It was from one of Munroe's old records. It was yours, Mae."

There was no color in Mae's face. She leaped and tried to yank the gun from Bowers' hip, shouting at Lance, "You lying meddler!"

Lance jumped up and caught Mae's wrist.

By this time he was not certain Mae was the killer, yet his speech had served its purpose. It showed them all that he knew how the murder was committed. Now something in one of their faces might give the secret away.

Bowers was running around in circles, yelling, "Hey, hey, what's all this." Mae was still tagging at the sheriff's gun.

"Some one take her hand off that rod," said Lance as he clamped down on Mae's arm.

Ross and Hobart seemed riveted to their spots, but Wilma dashed over, reached over Lance's back, got hold of the gun, and handed it to Bowers.

Lance unloosed his grip, and Mae sat on the bed, and spoke without tears or hate:

"No, I didn't kill Munroe. Maybe it

looks bad for me, but I'm innocent. Yes, he'd promised to marry me. I guess I loved him once. But not after he'd begun to put on the act with the kid there."

Mae pointed to Wilma. "Oh, I'm not blaming her. She didn't want his attentions. Munroe had treated me meanly, like a cad, but it wasn't me that shot him." She turned to Bowers. "You can lock me up, Sheriff, whenever you're ready, if you want to make a damn fool of yourself!"

Bowers was perspiring profusely. "Is this all on the level?" he asked Lance.

"Mr. Big Shot has figured out all the dope," said Mae sarcastically. "And I guess I threw the gun in the pool?"

If scorn could have withered a man, Lance might have been a cinder. But he wasn't looking at her.

Wilma was crying silently while Hobart patted her hand. Ross lifted his crooked body from his chair.

Bowers kept looking from Mae to Lance. "Are you going to testify against her?"

"Yes," said Lance slowly, watching Ross, "I'll have to, even though I know Munroe was a louse."

Lance lifted his fabricated record from the pile of good ones, held it in his hand. "The evidence is right here."

Ross limped up from his chair, tripping awkwardly on the carpet, his hand straight out to steady himself.

The record slipped from Lance's hand to the floor with a metallic sound. Lance didn't stoop to pick it up.

Ross, clumsily trying to lift it from the floor, got his feet tangled in it. There was a crackling, crunching sound. A hundred bits of smashed phonograph record lay scrambled on the floor.

Ross straightened up his crippled body, his face red with embarrassment. "I'm terribly sorry," he said.

"Hang it, man, you've destroyed the evidence!" shouted Bowers.

"This," she said, "is where we hide things if there's a raid by the police."



Mae, Ross, Wilma and Hobart were in a conspiracy to hide the facts.

Bowers was mopping his brow. "I don't understand all this talk of old records, new records, broken records. That's a cock and bull story to me. Somebody shot Munroe. That's certain. Maybe he had it coming to him. I looked up his record. A wife and kid abandoned. Two embezzlements. Injuring an old man, driving when drunk."

"Maybe I've been sticking my nose into

THINGS were working out like Lance wanted them to. He was certain now that he knew who the killer was and that

something I should have steered clear of," thought Lance.

"A regular louse," summed up Bowers. "Somebody shot him. The simple thing is to find the gun. The killer's prints will be on it."

"The person that killed Jerry Munroe was Jerry Munroe himself," said Mae, "a plain case of suicide."

The word, "suicide," seemed to relieve the sheriff. "That makes it easier, if it can be proved," said Bowers.

Mae opened the bureau drawer and pointed to the .32 that lay there. "There's the gun that did it. I found it inside the piano today."

Taking the gun up by the muzzle, Bowers gingerly inserted it in an oilskin pouch. "I'll have my men examine it for prints. And I hope it's as you say, Mae. I'll call you later about it. If things are O. K., you can start running again tonight."

FOR the next two hours Lance was a solitary drinker at the bar. Then the message came through from the sheriff's office. The prints on the gun were Munroe's, and the bullet that had been extracted from the body came out of Munroe's gun.

Bowers called away his men from The Mountain Lodge.

Lance went up to Mae's room and knocked. Wilma opened the door part way and called back, "It's *him*."

"Let Mr. Nosey Big Shot in," said Mae, and as Lance entered she stood up facing him, flanked by Ross and Hobart.

Her tone was withering; "Look at him! Mr. Buttinsky, the old sleuth! Mr. Punk lets his evidence be destroyed right in front of his nose."

Lance knew she had been drinking too much, and that her scorn was not only because of his attempt to uncover the killer, but was to cover up the imagined personal insult to her womanly charms

when he had run out of her room earlier in the day.

"Now, get out, Mr. Chump!" she raised her voice to a shout.

"Not until I've had my say," replied Lance quietly. He took out a folded silk handkerchief from his pocket, unwrapped the broken piece of blue-centered phonograph record that he'd found in that room that morning.

"And not until you advise me," he went on, looking squarely at Mae's reddened eyes, "what to do with this piece of evidence against the killer of Jerry Monroe."

At the sight of that piece of shellac in Lance's hand, the worry came back in Mae's eyes. Wilma bit her lip. Ross and Hobart paled.

"My story's good as it ever was," said Lance. "This time, if I choose to make it stand up, nobody's going to smash the evidence. One of you killed Munroe and killed him just the way I said. The fingerprints on this broken piece of 'Pop Goes the Weasel,' will name the killer for the law." Here Lance smiled at them, "if I want to get nasty."

Hobart swallowed hard, said hoarsely, "Why don't you let the matter drop?"

Ross, Wilma and Mae exchanged haggard glances.

"There's been a murder," said Lance. "And if I don't choose to let the matter drop, who's to stop me?"

Lance's voice got hard. "Now you all get out. I'll wait here until the one who did the killing comes to me and tells me why."

"Police, judge, and executioner all in one," said Mae scornfully, but Wilma's hand covered Mae's mouth, while Ross motioned for the two women to follow him and Hobart.

Now Mae turned to Lance, her eyes pleading. "Listen! If it's the \$1,000 reward you're after, I can fix that. I'll double it, if you lay off."

"I guess I'm too dumb to be bribed," said Lance. "Make up your mind who did the job. I'll be waiting here while you figure it out."



"This is the evidence we need to convict the murderer," he said.

The four went out of the room, leaving him alone.

After he'd smoked his third cigarette, Lance began to feel a little bit like a heel the way he'd treated Mae.

He was pretty sure he had the killer figured out, but he was curious as to how they would handle it.

ROSS came into the room. "Okay, Lance. The jig's up. I did it. I killed a good-for-nothing heel, and I

haven't a regret left to bother my conscience with. But maybe you'd like to hear why I did it?"

"I'm listening," said Lance.

"I shot Munroe because he wouldn't leave Wilma alone," said Ross. "It's a strange story. Once Wilma and Munroe

were sweethearts. That was two years ago. She was an idealist, a trusting soul. She believed Munroe's promises of love. She knew he had callously left his wife and child, but he convinced her that this time his love for her was the real thing.

"But Wilma was just an interlude in the life of a heel. He left her like he had left all the others. The girl was cruelly hurt. This beautiful creature was one in ten thousand. She knew that love, understanding and character meant more to her than physical charm. Life is strange. She found that kind of love in a man with a hump on his back, and a twisted leg.

"Yes, the Good Lord was kind to me. Wilma and I were to be married soon. When we came up to this job, we hadn't expected Munroe to be here. Had we known before, we'd never have started. But once arrived, we thought we'd stick the season out."

Ross brushed away something that glistened in his eye and went on:

"But Munroe was making things impossible for us. He got after Wilma again. He wanted to continue the old affair. But to Wilma that was dead, a closed chapter. He harassed, badgered her every hour of the day until she was a nervous wreck. He sneered at the idea of *her* marrying *me*. He threatened to overwhelm her with scandal.

"So if there was to be any happiness in her life or mine, a rotten soul like Munroe wasn't going to stand in our way. I killed him. Just about the way you figured it out. I wiped my prints off the gun, pressed Munroe's dead fingers on the gun-butt when Bowers' guards were drinking at the bar." Ross looked at Lance with wearied eyes. "So call in the law, but leave the others out of it."

Lance looked down at him, and they fenced with their eyes a long minute.

"I believe that story," said Lance. "The part of it about Munroe. And it justifies anything that's happened, as far as I'm

concerned. But it wasn't your job, Ross. *She* had a perfect right to do it, and—"

"Why did you say *she*?" broke in Ross. "I tell you May is innocent!"

"Not Mae. I mean Wilma," said Lance.

Then Ross got down on his knees. "Please, Lance, for God's sake, let me take the rap. Don't let her—!"

Lance raised him up to his feet. "Ross, you don't have to beg me to be silent. It's a pleasure and a duty. A rat got some lead in his gut and the world's better off for it." Lance took out of his pocket the piece of broken record wrapped in the handkerchief. He handed it over to Ross. "Get rid of it."

ROSS crushed the piece of shellac under his heel into a thousand bits, swept up the debris in his palm and slid it down the chute that led to the incinerator.

He grasped Lance's hand. "We've all been unfair to you. We all had you placed wrong. . . . But I'm curious to know how you figured it must have been *her*."

"It came to me after a while," said Lance. "Wilma was the only one who was small enough to get inside that dumbwaiter with the phonograph and ride with it."

"I don't get that clearly," said Ross.

"Just this," explained Lance. "The substitution of the phonograph record to simulate Munroe's playing, and the shooting could have been done by any one of you. But consider what the killer had to do between the time the record stopped playing, and the time that the lights went on.

"First. The killer would have to carry the machine and record upstairs out of the way. Second. Break the record into pieces and slide the bits down the chute. Third. Run downstairs and join the dancers.

"All those things would take too much time if it weren't for the help of the dumb-waiter. By lifting herself up to Mae's room with the phonograph, and afterward, lowering herself down, Wilma was able to save precious minutes, and was able to get back on the dance floor before it was discovered that Munroe was dead.

"I never figured seriously on Mae as the killer, because she had never left my side at any second between the cessation of the "Pop Goes the Weasel" record and the discovery that Munroe had been shot."

He gripped Ross' hand. "Now go to her. She needs you."

Lance went down to the garage for his car.

He opened the door and saw a Junoesque woman sitting on the running board of his Ford.

She stood up when he advanced and came close to him. Mae's eyes were languorous and darkly blue. "You don't have to leave here unless you want to," she said.

He looked at her. He saw a woman with a heart as big as all outdoors. Her eyes were inviting him.

"I guess I might as well stay where I belong," he said.

"I've been waiting for that," she breathed, as he clasped her in his arms.



*Give the War Wings
by Buying War Bonds
and Stamps Every
Payday*

Black Market

By JEROME SEVERS PERRY



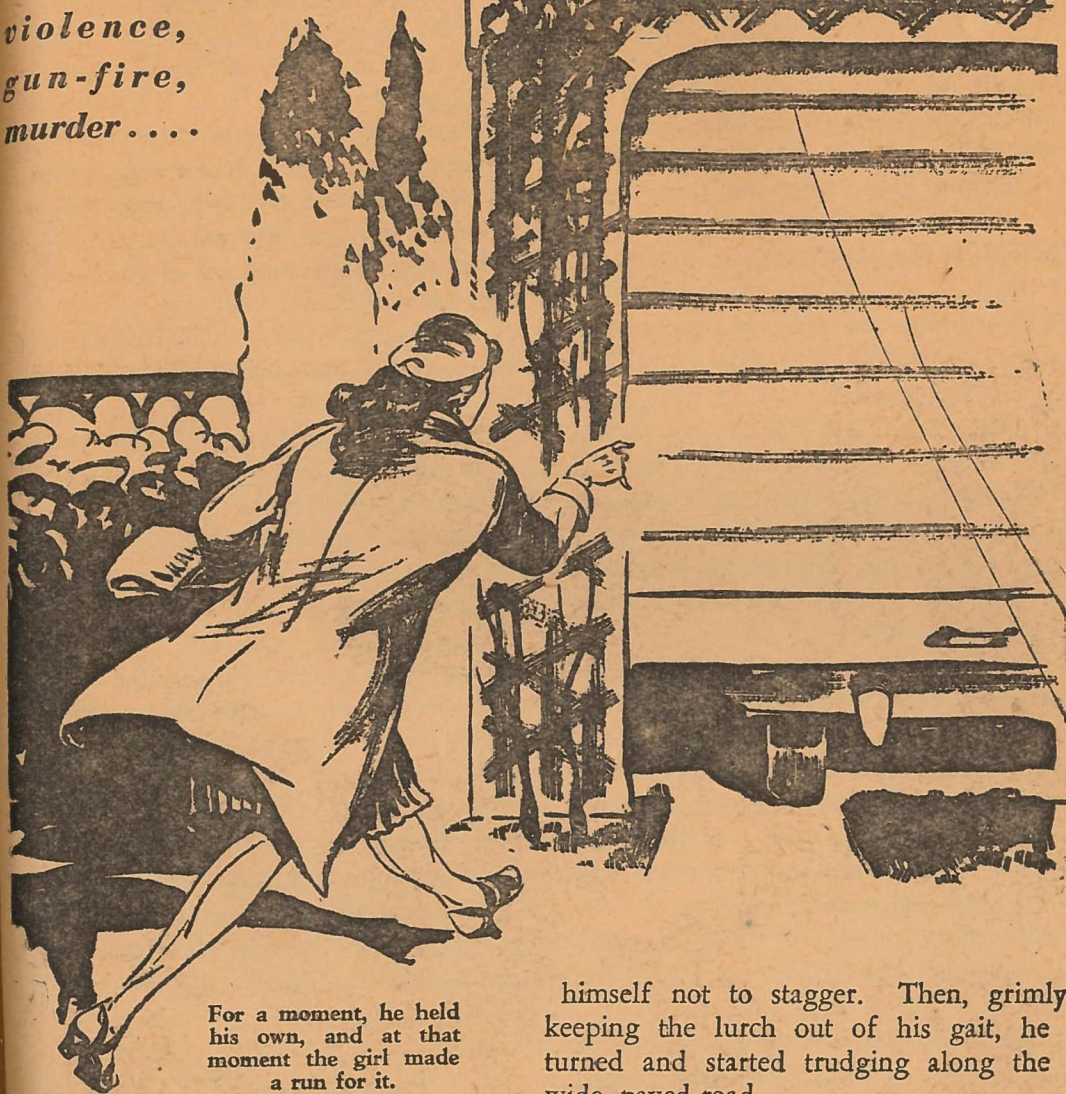
T WAS midnight now. In exactly six and one-half hours Corporal Joe Brent was due at camp, his furlough over. If he failed to show up for reveille, they'd probably strip him of his two cherished chevrons, bust him back to

the rank of private as punishment for being A.W.O.L.

He didn't see how he could make it, though. Not with a bullet crease across his skull and a dead man sprawled beside him in the highway ditch. The bullet crease didn't matter so much, now



*Hot meat was turning up
all over town, and in its
trail was
violence,
gun-fire,
murder....*



For a moment, he held
his own, and at that
moment the girl made
a run for it.

that Brent had regained consciousness; but the dead man was something else again. When you weighed cold-blooded murder against army discipline, there was only one way the scales could tilt.

Brent's legs were rubbery under him as he hauled himself out of the ditch, and his headache was a fiendish throb that reached through his whole body. He clenched his fists, gritted his teeth, forced

himself not to stagger. Then, grimly keeping the lurch out of his gait, he turned and started trudging along the wide, paved road.

But he wasn't going toward camp. He was facing in the direction of the city.

A car's purring motor sounded behind him, long before bright headlights topped the rise. It was against military regulations to thumb a lift, but Corporal Joe Brent ignored that rule now. A job had to be done; a personal job, savagely urgent. He waved at the oncoming car, flagged it down. Before it stopped he made certain his cap covered the blood-

encrusted wound on his scalp; he didn't want to answer questions.

The driver turned out to be a middle-aged man without curiosity. "Middlevale, soldier? Hop in."

"Thanks, sir. Thanks a lot." Brent sank his muscular leanness against the front seat's upholstery; sighed gratefully. "Walking gets pretty monotonous."

THIRTY minutes later the faint, dimmed-out glow of Middlevale loomed ahead: not a big city, but not a small one, either. A hundred and fifty thousand population; enough to support its own local packing house, among other things. Brent got out of the car a few blocks away from the Middlevale Meat Company's plant, thanked his benefactor for the ride. But he didn't mention the dead man he had left in the ditch, twenty miles back.

The walk to the packing plant consumed another ten minutes. A subdued air of activity hummed inside; you sensed that work went on here all night as well as all day. War-time food requirements were responsible for that. Joe Brent entered the main building; found his way to the shipment-routing office.

The night super was there, checking outgoing invoices. Brent said: "Hello, Mr. Garrick."

Carson Garrick was a hearty, affable man, forty or so, with a thickening paunch and thinning sandy hair. "Why, Joe!" he looked surprised. "What the devil are you doing back in town? I thought Steve was giving you a lift to camp."

"He was. He's dead."

"*Wh-what—?*" the older man's eyes popped.

"We were hijacked twenty miles east. Two sedans full of hoods. Steve caught a slug between the ears. My fault, probably. I tried to fight the gunsels off, so they started blasting."

"Good God!"

"I think I killed one of the rats. Maybe two," Corporal Joe Brent's voice was flat, emotionless. "Couldn't tell for sure. At least their bodies were gone when I woke up."

"Woke up—?"

"A bullet nicked my head. They must have thought they'd finished me. Anyhow, I came to in the ditch with Steve alongside me. No other corpses in sight. No sedans. No gunsels. And no refrigerator truck."

Garrick looked sick. "Good God!" he said again. "Another load of beef stolen. That makes the third. And Steve . . . our best driver . . . murdered. . . ." His voice trailed off, then strengthened. "You've notified the police, Joe?"

"I haven't had time. I just got back. You can call them. Wait, though. Do me a favor first."

"Such as what?"

Brent made a vengeful mouth. "Remember what they used to call me before I enlisted?"

"Sure. The cop with the camera eye."

"That's right. Once I saw a face, I never forgot it. I'm in army khaki now instead of blue serge and a badge; but I've still got my camera eye. And I'm pretty sure I recognized a couple of those hijack hoods, even though they wore masks."

"No!"

"Yes. I'd take my oath they were members of the old Buzzer Cordovan heist mob that used to loot silk warehouses and pull a lot of jewelry stickups in the old days. Direct descendants of the alky racketeers and protection gangs, during and right after prohibition. Maybe you recall how the local force broke up the organization a few years back. With the help of the F.B.I. we sent several of them over the road, including Buzzer Cordovan himself."

"I remember. But—"

"So they're back again with a new

racket: hot meat for black markets. That's why your refrigerator trucks are being waylaid for their beef cargoes. That's why Steve was murdered tonight. Only a lucky break saved me from what Steve got. And I'm going to do something about it."

"You alone, personally?" Carson Garrick exclaimed. "But you're not a copper any more, Joe. You're in the army. Aren't you due at camp by sunrise?"

"Camp can wait. I've got a debt to pay—with your help," Brent added quietly.

The packing concern's night superintendent blinked. "How can I help?"

"There's a girl working in the main office; secretary to the general manager. I noticed her the other day, recognized her. Betty Cordovan. I want her home address."

"Why—why, sure, Joe. I can give it to you. But why on earth do you want Miss Cordovan's address? She's . . . *say!* That name, Cordovan . . . do you mean she's related to Buzzer Cordovan?"

"His kid sister. Draw your own conclusions."

Garrick went to a file that listed all the meat company's employees; scribbled something on a slip of paper. "Here you are. I think you're making a mistake, though. I mean it's a police job, not something for a soldier to investigate. Especially when you've got so little time—"

"I'll take the time. You can call the cops now." And Corporal Brent pivoted, stalked out.

A TAXI carried him to his destination, a modest little cottage on the city's outskirts. He paid the driver and dismissed him; waited until the cab had vanished around the far intersection. Then he rang the bungalow's doorbell.

The door opened so quickly that Brent was a little startled. He studied the girl

who stood before him: a brunette girl, young, slender, almost doll-like in her diminutive daintiness. She wore a red beret on her wavy black hair, a loose-fitting topcoat on her liting form. "Yes?"

Brent said levelly: "You're Betty Cordovan," and pushed her backward into the house; followed her. "Buzzer Cordovan's sister. Maybe you'll remember me if you take a good look."

"Why, I—" she faltered, stared. Then recognition dawned in her brown eyes. "Yes, I know you now. You're one of the policemen who arrested my brother six years ago, sent him to p-prison. I was only a kid at the time, but I attended the trial. I remember seeing you on the witness stand, testifying. . . . What do you want? What are you doing here at this hour of the night?"

"I want Buzzer."

"What do you mean, you want him? What are you, a detective in disguise or something?"

Brent smiled humorlessly. "This uniform isn't a disguise. It's the real thing. No, I'm not a dick any more; I'm just a soldier. But I want your brother just the same."

"What for? Why do you want him?"

"I was hitch hiking tonight. A Middlevale Meat Company refrigerator truck was giving me a lift back to camp. The truck was hijacked; its driver murdered. A cargo of beef was heisted and I got a crease across my skull."

"And—and you think Buzzer had a hand in it?"

"I'm pretty sure of it. I recognized some of the hijackers as former members of his old mob."

"But—but that's insane! My brother's going straight. He was paroled six months ago and he's out of the rackets, understand? I know he isn't mixed up in—"

Joe Brent's heart felt curiously heavy as he looked at this naive, innocent-seem-

ing brunette girl. It was difficult to think of her as a crook, a liar, a finger moll for a murder mob. There was a fresh, poignant loveliness about her; an appearance of innocence that almost made him hate himself for his own suspicions. Instinct told him he was on the wrong track; but his mind argued otherwise. Long training as a cop had taught him never to trust his instincts where a woman was concerned. Women were clever; too damned clever. Young or old, they'd pull the wool over your eyes if they could.

"Listen," he said harshly. "You work at the packing plant as secretary to the general manager. That puts you in a position to know when meat cargoes are being shipped. You know what routes the refrigerator trucks will take. It would be simple enough for you to tip off your brother, so his mob could waylay those trucks. I don't want any more lip. I want Buzzer."

"He's not here. And when you accuse me of a thing like that, you—you're a liar!" her eyes blazed furiously.

Brent grabbed her, backed her against the wall. "I haven't got time to play around. Call your brother. Tell him to show himself. Right now."

"He isn't home. He—"

"You're asking for it," Brent said. He slapped her full across the face, hard enough to leave a red mark on her cheek and bring tears into her eyes. "Go on. Scream."

She moaned softly. "You heel. If Buzzer *was* here, you can bet I'd call him to deal with you. But he's not. Now hit me again if you want to. Help yourself."

Somehow Brent believed her. Or rather, he knew Cordovan would have come to his sister's rescue if the criminal had been within hearing distance. The very fact that the girl remained unprotected seemed to indicate that she was telling the truth.

Brent released her. "Where is he then, if he's not at home?"

"W-working."

"Working? Where?"

"At a defense plant. He's been there ever since he was paroled. He couldn't get in the army. You can understand why. But at least he could help the war effort by helping make fighter planes. That's where he works: the Middlevale Aircraft factory. On the swing shift. I was just leaving the house, starting out to get him in our car. I always pick him up at one in the morning. . . ."

"So that's why you're dressed to go out. Why you opened up so quickly when I rang the doorbell."

"Y-yes."

CORPORAL JOE BRENT considered this for a moment. Then he said: "Okay, I'll check up on it. I'll go with you. We'll see if Buzzer has an alibi for tonight around the time that truck was knocked over. Come on, sister; let's go."

She nodded silently, turned off the hall light. Together they stepped out to the porch, descended to the tiny patch of lawn surrounding the cottage; made for her car in the rear garage. But Joe Brent never reached the car. Three masked thugs jumped at him from the shrubbery that bordered the driveway; nailed him before he had a chance.

He caught one of them a sizzling punch, full to the mouth, and had the grim satisfaction of seeing the fellow topple backward in an unconscious heap. He also heard Betty Cordovan scream shrilly; saw her make a desperate run toward the garage. One of the two remaining thugs panted: "What about the jane? Shall I plug her?"

"Nix. This guy's the one we want." Then a blackjack bashed savagely on Brent's wounded skull. Brief pain coursed through him, a sharp, knifelike agony that ended in complete oblivion.

THE smell of death was in Corporal Joe Brent's nostrils when he blundered back to consciousness. His head ached hellishly and his muscles seemed cramped, paralyzed. That was because his wrists and ankles were bound with heavy cord, so that he lay sprawled on a cold concrete floor in a strained position that tortured every sinew of his body.

The room itself was big and vaulted and empty of furnishings; dank as a tomb. One single unshaded electric light burned overhead, filling the place with full yellow glow and sinister shadows. The shadows were not nearly as sinister as the three masked men who encircled him, though.

Brent tried to analyze the odor of death that hung so thickly in the place; wondered why the smell reminded him so strongly of fresh blood. Groggily he stared at the three masked men. Then, as his thoughts cleared into sharper focus, he knew the answer to many things that had been puzzling him.

"Okay, you rats," he said distinctly. "So you got me."

"Ah. The brave soldier laddie wakes up." A masked thug moved closer to Brent; booted him viciously in the ribs. "That's for the teeth you knocked out of my mouth, bub."

"Lay off," the second member of the hoodlum trio growled. "We want him wide awake until we find out what the boss told us to ask him."

Brent's eyes glittered. "I can guess what you're supposed to ask me. You want to know if I've recognized any of you."

"Yeah, that's right."

"So the answer is yes," Brent said. "You're Lefty Chadwick. That chunky louse alongside you is Pete Boston. The thin guy is Red LaMotte. All members of the old Buzzer Cordovan mob. You may as well take off your masks. I've got all of you tabbed."

Lefty Chadwick, who seemed to be in charge, said softly: "The camera-eye cop. Still good at your specialty even though you're out of blue harness, eh, Brent? Well, you've popped off once too often. Want to know why we kept you alive instead of croaking you when we first snatched you?"

"That's easy. You had to find out if I had really recognized you at the scene of the truck hijacking. So now you're sure I had you spotted. You realize my testimony can send you to the lethal chamber. Therefore you're going to kill me."

The gangster nodded. "Bull's-eye, hero. You've talked yourself into a bump-off. Okay, boys, cool him down."

Chadwick's two masked companions seized Joe Brent, lifted him, lugged him toward a heavy door across the cement-paved room. This door was studded with brass fixtures, held tightly closed by means of metal dogs. Chadwick himself opened the thick, insulated portal and a blast of icy air swept outward. "Toss him in, boys."

The order was not obeyed, though. Not right away, anyhow. From the far side of the main room a new voice said. "Hold it." Then a swarthy man stepped forward; a man whose sleek black hair revealed streaks of gray. He wore the slacks and jacket of a factory worker; had a Middlevale Aircraft employee's badge pinned to his breast pocket. He also had a gun in his fist.

Joe Brent recognized the newcomer. He was Buzzer Cordovan, one-time leader of the heist mob; the ex-jailbird whose sister claimed he was now going straight. As if to confirm this, the sister herself was standing at Cordovan's side.

"Betty drove to the airplane plant," the swarthy man said grimly. "She met me, told me you guys had snatched this former copper under her very eyes. She didn't tab any of you, on account you were all wearing masks. But she got the



license number of your sedan. I traced it to you, Lefty."

Lefty Chadwick glowered. "So what?" he demanded. "What are you hornin' in for?"

"To keep my own nose clean," Cordovan answered. "My sister says this Brent guy accused me of being mixed up

in some meat hijacks. I want you to tell him that ain't true."

"Hell, Buzzer, why tell him anything? Pretty soon he'll be too dead to care, one way or the other."



The fight there in that icy chamber was brief, one-sided.

THE former mob leader shook his head. "Wrong, Lefty. I've had a hunch you were pulling these refrigerator truck heists ever since they started. You're dealing in hot meat. Black market stuff. As long as I was cut loose from the old gang, anything you did was no skin off me. But when the finger goes out to hook me and my sister in a crooked deal, it's time I took steps."

"What kind of steps?"

"This kind," Cordovan waved his gun. "I sort of guessed you were using this old ice plant for a warehouse and hideout. It's a natural for the kind of business you're in. I took a chance, came here—and found you. Now I'm taking Brent out with me."

"Yeah? Why?"

"To prove I'm not connected with you. To show him I'm not on your side of the fence any more."

Lefty Chadwick's lips thinned to an animal snarl. "That's the same as stooling on us, Buzzer. You know he'll blow the whistle to the cops. You know the heat will be on us."

"That's your lookout. I'll give you a chance for your white alley. You can lam out of town—if you're lucky. But Brent goes with me. Right now. Cut those ropes on his arms and legs."

Chadwick's shoulders drooped as if in surrender. He pulled a pocket knife. But instead of slicing Corporal Joe Brent's fetters, he hurled the knife straight at Cordovan's gun-hand.

CORDOVAN'S weapon bellowed, spat flame. The bullet went wild, though, because the knife hit the gun's muzzle and deflected it as the shot thundered. Then all three hijack mobsters sprang into venomous action with clubbed automatics. The fight was brief, one-sided. Overpowered by superior numbers, Buzzer Cordovan went down. His sister tried to escape, but chunky Pete Boston

hit her with a flying tackle; brought her sprawling to the floor.

Nor could Corporal Joe Brent do anything about it. He was tied up; helpless. He felt himself being lifted again, tossed over the threshold of that thick, insulated door. Dim reflection filtered from the single light in the main room, revealed the sort of place into which he had been thrown. It was a refrigeration chamber lined with brine-pipes that brought the temperature down below freezing. From ceiling and walls, great sharp hooks protruded—hooks on which hung animal carcasses: sides of beef, whole lambs, pork quarters, hams and heavy flitches of bacon.

Abruptly he knew that this was the secret storehouse used by the hijackers for their stolen meats; the cache from which they supplied their black market customers in defiance of rationing laws and price ceilings. Those black market customers were just as lawless, every bit as guilty as the mobsters themselves; to buy stolen goods was to compound a felony—and condone murder. Brent cursed silently when he thought of the slain truck driver whose corpse lay in a highway ditch, thanks to a certain selfish, un-American element that was willing to deal with racketeers when there was a war to be won. . . .

THERE was no time for such reveries now, though. The three thugs had pitched Buzzer Cordovan and his sister into the freezing chamber; slammed the door shut. The girl moaned softly. "We'll freeze! They're leaving us here to die!"

In solid darkness, Joe Brent said: "Chin up. Maybe we've got a chance to beat them even yet, the rats. Listen. I apologize for accusing you and your brother. You've both proved how wrong I was. Now we've got to work together."

"Fat chance," came Cordovan's answer from the frigid blackness. "I stuck my

neck out to save you, copper. But it didn't do a bit of good."

"Don't be too sure. Are your hands tied?"

"No."

"Then feel your way over to me. See if you can get these ropes off me."

"Okay. Come on, sis. You can help."

Betty Cordovan and her brother located Brent; fell to work on the loops that held him helpless. It was hard work; brutally hard in that frigid chamber where sub-zero temperature numbed their stiffening fingers. But at long, painful last they succeeded. Brent stood up; beat his palms together. He stomped his feet to restore the circulation.

"Now," he whispered presently. "There's a heavy chain over here somewhere, hanging to a meat hoist. A pulley arrangement that runs on an overhead track for lifting beef carcasses and swinging them into this ice-box. I noticed it when there was still some light, before the door was closed. Ah, I've found it."

"What good will it do?" Betty Cordovan's voice sounded weak through the chattering of her teeth.

Brent answered triumphantly. "I also noticed a double glass window in this left wall. A sort of view port, so those in the main room can look in here to inspect the interior without opening the door."

"You're g-going to smash it out? But th-those men—"

"They're gone. They must be gone. No light comes in the window. That means they turned off their bulb in the outer room. And they wouldn't sit around in darkness. When they switched off their light, they left. Stand back, both of you. I'm going to swing this pulley chain. Duck low!"

As he spoke, Brent used every ounce of his strength to crash the dangling links against the freezing chamber's inspection glass. Metal smashed against

the double-thickness pane with shattering impact. Shards went clattering outward.

Again Brent smashed at the window with his chain. Then, unmindful of cutting his hands on the jagged fragments of glass that remained in the square frame, he cleared away those sawtooth edges with his bare fingers. This done, he drew himself upward by main strength; pulled his hundred and fifty lean pounds through the aperture. The odor of death was strong in his nostrils from the beef carcasses.

Landing outside, he turned. "Cordovan. Give Betty a boost. I'll help her through from this side."

THE girl could be heard scrambling. Brent caught her in his arms, lowered her gently. For a single instant she was very close to him. He'd never had a sweetheart; never had time for such stuff. Being a cop had been a twenty-four-hour job every day; and it was just about the same now that he was in the army. Funny how he'd never even thought about romance until this diminutive brunette girl clung to him, here in the darkness. . . .

But then he remembered that truck driver's corpse lying in a highway ditch twenty miles east of Middlevale. When Corporal Joe Brent remembered the slain driver, he put everything else out of his mind. He also put Betty Cordovan out of his arms, gently.

"Come on, Buzz," he told her brother.

Cordovan crawled out of the freezing chamber. "I'm okay. Now what?"

"Now we track those three lice. You needn't come along if you don't want to. After all, they were your pals once."

"Yeah, but not any more. They tried to bump my sister; tried to bump me. And this business of peddling illegal meat ain't what I'd call a nice business even for crooks. Not when we got the Japs and Nazis to lick. I'm with you, soldier."

Brent said: "Thanks. Let's see if your

car is still outside." And all three stole out of the building.

Cordovan's car was there; the lucky break Corporal Joe Brent was praying for. He took the wheel, with Buzzer beside him and the girl in the tonneau. Brent kicked the starter.

LEFTY CHADWICK, Peter Boston and Red LaMotte—all who remained of the old Buzzer Cordovan mob—were in an alcove formed by an L of the loading platform. The platform was at the rear of the Middlevale Meat Company's packing plant. It was Chadwick, with a thug's sixth sense, who first spotted Joe Brent and Buzzer Cordovan moving toward them.

"Cripes!" he yowled to the man he'd been talking to. "They got out! Blast them, boys!"

All three hoods went for their guns. They were just a little slow. Brent catapulted forward like a projectile from a trench mortar; caromed against Chadwick with a force that drove the killer staggering. He seized Chadwick's automatic. "Got you, Lefty."

The other two mobsters opened fire. A bullet tore into Buzzer Cordovan's left thigh, knocked him sprawling, put him out of action before he could be of any help to Brent. Brent didn't need much help now, though. He was triggering his captured automatic, feeling it jump in his fist as he squirted slugs at his enemies. Pete Boston folded with a hole in his guts. Red LaMotte let out a choked screech when a slug smashed his chest open.

Lefty Chadwick tried to run. That was when Betty Cordovan appeared. She fastened herself onto the gangster like a fury; impeded him until Brent could mace him over the head. Chadwick sagged. Then Betty raced to her fallen brother; cradled him. "Buzzer . . . you're hurt . . ."

"Forget it, sis. It's just my leg, is all."

Corporal Joe Brent didn't stop to check up on this. He had one more job to do. He dived at a packing case, around which someone had scuttled an instant ago; the man who'd been talking to the three thugs.

The man was crouched in concealment, white-faced, terrified. Brent said grimly: "Get up, Carson Garrick. Get up and keep your hands high. Unless you'd sooner have me put a bullet through your stinking brain."

There was nothing hearty about the packing plant's night superintendent now; nothing affable. His snarl was that of a cornered rat. "Blast your soul, you can't—"

"I can kill you and ask questions later. Or I can hand you over to the law as leader of the hijack mob. Take your choice."

"Me? Leader of the hijack mob?" Garrick gasped.

"That's right. It had to be someone on the inside; somebody who could tip the gang where to waylay the refrigerator trucks. And you gave your own hand away."

"Wh-what do y-you m-mean?"

"Tonight I told you I'd recognized some of the heist gang. I got you to give me Betty Cordovan's address. Presently the mob put the snatch on me outside Betty's cottage. *You were the only man who knew I was going there. You were the only person who could have sent those rats after me.*"

"My G-God—!"

"So I knew you were the guy behind the hot meat racket. And now you'll pay for the murder of Steve; a murder you were responsible for, because it was your hoods who did it."

"But—but I didn't tell the fools to kill the driver—" All of a sudden Garrick sobbed in his throat as he realized how the words had been the same as a confession. It was too late for him to retract them,

though. Betty Cordovan had already found a phone, called the police, summoned an ambulance for her wounded brother.

AN HOUR later, the diminutive brunette girl was driving her sedan through the pre-dawn darkness, heading eastward in the direction of the army camp. Corporal Joe Brent sat beside her.

"I'm sorry I slapped you, Betty," he said moodily. "That's the one thing I can't forgive myself."

"But I forgive you, Joe. After all you were hunting Buzzer because you thought he was g-guilty. . . ."

"He proved I was wrong. I'm glad that bullet only got him in the thigh; glad he'll pull through. He'll probably win a pardon for what he did tonight. He helped me clean out a nest of vermin."

She stole a sidewise glance at Brent. "There's just one thing I can't quite un-

derstand. You'd been creased across the head. You were due back at camp by sunrise. Yet you were willing to go A.W.O.L., willing to risk your life, to get those murderers. Why?"

"For the same reason you jumped in to help Buzzer at the last minute," Brent answered. "He's your brother. Blood's thicker than water."

"Meaning—?"

"Meaning the truck driver who was giving me a lift tonight, the one who was killed, happened to be named Steven Brent. I had a brother, too, Betty. Now I haven't got one. But I avenged him." Then Corporal Joe Brent's destination loomed ahead. He alighted from the car, got ready to show his pass to the sentry. He'd made it in time to keep his chevrons. And as he said good-by to Betty Cordovan, he had a hunch he might be seeing her again, some day not too far distant. . . .

Besides **PRIVATE DETECTIVE STORIES**, the Speed
Group of Magazines includes

SUPER DETECTIVE

DAN TURNER

HOLLYWOOD DETECTIVE

SPEED MYSTERY

SPEED DETECTIVE

SPEED WESTERN STORIES

SPEED ADVENTURE STORIES

Each **15¢** at all newsstands

MARRIAGE

By LAURENCE DONOVAN



OM BARDY was about to commit a violent, illegal act. Although a confidential investigator, he was seasoned to the final degree of toughness by army training. Several crooks of the lake city had found Bardy plenty tough before he had enlisted.

Furloughed, on call, Bardy was in this case up to his neck, contrary to his own judgment and a few rules. But he wasn't in it for pay, not for a thin dime.

His client was an aged, socially prominent person. Bardy knew she had come to the end of her means. Moreover, she was a frail old lady, suffering with a broken heart, from whom Tom Bardy would have refused to accept a retainer, if she had possessed it.

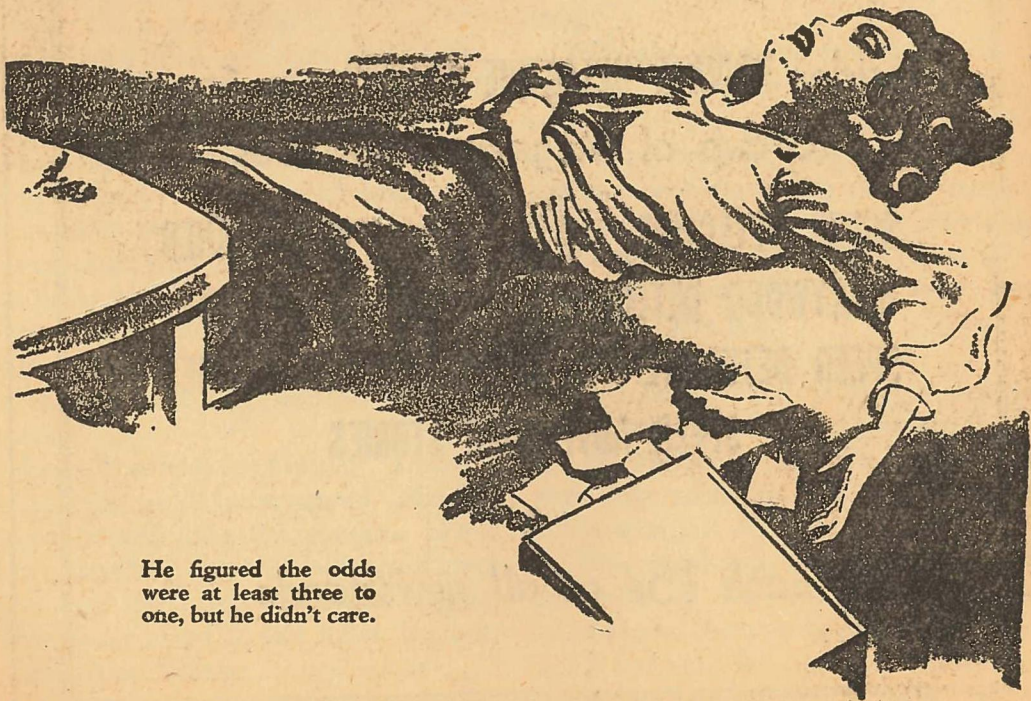
As a boy, as tough as a dead-end street could make him, Bardy had been strangely

given to music—good music—the opera. He had heard Marilyn Lane sing before she had married the name of Mrs. Lance Scarvan, and the then Scarvan millions.

Only a few nights ago, Bard had been shocked when he had been summoned and had seen the delicate, suffering woman who had been Marilyn Lane. Years before she had replied to a scribbled letter, written by the boy of the back streets, in a fit of enthusiasm for the singer he had heard from the back row of a poor boy's heaven.

Bardy had not seen Marilyn Lane for years. A summons from Mrs. Lance Scarvan had been a complete surprise. Her story and appeal to him had been common enough. It was one of those affairs into which a confidential investigator never should be drawn.

But hearing the wispy voice that had



He figured the odds were at least three to one, but he didn't care.

OR MURDER

It had started as a boy's infatuation for a great woman, but now it was a heaven-sent opportunity to work for justice, and to make that little boy's dreams come true



once been glorious, Tom Bardy had yielded to the plea of the broken woman who had been his own first love and idol. As a private dick he was now stepping in where not only the angels, but the devil himself would have feared to tread.

And being in it, Bardy intended to

get all the enjoyment possible. His hardened knuckles already savored the satisfaction of smacking upon flesh and bone. This flesh and bone would be the dark, good-looking face of Nicky Tralone, notorious boss of some new black markets of the war, and owner of the swanky Blue Goose nighterie on the South Side.

Now Nicky Tralone would be on his way to a wedding, his own, and perhaps his first. Marriage rites had never been essential to Nicky's popularity with this and that girl friend. This time it was different.

Perhaps Nicky Tralone had become socially conscious. Bardy could not be sure of that. He was sure of the vivacious, madcap appeal of golden-haired Gloria Scarvan. Why this playgirl daughter of the once great Marilyn Lane had been insane enough to yield to the glamor of the criminal Nicky Tralone, was beyond Bardy's comprehension.

Tom Bardy was here to stop Nicky Tralone, the racketeer whom the police had never been able to nail down. Bardy alone meant to do just that. That he had to step outside the law was a minor matter, compared to his memory of the frail, broken Mrs. Scarvan who would be waiting for some hopeful word.

TOM BARDY watched the long, maroon sedan stop for the traffic light. A street lamp showed that Nicky Tralone's personal bodyguard, "Chuck" Marsden, was at the wheel. Nicky himself occupied the roomy rear seat in solitary splendor. Or that was the way Bardy viewed it, knowing Nicky was on his way to meet Gloria Scarvan at a corner not far from the old, and long-neglected Scarvan mansion, on the North Shore.

Bardy stood with pedestrians apparently awaiting the traffic light change. He was himself dressed roughly, his hat slouched over his eyes,

Just as the red changed to intermediate white before going to green for vehicle traffic to move, Bardy stepped into the street. His movement went unnoticed by those watching the lights, including Chuck Marsden, already shifting gears, and Nicky Tralone who was looking ahead.

The sedan's rear door handle turned to Bardy's quick pressure. The door snapped open. Nicky Tralone whipped his eyes around, started to squawk, to rise. Bardy's knuckles, wrapped around his stubby .38 automatic, crunched in exactly the right spot at the base of Nicky's long, white-skinned jaw.

Nicky groaned and slumped down. Chuck Marsden, in the act of getting the car underway, started to brake, his head coming around. Bardy crouched low behind him. The cold muzzle of the .38 prodded into Marsden's thick neck.

Bardy's gruff voice might have been that of any rival black marketeer. The new war racket already had built up its potential killer mobs. Hired rods were being heated again on the old South Side.

"Keep driving, Marsden! The thing in your neck won't make much noise! No more than your spine cracking!"

Marsden started as if to turn, but changed his mind. He kept on driving. The boulevard skirted along the lake park.

"I'll blast you for this, mug!" grated Marsden through his teeth, but he didn't blast right then.

"Turn toward the lake at the next corner!" ordered Bardy.

Nicky Tralone moaned and moved. Without shifting the rod, Bardy cracked his right fist under Nicky's long jaw. He was quiet again.

Marsden sensed what was coming and tried to beat it. With a sideways movement he jerked his neck away from the .38. The steel barrel made a clunking sound over his left ear.

Bardy reached over, caught the wheel and steered the sedan onto the grass. He threw the car out of gear with the wheel lever and went over the back of the seat.

Five minutes later Nicky Tralone and Chuck Marsden were in the black shrubbery, all taped up. Bardy got back into the sedan.

TOM BARDY took his time reaching the North Shore's swanky residence district. He had a glimpse of Gloria Scarvan's white face under the center light of a park circle.

Frail as she was, the ailing Mrs. Scarvan had followed her madcap daughter until she had established her meeting place with Nicky Tralone. Bardy chuckled grimly as he saw the suitcase sitting on the pavement beside the girl.

As he pulled over, the girl picked up the suitcase and stepped lightly toward the big maroon car. Tom Bardy might have had some pang of conscience over what he was about to do, but it was erased as the girl's face was outlined in all of its loveliness.

She was the image of the Marilyn Lane of years before. Perhaps she also might have become a great singer. But she had chosen to play with life.

"And it is about to catch up with you," whispered Bardy, as he swung open the front door of the car.

The girl peered into the sedan. She looked at Bardy with a half-puzzled, half-frightened air. She was about to back away.

"You the Scarvan dame?" said Bardy gruffly. "The boss said you'd be waitin' here. Git in!"

"But—you mean Nicky isn't coming? Who are you? I don't understand—"

"Listen, baby, crawl in!" rasped Bardy. "We ain't got all night. The boss sent me 'cause he ain't so sure some o' your folks ain't got the eye on you, I guess. Anyway, he said he'd be ahead of you an'

waitin'. I'm new here, an' my name's Smiler, an' I've got orders to keep pushin' along fast."

Bardy realized his low-pulled hat and his two days growth of beard didn't make for the girl's confidence. But that was the only way he could see to play it. Even then it was fifty-fifty he would come out wrong.

He was relieved, though, when Gloria Scarvan appeared to accept his word. He had to admire her quick taking over the situation.

"All right, Smiler, if Nicky wants it that way," she said. "But I'll ride in the rear seat, if you please."

"Makes no diff to me," growled Bardy, reaching back and pushing the rear door open roughly. "But we have to git movin'."

When the door closed, Bardy could hear the girl's quick breathing. He wondered if she felt any fear? What made a wild girl of her brand tick, anyway? With her background, especially her gentle mother, she must have a heart of flint.

"Okay, baby!" he grunted, knowing this was his worst spot. "The boss said you'd gimme the turns. An' when he takes over, I'm wantin' to git back."

This was Nicky Tralone's car. There wasn't another sedan like it in Chicago. That part would be all right with the girl. But what Tom Bardy had to ferret out was the outside town for which they would be bound, without creating suspicion.

Crown Point, Indiana, was the favorite for these quickie after-midnight hitches. He judged he would be turning south. The girl upset his reasoning. She indicated they would go north.

"I'm Miss Scarvan to you, Smiler," the girl said coldly. "And you will drive ahead and turn north on the Wisconsin shore highway. I still don't understand why Nicky didn't come himself."

Bardy chanced a long shot. He was

prepared for another piece of minor violence if it failed.

"You dames are all alike—excuse me, *Miss Scarvan*." He put hard accent on the *Miss*. "A big guy like Nicky's willin' to be hooked for keeps, an' you want all the answers before time. Well, there are some mugs would like nothin' better than trailin' Nicky's car somewhere into the country. They'd figure he'd be off guard tonight."

There was a half minute of hanging silence. Then—

"Just what did Nicky tell you, Smiler? I mean about me—us?"

"Nicky don't shoot off his trap, baby—*Miss Scarvan*. Only he was dolled up for it, an' when he puts on new stuff with all the trick open front suits he wears at the *Blue Goose*, what d'you think?"

"Yes, Smiler—I see," the girl said so slowly that Bardy let out his breath. "Sure, anyone could guess it, I suppose. Nicky driving another car?"

"Yeah, an' that's all I'm supposed to know!" Bardy maintained his air of disgust. "He said to push along, so I'm pushin' it."

BARDY had the powerful, smooth sedan rolling at sixty outside the city limits, heading for the shore road into Wisconsin. He was well aware that the little item of kidnaping and crossing a state line could enter into this if his idea cracked up. The girl's tone held too much suspicion, and he was watchful.

Willing or otherwise, the daughter of *Mrs. Lance Scarvan* was going for a long ride. What might happen a little later, he would be compelled to leave to chance and his own powers of persuasion.

If he could but make the madcap girl see all that her mother had been at her age, and how a tough, street boy had worshiped at her shrine, Bardy had a fool idea she might be touched. Then that was partly upset.

The sedan was hitting along the shore road in Wisconsin, with its stately, swank residences facing the lake.

The girl leaned forward and tapped Bardy's shoulder.

"The house—the justice of the peace, I mean—it is down the next gravel road to your left, Smiler," she said. "You'll have to slow up for the turn. It's a rough road. Stop the car and I'll come up there to direct you. Funny, we haven't seen any sign of Nicky's car. He must have started out right after he called me."

Bardy was on guard as he halted the sedan on the highway shoulder. He was prepared to make sure that *Gloria Scarvan* did not suddenly fade into the night. Then it happened—

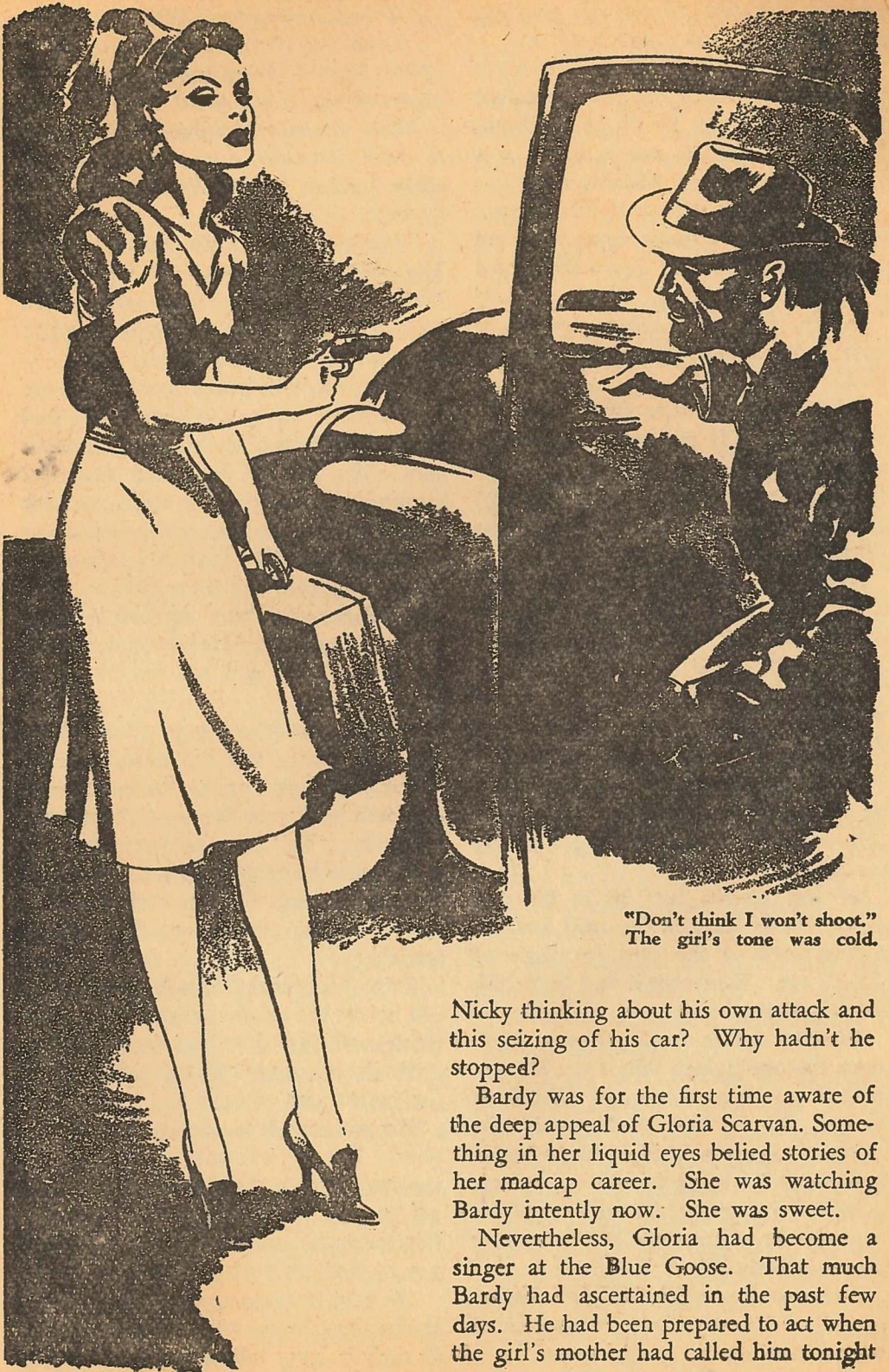
Glancing back, Bardy saw the lights of another car that stopped briefly. As *Gloria* was getting lightly into the front seat beside him, the other car was rolling, and it went by doing nothing less than sixty.

As quick as it had been in passing, Bardy, being on that side, was positive the figure at the wheel was none other than *Nicky Tralone*. *Gloria* was not in position to see into the passing car, and for that Bardy was thankful.

The big sedan slowed, bumping heavily on the rough road. The *J. P.* certainly had picked a rough lane to conduct his marriage mill, thought Bardy. And *Nicky* was taking all of this too easily.

He did not wonder why *Nicky Tralone* might have got free so soon, grabbed another car, and was now beating him to the place on the old, side road. It was likely enough that *Nicky* would have another car of mugs trailing his sedan.

The mugs might have lost it for a few minutes in the park, but they must have discovered *Nicky* and *Chuck Marsden*. That answered another question. *Nicky* would naturally come on alone to his wedding, although Bardy kept an eye open for some of his boys who might be trailing into the country. But what was



"Don't think I won't shoot."
The girl's tone was cold.

Nicky thinking about his own attack and this seizing of his car? Why hadn't he stopped?

Bardy was for the first time aware of the deep appeal of Gloria Scarvan. Something in her liquid eyes belied stories of her madcap career. She was watching Bardy intently now. She was sweet.

Nevertheless, Gloria had become a singer at the Blue Goose. That much Bardy had ascertained in the past few days. He had been prepared to act when the girl's mother had called him tonight

and told him that Gloria was packing, and that Nicky had called her.

The girl was silent, her face white and strained. Bardy judged she might have been taken in by Nicky's dubious glamour, but she was not as happy as a girl should be on her wedding night.

"This J. P. who's marryin' you an' Nicky must have a funny dump away out here," grunted Bardy. "You'd think he'd be up on the main drag."

For the first time, Gloria seemed to show some of her purported madcap spirit.

"Nicky's payin' you to drive, isn't he?" she snapped. "If the judge happens to be sleeping at home instead of at his office, what's funny about that? Anyway, the less you talk or think, the better Nicky will like it when I tell him."

"Okay, ba—Miss Scarvan," said Bardy hastily. "I won't think. My job's deliverin' you, that's all. I guess Nicky's burnin' up by this time, waitin'."

THERE was one lighted room in the ghostly, bleak old house at the end of the rough road. Bardy remarked it was the only residence since he had left the highway two miles back. The J. P. surely was an isolationist.

Set for trouble, his .38 in his coat pocket, Bardy scanned the road and the sloping lawn of the yard for signs of Nicky's car. Evidently it had been hidden. It worried him.

Then he saw a man's shadow move across the one lighted window. He was about to cut off the motor and climb from the car. In the back of his mind was a plan to accompany the girl to the house. Seeing that Nicky apparently was alone, he intended to enjoy himself to the limit reducing the prospective bridegroom to groveling flesh.

Gloria was too quick for him. Before he realized her intention, she was out of the car, carrying the small suitcase.

"Wait a minute!" snapped Bardy.

"You'll stay there," the girl said firmly. "Nicky knows what witnesses he wants at his wedding. And—"

Bardy was opening the door, anyway. A small automatic came up in Gloria's white hand. It pointed directly at Bardy's stomach.

"Don't think I won't shoot, Smiler!" The girl's tone was cold. "I'll see what Nicky wants first! You'll stay in the car! We—I don't want an ugly mug like you spoiling the ceremony!"

Even with the queer location of the J. P.'s house, up to this time Bardy had stuck to the idea given him by Mrs. Scarvan. The mother had been sure that Gloria intended eloping with the club owner who was seeking social position.

Or that was Mrs. Scarvan's interpretation. Bardy, looking at the girl now, having had her near him, decided it might be more than that. He swore at himself for thinking the girl was one in a million.

Possibly Nicky had to go all-out to get her. As Bardy saw her now, standing in the car lights, her loveliness was such as would hook even the big racketeer permanently. Yet the whole setup of the J. P.'s house being away back here brought the premonition for the first time that this might be something other than a wedding.

Once Nicky had Gloria Scarvan in that old house, the matter of ceremony would mean nothing. For that reason, Bardy growled, but permitted the girl to go up the gravel path alone.

He was unable to see who opened the door. But he was out of the car and moving through the shadows toward the old house as soon as the girl had entered. Cautiously he paused, listening to see if anyone had been planted outside.

He neither heard nor saw signs of life. It was time to step into Nicky's wedding, if such it was, with the strong arm of

violence. Bardy stepped around a big oak close to the porch.

A great limb of the oak appeared to descend upon Bardy's skull. His senses went into a personal blackout.

THE ground was rolling, rocking under him as he opened his eyes. It had seemed but seconds. Yet when he looked, the Nicky Tralone sedan was gone from where he had left it in plain view.

There was no other evidence of a car or of anyone being on the outside. Silence shrouded the house where the one window still glowed.

Bardy's fingers gripped his .38 as he found the door unlocked. There was an old-fashioned foyer. A wide, open doorway led into the lighted room, or parlor.

The silence of itself was alarming. But it was the faint smell of cordite from a recently fired gun that pulled Bardy into the doorway. His breath caught and held then.

Gloria Scarvan lay across an old bearskin rug. A trickle of blood had dried on her forehead. An antique vase lay nearby on the floor, as if the girl had been felled by that weapon. Bardy saw she was still breathing.

But the wizened old man, dressed in a rusty suit, was not breathing. The blood had stopped running from his skinny throat where there was a small hole. His sunken eyes were open and staring at nothing.

Then Bardy saw the feet of another man at the edge of a battered desk. This man's skull had been crushed. He was gray-haired and wore the clothing of a servant.

But Bardy's fascinated eyes came back to Gloria, and the small gun lying beside one limp hand. Without touching it, Bardy bent close enough to get the smell of freshly burned powder.

And, half under the girl's body, an old leather jewel case had come open. A

glittering necklace and other gems were spilled on the black bearskin rug. The door of a wall safe was swinging open.

"Of all the half-baked chumps, I'm the most underdone," gritted Bardy. "So Nicky was going to marry the playgirl, and—"

His own self reproach was stopped by his thought of the frail little lady who would be waiting to hear from him. Then, at some distance, the screaming siren of a state police car split the night.

Bardy had the setup now, but perhaps it was already too late.

TOM BARDY was intent for a moment. Then he became certain the state police had turned into the rough lane. That of itself presented an angle other than the apparent open evidence of Gloria Scarvan being a thieving killer.

Bardy realized the state police must have been called. It meant that he, Bardy, was expected to remain unconscious outside the house for some time. It came to Bardy then that the girl could not have shot the skinny old man after the blow of the vase had knocked her out.

The dead man could not have thrown the vase after he had been shot, unless he had hurled it at the exact time the death slug had entered his throat. Then there was the old servant.

"Nicky Tralone had to do that," muttered Bardy. "But what's the answer? Why would he leave a small fortune in jewels to frame the girl?"

Hurrying because of the wailing sirens having ceased their clamor—the cars had entered the two-mile lane—Bardy examined the small death weapon. It was an unusual .25-calibre, a woman's gun.

Then Bardy became conscious of two items at almost the same time. An odor other than burned powder touched his senses. And he saw three small white feathers on the bearskin rug near where the gun had been lying.

Bardy removed the cartridge clip, then replaced it. Two shots had been fired. His quick eyes found no marks nearby to account for a second bullet. He had no time to examine the body of the dead man.

He heard the coughing motor of an oncoming car. The girl showed no signs of returning consciousness. Her dainty figure was as quiet as that of a sleeping child.

Bardy made a quick circle of the room. He held three feathers in his hand, and he was seeking their source. There was no bullet mark that he could see. The cover of an old-fashioned couch at the side of the room drew his attention.

The couch cover had once been bright. It was so old it had faded. Its woven pattern had become a dirty gray. But at the head of the couch, where a cushion or pillow should have been, the cover was much brighter, the pattern clearer.

There had been a cushion there. It had been in place a long time to protect the cover from fading. More than one car motor thrummed in the rough lane, approaching the house.

"Smart, but possibly not smart enough," grunted Bardy. "Anyway, Nicky Tralone was not here for a wedding, and neither was Gloria Scarvan. Framed for the killing, or not, I guess it makes her just a no-good little tramp, but—"

Bardy was seeing the pinched, haggard face of Gloria's mother. Whatever the answer to this might be, Bardy was certain the imminent arrest of her daughter would be as fatal as a bullet in her heart.

From there, Bardy stopped thinking for several minutes. With the sound of state police cars drawing up in the lane outside, he pocketed the murder gun. He thrust the spilled jewels into his pocket. With almost no effort he had the girl's light figure in his arms.

Bardy was aware the police would be

held up a few minutes in the death room. Undoubtedly they would find the tire marks of Nicky Tralone's sedan and of the other car in which Nicky had arrived. But with worn tires what they were, there was about one chance in ten thousand of Nicky's car ever being traced.

Gaining the outside through a rear door, Bardy could only head for the open country in the darkness. He kept to hard ground as far as possible, though it seemed improbable the police would make much of a search outside after seeing tire marks.

HE WAS in a wooded stretch, trying to fix the direction of the Milwaukee railroad. But even if he found a small local station, at this hour the accommodation trains for commuters would be out of service.

Light as she was, Gloria Scarvan became a burden in his arms. He put her on the ground near a small brook, a mile or more from the murder house. Cold water on her face brought a long sigh.

The girl was murmuring incoherently. Lifting her head, Bardy was suddenly aware of her appealing beauty, even in the faint light. Perhaps it was an impulse—the kind that had converted a tough street boy into a worshiper of a famous opera singer—that started his pulse pounding.

His kiss that silenced the murmuring lips made him angry at himself for being a fool. Possibly it was reaction from shock, from her great fright, but Gloria's arms clung to his neck for a long moment before her full reason must have returned.

Then, before he could prevent it, she was clawing at his face. She screamed once, wildly. Mad speech came then.

"Don't—oh, don't—Nicky! You said you wouldn't hurt him—don't shoot again—in heaven's name—what have we done?"

"I'm not Nicky, only Smiler," said

Bardy grimly. "Nicky shot the old man then? The boss don't often do his own killin'."

Her struggle subsided. She trembled as if with the cold. She whispered, "Smiler? Mother, why must this happen

The little gun cracked
and Marsden went down.



to me? I—don't understand—where are we—where is Nicky?"

"You were going to marry Nicky, remember," said Bardy. "Or were you and Nicky planning a neat little holdup?"

The girl turned, quick as a cat in his arms. Again she screamed out, her words covering the movement of one hand as the other once more clawed at Bardy's eyes:

"You killing devils! You meant murder all the time, to rob us!"

Half-blinded, Bardy put up his hands to trap the clawed fingers tearing at his eyes. She had been clever. She had the little murder gun from his coat pocket. It snapped up, exploding, with the girl's evident intention to remove at least this one of Nicky's hirelings, as he had made her believe him to be.

Bardy's head jerked to one side. But the scouring slug furrowed through his hair, its impact having the effect of a sapping blow. He was stunned and falling. Gloria was free of his arms as he splashed face downward in the cold water of the brook.

The chill shocked Bardy's numbed brain back to normal. But as he came to his feet, he could but faintly hear the girl's light, running steps in the deep blackness among the trees. He made a stumbling effort to pursue, but Gloria was faster now than his own heavy-footed attempt.

Bardy's brain seemed bursting. Sticky blood bathed one ear. He slapped more cold water on the wound as he heard shouts from the direction of the murder scene.

"The little fool!" he grated. "Her shooting did it. The cops will round her up now in spite of all I can do, if I could find her."

Then, despite the gravity of the situation, Bardy smiled wryly.

"I'm the fool for not coming clean on who I am," he muttered. "But who

would have expected her to turn out that kind of a devil cat?"

It would be but minutes before the woods and fields would be filled with searching coppers. Bardy knew then he had a job to do. He could but leave Gloria to escape or capture, as her luck might run.

Suddenly conscious of cloth caught in one hand, he knew he was holding a fragment of the girl's torn dress in his clutching fingers.

Swearing under his breath at his own bungling, Bardy started to run through the trees. He was hearing the distant rumble of truck traffic on a main highway.

"It'll be tough getting a truck to stop," he said grimly. "One look at me, an' a driver will think holdup. Well, if that's what is has to be, I've a date with Nicky Tralone before it's too late for Gloria Scarvan, if it isn't already too late."

TOM BARDY'S holdup of a milk truck driver with his .38 and his ride into North Chicago became a part of the city police report as Bardy was rolling in a taxicab toward the South Side. A saw-buck and thought for his own personal safety were sufficient for the taximan who turned on the radio, questing for news.

The bulletin filtering through struck Bardy with the impact of wondering surprise—

"State police are reported to have sighted a disheveled woman fleeing across a field two miles from the Andrew Scarvan home, where Scarvan was found murdered shortly after midnight. Only fear of being mistaken in identity caused the police to refrain from shooting to stop the strange woman. However, as the murder bulletin came from a small calibre gun, it is the police theory that a woman killed Andrew Scarvan, but was aided by a male accomplice who killed the ser-

vant, Iverson, and opened the wall safe, said to have held a fortune in jewels."

"Andrew Scarvan?" whispered Bardy. "Great glory! Then the girl must be a devil cat. The dead man is some kin. She was going there with Nicky Tralone to rob him. I'm afraid Marilyn Scarvan will have to stand the shock of it."

But Bardy directed the taxi driver to a few blocks from his own room. At least his own identity and that of the madcap girl were still a mystery. However, it must be but a matter of a short time before she would be caught.

"The little fool probably will hang onto that gun," reasoned Bardy. "Okay, chump. You took this all on your own, and that's the way you have to finish the job."

He knew it might be but a short time until the taximan reported his tough passenger. Bardy employed all the minutes he could spare. A fast shave, the right clothes, and not even Nicky Tralone would have suspected he was the tough guy who had knocked him cold in his own sedan.

Tom Bardy checked into the Blue Goose nighterie shortly before its four a.m. closing time. His hair combed over the taped wound above his ear, Bardy appeared to be a playboy who had accumulated a considerable jag and a fight or two, judging from the bruises and scratches on his face.

Two hard-eyed waiters moved toward him as he found a table near the floor show exit door. But Bardy laid down a hundred dollar bill and he was apparently a much cooled off drunk.

The money talked. He had a Scotch and soda in front of him as he sized up the club's habitués. His pulse quickened as Chuck Marsden appeared at the nearby exit door, looking out over the club.

Nicky's burly bodyguard evidently was

watching for trouble. But the floor show was in its final swing and the place was quiet, except for a few celebrants. Bardy figured his chance of reaching the exit door and going along the corridor there to Nicky Tralone's closely guarded office.

As long as he was not tied up with the identity of the tough mug who had upset Nicky's plan of robbery, aided by Gloria Scarvan, Bardy judged he might, as a drunken customer, get to Nicky's office.

Bardy smiled grimly as he fingered the cold stones of a diamond necklace in his pocket. Nicky would scarcely expect such a necklace, possibly dropped here in the club, to be the same as that which had been left in Gloria Scarvan's possession.

THE girls were streaming off the floor. The orchestra was going into the closing strains of a final good-night waltz. Bardy suddenly arose, knocking his Scotch to the floor.

"Whadda you think o' that?" he exclaimed loudly. "The lady's lost her rocks! Go away! I saw 'em first!"

Bardy swayed, lurched into a waiter who tried to stop him. He went to his hands and knees, apparently groping under a table. He came up with a drunken shout. Gleaming diamonds made a cascade of light over one hand.

Two waiters reached him, but he swore at them and thrust the jewels inside his shirt front, making a wild swing at one waiter, and purposely missing. Then he was being yanked off the floor and toward the floor show door. He saw Chuck Marsden in the corridor.

"Chuck!" said one waiter. "Go tell the boss we're bringin' in a guy who just picked up some woman's necklace, an' he's drunk!"

Marsden's cold eyes surveyed Bardy's stumbling figure. Then he turned, going back along the corridor, Bardy maintained his pose. He realized he was facing tough odds. Only surprise could give

him a chance. The .38 under his waistband was unsuspected.

Bardy was going along peaceably now. He saw Marsden rap, then start to open Nicky's office door. At the rear of the corridor where it opened on an alley, a key grated in a lock.

A door was flung open. The vision disclosed was one long to be remembered. A man's raincoat, possibly loaned by some truck driver, dropped away from the figure of Gloria Scarvan.

Bardy thought he had never seen a more entrancing picture. He again could see her mother, Marilyn, as the once famed singer had appeared in the first opera he had ever attended.

Bardy was smart enough not to make a sudden move. He hoped in his new and more respectable guise the girl would fail to identify him. Chuck Marsden cursed loudly and, with Nicky's door swinging open, he hurled himself toward the girl.

A little gun cracked. Yelling wildly, Marsden went down. The smoking weapon in her hand, Gloria Scarvan gliding toward Nicky's office door. Marsden was trying to rise but, by accident or good shooting, he had received a cracked shinbone.

The waiters with Bardy were relaxed, distracted.

"Grab her, Pete!" snarled one, letting go of Bardy's arm.

Pete's underjaw crunched with Bardy's upcoming fist. The other waiter swung at Bardy, knocking him to the wall. Bardy let this mug have his flat foot in the stomach.

"Hold it, Gloria!" warned Bardy as he saw the toy gun come up to cover him.

Her senses and her eyes were unbeatable.

"Smiler? You?" she exclaimed, but as her eyes turned, a rough hand reached through the door and snatched her into Nicky's office.

BARDY had a glimpse of the girl as she fell forward. He was in the doorway in a split second. Gloria was on her face and one ugly thug had a rod lifted butt first to crack down on the back of her neck.

Bardy's falling dive carried him over the prostrate girl. Hard shoulders bent the thug at the knees. He fell across Bardy, bearing him down, beating at his skull with the rod.

Taking cruel blows on one arm, Bardy saw a second thug, and Nicky Tralone behind a desk. Nicky exploded.

"Shut that door! Lock it! Beat her ears off! The cops want her for murder! Don't kill her, but bump her brain so she'll never sing!"

The heavy door slammed shut. A bolt clicked. With a mug pounding at his head, Bardy knew he was locked in with three-to-one odds against coming out alive.

"Who is this guy?" demanded Nicky. "Sa-ay! I make him! This is sweet! He's Gloria's boy friend who grabbed the bus offa us! Cool him quick! The cops will be here any minute, so we'll put him below!"

Bardy was in no mood to be cooled or to be put below, wherever that might be. His hard head found the chin of the thug trying to brain him. Then Bardy came partly to his feet.

Blows hammered at the door outside. One of Nicky's boys spoke through a mike into the office.

"The cops, Nicky! They're comin'! Clear the office!"

Bardy had one central thought now. His cornered eye saw the girl turn her head slightly, blue orbs staring at him. Then she lay quite still.

"Get the junk outta here!" barked Nicky. "I'll take care of this guy! Open the trapdoor, ready!"

Bardy could feel blood running into

his eyes. He staggered and started to slide down as he saw Nicky coming around the desk with a deadly blackjack raised.

Even when the sap swung, Bardy kept sliding. That way the smash was a glancing blow that left him conscious. But he fell, sprawling on his side, his eyes apparently closed.

"It will be now or never," he thought. He permitted one hand to open slowly. The diamond necklace dribbled to the floor like a rainbow of sparkling water.

Bardy's other hand opened more slowly. Three damp, sticky feathers clung to his palm. This had to work to make everything clean. He heard Nicky's oath as he saw the feathers.

Then, "Get that blasted cushion outta the case!" snarled Nicky. "Dump it down with this egg! I'll slap all the talk outta the dame now!"

Bardy saw the other mug dive for the lower drawer of a steel filing case. At the same instant Nicky bent, the sap raised to curdle Gloria Scarvan's brain. The police already wanting her, that gun in her hand, and Gloria unable to talk, it would be perfect.

Bardy's play was over. He snaked out the .38 and squeezed its trigger with a lightning motion. Nicky Tralone groaned and his right arm jumped, the blackjack falling from his hand.

The other thug was quick. He had a rod out. Slugs chewed the corner of the desk close to Bardy's ear. Bardy grunted resignedly and let the thug have it right through his flat nose.

He came up then, swinging, and Nicky went down. Covering the room with the .38, Bardy backed to the door, opening it. Inspector McGrew was the first man inside.

MCGREW took one look and growled, "Tie up the dame. Get that gun! She's the one the state boys missed when

HOW YOU CAN BUILD A MIGHTY ARM



THIS BOOK Shows You HOW TO BUILD A MIGHTY ARM AND 16-in. BICEPS ONLY 25c TO YOU

A COMPLETE PICTURE COURSE ON ARM BUILDING

Why not get an arm of might with the power and grip to obey your physical desires? Weaklings whose arms were scrawny pieces of skin and bone have taken this course and in a short time developed themselves into strong men of powerful proportions with bulging biceps and brawny forearms . . . strong, solid arms of power that are respected by men and admired by women.

Learn The WORLD'S GREAT SECRETS OF ARM STRENGTH

This course is especially planned to build every muscle in your arm. Many pupils have developed a pair of triceps shaped like a horseshoe, and just as strong, and a pair of biceps that show their double head formation. The sinewy cables between the biceps and elbow are deep and thick with wire cable-like ligaments. The forearm bellies with bulk, the great supinator lifting muscles become a column of power, and their wrists are alive and writhe with cordy sinew. Wouldn't you like to have a magnificent arm like the figure pictured above?

You can't make a mistake. The strongest armed man in the world wrote this course for you. His great experience stands as proof that you too can succeed. You get his secret methods of strength, development illustrated and explained as you like them. Rush only 25¢. You are not limited to the arm. Try also: Moulding a Mighty Back, Moulding a Mighty Grip, Moulding a Mighty Chest, Moulding Mighty Legs.

SEND FOR THESE FIVE FAMOUS COURSES
formerly \$5.00 each — NOW in book form ONLY 25¢ EACH
or ALL 5 for \$1.00

Mail your order now and "NERVES OF STEEL, MUSCLES LIKE IRON" will be included FREE! It is a priceless book to the strength fan and muscle builder. Full of pictures of marvelous bodied men who will show you what The Jowett Progressive Power Course has done for them and how it can build you into a man of marvelous muscular symmetry and dynamic strength. Reach out . . . Grasp this last chance-limited time offer.



Book With Photos of Famous Strong Men FREE

... and how you can become one of them!

If You Mail Coupon NOW!
Jowett Institute of Physical Culture
230 Fifth Ave., New York City, Dept. 306
George F. Jowett: Your proposition looks good to me. Send, by return mail, prepaid, the courses checked below for which I am enclosing

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> All 5 Courses for \$1 | <input type="checkbox"/> Moulding a Mighty Grip, 25¢ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Moulding a Mighty Arm, 25¢ | <input type="checkbox"/> Moulding a Mighty Chest, 25¢ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Moulding a Mighty Back, 25¢ | <input type="checkbox"/> Moulding a Mighty Legs, 25¢ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Send all 5 courses C. O. D. (\$1 plus postage). No orders less than \$1 sent C. O. D. | |

GEORGE F. JOWETT
"Champion of Champions"
Holds more strength records than any other teacher or athlete.

Name Age
Address

she caught a farm truck into Chi! Nicky, how come your blues singer's teamin' up with killers? She's wanted in that Andrew Scarvan murder!"

Nicky groaned over his busted arm. But he blustered through.

"What? Gloria wanted? So that's it! Know her, Inspector? That's Gloria Scarvan, the niece of Andrew Scarvan. Sings here, but didn't show up tonight until a few minutes ago, an' come in crazy, shooting."

"Andrew Scarvan's niece?" said McGrew. "Huh! An' his private safe was robbed. It ties up. Say! Tom Bardy! Thought you was in the army, fellow?"

"I am in the army, Mac," said Bardy quietly. "Having a kind of furlough. I wouldn't put the bracelets on Gloria Scarvan. Nicky's your rooster, Inspector. Nicky and Chuck Marsden who's nursing a smashed leg outside where the girl got him."

"What in thunder you talking about?" roared Nicky Tralone. "You come busting in here with a handful of diamonds, and started shooting up the place. I've seen you around the club, but I didn't know you—"

Bardy stepped over the dead mug by the filing case. He pulled open the bottom drawer. An old cushion filled with feathers came out.

Bardy held it up. A small, burned hole appeared in one end. He rubbed three white feathers off his palm into McGrew's hand.

"They'll match those in the cushion, Inspector," he said. "You see, Nicky and Marsden killed Andrew Scarvan. I happened to drive Nicky's car, by accident. I was knocked out and slept through the neatest frame you ever saw."

"You take the test of Gloria Scarvan's hand, and it'll show powder. It would have showed powder if you had found her knocked out beside the body of her uncle, Andrew Scarvan. But Nicky had

to put her fingers around her gun and fire the second shot into a couch pillow to put the powder on her skin.

"Nicky couldn't leave the cushion. Not much chance to throw it away driving back to town, without it being picked up. So he has to bring it to his office and stow it away. There's a bullet in that cushion will match the slug in Andrew Scarvan."

Bardy saw Gloria was sitting up, staring at him. Her eyes were like a June sky. She was still silent, watching Bardy as a trip through the still open trapdoor produced, among some black-market items, three cases of jewels.

The gems were many times the value of the diamond necklace.

TOM BARDY drove his own car into the North Shore circle. Gloria Scarvan had spoken but little.

"I'm cured of being a fool at least," she said. "My father willed all those jewels to mother, but Uncle Andrew swore they had disappeared. I sang at Nicky's club because we needed the money. And he was always good to me."

"Sure," said Bardy. "And as a great guy, he offered to help you get back your mother's jewels all free for nothing?"

"No, not quite," she said. "But I trusted Nicky because he wanted me to marry him, or always said he did. I was fool enough to think if mother had the jewels to take care of her, marrying Nicky might not be so bad."

"And now, Gloria?" asked Bardy quizzically. "Cured? We'll keep as much as we can from your mother, but it will be a blow. I didn't think I'd ever like anyone who hurt Marilyn Lane, but I guessed wrong."

"Mother still treasures a letter scribbled by a small boy who told her how much he loved her," said Gloria. "I wish I had lived the kind of a life that would bring that kind of a letter from that kind of a boy."

Tom Bardy could see Marilyn Lane again in the lovely face, in the wide eyes. The madcap playgirl seemed never to have existed. He thought of the little gray old lady waiting.

"I think your mother would be very happy, Gloria, if she could see that street kid who loved her as her son," said Bardy.

"You'll even do that for Marilyn Lane, Tom Bardy?"

"For Marilyn Lane, yes, but mostly to give a buck private in this man's army someone to come home to," he said.


"Putting it that way, we'll have to drive south," smiled Gloria. "The nearest marrying justice is that way. I'm sorry I told you wrong tonight, Smiler."

*Are you doing your part
to help America
win the war?*

*Buy War Stamps
and Bonds
Every Pay Day!*

Over 200,000 Satisfied Users

DO YOU WANT TO STOP TOBACCO?



Banish the craving for tobacco as thousands have. Make yourself free and happy with Tobacco Redeemer. Write for free booklet telling of injurious effect of tobacco and of treatment which has relieved many men.

FREE BOOK

THE NEWELL COMPANY
207 Clayton Station, St. Louis, Mo.

Over 30 Years in Business

GRAY HAIR VITAMIN NOW \$1.95


No dyes—No drugs—Hair grew out in Natural Color in almost nine out of ten test cases just adding Calcium Pantothenate Vitamin to regular diet.

Why Pay \$3.50 to \$5.00 for the famous "Gray Hair Vitamin" when you can buy 100-10 mg. tablets of genuine Calcium Pantothenate—same as used in National tests—by mail for \$1.95. **SEND NO MONEY.** Just send name and address on penny postcard. We will ship 100-10 mg. tablets C.O.D. for \$1.95 plus few cents postage. If not completely satisfied with quality return package within ten days for immediate refund of your money.

Address Lilee Products Co., 2017 S. Michigan, Dept. 475, Chicago

"YOU ARE UNDER ARREST!"

Help Bring Crooks to Justice Through Scientific CRIME DETECTION!



I have taught thousands this exciting, profitable, pleasant profession. Let me teach you, in your own home. Learn Fingerprinting, Firearms Identification, Police Photography, Secret Service Methods thoroughly, quickly, at small cost. 48% of all American Bureaus of Identification are headed by I. A. S. students and graduates. I can prepare you for this fascinating work, during spare time. Write today, stating age, for "Bingo Book of Crime."

INSTITUTE OF APPLIED SCIENCE, 1920 Sunnyside Ave., Dept. A-383, Chicago, Illinois

FALSE TEETH
LOOSE? SLIPPING?



GUM GRIPPER
NEW PLASTIC DISCOVERY

Tightens Them Quickly—or No Cost

EAT-TALK-LAUGH with FALSE TEETH that won't slip or slide. Use "GUM GRIPPER," new plastic Dental Plate Reliner. Just squeeze on with handy tube. Place teeth in mouth. Wear them while they set—snug and comfortable. Easy to apply! Not a powder or paste. Can be scrubbed or washed. **One Application Lasts 5-6 Months**—or your money back. Only \$1.00. Try GUM GRIPPER today. **FREE OFFER**—Order now and receive FREE of extra cost, generous package Dental Plate Cleaner. Cleanses without brushing. Won't harm denture.

SEND NO MONEY—TEST AT OUR RISK
Send name and address. When package arrives, deposit \$1.00 plus postage with postman! You must be satisfied or your money back. Send \$1.00 with order and we pay postage.

WEST LABS., 127 N. Dearborn St., Dept. 54, Chicago, Ill.

PATENT YOUR IDEAS

WHAT IS YOUR INVENTION?
Send Sketch or Write for FREE Inventor's Recording Blank. Confidential Advice

Z. POLACHEK Reg. Patent Attorney-Engineer
1234 BROADWAY, NEW YORK

BE A DETECTIVE

Work home or travel. Experience unnecessary. DETECTIVE Particulars FREE. Write NOW to **GEORGE S. D. WAGNER, 125 West 36th St., N. Y.**

SUPER-DETECTIVE

features a complete Jim Anthony novel

in every issue. If you haven't met

Jim Anthony you've missed

a real experience!

Some Notes on the Queer



COUNTERFEITING has a very long historical background, reaching back as far as the earliest currency systems. High school physics courses still contain mention of the Greek philosopher who discovered some dirty work on the part of a counterfeiter of royal coronets.

The current King had ordered a gold crown, but when it rested too lightly upon the royal cranium, His Majesty's suspicions were aroused. He called in one of his advisers who took the matter under advisement. It wasn't until the adviser took a bath, however, that the matter was solved. Thinking in his tub, the adviser noticed how his body displaced a certain amount of water. He got up, obtained a weight of gold, of what he thought would be the approximate weight of the coronet, and dropped it into the water. He then measured the displacement. The coronet was given a similar

test. It was found to be lighter! Consequently, a certain purveyor of coronets to royalty lost his head a short time later.

The French Revolutionary period is productive of another interesting phase of counterfeiting. The French counterfeiters of that day may well turn in their graves, for their platinum counterfeits of gold florins have earned a place in the Louvre! These platinum counterfeits are, of course, much more valuable today than their genuine counterparts. At that time platinum was of no great value; the ore was to be found in the Urals in the kingdom of Catherine the Great. It very nearly approximates gold in weight, ring, and malleability, hence the anxiety of earlier counterfeiters to obtain it.

The ancient counterfeiter was an artist-soundrel; his modern counterpart is a scientific workman. The older marker of queer goods worked by hand; the new marker depends upon precision instruments and excellent materials.

Queer passers generally work in pairs. One carries the roll of spurious money; his partner carries only one bill at a time on his person. Whenever the latter passes a fake bill in a store, a railroad terminal, or a café, he gives the real currency to his confederate and takes another fake bill.

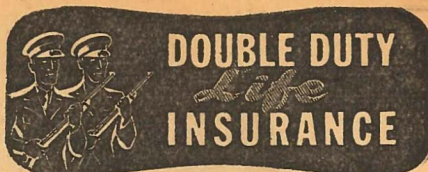
The easiest touches are to be found among the small merchants and tavern-keepers, but now and then a queer passer will go in for a cute stunt. One passer had a swell racket doped out for himself until the Secret Service boys caught up with him.

THE passer preyed exclusively on Jewish rabbis. The Jewish religion provides that at certain times of the year the sons of deceased Jews must visit family graves for prayers. It is the custom, on these occasions, for the sons to hire rabbis to say special prayers.

The passer capitalized on this latter practice. He used to travel from cemetery to cemetery, hire rabbis to pray over his "father's" grave, and then hand them a phony ten-dollar bill. He always got back eight dollars change in good United States currency. However, the Secret Service traced the bills to a number of rabbis and from them got the story that led to the passer's arrest.

Ironically, he was praying over his own father's grave this time. But his pockets were loaded with phony ten-dollar bills, and each of his victims was able to identify him as the man with forty dead fathers!

Everything possible to protect the law-abiding citizen from counterfeiter and passer is being done by the United States Secret Service under Frank J. Wilson. Tracking down counterfeiters is infinitely harder than apprehending passers. But in 1940, only about \$100,000 in counterfeit was added to official production, and that was less than ten per cent of what the previous figure had been.



PAYS DOUBLE BENEFITS

Costs only \$1⁰⁰ a Month

Now, you can buy **MORE** Life Insurance backed by Legal Reserves for **LESS** money. This amazing policy offers you an opportunity to secure **DOUBLE PROTECTION** during the first 5 years. Old Age Disability Benefit also included. Benefits are based upon your present age. At age 29 policy pays \$1000.00 for loss of life from any cause or \$2000.00 for travel accidental death. No matter what your age the premium always remains the same—\$1.00 a month. Policy issued to men and women in good health, from age 10 to 65 years, without medical examination. Get **FREE** details. No red tape—no agents. Write today! **PIONEER LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY**
6060 Times Building • Rockford, Illinois

"Facts about EPILEPSY"

This most interesting and helpful Booklet will be mailed to anyone while the supply lasts. I will send a free copy to anyone who writes for it. **C. M. SIMPSON**
Address Dept. N-13, 1849 W. 44th St., Cleveland, Ohio

CASH FOR YOUR SURPLUS UNUSED U. S. STAMPS

Mail Order Dealers: Collectors: We buy accumulated and surplus UNUSED U. S. Postage Stamps at 90% face value for denominations 1/2c to 19c. 85% face value for denominations 20c to 50c. Small lots 85%. **MAIL STAMPS REGISTERED.** Money sent by return mail. **GARBER SERVICE, 72 Fifth Ave., Dept. RM-6, New York City**

SUPER JU JITSU



NOW GET TOUGH DOUBLE-QUICK!

Learn how **YOU** can be dangerous. Lick brutes twice your size *with only your bare hands*, even when they are armed. This powerful fighting system is unbelievably efficient. You don't need ox-like muscles — it's brains that count! New, easy self-study course at amazing low price. Free-trial offer and money-back guarantee. Hurry! Write today for **FREE** DETAILS. Nelson Co., 500 Sherman, Dept. F-510, Chicago.

For Victory
on the
Home Front
Buy
U. S.
WAR STAMPS
and
WAR BONDS
Every Payday!

The Man With the Phantom Dead



EVERYBODY knows of the guy who was said to be so dishonest that he'd steal the pennies from a dead man's eyes. But we'll bet you've never met the Man with the Phantom Dead, one of the "leading" small-time rackets in this country. Undertakers still fall for it.

You'll never know where the Phantom Dead artist is going to work next. He's smart enough to know that big-time prospects are just as gullible as small-town suckers.

The racket starts off easily enough. Let's say a young man, sad-faced, and with red eyes, stops his car in front of a local undertaking establishment. He appears bewildered as the proprietor comes toward him. Mr. Undertaker is very solicitous. "Ah, my boy, when death, as it must, comes to each of us, we must bear our burden bravely."

The young man's shoulders twitch convulsively as he brings a telegram from his pocket and hands it to the undertaker. It bears horrible news. This stranger's brother and sister have been burned to death in a fire back in New York!

The young man explains that he has received the telegram that morning in a town some one hundred and fifty miles distant. He has been driving steadily ever since and wonders if the undertaker will help him out.

How? Financially! There is money to be had, but it is in New York. Besides, the man's brother and sister have each made him beneficiary in their \$2,000 insurance policies. Now, he wants the undertaker, who has been recommended

to him in a town fifty miles back, to take over the burial.

"To tell you the truth," he confesses, with his voice breaking, "I haven't even enough money for gasoline."

The pathetic story convinces the undertaker, particularly when the young man agrees to drive him in. The undertaker accepts, saying he'll pay for the gasoline.

THE pair go outside only to find that the car won't start! Tears spring into the young man's eyes, and suddenly, looking at his wan, peaked face, the undertaker has a flash of inspiration. He asks if the young man has eaten. Shamefacedly, the latter admitted he hasn't. No money.

The undertaker looks at his watch as though making a decision. Then he snaps shut the case. "I can make the New York train," he says. "And you can have the car fixed and follow me. By the time you arrive, I'll have everything in order."

Gratitude floods the young man's face, and his eyes water again when, a few minutes later, the kindly undertaker presses \$100 on him against the insurance money. The young man accompanies the undertaker to the train, shakes his hand firmly, then returns to the car.

This time it works, particularly since the young man has replaced the small part he had taken from it before entering the undertaking establishment! Whistling, he drives off.

And the undertaker? He is on his way to the address in New York. When he arrives, he will find a vacant lot and no bodies.

Scotland Yard's Flying Squadron



ALTHOUGH most of the big city police forces have Flying Squads nowadays, that branch of Scotland Yard still functions as one of the foremost law-enforcing agencies.

Chief Detective-Inspector Frederick Fox, whose name looms large in the Criminal Investigation Department annals, first thought of a Flying Squad some forty years ago when he discovered that divisional detectives were hampered in their work by being too well known to criminals.

Fox suggested that four of the brightest young men in the CID be given a roving commission as a "flying brigade" under his aegis.

It did excellent work, notably against pickpockets and sneak thieves, as well as footpads. One of its biggest exploits was the breaking up of a gang of ladder burglars, who had long defied arrest. The Flying Squad detectives managed to discover the thefts were being pulled off by a man as elusive as the Scarlet Pimpernel. He was named "Quiet Joe" and he never pulled a job twice in the same district. So elusive was he that some police officers, veterans in the job, declared him a myth.

THE Flying Squad didn't think so. They couldn't find Joe for a long time; so they went after a friend of his, "Razor Bill." They shadowed him night and day, figuring that sooner or later he would be in communication with Quiet Joe. Their vigilance was rewarded. Two weeks later, Razor and Quiet met in a public house in Ludgate Circus. "Tails"

(Turn to Page 111)



Swing your way to POPULARITY with the NEW DANCES

Whether you have ever danced before, or not . . . you will find it much easier with the help of these 3 books. Avoid embarrassment . . . learn to dance in the privacy of your own home. All the new Swing steps — the Rumba, Sals-G, Truckin', and Bomba, as well as the basic Fox Trot and Waltz and Tap steps, are explained with simple, graphic diagrams, in "Dancing" and the two books we include FREE with each order.

GET MORE FUN OUT OF LIFE!

It is the person who can dance the new steps that gets invited to the dances and parties where Fun begins. Watch your own popularity increase as you learn the grace, the swing of dancing! No more wall-flower nights, or days of waiting for the phone to ring! This is your chance to fill your future with romance.

Make this FREE test!

"Dancing," by Betty Lee, includes everything you need to know about dancing. Instructed by this well-known teacher, you learn the fundamental steps in the right way . . . quickly. But you need not take our word for it! You may return the book in 5 days and get your money back if you are not delighted with results! And remember, we include two books FREE of extra charge . . . "Tip Top Tapping" and "Swing Steps." Let these three books teach you to dance for fun or money — or it costs you nothing!

SEND NO MONEY!

When your books arrive, deposit \$1.98 plus postage with the postman. Practice these simple dance steps each day and in 5 days if you have not learned to dance, we will refund your money at once. Act now and surprise your friends at the next party!

PIONEER PUBLICATIONS, Inc., 1790 Broadway, N. Y. C.

PIONEER PUBLICATIONS, INC.

1790 Broadway, Dept. 225-H, New York City, N. Y.

Send me "Dancing," by Betty Lee, and include 2 free books.

Ship C.O.D. I will pay on arrival, plus postage.

I enclose \$1.98. Ship postage prepaid.

If in 5 days I do not learn to dance, I may return book and you will refund purchase price.

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY STATE.....

The SPEED Magazines

Years ago, in more leisurely times, people liked books and stories that built up slowly, wandered through rambling by-paths, moved at a random tempo to their ultimate objectives.

But all that has long since changed.

Today the keynote of popular fiction is "Speed."

All life is gaited at a more rapid pace. In every phase of our lives we ask for "Speed." Our modes of transportation, our vast industrial system, even our mental activities are tuned up for "Speed."

It is to satisfy that present-day urge that the "Speed" magazines were conceived, and are now edited and illustrated.

If you are acquainted with them, you know what we mean. If you haven't discovered them, we suggest that you waste no time in looking into

HOLLYWOOD DETECTIVE

SPEED WESTERN STORIES

SPEED DETECTIVE

SPEED MYSTERY

PRIVATE DETECTIVE

SPEED ADVENTURE STORIES

SUPER-DETECTIVE

discovered that the pair spent plenty of time in public libraries pouring over reference books. Such literary endeavors surprised the Flying Squad tail men until they discovered that the literature in which Quiet and Razor were interested happened to be Burke's "Peerage" and "Who's Who." It became all too apparent then that the pair was planning a new job. When they made a journey to Fleet Street and bought a large-scale map of the Bristol district the theory was cinched.

UNAWARE that they were being shadowed, Quiet and Razor, a couple of days later, bought tickets at Paddington for Bristol. They disguised themselves as farmers. Behind them followed the Flying Squad, also disguised.

At Bristol the suspects left their handbags in the cloakroom while they booked lodgings in the town. A Flying Squad man followed them, and the others contacted the local police, while a Flying Squad inspector set to work on the handbags with skeleton keys.

They contained the finest set of house-breaking implements the craft would provide! There were two powerful jimmies, a handsaw for cutting ladders, wire for making booby traps for pursuers, and poison for dogs!

There was no question, then, about the value of the Flying Squad. But, just an hour later, a very strange thing happened. When Quiet and Razor arrived to claim their handbags, they were instantly arrested. If the Flying Squad had thought first, they would have decided to catch the crooks red-handed on their jobs. In that way, they could have added quite a few more years to the sentences the pair ultimately received. But they didn't—and for a long time it was said by political foes that the Flying Squad had been afraid to give the burglars too much rope for fear that Quiet Joe might have lived up to his reputation for elusiveness!

CLASSIFIED

PHOTOGRAPHY

STEREOSCOPIC (three dimensional) Art Photos. Stamp brings sealed particulars. Oddity House, St. Petersburg, Fla.

DETECTIVES

DETECTIVES—TRAINING—SECRET INVESTIGATIONS—FINGER-PRINTS. Short Modern Easy Method. Home-Travel. Secret Code, Booklet and Particulars **FREE.** Write Chief Mullica, International Detective System, Box 756-K, Journal Sq. Station, Jersey City, N. J.

DETECTIVES—Make secret investigation. Experience unnecessary. Detective Particulars free. Write George Wagner, B-125 West 86th St., N. Y.

SONG POEMS WANTED

SONGWRITERS: Send poem for immediate consideration and **FREE Rhyming Dictionary.** **RICHARD BROTHERS, 45 Woods Building, Chicago.**

Write for free booklet, Profit Sharing Plan. Allied Music, 7608 Reading, Dept. 35, Cincinnati, Ohio.

EDUCATIONAL

MAKE UP TO \$25-\$35 WEEK AS A TRAINED practical nurse! Learn quickly at home. Booklet Free. Chicago School of Nursing, Dept. D-5, Chicago.

**Give—
till
it
Hurts
the
Axis!**

★ BUY U. S. WAR BONDS ★
and STAMPS

3¢ A DAY HOSPITALIZATION PLAN

**Your HOSPITAL
and DOCTOR BILLS
PAID!**

SICKNESS or ACCIDENT

Don't allow Hospitalization expense to ruin your life savings! Insure NOW at lost cost . . . *before it's too late!* The famous North American Plan provides that in case of unexpected sickness or accident, you may go to any Hospital in the U. S. or Canada under any Doctor's care. Your expenses will be paid for you in strict accordance with Policy provisions.

NO MEDICAL EXAMINATION

One individual or entire family (birth to age 70) is eligible. There is no red tape involved . . . either in enrollment or payment of benefits. Unusual features of the North American Hospitalization Plan are its provisions for Doctor fees and a liberal \$1,000.00 Death Benefit . . . seldom if ever available in ordinary Hospitalization Insurance Policies. Also, as a civilian, you get WAR RISK coverage at no extra charge. For solid, dependable, economical protection North American has won the approval of leading Hospitals and physicians throughout the United States.

NO AGENT WILL CALL

North American Hospitalization protection is sold direct . . . at a saving to you. The Company is under the supervision of the Insurance Department. Sickness and accident strike suddenly . . . **BE PREPARED!** Over 6,000,000 thrift-minded persons in this country are already enrolled under the popular "3c A Day Plan."

LIBERAL CASH BENEFITS INCLUDE

Hospital Expenses for Sickness up to **\$540.00**

Hospital Expenses for Accident up to **\$540.00**

Doctor or Surgeon Expenses up to . . . **\$135.00**

Loss of Time from Work up to . . . **\$300.00**

Loss of Life . . . **\$1000.00**

EXTRA: You get WAR RISK coverage

And many other valuable benefits including
AMBULANCE SERVICE EXPENSE . . . cash pay-
ments for PHYSICAL DISMEMBERMENT, etc.

North American Mutual Insurance Company
Dept. SF3-6, Wilmington, Del.

Please send me, without obligation, details about
your "3c A Day Hospitalization Insurance Plan."

Name.....

Address.....

City..... State.....

(Fill in and clip this coupon. Mail in envelope or
paste on penny postcard.)

RUSH THIS COUPON for BIG FREE BOOK
GIVING COMPLETE FACTS

How to Destroy Your Enemy Quick!



SUPER Ju Jitsu

STRIKE WITH COMMANDO LIGHTNING!

Know how to win in hand-to-hand fighting. Prepare now to defend yourself against fists, clubs, kicks, knives, guns and other weapons. Use SUPER JU JITSU—the most devastating and efficient counter-attack ever developed! Get ready, *right away*, for any emergency. Learn how you—with your bare hands only—how you can scientifically disarm, disable and capture a brute twice your size even when he is armed.

It's a fact that "the bigger they are the harder they fall." Here are secrets that show you how, *regardless of your size*, you can conquer ox-like strength and dim-witted muscles.

TECHNIQUE is the Deadly Secret

You can get tough so *quick* you'll think there's magic in Super Ju Jitsu. Nothing else is exactly like it! But it does not depend on magic . . . this powerful attack system depends on brains. Not strength, not size. Super Ju Jitsu is simply *applied science*—a ruthlessly efficient method of counter-attack—the "ALL-OUT" one-man blitz method of fighting that STOPS AT NOTHING.

Terrify Your Enemy

Red-blooded American men go for this dynamic smashing system of defense because it strikes back like lightning and can leave the same shattering results. Super Ju Jitsu is not a sport, not a game. Quite the opposite, in fact. It is that deadliest kind of counter-attack you would be willing to use only to protect your own life and save your loved ones. You've got to fight fire with fire!

THIS VITAL COURSE WILL SHOW YOU HOW TO:

- Protect yourself against all comers, with just your bare hands
- Insure the safety of your loved ones
- Strengthen your self-confidence
- Develop your body, improve your health
- Think with split-second speed
- Make a better impression on people
- Eliminate the fears and doubts that hold you back
- Sharpen up your wits
- Use the revealing facts you learn about the human body
- Condition yourself to remain calm under great stress

WHEN THIS HAPPENS TO YOU...



DO THIS



FREE! Exciting Details

This sensational new self-study course now offered at a miracle-low-price. You get a liberal Free-Trial Offer and Money-Back Guarantee. Don't you owe it to yourself and your loved ones to get further interesting details? No charge, no obligation. Clip coupon and mail right away. TIME IS SHORT!!

NELSON CO., 500 Sherman St., Dept. F-510, Chicago

MAIL THIS COUPON TODAY ...OR DO THIS →

NELSON CO., 500 Sherman St., Dept. F-510, Chicago

Please *rush* me FREE, complete information on Super Ju Jitsu Course and details of special low price free-trial offer. (No salesmen will call.)

Name

Address.....

City..... State.....



FOOT ITCH

ATHLETE'S FOOT

WHY TAKE CHANCES?

The germ that causes the disease is known as Tinea Trichophyton. It buries itself deep in the tissues of the skin and is very hard to kill. A test made shows it takes 15 minutes of boiling to destroy the germ, whereas, upon contact, laboratory tests show that H. F. will kill the germ Tinea Trichophyton within 15 seconds.

H. F. was developed solely for the purpose of relieving Athlete's foot. It is a liquid that penetrates and dries quickly. You just paint the affected parts. H. F. gently peels the skin, which enables it to get to parasites which exist under the outer cuticle.

ITCHING OFTEN RELIEVED QUICKLY

As soon as you apply H. F. you may find that the itching is relieved. You should paint the infected part with H. F. night and morning until your feet are better. Usually this takes from three to ten days.

H. F. should leave the skin soft and smooth. You may marvel at the quick way it brings you relief. It costs you nothing to try, so if you are troubled with Athlete's Foot why wait a day longer?

H. F. SENT ON FREE TRIAL

PAY NOTHING TILL RELIEVED

Send Coupon 

At least 50% of the adult population of the United States are being attacked by the disease known as Athlete's Foot.

Usually the disease starts between the toes. Little watery blisters form, and the skin cracks and peels. After a while, the itching becomes intense, and you feel as though you would like to scratch off all the skin.

BEWARE OF IT SPREADING

Often the disease travels all over the bottom of the feet. The soles of your feet become red and swollen. The skin also cracks and peels, and the itching becomes worse and worse.

Get relief from this disease as quickly as possible, because it is very contagious, and it may go to your hands or even to the under arm or crotch of the legs.

Sign and mail the coupon, and a bottle of H. F. will be mailed you immediately. Don't send any money and don't pay the postman any money; don't pay anything any time unless H. F. is helping you. If it does help you, we know you will be glad to send us \$1 for the bottle at the end of ten days. That's how much faith we have in H. F. Read, sign and mail the coupon today.



GORE PRODUCTS, Inc.

S. F. G.

811 Perdido St., New Orleans, La.

Please send me immediately a bottle of H. F. for foot trouble as described above. I agree to use it according to directions. If at the end of 10 days my feet are getting better, I will send you \$1. If I am not entirely satisfied, I will return the unused portion of the bottle to you within 15 days from the time I receive it.

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY STATE