

PRIVATE

NOV. 15¢

# DETECTIVE

IND

STORIES

A  
**SPEED**  
MAGAZINE



## MURDER BY ACCIDENT

by *Roger Torrey*



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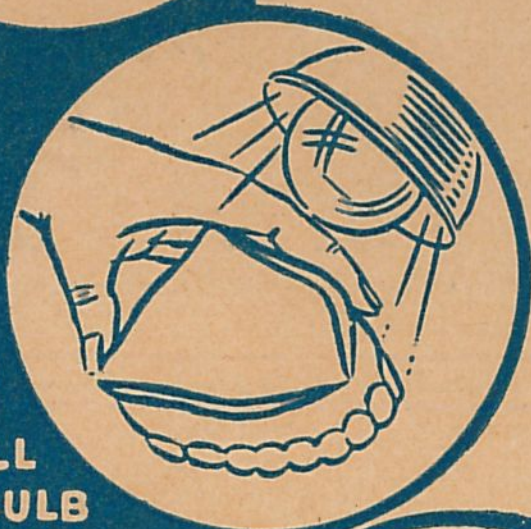
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of more men for the Radio  
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# I WILL SEND A SAMPLE LESSON FREE to PROVE I can Train You at Home in Spare Time to BE A RADIO TECHNICIAN

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"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, 300 W. Texas Ave., Goose Creek, Texas.**

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in Army,  
Navy,  
Too**



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

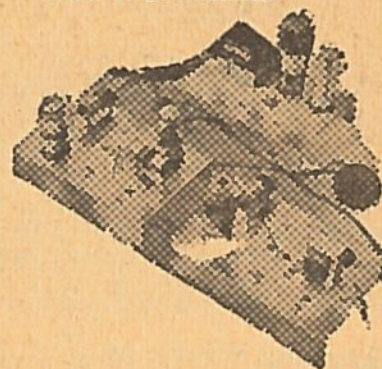
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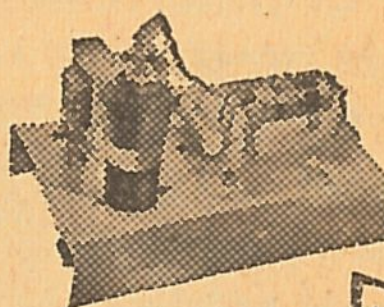
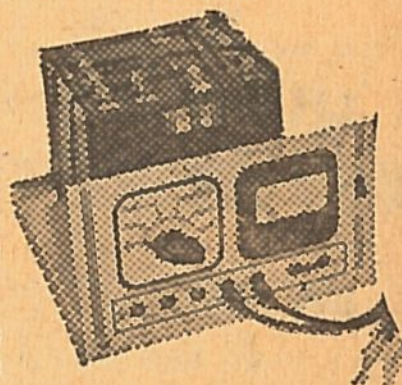
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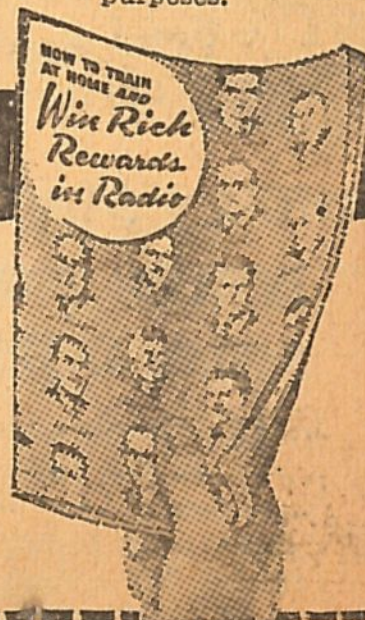
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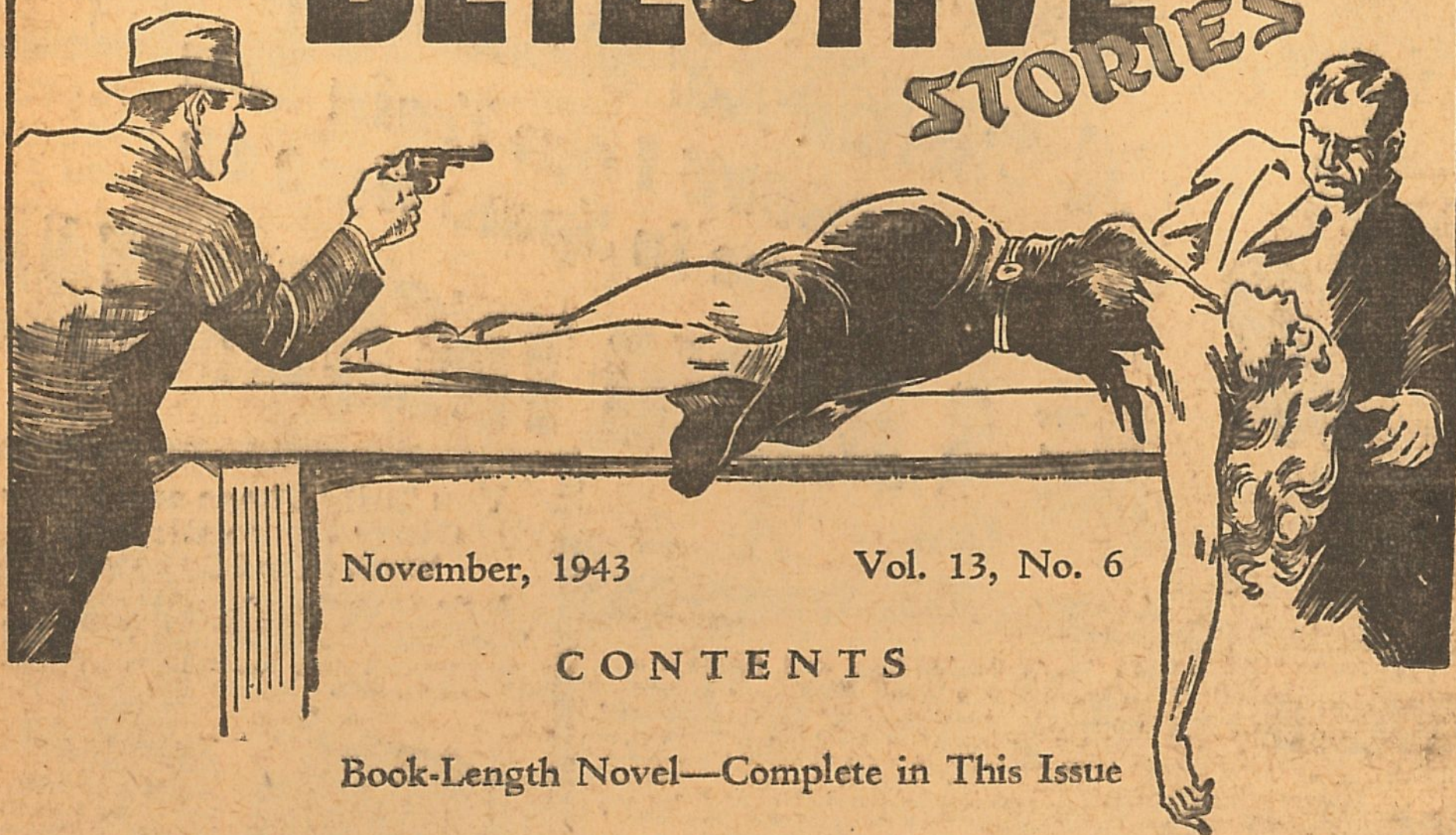
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# PRIVATE DETECTIVE STORIES



November, 1943

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*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.*

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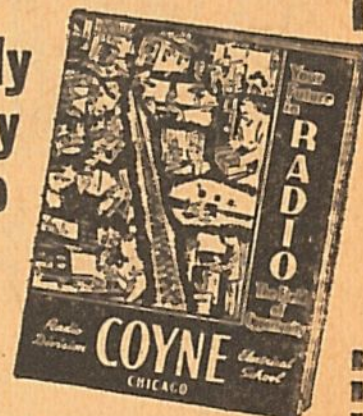
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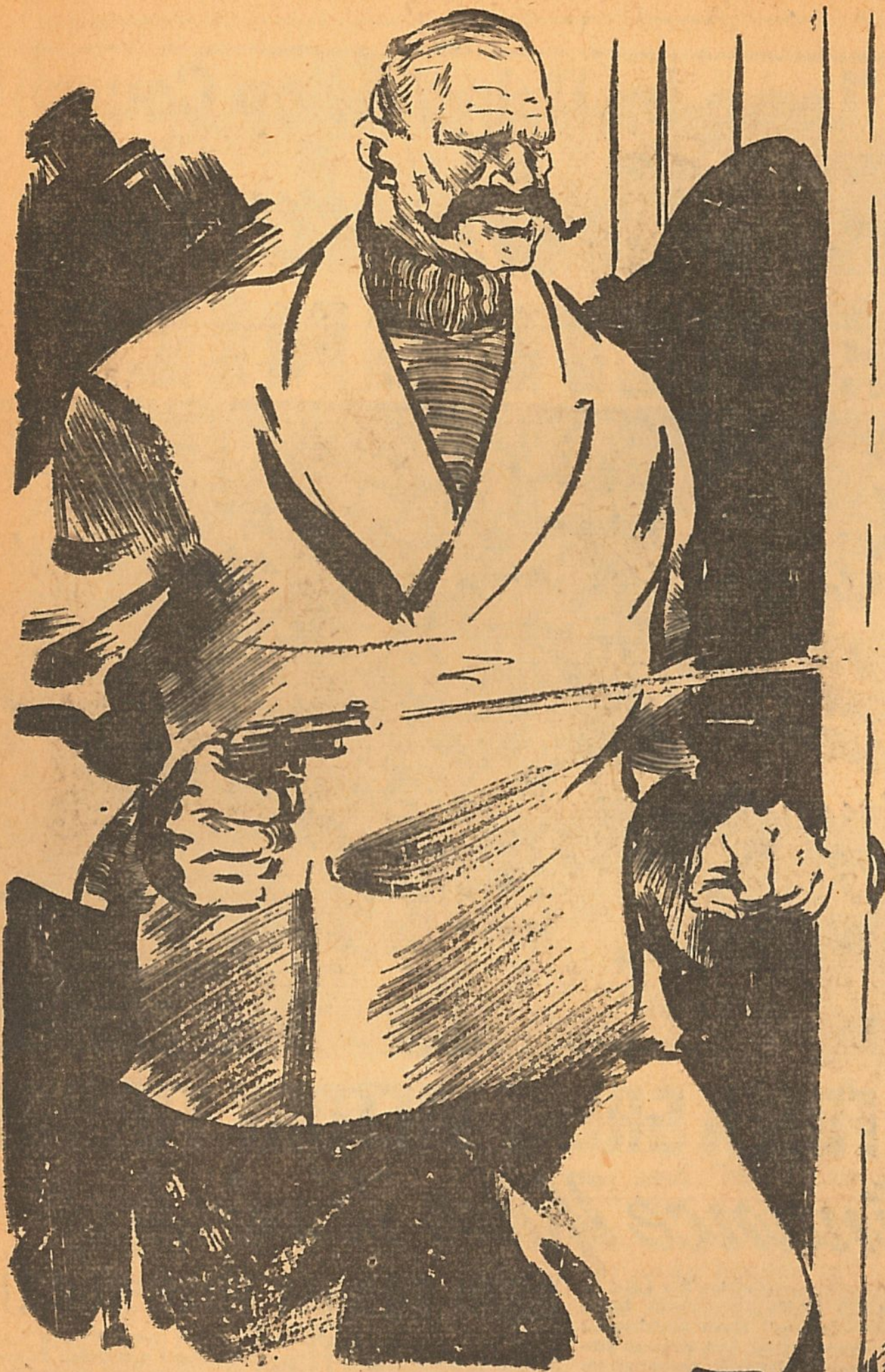


RADIO RECEIVERS





*Because her brother had changed his habits, the girl was sure he was in trouble. Her fiance tried to shrug it off, but the detective thought maybe she had something*



**M**ISS MARTIN was pretty and she had a temper. And she ran things her way, as I could see right off the bat. She said: "I'm Joan Martin and this is George Summerville. He's here under protest; I'll tell you that to begin with."

# Murder By Accident



## By ROGER TORREY

It was Vladimir who won  
on the exchange of shots.



I said I was glad to meet them and shook hands with Summerville. He had a nice firm hand and his smile was friendly enough. I took him to be about thirty-five and the girl possibly ten years younger.

"It's about my brother. Peter Martin. He's in trouble and I want you to find out what it is."

"You're guessing, Joan," Summerville told her. "You've nothing but a notion."

"I'm not guessing," she said. "He's borrowed from me and he's borrowed against his share in the estate. He's never done that before. And he isn't running around and spending his money as he did before. There's something wrong."

Summerville shrugged and said: "The boy's young. It's natural that he gets in over his head once in a while. Don't you agree, Mr. Ryan?"

I said: "I don't want to get involved in any arguments, people. Suppose you tell me about it. Is your brother the one that got—ugh—involved with a girl from the Versailles last year?"

She made a face and said: "That's right. It may be something like that now. It probably is. But he told me all about



that mess, and he won't say a word about his troubles now. He doesn't even tell me where he's going, and that's unusual for Peter. I've practically raised him, Mr. Ryan. He's only twenty."

I kept quiet and let her take it on from there.

THE Martin kids, it seemed, had been on their own for the last three years. At that time their father had died and left them the estate tied up, with Joan's half coming to her when she was twenty-eight and with Peter's share coming due when he turned twenty-one. She was twenty-six—the boy was twenty, with his twenty-first birthday four long months away.

George Summerville, who'd been the junior partner in Martin and Summerville, was executor, working under bond, of course.

Summerville broke in here with: "It was—I should say it is—a general brokerage firm, Mr. Ryan. We have a seat on the Exchange, naturally. We still carry on under the same name."

I said I understood. Miss Martin went on with: "Peter has been trying for a commission in the Air Corps. He's been flying his own plane for the last two years and has a little over six hundred hours in his log book. He's very serious about it. He's practically stopped drinking and foolishness like that. That's why I don't understand his actions now. And he's frightened—terribly frightened. I know him so well that I can't be mistaken."

Summerville smiled as though he thought she was using imagination, and she flared back at him with: "I know he's frightened, George. I should tell you, Mr. Ryan, that George and I are engaged. We plan to be married in the Fall."

I offered congratulations and didn't know who I meant them for. She was

pretty but she had a temper that wouldn't make for a happy home life if I was in the home. I could see that. Summerville was a good-looking geezer, but one of the smarty kind that knew it. In spite of the looks I didn't think he'd be a bargain for a girl.

She said: "Now Peter's been this way for the last two months. He stays in—doesn't run around and drink and gamble as he did. Once a week, usually on a Thursday evening, he goes out, and he dreads the trip. I know him so well I can tell it. It's before he makes these excursions that he borrows money from George and me, and I'm sure these trips are made for the purpose of paying out blackmail."

"Sounds like it."

She got red in the face. "I don't want you to think I make a practice of spying on my own brother, Mr. Ryan, but I followed him last week. I felt I should. He went to 417 West —th Street, to a shabby looking brownstone building, and he was in it not more than fifteen minutes. He returned home then. I'm sure that's where the blackmailer lives."

I said it was possible, but that more than likely that was just the contact point. With this she turned to Summerville and looked triumphant.

"You see, George," she told him. "Mr. Ryan knows how these things are managed. I was right in going to him, no matter what you say."

Summerville shrugged again and gave me an apologetic smile. "It's just that I don't like to see Joan make an issue out of something that probably has a perfectly normal explanation. That's all."

I said: "And you want me to check on what the boy does? That it?"

"That's it," she said.

I told her she'd hired a man.

I stalled around the corner drug store two blocks above 417 West —th Street for two hours before I got the call.



I took it in the booth, and Joan Martin said:

"He's just leaving, Mr. Ryan. He's just going down the drive."

I asked how he was dressed and she told me he was wearing a light gray suit, gray hat, and a gray topcoat. The topcoat was tweed, which would make it a cinch to spot.

I said: "Okay! I'll be there," and hung up the phone and drifted down to the brownstone. I'd already looked the place over—it was one of the old houses remodeled into housekeeping rooms, and it was typical of the neighborhood. An open-fronted glass door opening into a cubbyhole lined with mail boxes on each side, with a bell and a speaking tube above each mail box. Then a door with an electric release opening into the main downstairs hall. I didn't bother calling anybody—just went inside and used a thin dime to open that inner door—and I was waiting back of the stairs leading to the second floor when Peter Martin highlighted himself in the space between the doors.

I watched him shove a button and bend down and speak through a speaking tube. I heard the door click half a dozen times, letting him through, and he came in with his topcoat over his arm and with a sick and worried look on his face. It was the first I'd seen him. He was chunky and tanned and blond, and looked like the average college boy with an athletic turn of mind.

He went up the stairs as though he was going to his own funeral, and, as soon as he cleared the top, I was after him. The place was four stories high, but his appointment was on the second floor. I kept everything but my head below the hall level and watched him go down to the last door on the right-hand side, and saw him knock and then hesitate.

That was all I wanted to know. At

least right then. I went downstairs and out, and saw, two cars down from the door, a big convertible that would take six months of the Ryan income for a down payment on.

And I was standing by it when the boy came past me, almost running, and slammed into the seat of it. His face was white and he was panting, and he was so excited it took him minutes to find the starter on his own car. He took off in second gear and he was doing at least fifty by the time he reached the first intersection.

THE door at the right at the end of the hall was open, and the lights were on. The man inside was on his back, with his arms and legs thrown out as if they'd all been broken. There was a trickle of blood still dribbling from his mouth—his head was twisted to the side—and his head, from the top to below his ear, was crushed. There was a fancy ornamental ashstand by him, on its side, and it was no trick to figure what had hit him. He hadn't been dead more than five minutes, and that put it right in Peter Martin's lap.

Or so I thought.

I couldn't see where a few minutes one way or the other would make any difference to a man that dead, so I closed the door and started through the place. There was a desk in the corner, with nothing in the pigeon holes. I looked under the corners of the shabby rug and didn't find a thing. The bedroom was littered, but it looked as this was more the result of poor housekeeping than a search. I found a pile of dirty clothes, a few clean ones, in the dresser. There were two suits, both needing pressing, in the closet. Nothing in the pockets of either. The kitchen was littered with dirty dishes—mostly glasses—and there was a half-full bottle of cheap gin on the drainboard, along with three halves of lemon. The other half



had been squeezed dry, and was in the sink with a greasy frying pan and a half-dozen cockroaches that didn't even bother to scuttle away from me.

The back door from the kitchen opened on a landing and I went out on this and saw stairs zig-zagging down to the alley.

That made it look a little better for Peter Martin, anyway. He'd called the apartment from downstairs and certainly somebody had answered. Somebody had clicked the door open for him. That same somebody could have slammed the man inside over the head while Martin was on his way upstairs, and that same somebody could have left the apartment and the body for Martin to find.

It was Martin's only out, so it was at least something to consider.

I went back through the place, wiping everything I'd touched clean with a handkerchief. My prints were on file at the station because of my gun permit and my license—and I wanted to keep clear of the mess until I had a lead.

And with this done I went downstairs and up to the corner drug store and got the Central Station on the phone. I held a half-dollar in my mouth, and if a voice can be recognized with a handicap like that, I'd like to see it done.

I said: "If you'll send an officer to 417 West —th Street, to the last apartment on the second floor—the one on the right—you'll find a dead man."

"Who's calling, please?" the desk man asked. I could picture him holding the phone with one hand and signing to somebody else for a tracer on the call.

I mumbled something that could have been any name in the telephone book.

"What's that?"

I said: "There's a dead man there," and hung up the phone and went down to where my car was parked.

It took about thirty minutes to drive out to the Martin place, and I spent that time in a lot of thought.

A MAID in a frilly cap led me into what had been Martin Sr.'s library. A fine big room with three walls lined with books, and with a fireplace that was meant for use instead of decoration. George Summerville was there, as well as both the Martin kids. Both Peter Martin and Summerville had drinks in their hands, but Summerville had cut his with soda and Martin was taking his straight. In a wine glass, and straight Scotch in quantities like that certainly show a troubled mind.

I said: "Hello, Miss Martin. Hiya, Mr. Summerville."

Joan Martin said: "This is my brother Peter, Mr. Ryan. Pete, this is John Ryan—you may have heard of him."

The kid grunted and said he hadn't had that pleasure. He took his Scotch down straight and poured another before the first had time to hit bottom.

"The detective," she added.

He choked on his second drink.

Summerville said: "Won't you join us, Ryan? I just got here myself."

Both he and the girl looked worried—but they couldn't hold a patch to the boy. He was having the jitters in a big way. Summerville poured me a drink, with me telling him when, and I got half this down me before I started the business.

And then I said: "Did you kill him, Pete?"

The kid dropped his glass but it didn't break. If the rug hadn't been two inches thick, it probably would have. He tried to say something but just stuttered.

"I was up there not two minutes after you left. The guy was still bleeding. Can you make it self-defense or anything like that?"

He sat down—almost fell down—in one of the big chairs. He said: "My God! I didn't do it. He was like that when I walked in. He told me to come up and opened the outside door for me, and I walked in and found him like that. I ran





The car didn't hit him very hard, but he was a mess when they picked him up.

out. Maybe I should have stayed and called the police, but I lost my head."

"You should have called them, all right."

"I was afraid. All I could think of was that they'd say I did it, and then I'd never get in the Air Corps."

Both his sister and Summerville were shooting questions at me, but I was watch-

ing the boy. Trying to decide whether he was telling the truth.

"Who was he?"

"His name was Andrews. John Andrews."

"Why was he blackmailing you?"

"I hit him with my car."

"When?"

"About three months ago."



"Where?"

"Long Island. Out in Roslyn."

"How'd you do it? Why the pay-off?"

HE STARTED shaking all over and Summerville splashed whiskey into another wine glass and gave it to him. He needed it. He looked at the floor, any place but at his sister, and, when he spoke, his voice was so low I could hardly hear him.

"It started like this," he said. "I might as well tell you and let you arrest me and get it over with."

"I'm a private cop. I'm working for your sister, not for the town. I'm on your side, Pete, so give it to me straight."

He looked at his sister for confirmation and she nodded. Summerville said: "You'd better tell Mr. Ryan, Pete. He can do more than anybody else to help you right now."

Pete managed to get his voice up a little but he still kept staring at the floor. "I'd been playing cards. I was at Jerry Hinkle's place, on Madison. There was a man there I'd met and played with before—a man named Evans. Charley Evans. I didn't know him very well, but when I ran out of money and dropped out of the game I talked to him a little. He told me he knew of a place out in Long Island and suggested we take a run out there, and I was tired of playing in Hinkle's place and took him up on the idea."

I said: "I know Evans. Used to be a bootlegger. Then he turned to hi-jacking. Strictly a bad one."

"I didn't know him very well. Just saw him around, you know."

"Go on."

"I was broke so we drove down to your apartment, George. D'ya remember? That night about three months ago when I went up and borrowed three hundred from you? About eleven at night?"

Summerville said he remembered.

"Evans waited in the car while I went up and borrowed the money from George. Then we drove out to Roslyn and just a little past, and turned down a side road. The place was off the road in a clump of trees, and just as I turned in to it a man fell in front of the car. I hit him—I didn't have either time or room to turn. I didn't hit him very hard, but it smashed him up pretty badly in spite of that."

"Were you drunk?"

"That was it. I wasn't, but I'd had a few drinks. You know how you do when you're gambling."

I said I knew only too well.

"I didn't know what to do. I wanted to call the police and an ambulance, but I was afraid they'd charge me with drunken driving. I knew that would blank out any chance I had to make the Air Corps. Then Evans suggested we take the man to a doctor he knew right by there, so I did that. The doctor looked him over and said he'd take care of it, and I arranged to have the bills sent to me."

I went out and saw the man several times, and when he was better I gave him five hundred dollars. Your money, Sis—you remember that was the first time I'd borrowed from you."

Joan Martin said she remembered.

"Then I thought it was all over. But about two months ago this man called me and told me he wanted me to run down and see him. It was Andrews, and he was at 417 West —th Street, where he was tonight. He told me he couldn't work—that he was a nervous wreck—and so I gave him what money I had with me. He told me I'd have to give him so much a week—two hundred and fifty dollars—or he'd report me to the police as a hit-run driver and all the rest of it. I talked to Evans and he advised me to pay it."

"Why didn't you talk to me?" asked Summerville.



The boy didn't answer this but I caught the look he gave Summerville. There was no love lost between them, in spite of their relationship. I could see the boy didn't like him—could see he didn't like the idea of his sister marrying him. There was brother-in-law trouble coming up between them even before they'd reached that status.

I said: "Well, it's done now. The thing to do is try and work you out of it. Did you always drive your car to this West —th Street address?"

"Usually."

"Ever meet anybody there? I mean in the halls?"

"Why, yes."

I said: "Then, sonny, all you've got to do is sit tight and wait for the police. A car like the one you drive isn't going to go unnoticed in a neighborhood like that. Somebody's stopped and looked at your name on the registration. Somebody's going to remember seeing you in the halls—and clothes like you're wearing aren't common around there, either. And then the guy probably has your name tucked away in that place, somewhere. So just sit tight."

Miss Martin said: "What are you going to do, Mr. Ryan?"

I said: "Try to break it before the police do. That's all I *can* do."

THE first thing to do was try and find what the cops knew, and I went to the precinct station that covered the section 417 West —th Street. I happened to know Nels Jorgenson, a Homicide lieutenant, there, and knew he'd give me the dope, if I worked it right.

I caught him in and told him I was by his way and just stopped in to say hello. He might even have believed it.

He started to light the cigar I'd bought just for him, and I started it out.

"Anything new?"

He looked at me through the smoke

and asked: "In your line or mine?"

"Just making conversation, Nels."

"We got a funny one at that, Johnny. Some duck called in and told the boys at Central that they'd find a stiff in our territory. Sure enough they did. A guy named Ellis, though he was going under the name of Andrews. A guy that used to be a contortionist in a circus. A guy that's been in the accident racket so long he's worn himself out with the insurance companies. Ever hear of him?"

I said I hadn't.

"The boys are working on it now. It's some kind of a racket but they can't figure out just what."

I said it was very interesting and talked for a while longer and then left Nels. He knew more than he was telling me, but the only way I could have found out just what it was would have been to come out with the questions.

And Nels was too old a hand to take those sort of chances with.

From there I called Summerville and got him just as he got back to his apartment. I said: "I'm going calling, and you might go along. You're working with me on this, I take it."

He said he certainly was, and I picked him up clear uptown. Almost where I wanted to go.

"You're seeing somebody?" he asked.

"Charley Evans."

"Isn't that the man who touted the boy out to Long Island?"

"That's right."

He looked puzzled and I explained.

"I figure the accident was a phony," I said. "This Evans—the kid knew him as Andrews—was a professional accident victim. He got so hot he couldn't take the insurance people any longer, so he must have gone into private trade. He probably worked the same gag on a lot more people than young Peter."

"And you think Evans was with him on it?"





"Sure. Proving it's going to be something else again."

"Then possibly some other victim was the one who killed him."

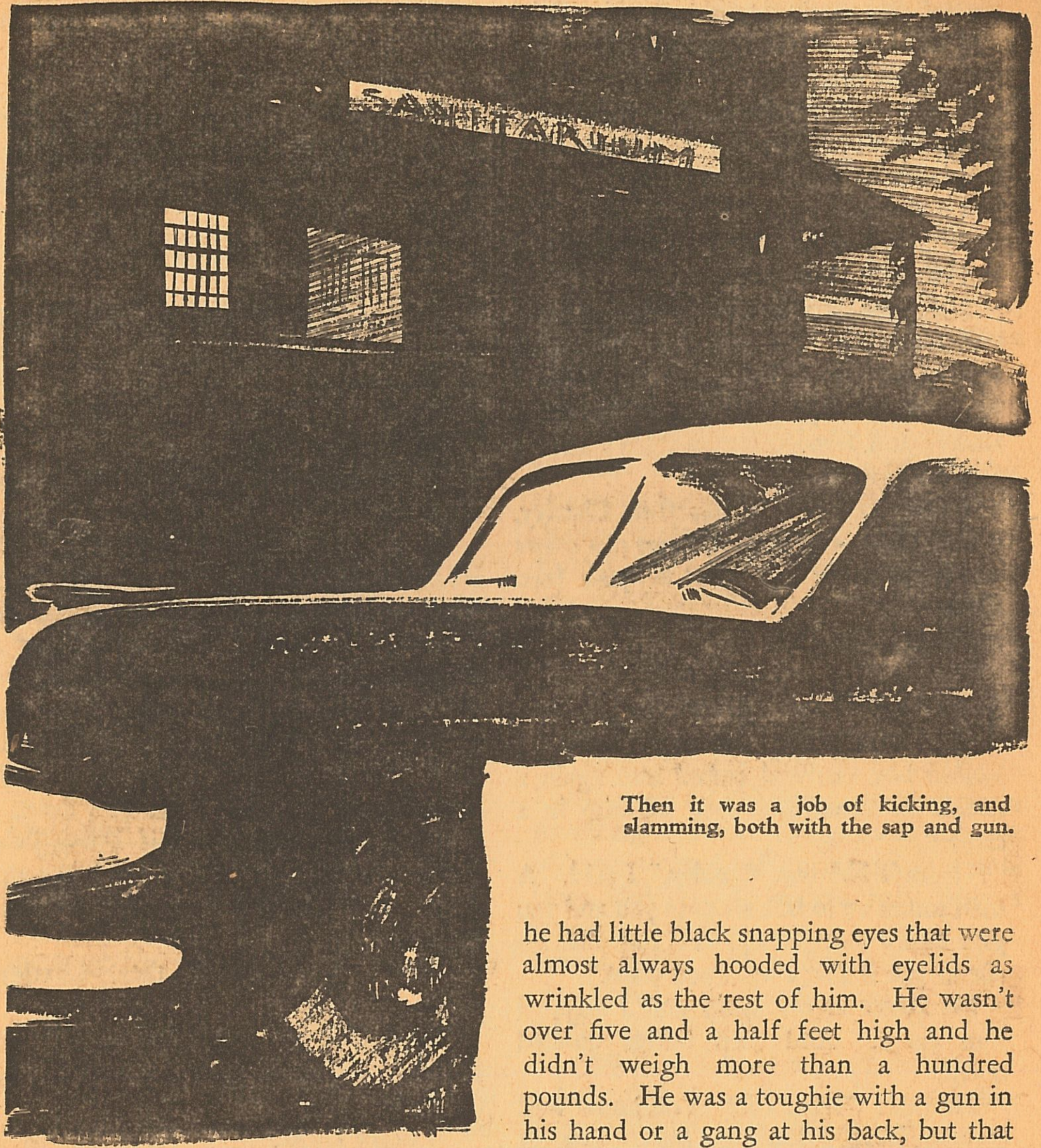
"Possibly. But if the cops put young Martin on the spot, and with the proper leg work that's what they'll do, he'll burn for it. The guy was killed just about the time he was up there."

Summerville scowled and said the boy always was unlucky. Or guilty of poor management.

**I SAID:** "Here we are. This guy's tough—let me do the talking."

He said he certainly would. He didn't act near as cocky as he ordinarily did, either. I pegged him right then as a man





Then it was a job of kicking, and slamming, both with the sap and gun.

who talked a good fight but talked himself out of it rather than in.

I rang Evans' bell and he answered the door himself. And I heard Summerville gasp as Evans' full beauty burst upon him.

Evans was an old-timer and looked the part. Between fifty and sixty and bald. He had a nose like an eagle, and the skin on his face and on the top of that bald head of his was wrinkled and blotched, the last from a bad liver, I thought, and

he had little black snapping eyes that were almost always hooded with eyelids as wrinkled as the rest of him. He wasn't over five and a half feet high and he didn't weigh more than a hundred pounds. He was a toughie with a gun in his hand or a gang at his back, but that was all.

I said: "Hello, Charley."

He just grunted and I couldn't tell whether he was scowling at me or Summerville.

"I want to talk to you."

"Well, talk. You're here."

"Inside, Charley."

"Here in the hall. I wouldn't let a private dick stink up my place."

I put a hand on his chest and shoved him back. He went, rather than fell backward. Inside, his place looked like a



second rate movie set, with too big chairs and too long couches and too many, too fancy floor lamps.

I said: "That's no way to treat company, Charley. This is Mr. Summerville. Say hello to Mr. Summerville."

He said:

"To hell with Mr. Summerville and to hell with you, you cheap—"

I slapped him and he went back and under a table. He landed on his hands and knees and stared up at me without trying to get up. He was in his shirt-sleeves and I could see he didn't have a gun on him.

"You want to talk like that, Charley, it's all right with me. Or you can crawl out from under and stand on your feet. Either way."

"Talk to you, hell."

I STARTED toward him and he scuttled back farther under the table. I hauled him out and cuffed him again a couple of times and then sat him in a chair.

"I don't like this, Charley," I said. "A man comes up to talk sense to you and you give him a piece of lip. I'll slap that lip out of you if that's what you want."

He swore at me again and I slapped him again. And then things quieted down.

He said: "What's it? You know well enough, Ryan, I don't like cops. You get me burned, just looking at you."

"What's the idea of tolling a client of mine into a fakeroo like that Long Island phony? You know the deal I mean."

"I do not."

I lifted my hand and he flinched away from me, which was what I wanted. He said hastily. "I know what you're talking about, all right, but I just happened to be along with the kid. That's all."

"Nuts."

"That's my story."

"Want to tell it to the cops?"

"You dizzy enough to call cops on me?"

"Sure."

He laughed. "Then you're also dizzy enough to keep that fool kid out of the Army. The stink that'll raise would do it and you know it."

"It's murder, now, Charley."

"Hunh!"

"The stooge. Andrews. Ellis. Whatever you call him."

"You crazy?"

"No."

"Is the guy dead?"

"As mutton. Want to talk to the cops about it?"

He suddenly began to laugh and I think he meant it. He said: "Listen, you dope. That would clear me if anything will. If I was in it—and I'm not admitting a thing, would I be fool enough to kill off the only guy that could collect on the racket? Hey? The stooge would be the only one who could collect a pay-off, wouldn't he be? Hey? If he's dead, I couldn't get a dime, and if I was in a racket like that, I'd only be in it for the dimes, and you and I and the cops all know it."

"You've got something there, Charley, at that."

"And I've got something else, Ryan. Do the cops know your boy was paying off Ellis?"

"I don't know."

"They fool around with me and maybe they might find out. Not from me—from this anonymous that's always tipping 'em off. Get what I mean?"

"Sure. Mind telling me the name of the doctor you took the guy to? That friend of yours out there that's in the racket with you?"

"Don't you know it?"

"I'm just checking. The kid told me but I want to see if you tell me the same thing."

"It's Seitz. Dr. Seitz. And he's legit



and you'll play hell proving he isn't."

"Maybe the Medical Board can," I said. "Be seeing you, Charley."

**H**E DUCKED but not in time. He ended up under the table again and the language he used was lurid. I was laughing when we went out, and Summerville was looking worried.

He said: "I don't understand that, Ryan. You deliberately antagonized the man."

"Sure."

"But why?"

"It may bring things to a head."

"But he's a vicious character if I ever saw one. It may be dangerous."

"Sure."

"I don't mean for you. But he's certainly going to hold this against Peter. He'll know that Peter told you of him."

"Sure. But Peter'll be safe enough. The first thing that's going to happen to Peter is a visit from the police. Peter will be safe in a nice cell, where Charley Evans and his boys can't touch him."

"You seem sure the police will get on Peter's track."

I said: "I know the cops. They're not the dopes that people think they are. They wouldn't be cops if they were."

Summerville thought that over and admitted I might be right. I said: "There's just one thing. They'll pick him up, all right, but they may hold him on some slighter charge than suspicion of murder. They may hold him on something bailable. If they do, you leave him in. Don't bail him out and don't let his sister bail him out."

"I'd have a hard time stopping her."

"Be a man, not a mouse."

It took him a minute to decide not to get sore at the crack, but he finally made up his mind. He laughed and said: "I see you don't know Miss Martin very well. She does pretty well as she pleases."

"If she wants to keep little brother

safe, she'll leave him in jail," I said. "Here we are at a cab stand. I'm going to pick up my car and drive out to Long Island. You tell Miss Martin that under no circumstances is she to bail the kid out. I've started dynamite and I don't want the wrong party in the blast."

"I hope you know what you're doing, Ryan," he said, sounding doubtful.

I told him not to worry and climbed in a cab and gave the driver the name of the garage my car was in. I didn't know exactly what I was starting any more than Summerville did, and I was as worried as he was. But it was a case of smoking somebody out in the open before the police had a chance to build up a solid case against the Martin boy — and that wouldn't take them long.

All I wanted to do was get things moving.

**I** DIDN'T find where Dr. Seitz was located until the third filling station in Roslyn gave me the dope, and that was a tip-off right there. The guy was only out of town a couple of miles, and in a little place like that he should have been a landmark. I drove out an unpaved road, turned to the right and then to the left, as directed, and finally came to a sign reading QUIET PLEASE—HOSPITAL. The place was right around the bend—a big white house that looked more like a country home than the sanitarium it advertised itself as being. Sure enough, the sign in front was lettered THE SEITZ REST HOME FOR CONVALESCENTS.

It was a rambling sort of thing and I had to admit it looked restful. A slope of lawn that ran to the road, dotted with Norway pine and lilac bushes. Soft lights behind Venetian blinds. Some way of lighting the grounds directly around the house from under the eaves, but in a soft and shaded way not much stronger than moonlight.

I parked in front and sat in the car a



moment, just looking around, and then a man came to the side of the car and shoved a gun in my face.

"You'll be Ryan," he said.

"That's right. This the way people usually get admitted to the sanitarium?"

He laughed but he didn't sound at all funny. "Special, just for you," he said. "Hey, Mike."

Mike came from around the corner of the house. He was a tall thin man and he'd had a broken nose at some time that hadn't been set right. He also had a sap in his hand.

"This the guy?" he asked.

"This is him."

"I see Evans has been busy on the phone."

"Take his gun," the first man said.

Mike crawled in with me and took it. I didn't do a thing except look at the gun the first man still showed me.

Then he said: "Get out of the car."

It happened then. I got out and walked into the sap and went down. I got the side of the gun across my face when I started to get up, so I stayed down that time. Then they started kicking me and slamming me with both the gun and the sap—and the last thing I remember was the one called Mike jumping up and down on my left hand, which in some way I'd thrown out to the side.

I woke up in the back of a farmer's pick-up truck just as we stopped in front of the Roslyn hospital.

They held me for three days in spite of anything I could do. The Roslyn chief spent most of his time sitting by the bed asking me questions, in between the times the doctor was putting me together again. I'd been picked up in the road alongside my car, at least a mile from the sanitarium. The car hadn't been hurt nor had I been robbed. Even my gun was back in its clip inside my coat. The chief wanted me to swear out a complaint against the people responsible for

the outrage. I wouldn't. The doctor wanted me to stay and let him make sure the slight concussion I had was coming along all right, and I couldn't see that.

My hand wasn't broken, but it was swollen all out of place. It had been on soft turf during the stamping and that had saved the bones. Both my eyes were black clear down to below the cheekbones, but the dividing line wasn't clear because both cheekbones were so bruised. I had four teeth out in front and they'd come out the hard way. They'd broken off level with the gums and the doctor had to get a dentist to come in and pull the roots. My lips were swollen so I had trouble in opening my mouth, much less talk—and my throat and mouth were so sore that all I could eat was soup.

I had two broken ribs on my left side and three on the right, but my sides weren't as sore as my stomach. They'd really booted me down there—I was black and blue all over, and the medico couldn't understand why I hadn't internal injuries. He seemed almost disappointed that I didn't have.

I managed to say: "I'm the same guy, Doc, that the Army turned down. They said I was too old to fight—that I couldn't take it."

He went away, shaking his head and saying, "My God," to himself, over and over again.

**B**UT they turned me loose on the fourth day and the doctor got a local boy to drive me in town in my own car. I went up to the apartment and sent him after a quart of whiskey before I paid him for the trip and sent him back to Roslyn. And then I called up a rubber I happened to know that was off shift in a Turkish bath and then got the Martin house and Joan.

I said: "This is John Ryan, Miss Martin."

"I'm surprised you'd bother to call me," she said.



Cuddling the little derringer in my palm, we bandaged the whole thing.



"What's the matter?"

"Don't you know?"

"I do not."

"Can I believe that, Mr. Ryan?"

That made me sore. I said: "Listen,

sister. You may have all the dough in the world but I still don't have to lie to you about one thing. You can believe it or not."

She sounded a little friendlier. "What



makes you talk that way? You don't sound normal."

I was still sore. I said: "I had four teeth kicked out, lady. Try it sometime and see how *you* talk."

"Oh, Mr. Ryan! Then you really didn't know."

"Know what?"

"It's Peter. He's in the hospital. He may not live—he may not even regain consciousness."

"What happened to him?"

"Why, the police arrested him. They charged him with conspiracy to defeat justice and with withholding information vital to the police, or some legal way they have of saying what that means. They didn't accuse him of murder, though I think they were all ready to do that when it happened."

"When *what* happened?"

"I bailed him out, Mr. Ryan, or had a bail bond man do it, rather, and Peter was assaulted on his way to the cab stand, just down the street from the police station. His skull is fractured and he has internal injuries and the doctors say it's an even chance whether he lives or not."

"Anything in the papers?"

"Not as yet. George, Mr. Summerville, says he thinks they are trying to complete the case against Peter before they break it."

I said: "Maybe I can break it before they do, even now. I'll try, anyway."

"It seems so unimportant. I'm almost crazy. Don't you realize Peter may not live?"

I said: "Listen, Miss Martin, and get hold of yourself. If he lives and the thing breaks in the papers, he's lost his chance for the Air Corps. If he gets over this, that's going to be the most important thing in his life. So don't lose your head. Where's Summerville?"

"He'll be in this evening. I'm going to the hospital now. Would you like me to stop at your office and see you?"

"You wouldn't like the sight," I told her, and hung up and opened the door for Vladimir Volenski. Volenski was the rubber from the Turkish baths.

**V**LADIMIR was a good guy and he did the best he could, but I didn't expect too much and I didn't get it. He worked me over as easily as he could and I finally got so I could move without feeling as if I'd break in pieces. He took the tape from around me—that Roslyn doctor had me fixed up like a mummy—and he held my ribs in place with lighter wraps.

I could twist a little, even if it hurt like Billy Blazes. He dressed me; I helped but very little, and then we got down to the main piece of business.

I've got a little gun I'd always wanted to try, and I dug it out of the little collection I've got in a wall case. A .41 Remington derringer with one stubby barrel over the other. Just two shots, but that heavy flat-nosed .41 slug has wallop up at close quarters. It's strictly a bar-room gun, made for shooting at card table distance, but the only modern gun that compares with it in smallness is the little .25 Colt automatic and that hasn't the punch I knew I'd need if I needed a gun at all.

Of course the gun hasn't been made for a good many years, but that was no reason for my not giving it a try.

Vladimir ripped up a sheet and made a sling for my bad left hand. He wrapped bandages around it, after I'd cuddled the loaded little derringer into the palm, even closing the bandages around the ends of my fingers. The bandages would catch fire if I had to shoot but I thought I'd rather have a burned hand than a bullet in the middle.

That was another reason I picked the derringer, for that matter. An automatic might jam being used in wraps like that. The slide could be caught and an ejected



shell could jam the action because of not being thrown clear.

I tucked another gun in my waistband—a .38 Police Positive, but I knew fairly well I'd not have a chance to use it.

The trouble I was going to run up against was too smart trouble ever to let me get away with a gun in plain sight or a hide-out gun in the usual hidey spot. The bandage trick was an old one—but it was so old I thought it might get by with the younger generation where it wouldn't with an old head.

It was worth trying, anyway.

**WE** TOOK my own car and Vladimir left me off in front of Evans' apartment house. I said: "Now look, Russky. If you hear any shooting, you get the cops in a hurry. Speed it up. If I don't come out in half an hour, you get 'em. Understand?"

He said: "You are my friend, Johnny. It is not right that you should fight when you are injured."

"I'll get a lunch while the other guy gets a meal," I told him. "Got that straight about getting the cops?"

"It is understood," he told me. Vladimir's big—well over two hundred—and he looks like he's a barrel of fat, but he's all muscle under that thin layer of suet. A blank red face—skimpy blond hair and with no eyebrows at all, and with hands like the hams that used to be heard about. I climbed out of the car and went inside, and as I looked back over my shoulder I could see him still sitting there, watching me with a puzzled frown on his broad face.

I'd known him for years and knew I could depend on him.

And in the shape I was in I needed somebody like that.

Charley Evans might have been waiting for me. He opened the door almost before I had my hand down after rapping. He stepped aside and waved and

said: "Why, come right in," and I saw the guy from Long Island, the one called Mike, standing back of him and pointing a gun my way.

I said: "The last time I saw you, Mister, you were using a sap. It's a gun now, eh?"

He nodded and grinned at me. He had a broken tooth right in front, and there was a gap, on the side where a couple more were missing.

There were three more men in the room beside Evans and Mike. One was Mike's pal—the other one of the two who'd worked me over in Long Island. The one who'd had the gun that time. One of the other two was of the same stripe—just a hoodlum—but the third man was short and weazened and looked as though he'd rather be anywhere but where he was.

I said: "You'd be Dr. Seitz."

He nodded once before he thought.

"You boys all together here trying to figure somebody to take the place of Andrews, or Ellis, or whatever you called him?" I asked. "You can't work that accident gag without a guy to take the phony fall, can you? Why don't you try and get an India rubber man from some carney? There's a guy that should be able to do tricks for you."

Mike moved to the side and nodded, and his partner took my .38 from my waistband. He also patted me all over for a hide-out gun, and I talked fast so they wouldn't look over my bandaged hand.

I said: "Or are you going to let the racket die down for awhile?"

Evans said. "Die down, hell! It's good for five grand a week, with enough suckers paying off, and that's too good money to lose over a dope like you butting in. So you're on the way out. I've had cops up here asking about Ellis. I've had cops up here asking me about framing the Martin kid. I've had merry Ned raised with me over this business, and on top of



that I took a cuffing around from you that I won't take from any man in the world. You're on your way out, Ryan.

"The next time the cops come up here, they'll be here to take your body out. I killed you in self-defense, and I've got four witnesses to prove it. They won't believe the story but they'll swallow it because they'll have to. You'll shoot at me and miss, and there'll be a slug in the wall from your own gun to prove it. I won't miss, and there'll be a slug in you that'll prove that, too. Now what?"

I said: "You're a fool, Charley. You'll never get away with it. If the Martin kid dies, his sister will swear out a complaint against you for murder. Killing me will make it that much stronger. I wouldn't have come up here if I hadn't figured that out."

**H**E LAUGHED. He said: "You dope! If I'd wanted the kid beat up, the way he was, I'd have waited. I wouldn't have picked him half a block from the station, right after he was released on bail. I didn't even know he'd been pinched, Ryan, much less know he'd be at that precinct station at that time and out on bail. You don't use your head."

I swung so that my bandaged hand was bearing his way. I said: "That's only part of it. I was hired to clear the kid on the phony accident thing and that's what I'm doing. It'll take an accountant to tell who's responsible for the Martin kid being in the hospital now, if you know what I mean."

"Then you figured it out?"

"Sure."

He said: "Too bad you'll never have a chance to tell anybody about it. Gimme that gun out of the drawer, Sully."

The one who'd taken my gun handed Evans a .45 Army automatic. He said: "We work it like this. Sully, you stand alongside of Ryan. You turn his gun

loose into the wall, here by me. I'll blast him at the same time."

Sully stood at my side and Evans snicked the safety off on the big automatic. I tipped my hand in the bandage, so the bore of the derringer centered on his belt buckle, as near as I could line it. Out of the corner of my eye I could see Sully raise my gun—could see Dr. Seitz crouch down in his chair and put his hands over his ears. And I could see Mike and the other thug lean forward, grinning.

And then, from the hallway, came: "I would not be hasty, gentlemen."

It was Vladimir. He'd sneaked a .357 Magnum out of my gun case, and that big gun looked like a cap pistol in his big hand. He took up most of the hallway, and I never was so glad to see anybody in my life as I was to see that big hulk.

Mike still had a gun in his hand, as did Sully and Charley Evans. Vladimir had his eyes on Mike and Sully and wasn't watching Evans. I saw Evans tip up his automatic, turning so it lined on Vladimir, and I turned loose the derringer at that ten-foot range. And that took Evans off his feet, blowing him sideways into the wall—and it also opened the ball.

Mike lifted his gun and Vladimir shot at him and missed. A revolver, and particularly one as big as that Magnum, isn't an easy gun to shoot, and Vladimir had little experience. Mike shot once and I saw Vladimir sag, and then I gave Mike the second barrel of the derringer. The little gun had jumped out of my hand when I'd shot Evans, and I didn't have it solid in my hand on that second shot—and probably because of that I hit Mike in the haunch, rather than in the belly.

The result was as successful; though. That big flat-nosed slug broke his leg at the same time it knocked it out from under him, and when he went down, he dropped his gun.

That left Sully, and he and Vladimir



were trading shots. Vladimir jerked again and I knew Sully had got to him but Vladimir won on the exchange. He caught Sully in the teeth and the Magnum load went right on through, taking part of the back of Sully's head with it.

I picked up my own gun—the .38—when Sully dropped it, and started ripping the bandages away from my left hand. They weren't burning but they were smoldering, and there's no pain in the world just like a burn.

Then there was a thin little pop—it sounded thin at least, after the slamming noise the big guns had made, and something tapped me lightly high on my left shoulder. Vladimir was falling, going down in an easy way, as I turned and saw Dr. Seitz.

He had a little .22, a pearl-handled woman's gun, and he was holding it in both hands and trying for another crack at me. He was shaking so that he was pointing it all over the room, rather than in my direction, and I didn't bother to turn loose at him with the .38.

Instead I bopped him along the jaw with the barrel of it and looked around for the other hoodlum.

This one was standing against the wall with his hands up almost to the ceiling. If he'd been a foot taller, he'd have reached it.

He said: "Not me, Mister! Not me! I'm out of it."

I said: "Maybe out of the shooting but not out of jail. You won't be out of that for a long time."

I took time out before calling the cops to look Vladimir over, and found he'd taken one through the flashy part of the thigh and another right under his left collarbone. Neither slug had touched a bone and so there was nothing to worry about.

I told him this and he grinned and said: "You and I are the good friends, eh, Mr. Ryan?"

I said: "We're pals, Russky. Now I'm going to get the cops and an ambulance and the dead wagon."

MISS JOAN MARTIN wasn't too hard to convince. And also she was happy because the kid brother had regained consciousness and the doctors had jumped his chances of getting well. He was about ninety-ten then, with the big odds his way. We were telling each other what good news that was when George Summerville followed the maid into the library.

He looked at me in a startled way and said: "Why—ugh—I thought that you'd dropped the case, Mr. Ryan. After all, we've seen nothing of you since Peter was beaten and sent to the hospital."

"That's right," I said. "I was beaten a bit myself, but I can't lay that on you. I'm just accusing you of having the job done on Peter, after you bailed him out."

"Are you crazy?"

"Oh no. I told you to let him stay in jail, didn't I?"

"Why, yes. And, Joan, if you'll remember, I told you the same thing."

"But you didn't insist on it and you didn't tell Miss Martin I'd made a particular point of it."

He said stiffly: "I don't have to answer to you for my actions, Mr. Ryan. Joan, do I understand that you are taking stock in this man's ridiculous charges?"

The girl looked at him as though he were a stranger. She said: "Your ring is on the table, George. Right by you. I want to tell you that I am having an accountant start checking the books on the Martin estate immediately. I think that answers everything."

He said: "But Joan! Please!"

I said: "You fool! You've been looting the estate and you knew it would come out, when Peter turned twenty-one and demanded an accounting. He hates your guts and you know it and he'd slam it on



you if he caught the shortage. If you could get him out of the way, either on a murder charge or by killing him, you'd have married Miss Martin and be in the clear. You followed him and found out about the accident jam he was in. You killed that contortionist after Peter was on his way up to the guy's room, and you went down those backstairs and left the kid to find the body and to take the rap. When that didn't work, you hired a couple of thugs to beat him to death, thinking it would be blamed on Charley Evans. It backfired. You're it."

"Joan!"

"I'm having the books checked in the morning, George."

I didn't expect gun play but I was watching for it. Instead of that he reached in his handkerchief pocket and hauled out the handkerchief that matched his socks and tie. He mopped his face and then went forward on his face—and I rolled him over and got a whiff of what he'd taken.

It was cyanide, of course. Just about the only thing that would get him that fast. He'd had it in a little glass tube and he'd crunched the tube so it cut his lips and mouth and gave the poison a chance to hit the bloodstream then and there.

I said: "He's gone, Miss Martin."

I'd known she had a temper but I hadn't thought she was as cold-blooded as she was. She only said:

"He'd have died anyway, in the chair. This saves the State a lot of unnecessary bother."

And then I changed my mind about her being cold-blooded. She went over in a faint before I could make a move to catch her.

THE doctor, Seitz, got five to ten on a fraud charge, along with one for criminal practice. The hoodlum with him—the one that hadn't joined in the gun fight

in Evans' apartment, got three to five, also on the fraud charge. The girl and Peter got back what Summerville had looted the estate for—a little matter of two hundred thousand dollars plus—this from the bonding company over Summerville.

And I got my fee and a thousand-dollar bonus, as well as the Roslyn hospital bill and other minor expenses, but I'd rather expected that.

The big winner was Vladimir. He waved the thousand-dollar check Miss Martin had given him and got so excited he could hardly talk.

"With this, my friend Johnny," he told me, "I shall return to Russia. I have a way of travel routed out. It is a long way but I shall arrive. There is yet the time to fight for Russia and I, Vladimir, will be there in time."

I said: "Swell stuff, Russky."

Miss Martin looked puzzled and Peter Martin grinned. We were in his room, both Vladimir and I still patched up but well on the way to recovery.

Miss Martin said: "But, Mr. Volenski. I understood you left Russia to come to this country because you were not happy there. Isn't that correct?"

"But yes, Miss. But that was before my Russia was in war. Now it is different. I feel a duty—as your brother feels a duty to fight for your own country. Is it not clear?"

Miss Martin said she thought she understood, but there was no question in my mind about her little brother knowing how the big guy felt.

If he hadn't had the same notion, he'd never have gotten himself in the mess he had.

And if I hadn't thought much the same way I'd never have worked so hard to keep his record clear so he could make it in the Air Corps.

It was once I was working for more than money.



# SILLY STATUTES OF THE STATES



NOT long ago the legislature in Nebraska received a horrible shock. Considering amendments to the marriage laws of the cornflower state, the law-making body discovered to its consternation that in 1937 a law was enacted depriving Justices of the Peace and clergymen of the right to perform marriages.

A quandary? Maybe you're in it, brother, because since the 1937 law was enacted, judges and clergymen have been going right on marrying people. Consequently, the validity of some 175,000 marriages performed since 1937 is being questioned. The Attorney-General is expected to render a ruling on the subject most any day now.

But, you ask, how did so silly a statute even get on the books? That, friends, is something nobody seems able to answer; any more than can be answered a great many of the looney laws on the books. They stay there from oversight, from bull-headedness, and from sheer deviltry. As a matter of fact, someone once figured out that these crazy statutes fall into three classes: the foolish, the absurd, and the preposterous.

For example, in Kansas there's a law not yet wiped off the books which regulates the procedure when two trains meet at a crossing. "When two trains approach each other," the law maintains, "they shall both come to a full stop and neither shall start up again till the other has passed."

If the engineers had ever stopped to figure that one out, both the cab boys would have wound up in straitjackets!

Think that's silly? Only a short time ago, an assemblyman in the New

York State legislature introduced a bill that wins this month asbestos kayak, so that the guy can ride on the hot water he's probably in now.

This bill intends to curb the operators of caterpillar tractors from going on reckless driving sprees. It provides that before any operator of such a tractor attempts to make a crossing over railroad tracks he must first notify the superintendent of the railroad at what points he intends to make such crossing. Warning must be in writing and delivered to the superintendent or his agent twenty-four hours before the intended invasion! It is hoped the ittie bitty twactor won't frighten the gweat big twain.

Some of the screwiest laws have involved animals and foodstuffs.

Let's take Montana where, if vacationing, you decide you'd like a fur-bearing animal for a pet. You can have one for nothing, the law states, by simply tattooing your name on it. (Quick, Watson, the needle!)

In Kansas (boy, what fun they have out there!) it is considered a breach of law to have any exhibition which consists of "eating or pretending to eat, snakes, lizards, scorpions, centipedes, tarantulas, or other reptiles."

However, it remains for Pennsylvania to take care of the digestion. In the Keystone state there is a law which requires that restaurants be equipped with stretchers and wheelchairs! After all, nobody knows when a gas attack will strike. And, incidentally, if you don't like cheese, you should stay out of Wisconsin. There's a law there which states "All boarding houses, clubs, hotels, restaurants must serve with every meal sold at twenty-five

(Continued on page 85)



*A cabin-camp near a war factory is a good set-up for a murder jackpot—especially with jealousy. Jim found that out when one girl was murdered and his own wife disappeared. His first job was to find her . . .*



SO IT was eight in the morning and the birds were singing their heads off. I drove south on San Fernando Road, keeping my car windows open so I could soak up all the California sunshine there was in sight. A guy working all night putting instruments in war-plane panels don't get enough of them vitamins the sun's got. I was driving straight into a murder jackpot but all I could think about was sleep and if I'd get a glimpse of Ruth.

She's my wife and one of the best

welder's in the game, considering her twelve weeks' training. I hadn't seen her in over a week and that ain't right for a young couple married less than a year. But she worked the four to midnight and I had the swing shift. Figure the time we was sleeping and it adds up to only a glimpse now and then, or maybe a whirl at the bowling alleys when we wasn't too tired.

I was sure I'd killed him,  
he fell so limp and still.





# MURDER'S NOT RATIONED

By **LEE E. WELLS**



I drove at a pretty fast clip through Burbank and Glendale and at last I saw the railroad tracks. It wasn't far now to the auto camp I called "Home Sweet Home." There was a time when auto camps was strictly for the rubbernecks, but not any more. In the Overland, where I lived, there wasn't a cabin any more but what was the legal address of a defense worker or some one in essential industry.

The Dutch Bakery and Cafe at Fletcher Drive was a welcome sight. Just around another curve or two and there I'd be. I caught the traffic light on the change and gunned forward. In another couple of minutes, I'd be there. I held out my hand to signal the turn and pulled into the main drive of the camp.

The office door opened and Pop Scanlon yelled at me. "Jim! Jim Wayman!"

I braked and leaned out the door as Pop came alongside. I never did know where he got that name, Pop. He was right at forty and no older. Maybe it was because he took a personal interest in all his tenants, smoked a pipe, and gave out with good advice at the drop of a hat. But he was a pretty good-looking duck, with a thick shock of black hair, thin lips that was always smiling and a placid, drawling way of talking.

Right now his black eyes looked sleepy and he yawned considerably when he crossed the gravel. "Ruth says you're to get lamb chops for tonight. Her shift's



been changed to the same as yours and she wants to celebrate."

That was news! I must have been grinning all over my ugly pan, for Pop Scanlon looked thoughtful. "Now, Jim, you don't want to celebrate too heavy. You get a hangover, or lose sleep, and you can't do good work. You gotta remember that's what the Axis want you to do."

I grinned wider and made a derisive motion with my hand, all blackened up with the rubber insulation off wiring. "I won't, Pop. Now I am a married man!"

A TRUCK swung in behind me and the driver came down hard on the horn. I looked through the rear-vision mirror and saw it was Charley Oakes. Me and that guy snarled well together and he was just letting the poison out of his system right now. He drove his own truck, contracted to a defense plant.

I scowled and meshed gears. Our cabin was the second from the end of the row and not far from the wire fence and the railroad tracks that was the main Santa Fe line into Los Angeles. I had to do some backing and shifting to swing the car into position to park it between my cabin and the next one. Oakes waited and laid on the horn again.

That burnt me up. I opened the door, scrambled out and went over to the red truck. Charley Oakes was looking tough and nasty and he had a face that could. It was wide, the forehead just a trifle low. He'd been a pug sometime way back and his nose had the mark of the trade. He had a dirty, broken-billed cap pulled low over his eyes.

I put my foot on the greasy running board and scowled right back. "Your horn's okay, now try your lights. You trying to wake up all of L. A.?"

His green eyes sparked. "I want you to get that rattletrap out of the road." His voice needed oiling and it was one

of the unpleasant things about him.

I dropped my foot to the ground again. "Make less noise and keep your pants on. A guy's got to work, I guess."

Charley's lips got that sneering grin he usually wore. "Sure you were working? Sure you wasn't stepping out?"

I'd turned and was going back to my car. That crack brought me whirling around, plenty burning. "Who'd I step out with? My wife's sleeping right now."

Charley made a bird and his eyes got nasty. "How about Veda? She ain't home yet."

My face got hot. Veda was Charley's wife, one of those wenches who figure they're irresistible and often are. When Ruth and me had first moved to the Overland, Veda had gone to work on me. But it hadn't worked and I gave her the brush-off.

But Veda was a persistent gal and she'd never admit a failure. She'd kept at it and with any other wife but Ruth, I'd have had trouble. But I kept brushing off.

I came back to the truck. "Look, Charley, I ain't seen Veda for a month. I don't want to see her. Keep your cracks to yourself."

Charley's face got ugly and he opened the door. He stepped out of the truck, all six feet of him and he had a heavy lug wrench in his hand. We were just about evenly matched except that I'm skinnier and didn't have the muscle bulges on my arms and shoulders like him.

Charley hefted the wrench suggestively. "You been making passes," he said, cold as an Eskimo's nose, "and I don't like it. I been wanting to change the shape of your face."

I didn't like the looks of that wrench but I was mad as hell. "No time like now," I said and waited.

Charley's green eyes bored at me, and then they signaled his move. I was ducking before he started. The wrench came



around in a barrel-house swing that whistled just over my head. I bored in and caught him a one-two in his stomach. Hell, even that was padded with muscles! My fists bounced back like I'd hit rubber. He was getting set to swing again and I shifted to his face.

I caught him alongside the jaw and it staggered him. He started back-pedaling and I kept coming at him. If that wrench connected with my skull, I'd be building pursuit planes for the heavenly host.

We were making plenty of noise and I heard a cabin door open. Mrs. Macker's loud scream sounded like a file on a bathtub. I had Charley against the truck and I was trying to keep him plastered there with punching blows at his nose, eyes, and mouth. Up to now I kept him too busy defending himself to get in any damage to me.

**D**IMLY I heard running steps on the gravel. Pop Scanlon shoved in between us. He was pretty hefty and right now he was mad. A sweep of his arm sent me staggering back and he twisted the wrench from Charley's hand before the trucker knew what was happening.

He stepped back, breathing deep. "Break it up! There's people sleeping. Want to give the camp a black eye?"

I shook my head and glowered at Charley. "No, but I'll hand him one. A guy's got a right to swing his car around and park it, I guess."

Pop Scanlon turned to Charley Oakes and Pop looked pretty mad. "Get in your truck and calm down. You pull another stunt like this and you can find another place to live."

Oakes shrugged his big shoulders and talked tough. "It might be a good idea at that." He climbed in the truck, though, and stayed there until I got the crate in between the cabins. Pop had used a real threat, as crowded as Los Angeles is.

I felt pretty embarrassed since Mrs. Macker, Lil Pacetti, and a bunch of others were standing in the cabin doors watching us. Ruth hadn't come out and I hoped the trouble wouldn't wake her.

At last Charley rolled the truck down the drive toward the big empty space by the opening laundry room. As he passed, he stuck his head out the door and spat toward me. His voice was surly. "The crack about Veda goes. I'm telling you, lay off."

I turned, my fists doubled. Then I thought what's the use. The guy was going to figure that way anyhow and, so long as Ruth knew I was having nothing to do with Veda, it was all right. I slipped the key in the lock and went inside.

We had rented the place furnished but in the time we had been here, Ruth had bought a lot of little knick-knacks of her own that made the place seem strictly the Waymans'. Our little living room was as neat as a pin, all cheery with flowered chintz curtains and slip covers. I crossed it to the kitchenette, shiny and clean, and into the dining room. Off from it was three doors, one leading to the shower and bath, the other two to our bedrooms.

Her door was closed and I stood before it for a few minutes. I sort of wanted to go inside and kiss her and run my fingers through her thick brown hair. She'd be sleepy and star-eyed—I turned away abruptly. She needed rest and after tonight we'd be together a lot anyway.

I went to my own room and got ready for bed. I stuck my "Defense Worker Sleeping" up into the window and stuck cotton in my ears. I sat on the edge of the bed, smoking a last cigarette and looking at the sunshine streaming in the window. I sighed and pulled the blinders over my eyes and laid down.

I remembered thinking Ruth was talking about lamb steaks and all we could get in L. A. right now was weinies. Still





dogs could make a feast if a guy really had something to celebrate. Me'n Ruth—and I was sound asleep.

There's no telling how long I'd been asleep. The first thing I was conscious

of was that someone was knocking on the front door. I twisted over and tried to go to sleep again. The knocking came again.

I turned some more. Ruth ought to be

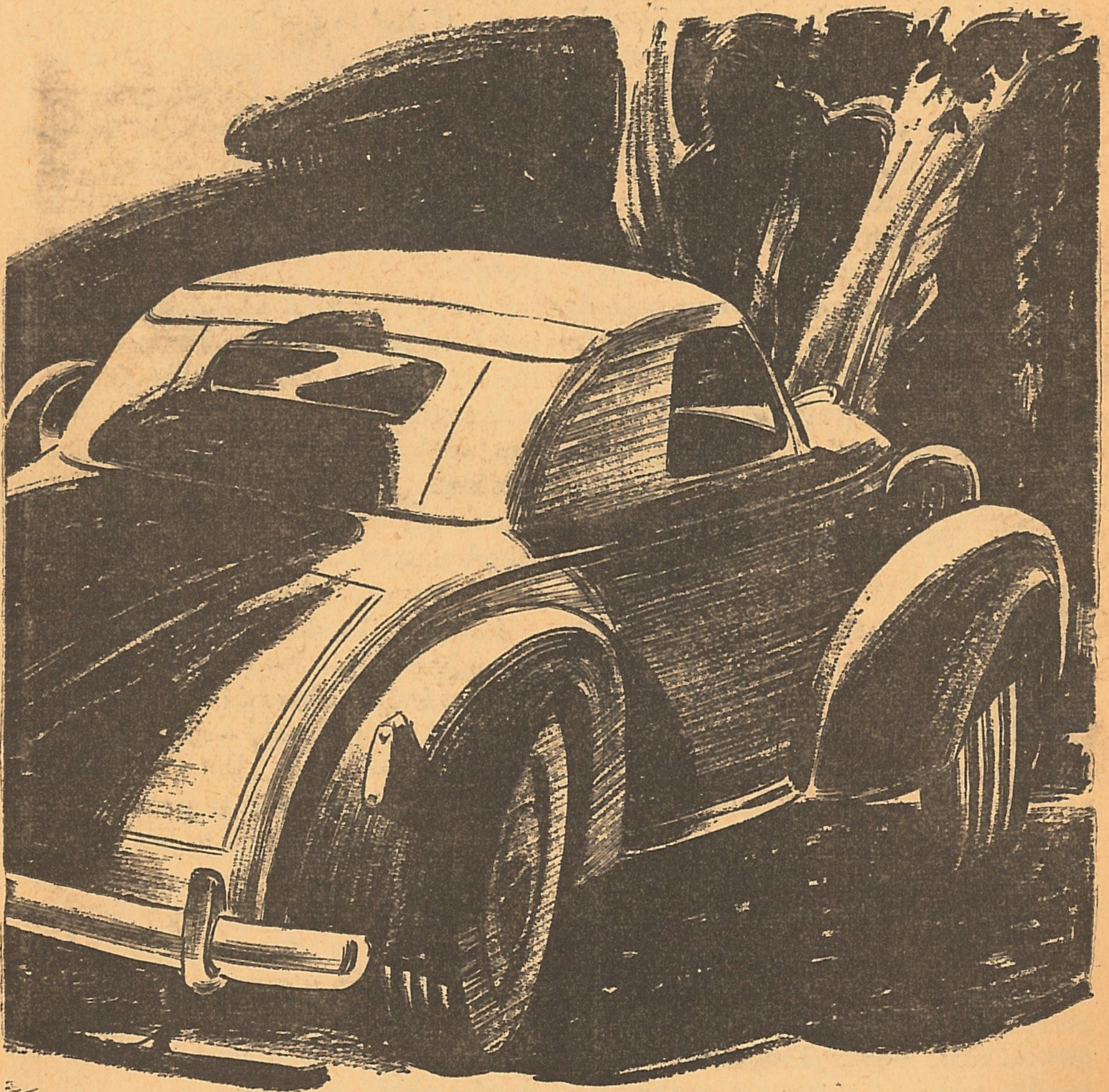


answering the door. It wasn't like her to let anyone make noises around the place of a daytime. The guy knocked again. I swore under my breath and sat up, untying the blinders. I blinked against the sunlight and got out of bed.

Ruth's door was still closed, I shuffled through the kitchenette to the front room, and across it to the door. I saw a guy turn away and go toward the next cabin

and I spied the stack of magazines he carried under his arm. Magazine subscription man! I was a little mad by then.

I turned away and yawned back to my room. I fumbled for cigarettes and found I had an empty pack. That helped the temper considerably and it was worse when I pawed through everything and couldn't find any. By then I was wide



The wrench just whistled  
over my head. Then  
I bored in.

awake and grouchy and wanted a smoke in the worst way. There was nothing to do but get one from Ruth.

So outside I went again and tapped lightly on her door. She didn't answer.



I figured she must be dog tired, for usually the least little sound wakes her. I gently turned the knob and slipped inside.

The blinds were down and the room was dark. I could see the bed and the mound Ruth's body made under the bedclothes. I slipped to the dresser and got a cigarette pack. I was about to slip out when I decided to slip Ruth a kiss anyway.

I was barefooted but I still tiptoed over to the bed. I gently pulled the covers down from her head. Right then I froze. I was looking at red hair! I must have looked awful stupid, just standing there and staring. Then I got a fresh grip on myself and the covers and pulled them back.

It was Veda Oakes. My eyes bulged out in numbing shock. There was Veda, in my wife's bed, and the blue marks were still on her white throat where someone had choked her!

## CHAPTER II

### Murder Will Out



ROTHER, that had me! I could feel my throat getting dry and it was hard to swallow. My unlighted cigarette dangled from my slack lips and I guess my eyes were as big as billiard balls and just about as blank. My long arms hung slack and I could feel a band of fear tightening around my chest.

My first thought was what Charley Oakes would say. A guy thinks of funny things at times like that. Not the important things like where Ruth might be, or who killed Veda. That didn't register at all at first. I just stood there thinking of the fight Charley and me had just had over this dead woman before me.

Then I began to get over the shock. I found that my hands were trembling and I had to put the covers back up over

her. I began to fear for Ruth and wonder where she was. I worked myself into a dithering state where I couldn't think clearly at all.

I backed from the room and closed the door. I prowled over the rest of the cabin. I knew Ruth wasn't there but I had to look. My nerves wouldn't let me do anything else.

At last I got some semblance of reasoning power back and I returned to my own room. I had to find Ruth and find her before I reported the body to the police, or someone found it. I began to fear that maybe Ruth had—I shoved that thought out of my mind right quick. Ruth couldn't do such a thing. I knew it, but who else would? That's what had me worried.

I fumbled around a lot dressing but at last I made it. I was wide awake and thinking fast. I made sure the side door to the cabin was tight locked and then I went to the front room. I looked out the window. Everything was peaceful and I could see Mrs. Macker working at her laundry across the court. I took a deep breath and stepped outside.

I locked the door and turned away. I caught Mrs. Macker's broad face turned my way and her shrewd blue eyes studied me and I knew the old windbag was getting ready to pump. She wanted to get some scandalous details to smack her lips over. I turned my back to her and hurried away.

Pop Scanlon was standing in the doorway of his cabin-office and he looked surprised when he saw me. He raised his hand and whistled. "You get your sleep quick, Jim. Was someone making too much noise?"

He was frowning. Pop sure looked after his tenants, I'll say that for him. I tried to keep my voice steady and natural. "No, I just got up to buy them groceries Ruth wanted."



Pop gave me a searching look and then smiled. "Lamb steaks, too?"

"Sure," I said, backing off, "lamb steaks and—and the trimmings."

Pop rocked back and forth on his heels, smiling wide. "You'll have to run all over town, Jim. I'd take the car."

He was looking right at me. I wanted to get out of there quick and get some line on Ruth, but I couldn't let Pop or anyone else see I was blowing my top with anxiety. I shrugged and walked back to the cabin and my car. I backed it around. Charley Oakes' red truck wasn't beside his cabin and I had another sinking feeling. He was out hunting for his wife and she was in my cabin, dead as a Jap on Guadalcanal.

I PULLED out of the camp and onto San Fernando Road. I cut up toward Fletcher Drive and I guess I broke the speed record getting to the drug store up there and the pay telephone. I only half parked and ran inside, plunging into the telephone booth. I fumbled around for a nickel and finally got it in the slot and dialed Ruth's plant.

I had a slight argument with the plant operator but she finally put me through to Ruth's department and her foreman. I had the hopeful idea that she might be working.

He wasn't long in telling me different. "Ruth checked out at midnight," he said. "No, no overtime. She's to come on at midnight the next shift."

I thanked him in a weak voice and hung up. I wandered aimlessly out to the car and drove back to the camp. I did things automatically now and without thinking much about them. I had to find Ruth.

Pop Scanlon wasn't in sight when I drove in and the cabins seemed to be quiet. I saw Jewel Jones' laundry truck in the drive beyond ours but didn't think

much about it. Later I was to wish I had, but right now I drove to my cabin and cautiously unlocked the door.

Everything was quiet, too quiet. I found myself walking on tiptoe, though the woman in Ruth's bed wouldn't have minded if I used dynamite. I had to force myself to open the bedroom door and go inside. There was still that silent mound of covers where Veda Oakes lay dead and I hastily averted my face.

I opened the closet. All of Ruth's things were gone and so were the two suitcases shoved back in a corner on the floor. I stared at the blank hooks and a horrible fear grew in my mind. Ruth had taken a powder, run away.

It looked worse and worse. I knew my wife wasn't a murderess, but I figured she'd come on Veda much like I had. Ruth had lost her head and cleared out, not realizing that was the worst thing she could do. I had to find her—and do it quick before the corpse in the bed was discovered.

I closed the closet door and walked out of the room, keeping my eyes away from the bed. I closed the door to the bedroom and tiptoed through the cabin again. Outside, I carefully locked the door and walked down the path to the street. To one side of the drive was a little grocery store where we did our trading. It had a telephone.

Old Randall looked up when I came in and said something about the weather. There was just me and him and the potatoes in the place. I bought a pack of cigarettes.

"Seen my wife?" I asked casually.

Randall shook his head and his old eyes gleamed. "Nope, I ain't. Heard you and Charley Oakes had a ruckus."

I nodded briefly. "Just an argument. I want to use your phone."

"It'll cost you a nickel, but you're welcome."



I dropped the coin in his hand and circled the counter to the littered shelf where he kept the phone. I dialed Ruth's folks and Mrs. Rader answered. No, my wife wasn't there.

Mrs. Rader sounded worried. "Anything wrong?"

"No," I answered hastily, "nothing's wrong. I guess she's—she's working another shift. Thanks, Mom."

I hung up and stood staring at a bread calendar on the far wall. This was getting worse and worse. I wondered where I could find Ruth, if maybe she was staying at some girl-friend's house. But I didn't get an answer and I couldn't get the picture of Veda Oakes' dead face out of my mind.

Old Randall leaned on the nearly empty meat case and watched me. He licked his thin lips with a pointed tongue and dropped his glance when I turned around.

"Can't you find her?" he asked.

I glared hard at him and he turned away. I walked out of the store and stood uncertainly on the sidewalk. I turned to face the auto camp and saw Jewel Jones push her cart of dirty linen toward the rear of the camp. It didn't register. I just stood there, looking at the traffic on San Fernando Road and not seeing it.

Not for long. All of a sudden I heard the loudest scream outside a Karloff thriller. It sort of reached right up into the bright blue sky and hung quivering there. Then it broke in cold shivers down my backbone. It had come from the auto camp.

I jumped and started running. At the drive, I pulled up short and my face went white. The laundry cart was before the open door of my cabin. The maid had walked right in on the body of Veda Oakes.

I felt sick and quivery at my stomach.

## CHAPTER III

### Riddle Me This



POP SCANLON popped out the door of his office. He gave me a quick glance. "What was that!" I gulped. "Some one had just screamed."

He started running, and all through the court cabin doors were banging open and people were pouring out into the graveled drive. Jewel Jones came running out of my cabin, her black face with an ashy hue, her eyes and mouth wide open. Pop Scanlon caught her by a thick arm and whirled her around.

"What's the matter?"

She just stared at him pop-eyed. She tried to talk but couldn't make it. She just moved her thick lips and pointed weakly to the open door. Pop dropped her arm and ran inside. I shuddered and waited for hell to break loose.

It did, but in a gentle sort of way. Pop came out of the door and stood on the steps looking out at us. I could feel myself getting smaller and smaller. Pop said it quietly. "There's been trouble. Someone phone the police."

Mrs. Mackers threw up her arms and snorted a loud, "Well, I never!" and hurried toward the office.

Pop looked directly at me, his eyes hard. "Jim, you stay in sight."

I nodded miserably. Pop wouldn't say nothing and all those people looked at me as if I'd done something pretty horrible. It seemed like all the women and kids of the camp were out there. I've never seen more curlers, unpainted faces, and filmy dressing gowns before or since, nor more ungirdled fat. I just stood there with my hands in my pockets, my eyes on the ground and leaned against the cabin.

Pop watched the crowd, hard-eyed. Once he spoke out of the corner of his





She came out screaming and he caught her by the arm and whirled her around.

mouth to me. "What do you know about this?"

"Just what you do. I—just found her."

"Why didn't you report it?"

I shook my head. "I wanted to find Ruth."



He looked surprised. "Ain't she around? I saw her last night."

I shrugged and shut up. I'd said too much already, I realized. From over behind the next line of cabins I could hear Jewel Jones' heavy sobs and the people kept milling around the door and pressing closer.

At last we heard the wail of a siren and I was glad. At least I'd get away from these curious, staring eyes. The crowd parted to let the police car through and a couple of plainclothesmen climbed out. Pop motioned them to the door.

He told what Jewel had found and how he'd investigated. Mrs. Macker was back, her sharp face and ears close, her probing eyes studying me with a triumphant air. The head cop was a short stocky fellow with cold fish eyes and lips that looked like they'd been sucking alum for the last twenty years. Pop explained about me and Lieutenant Gleed tapped me hard on the shoulder.

"You'd better come inside," he said.

I followed them in and walked with them to the back bedroom. Gleed picked up the bedcovers and took a good look. He carefully rolled Veda over and then I saw the blood. It was all over her and there was a hole in her back. Gleed gave me a hard glare with his granite eyes.

"You do it the hard way. Choke 'em and then stab 'em. I guess that makes it doubly sure."

"I didn't do it," I said quietly and then felt so sick I had to sit down in a hurry.

Gleed looked up at his companion. "Call Doc Stroud and the morgue wagon, Sullivan," he ordered. "We got us a murder case."

He dropped the bedclothes back and turned to face me, his short arms akimbo on his hips. "Well, what's your story?" he demanded.

I TOLD him what little I knew. He listened, stopping me now and then with a question that checked back on earlier statements. I finished and Gleed looked around. "You married?"

I nodded and Gleed's eyes gleamed. "Where's your wife?"

I could answer only that I didn't know. Gleed turned and opened the closet door. His eyes traveled over the empty hooks and to the blank shelf above. "Looks like she's not here for good," he said and came out again.

Gleed wandered out into the dining room and we all followed him. He looked around, noting my bedroom door, the door to the shower. He wandered into the kitchenette and looked over the little square icebox that was part of the equipment of each cabin. He came back in and sat down at the table.

He lit a cigar, took a couple of deep drags to get it going good, and then really started in on me. He threw questions as fast as I could answer them. Where did I work? What did I have against Veda Oakes? Where was her husband? What was she doing in my cabin? Where was my wife?

I could see that he was playing around with one idea, that this murder fit into the old triangle pattern, that Veda and me was sort of over friendly, and either Charley or Ruth had torn down our playhouse with murder. It burnt me up but I could see where that motive would easily seem to fit this crime.

Finally I couldn't stand by any longer and watch him build up that angle. "Look, Lieutenant, Veda Oakes made passes at anything in pants, including me. But I didn't want anything to do with her and gave her the brush-off. Ruth knew that."

Gleed's cold eyes studied my face, a long, steady stare that tried to pull out everything I knew. He rolled the cigar



around to the other corner of his mouth. "Yeah, I guess she did know it."

He swung around abruptly to Pop Scanlon. "Where's this Charley Oakes?"

Pop looked blank. "I don't know. He came in and then drove off again."

Gleed jerked his thumb at me. "Did Oakes and this guy ever tangle over the dame in there?"

Pop gave me a quick, startled look and flushed red. Gleed caught it and leaned forward. His voice was hard as nails. "Come on, Scanlon, what about it?"

So Pop had to tell him about how I'd tangled with Charley just that morning. Gleed listened and slowly twisted around in his seat so that he could watch me. I could see his face getting tighter and harder and pretty soon a muscle started twitching in his jaw.

Finally Pop finished and Gleed glared at me. "So you and the dame weren't talking?" he asked. "So you couldn't be bothered? Yet her old man thinks he's got enough on you to crack your skull with a lug wrench."

My mouth dropped open and my throat contracted. Then anger broke the fear that held me. I came to my feet, my face red. "I didn't have nothing to do—"

JUST then the front door opened and Sullivan came in. He had Lil Pacetti in tow. Lil was one of the four kids of Giuseppe in the next cabin. She was a slinky dame with an olive face, dark red lips, and great big eyes. She had long slender legs and could give Lana Turner spades in a sweater any time.

Sullivan interrupted me. "This dame says she's got something."

Gleed gave her the once over and nodded. "I can see that. Okay, sister, what is it?"

Lil gave him a flash of her white teeth and sat down.

Lil talked in a throaty voice that went with the legs and the sweater. "I came home from a date about three," she said. "Me and Mike went to a dance and had something to eat afterward. Well, I heard a couple of women arguing over here. The side window in this room was open."

I involuntarily looked up and sure enough it was still cracked a little at the bottom. You get in the habit in California where gas heaters every now and then knock someone off. Gleed nodded, staring, and not at her face.

Lil didn't mind. She went on. "They were arguing about Charley and—Jim."

Gleed pulled up his eyes and his face became alert. "Who were they?"

Lil gave me a sorrowful glance. "It was Ruth Wayman and Veda. I could hear them plainly."

"Okay, what happened?" Gleed barked.

Lil shrugged. "I don't know. I thought I heard a man's voice once. I said good night to Mike and went to bed. They were still arguing."

She sank back in the chair, her big eyes watching Gleed as though she expected to be questioned. Gleed rolled the cigar around and chewed hard on it. His eyes had dropped again and Sullivan was having an itch over by the door. At last Gleed nodded his head.

"Thanks, sister, maybe that'll help. We'll know where we can get you if we need that evidence."

Lil reluctantly got up and swung out of the room. Sullivan followed her. The silence after that was pretty deadly. I could see what Lil's evidence had done in building up Ruth's guilt in Gleed's mind. He just sat there, scowling at the linoleum floor and drumming his fingers on the table.

The front door opened again and a little guy with a black bag came bus-



ting into the room. He was all eyes, pointed beard, and nervous efficiency. Gleed stood up and pointed to the bedroom door.

"In there, Doc, and I hope you get the right answers."

The doc flashed a grin through the whiskers and disappeared. Me and Gleed and Pop Scanlon just sat around, and I couldn't keep my eyes away from that blank, closed door. The doc would only tell us she was dead, I thought, and we all knew that. But still I felt my clenched hands getting all sweaty in the palms.

At last the little guy came out. He adjusted his dark, pin-stripe coat and daintily brushed off his tapered hands with a big white handkerchief. He looked at me and Pop and then turned to Gleed.

"I'd say she was killed about four this morning. Someone choked her insensible, I'd say, and then ran a stiletto in her back."

GLEED looked up, surprised. "Stiletto! What's that?"

"It's a long knife with a slender blade. The wound is generally a puncture like that of a—a—"

Gleed's eyes lighted. "Like an ice pick?" he asked.

The doc smiled through his whiskers again. "That's it."

Gleed looked more triumphant. "Doc Stroud, would you say this did it?"

He stepped inside the kitchenette and lifted up the lid of the icebox. He reached down and pulled out a pick and I could see the point was stained a crusty, dark red. My eyes must have got big as propeller hubs and Stroud gasped. He took the weapon carefully from Gleed's hand and examined it.

"I'd say that did it."

Gleed turned to me and his voice was a growl. "Brother, that wife of yours is going to do some tall explaining. I got

the motive and the weapon—and she's missing."

I felt sick and I guess my face turned a pasty green. Stroud took one look at me and came bustling over. "You'd better lay down a minute."

I nodded and weakly arose. "My room," I made a vague gesture toward the door. "The bed."

Gleed started to growl something but Stroud waved him aside. "Better let him. He'll last longer."

I stumbled inside my room and lay down on the bed, my face to the window almost dark from the blinds. Gleed stood in the door and watched me for a minute, then Doc Stroud said something and turned away. I heard them move to the front of the cabin.

I just lay there until my stomach got back in place. I thought of Ruth and how that copper out there was shaping a noose for her pretty neck. He was wrong—I knew it. Lord knew where Ruth was, but there was some good reason for her being gone and it wasn't murder.

I rolled over, staring at the ceiling. I could see the police alarm going out for her and maybe they'd pick her up. They'd give her the third degree and drive her into saying something that would pin this murder good and tight right on her. They couldn't do it, I told myself. Maybe if I could find her first and talk to her, I'd know what happened. Maybe I could get the killer myself and—

I sat up abruptly and listened. Gleed and the others were still in the front room and Gleed was growling at Stroud. I pushed over to the window and pulled the blind to one side. Not three feet away was a rickety fence that led to another auto camp. I carefully raised the window and threw my leg over the sill. In another moment I was outside.

There was still a crowd in the drive in





I'd found Lil, all right. She was lying sprawled on the couch with the handle of an icepick sticking out of her.



front but the coast was clear out here. I slipped through the fence and walked away from Veda Oakes and murder. I had to find Ruth.

## CHAPTER IV

### A Knife for Lil



IT WAS as simple as that, though I knew I was putting myself in a jam. Still, I figured the risk would be worth the results if I could find Ruth. I kept my nerves in hand and walked easily to San Fernando Road, and cut across it to catch an in-bound car. I expected trouble to pop most any minute but Gleed had evidently not looked for me by the time the trolley pulled away.

It seemed to me that trolley would never get downtown, but at last it passed the Hall of Justice and we were on Broadway. I swung off and jiggled restlessly from one foot to another until a Pico car came along. It went a little faster and it wasn't too much later that I swung off the car at Berendo.

Ma and Pa Rader, Ruth's folks, lived up over a drug store and I fairly ran up the narrow stairs and along the hall to their apartment. Pa Rader answered my knock. He was a skinny little man with a high, bald head and an impish grin. Me and him got along swell.

I stepped inside. "Seen Ruth?" I asked.

He looked surprised. "No, she ain't been here." He stepped back and scratched his chin. "You and her ain't busted up, Jim?"

I made an impatient gesture and shook my head. "No, and we won't, Pa. She wasn't at the cabin and—and I got to see her about something important."

Pa looked relieved and grinned. "You guessed wrong, son. Maybe she's visiting one of her girl friends."

I doubted that but I let it pass. I turned to go. If I stayed any time at all, the old folks would start asking questions and I'd probably let the cat out of the bag. It was no use worrying them. So I beat it even before pa could ask me to sit down.

There I was out on the street again and working myself into a good case of dithers over my wife. I walked a couple of blocks toward town and stopped in at a drug store. I sat down on a stool at the soda fountain and ordered a soft drink. I just sat there, staring back out at the sunlight on Pico and wondering what to do next.

I hardly touched the drink after it came. Then I had an idea and went to the phone book. I spent five nickels and talked to five of Ruth's friends. None of them had seen her. I came out of the booth, more worried than ever.

It struck me that Lil Pacetti just might possibly know a little more than she had told Gleed. She had certainly just come in at three, and she might have still been awake around four, or maybe she'd seen something else that hadn't looked important to her. She had heard a man's voice—whose? At least, she was worth a try and it was about all the lead I had left.

Of course, it meant going right back to the Overland Camp and asking Gleed to clamp the bracelets on me, but it had to be risked. I paid my check and went outside again. I caught the trolley going back to town and made the transfer. This time I rode past the station across from the camp but went on a square or so up Eagle Rock. I got off and walked back.

I could see the Overland from the corner and there wasn't much excitement. I spotted a couple of the gossips going at it hard and heavy beside one of the cabins. Pop Scanlon went into his office and there was no sign of the police cars. I saw old



Mrs. Pacelli and her brood leave the camp, headed north toward Fletcher.

That was a break I hadn't expected. I trailed them from the other side of the street and I became pretty certain they'd be gone for some time. The old lady had a definite place in mind and was going there. I could tell by the way she hurried the kids along.

Satisfied, I let her go on while I turned back toward the camp. Just north of it was a little factory building long since closed down by priorities. I cut along the side of it to the Santa Fe tracks and followed them to the edge of the camp. My steps became slower and my eyes got busier. At last I was right at the fence and could see down one of the graveled drives.

THE Pacelli cabin was quiet. I saw Charley Oakes' red truck sitting in the drive and I wondered how he was taking Veda's death. He was probably looking for me and he'd try to kill now if he found me. I saw no sign of Gleed but I figured he was over in the next drive at my place. Probably the whole camp was crawling with coppers but I couldn't see them.

I shivered and came close to just getting out of there while I could. Then I thought of Ruth and my lips tightened. I gave the drive another quick look and scooted over the fence. I scurried to the bushes along one side of the fence. I was out of breath and a little scared but I hadn't been seen. That was something.

At last I could breathe normally and I started along the fence, to the rear of the row of cabins that led to Lil's. Twice I thought I was going to be spotted from windows and froze in the bushes. But each time I escaped and at last I was behind the Pacelli place.

Now came the most ticklish part of all. I had to slip between the cabins to

the side door, knock, and get inside without being spotted. It would take some doing and a lot of luck.

I made the door all right and knocked. No one answered, and I got more and more jittery. I tried it again. I looked over my shoulder at the cabin windows behind me and I guess I leaned against the door. It swung open.

Surprised, I stepped inside. "Lil!" I called softly. No one answered. I pushed the door closed and called her name again. Luck was against me, I thought, Lil's gone somewhere and I've run all this risk for nothing.

A motor roared to life in the drive and the sudden noise made me jump. I peered out the window and saw Charley Oakes back his red truck around. I hope I never see another face like his was just then. He showed grief and anger and murdering hate. It was written all over the twisted lips and the harsh, glinting eyes. If he ever got his hands on me, I would be deader'n the Italian Empire.

I watched him back the truck around and drive away. Then I tried calling Lil again. The Pacelli cabin was just like ours and I had entered the big dining room. The two bedroom doors were open and I could see into them. I stepped into the kitchenette and peered into the living room.

I'd found Lil. She was lying sprawled on the davenport, her blouse torn open at the throat. Her big brown eyes glassy and staring up at the ceiling she couldn't see. One arm hung limply to the floor and the handle of an ice pick stuck up on her chest.

Something made my heavy feet move, forcing me across the room to her side. She was dead, I could tell that. But I just couldn't make my brain realize it. My hand reached forward entirely on its own, and I touched her bare shoulder. It was still warm.



I stepped back, gasping. This murder had been committed in the short period between the time Mrs. Pacelli had left the cabin with the kids and I'd come slipping in—fifteen or twenty minutes at the most. I thought instantly of Charley Oakes driving away in his red truck.

I couldn't see why he would want to kill Lil and yet his face had certainly showed he was in the mood for murder. I looked at the pick handle. Lil had gone the same way Veda had, and I knew that the same killer had been behind these murders. That still didn't eliminate Charley. I could see him killing Veda in a jealous fit but where did Lil fit in? Had she seen him the night before and had he been afraid she would talk?

Suddenly I realized that I'd better be getting out of here. Mrs. Pacelli might be back any minute and I didn't want to be caught. It would be tough, I thought, the sight of this on the old lady and the kids but it couldn't be helped.

I went back to the side door again and eased it open. The cabin next door was quiet and I couldn't see anyone moving near the window. I slipped outside and gently eased the door closed behind me. So far, everything was smooth and I started back toward the fence again.

I was just about a yard from the back corner of the cabin when I heard Pop Scanlon's voice. "Hey! You! Stop!"

It was like I'd touched a hot wire. I jumped and started running. I skidded around the corner and then sailed up and over the fence. I heard Pop yelling for Gleed.

"It was Jim Wayman!"

I didn't wait, but plunged across the littered yard back of the store to the fence that separated it from the railroad tracks. In another second I was over that barrier and ducking between some railroad cars. I heard a police whistle shrill and I knew all hell would pop shortly. I

couldn't cut across the tracks for fear I'd get spotted trying to cross the dry bed of the Los Angeles River. I just hugged the line of boxcars and started north

## CHAPTER V

### Truckload of Trouble



T LAST I felt it was safe to leave the railroad yards and cut back toward the street. I came out on San Fernando a little south of Marguerite Street and tried to act like any other pedestrian. It wasn't easy, particularly when a squad car came tearing around the turn toward Fletcher Drive.

Now they were after me and I could picture Gleed looking at Lil Pacetti's body and giving me plenty of motive for the job. I could see where I might get loaded with Veda Oakes' death, too. It was a bad spot and the more I thought of it, the more I could picture me in the death cells. Something had to be done, I had to think straight and hard.

I remember Charley Oakes pulling out in that red truck of his. Just then I couldn't see any connection, but of one thing I was sure. The answer to the murders and Ruth's disappearance lay right back there at the Overland Auto Camp. The trail had to be picked up there.

I took a deep, long, trembling breath. There was nothing left for me to do but go back. I had a sudden yen to look over the Oakes' cabin. Maybe there was something there that would give me a lead to Veda's murder. If I could find it, I had no doubt but that I'd get a line on Lil's killing and Ruth's vanishing. It had to be that.

My heart beat like a trip hammer when I turned and started down along San Fernando Road. I made the turn and could see far down the street, and the sign of the Overland Camp. There didn't



seem to be too much excitement, though I couldn't tell what was going on in the court itself. My feet wanted to stay put and it took a lot of hard effort to pick them up and push them forward.

The closer to the camp I came, the more slowly I walked. I was ready to dart off the sidewalk at the least sign of trouble. Coming from the north, I'd have to pass Pop Scanlon's office on that side of the drive. There was no way out

of it. But I figured the police wouldn't be looking for me right under their noses. The very boldness of the move gave me a shadowy sort of safety. It all depended upon who looked when.

At last I was at the very edge of the camp. I kept my face turned toward the street until I was right at the drive. Then I chanced a quick look. The Overland

Pop said, "Don't think about her too much. She got to thinking and remembering too much, and that's why she died."





Camp was in a turmoil. There were policemen and every occupant of the camp before the Pacelli cabin. I hastily turned my head again and walked to the next drive.

It was empty. I stopped and looked back. The street was fairly deserted. My cabin was up at the end of the line, Charley Oakes' across from it. If all the excitement centered on the other drive at the Pacelli's, I had a faint chance of getting where I wanted to be.

I took a tight mental grip on my courage and turned in, my feet crunching in the gravel. I could hear the buzz of talk and movement from beyond the cabins to my right. My eyes were wary and my muscles tense. At the bat of an eyelash I'd have been out of that place in a flash. But no one showed up. The cabin doors were open and, as I had thought, everyone was trying to find out what had happened to Lil.

In a few seconds that seemed hours long to me, I made my cabin. I had darted quickly over the spaces between the cabins where anyone in the other drive could have seen me. I had a brief glimpse of the Pacelli cabin and saw Gleed in the door. I had heard Mrs. Macker's voice going a hundred words a second.

Charley's truck wasn't around and I figured he was gone for a while. I stepped hastily to his door and turned the knob. It was locked. I fished in my pocket for the ordinary door key that fitted my own lock. It fitted the Oakes' rickety bolt, too, and I was safely inside, the door closed. I used my key again and turned to stare around the room.

THESE cabins were all of a pattern. This was the living room, identical to mine, except for the expensive radio set that Charley had bought a few months before. I figured my clues, if any, would be in the bedrooms and I cut through the

kitchenette to the dining room. I stopped there and snicked back the bolt on the side door in case I needed a quick exit.

I turned and looked at the bedrooms. The doors were open. One bed was made, the other wasn't. A sock draped over the foot of one bed told me which was Charley's. I went to the other one.

It was like Veda's had been, over-frilly and over-perfumed. The stale scent of cheap sandalwood incense clung in the place and I would have liked to open a window. Some French dolls and a stuffed Bambi were on the peach-colored bedspread and bolster.

My attention centered on a vanity that evidently hadn't gone with the rest of the furnishing. It was new and loaded down with cosmetics, perfumes, lotions, and a thousand other pieces of junk. I started through the drawers.

While I searched, I kept my ears strained for a warning sound. I could still hear the commotion over in the next drive and once I stopped when a siren sounded and there was an excited raise in the voices. I listened and finally identified it as either police or ambulance, probably Dr. Stroud to say I'd punched Lil in the brisket with the ice pick.

I went back to my searching. Five drawers didn't give me a lead. In the sixth, I found a folded piece of writing paper. I opened and read it, the handwriting looking familiar.

"Tell Charley a dozen cases to Burbank and San Fernando. Watch OPA snoopers."

It was unsigned. I stared down at it, my mind trying to get the meaning. A dozen cases of what? It sounded like something that would have to be hauled in the truck. And what were OPA snoopers? Who wrote this, and did it have any bearing on the killers? I couldn't answer 'em, so I stuck the note in my pocket and turned to the closet.



Veda Oakes had more dresses than a Hollywood star. There was a lot of them, but they didn't cost very much. I glanced over them and then pulled them aside. Down on the floor, in the back, I saw at least two dozen of those little flat boxes that hose come in. I bent down and opened one. Hose was right, and silk of the very best texture from the looks of it. From what Ruth had told me, silk hose were as scarce as hen's teeth and more costly than diamonds. Veda Oakes certainly had laid herself in a supply.

There were plenty of shoes, all neatly arranged in two rows across the floor. I gave Charley credit for keeping his wife well supplied with clothing. I glanced over the shoes and stopped at a black, squared-toed pair. My wife had shoes like that. Then I saw some sandals. My wife had some like that, too. I guessed that Veda had done some copying of what Ruth wore.

I looked back at the dresses, more closely this time. I immediately spotted a polka dot like Ruth's. This was getting to be a little too much and I looked more sharply. My eyes fell on a sky-blue slack suit that was a copy of Ruth's. I pulled it out and looked it over. When I saw the tear along one side of the jacket pocket, I knew I had something. Veda might copy Ruth, but I knew she wouldn't rip her clothes like Ruth. I remembered that tear. Ruth had done it on the car handle.

I got excited. I suddenly saw what had happened. Someone had distributed Ruth's things among these clothes, knowing they would not be questioned. Charley Oakes had a definite link with Ruth's disappearance! And somehow he was concerned with double murder.

I rummaged deeper but found nothing more. I was down on my hands and knees when I heard the sound of a key in

the front door lock. I froze, listening. The door opened.

THERE wasn't time to make the side door. I quickly pulled the closet door closed and pushed myself against the wall, back of the clothes. If I could have held my breath, I would have. As it was I knew I sounded like Goering with the asthma.

The steps came into the living room and I knew there were two of them. I heard the davenport squeak as someone sat down and there were shufflings as if someone else paced the floor in an erratic circle. There was a long moment of silence, except for the nervous pacing up and down.

Charley Oakes' voice was trembling with suppressed violence. "I don't see the need of it. Damn it, black market's one thing but murder's something else. Besides, it was Veda. You got that? Veda!"

Pop Scanlon answered, "Take it easy, Charley. Jim Wayman can't stay out of police hands forever. The rap's pinned right on him."

I thought I heard a deep sob, but I couldn't be sure. The pacing resumed again. Back and forth. "How about the truck, Pop? What am I going to do with this load? It's hotter than silk this time."

Pop's voice was impatient. "I'll tell you. Keep it parked out there on the street and nothing can go wrong."

Charley snorted. "No! Nothing can go wrong! One loose knot and we're in the soup right along with Jim Wayman!"

I tried to figure that one out, my ear pressed close against the wall. It was coming clearer all the time. "Cases to Burbank and San Fernando." I recognized the writing now, I had seen it on a dozen registration cards up in the camp office, and on rent receipts. Pop Scanlon had written that note. The thin boxes of



silk stockings close to my feet in the dark closet. Ruth's clothing and shoes distributed among Veda's things, and "a loose knot" that would call suspicion to Charley's truck. I knew where Ruth was.

My impulse was to slam open the door and start swinging knuckles around. But there were two of them out there and Charley was enough to keep me busy, not counting Pop Scanlon.

Pop's voice cracked through the silence. "Sit down, for Pete's sake!"

"I can't. I keep thinking of Veda."

Pop sighed. "Sure, and I'm sorry. But don't think about it too much, Charley. That's what happened to Lil. She got to thinking and remembered she'd seen something else she hadn't reported to the police."

There was a dead silence and then Charley's voice came in a half whisper. "Is that why?"

"Sure, Charley. You know, I'll bet the murderer got that idea and gave her the ice pick."

"But why should Jim Wayman want to do a thing like that? Why did he kill Veda?"

Pop's voice was deep with understanding. "Hell, Charley, you know why. Jim was playing around with Veda. He was doing you dirt. Maybe he got scared Veda'd squeal to you or his wife. That's a guess."

Charley's voice choked. "Pop, if I ever get my hands on that—" His voice died off in a line of hot profanity.

I was getting madder by the minute and my fists were clenched and perspiring. The kill rap was centering on me more and more and now I'd have a husband with mayhem in his heart to face. The davenport squeaked again.

Pop sighed. "This'll calm down in half an hour. Take your truck to the Long Beach hideout and the boys

down there will take care of your load."

Charley fairly snarled. "Yeah, and I hope they dump her in the drink!"

Pop Scanlon chuckled. "That's just what will happen, Charley, and then you'll be sort of evened up. But you get that truck rolling pretty shortly and then scoot back here. We got a big run to make tonight. San Diego and return."

I HEARD them walk to the front door, I heard it open and close. I waited a minute, listening, and then opened the closet door. I stepped out into the room. My face must have been as black as Shickelgruber's swastika.

I hustled to the side door, intent on getting out to the street and that red truck before Charley could pull away. I had my hand on the knob when I was stopped dead with a roar from the front room.

"Hey! Who d'you think—?"

I turned and Charley's roar died in his throat. He stared at me. I realized the mistake I'd made in thinking *both* men had left the cabin. Charley's face slowly reddened and he advanced through the kitchenette.

His voice was a low growl. "You murdering skunk! I'm going to tear your throat out!"

I turned, stepping away from the door. "Wait, Charley. I didn't kill Veda or Lil."

He shook his head and kept coming, a slow step at a time. His big hands were knotted into fists. "Don't lie to me, Wayman. You killed Veda. I know why."

I backed away, my eyes searching frantically for some weapon. I knew Charley wouldn't let me leave the cabin alive. "Charley, Pop Scanlon was lying. I didn't kill Veda. If you and me'll just go to the truck and get Ruth—"

He jumped. His fists crashed through my guard and blasted off the side of my face. I went sprawling backward, struck



the arm of the davenport and cartwheeled to the floor. A smoking stand crashed down beside me.

Charley came on—that same, slow and deadly pace. I looked around frantically and my fingers touched the base of the smoke stand. It was one of those metal things. I came to my knees, my fist tight around the stand.

"Look, Charley. Listen to me. Let's get Ruth. She'll tell you who killed—"

He charged in. His fists swinging. I stepped back and used the smoke stand. It split the air and bounced off his skull. For a second I thought I hadn't stopped him. Charley stood stock still, his arms hanging. His eyes glazed suddenly and he fell to the floor in a heap.

I knew I'd killed him, he was so limp and still. I bent down and felt for his heart. It was beating, and I nearly passed out with relief. Then I got a hold on my nerves and frisked for his keys. In a minute I had them and I ran to the front door and looked out.

The excitement in the other drive still kept people over there. I opened the door and stepped outside. I wanted to run, but didn't dare. I couldn't be caught before I'd found Ruth and learned what had really happened. It's hard as hell to walk natural-like when every muscle is screaming bloody murder for action.

I reached the street. There was a crowd of curiosity-hounds out there, watching Lil being loaded in the dead-wagon. But none of them was from the Overland. One or two gave me a curious look but I walked away from them.

CHARLEY'S red truck was not in sight and I had a bad moment until I thought of that empty factory building. I hurried down there and rounded the corner. Sure enough, there it was in the rear where no one could see it. The big back doors were closed and locked with a chain and paddock.

My fingers were all thumbs when I tried to use the key but finally it opened and I was ripping the chain through the hooks. The gate dropped and I peered inside. It was empty except for a deep pile of bags up by the cab. Ruth was laying up there, trussed up in a mile of rope with tape over her mouth and covering a bandage over her eyes.

I jumped up inside. I spoke her name and she started threshing until I began on the tape. It must have hurt like hell, but I ripped it off. She blinked her eyes against the light. Her skin was a sickly white. I started on the tape holding her lips and it took some time.

Finally it was done and she sat up so I could reach the knots that held her arms and legs. She couldn't speak for racking sobs that choked her. At last I had her free and held her close. Her nerves calmed a little.

"Pop Scanlon and Charley are behind this, aren't they?" I asked.

She nodded and spoke in a jerky whisper. "It has because of Veda. She came to sell stockings, silk ones. They are black market, illegal. She—she talked too much and I knew Pop was behind it."

I got that much but the murder puzzled me. "But why was Veda killed?"

Ruth shuddered. "Pop heard her talking and broke into the cabin. She raised a big fuss and threatened to expose the whole racket. I guess she and Scanlon had been stepping out and he'd thrown her over."

I nodded, light appearing at last. "She'd spilled the beans to you and threatened to give the police and OPA investigators a lead that would put Scanlon in jail for a long time. Charley might learn about Pop from her and Pop would get himself all beat up. He just silenced Veda."

Ruth nodded. "I—I guess that's it. I fainted when he struck at her with the ice pick. I was tied and gagged when I



came to and I—I knew I was in a truck."

I helped her to her feet. "Something scared Pop and he couldn't get rid of you right away. He fooled Charley about Veda's murder and forced the poor guy to kidnap you in his truck. Charley's in this racket as deep as Pop."

A voice from the tail gate brought me whirling around, ready to fight. It was Charley. He was staring up at us, a big blue lump on his forehead.

He stared up at us, his eyes dull. "So that's it," he said softly. "Pop's been lying to me. That's why Lil was knifed. She heard Pop or saw him leave the cabin."

His fists knotted and the cords stood out on his neck. "The dirty, double-crossing louse! I'll show him."

He whirled and started running. I jumped out of the truck. "Charley! Wait! Leave it to the police!"

He didn't hear me but disappeared around the corner of the building. I helped Ruth out of the truck and she was pretty wobbly on her feet. We tried to go as fast as we could but it seemed like a snail's crawl to me. Still we hurried on.

We just reached the first drive of the Overland when shots blasted out. They slammed fast between the cabins and then broke off sharply. We halted, staring at one another and then ran on. I rounded the drive and pulled up short.

A couple of detectives held Charley between them and Gleed stood to one side, a pistol in his hand. Pop Scanlon was sprawled on the gravel. I took only a glance to tell he was dead. Gleed looked up and saw me and Ruth.

His pistol flashed up and leveled and his voice barked down the court. "Halt! I been looking for both of you birds. Now maybe we can find out what this is all about."

He came forward, glaring. "Ice pick stabbings, disappearances, maniac truck drivers! My God, all of you are talking—and fast!"

We did and Charley verified everything we said. He told of the racket him and Pop had been running. I found out that Charley had come busting into the court, smashed Pop down and accused him of the murder. Pop had drawn a gun and Gleed had been forced to shoot him down.

Well, it all came out at last and even Gleed was satisfied. He turned out to be a pretty nice guy, apologizing to me and making Doc Stroud check Ruth over to see if she was all right. The dead wagon came for the third and last time and the police hauled poor Charley Oakes to the Hall of Justice. The Federal Government would have words with him and he'd probably help them break up a black-market gang.

Ruth and me went to our cabin. Once inside, I kissed her good and hard and started gathering up our personal stuff. She watched me a minute.

"What are you doing, Jimmy?"

I shrugged. "Packing. My nerves are shot and I need a little rose-covered bungalow in Burbank. All our own." I looked around and shuddered. "If I ever move in another tourist camp, I deserve to be murdered!"

She smiled real slow. "I see what you mean, Jimmy."





# Boiler Room Bandits



BEFORE the enactment of the Blue Sky Law, one of the rackets most costly to the whole American people was security swindling. Here was an industry whose annual toll exceeded a billion dollars. Its death-knell was sounded by the passing of the Federal Securities Act, but the ramifications of the Boiler Room Bandits will long be remembered. Particularly by the suckers.

The real take of these thieves came shortly after World War I. Stock salesmen with glib lines and no consciences preyed on the war-rich. They promoted stock sales for the most fantastic of operations, ranging from methods for extracting gold from the sea, to silver from hair.

An exaggeration, this latter illustration? Not at all, particularly when you remember the number of persons who have bought the Brooklyn Bridge, the Aquarium, worthless mines. The stocketeers merely put simple swindling on a mass production line. With a gilt front.

These stocketeers operated from elaborate bucket shops, using "dynamiters" or telephone salesmen. That they were successful was shown in a record released by the New York Attorney General's office. In a four months' period preceding the closing of a bucket shop, the operators paid a \$650,000 telephone bill!

Smoothness and persuasiveness were the first requisites of the successful stocketeer; those, plus an inflexible rule never to give the sucker an even break. By his ability to hold a listener on the other end of a phone, was a stocketeer's success measured.

The phone was the stocketeer's friend. It enabled him to reach people he might otherwise never have been permitted to approach. Once a prospect's name appeared on a "sucker list" there was little

hope for him. These "sucker lists," alone, sold for fabulous sums.

LARGE-SCALE operators learned early that it was too dangerous, and took up too much time, to visit a prospect. So, the "boiler room" came into being. This was generally under the charge of a "front man," with a respectable name, similar to some well-known financial house. (Often, the front man carried a lot of aliases, depending on the cities worked.)

The "boiler room" was usually opened in a building adjacent to that in which the front man operated. If this did not prove feasible, the room was inconspicuously placed in the same office building. There, fifteen or twenty telephones, in separate compartments were set up and manned by the "dynamiters" high-pressure salesmen with a terrific gift of gab.

Through these salesmen the "inside dope" about stocks was spread. Night and day, the salesmen labored, getting a prospect at his home, his office, or his club. They knew their prospect's habits, probably, better than the sucker's wife.

However, don't get the idea that boiler-rooming was strictly blackjack. The boiler room boys played the sucker as a skilled fisherman will play a trout. In the "sell-and-switch" game, the telephone men first urged the sucker to buy some well-known stock, like U. S. Steel. Then, after the check came in for this—and nine times out of ten it did—the sucker received a purchase memorandum (often phony, by the way), and the path was cleared for the disposition of the worthless stock.

After the initial purchase, whether of true, or worthless, stock, the sucker found in his mail issues of a financial advisory

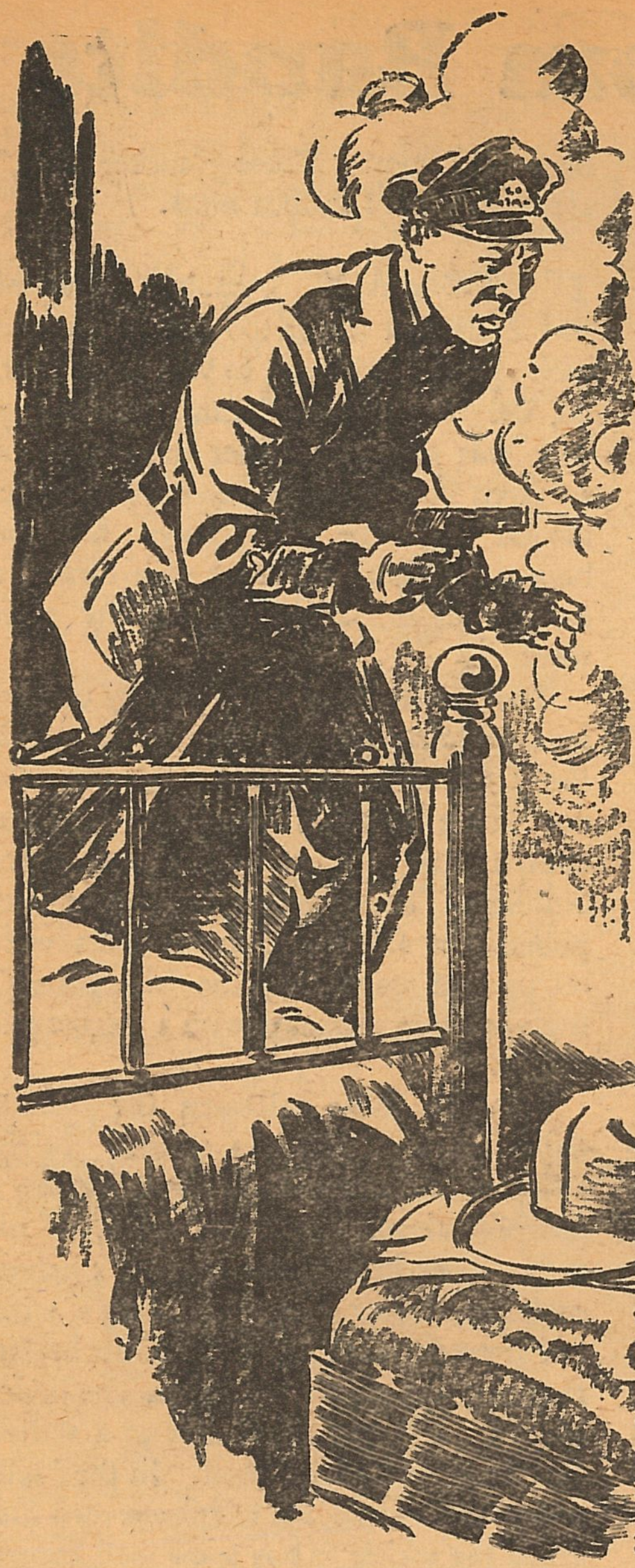
(Continued on page 108)



# Death Fruit

by  
**Arthur M.  
Oliver**

*Oranges with maps on them; a Society to Save Shade Trees; rare coins; trick chess men; racing sheets and molasses vats —everything was here to complicate an already complicated murder case*



HE Louisville business was done, a routine shadowing job. As Calhoun checked out of the hotel, the clerk gave him a letter.

There were two enclosures. The one in script was from Rixey, his boss:

Dear Cyrus:

The accompanying story explains

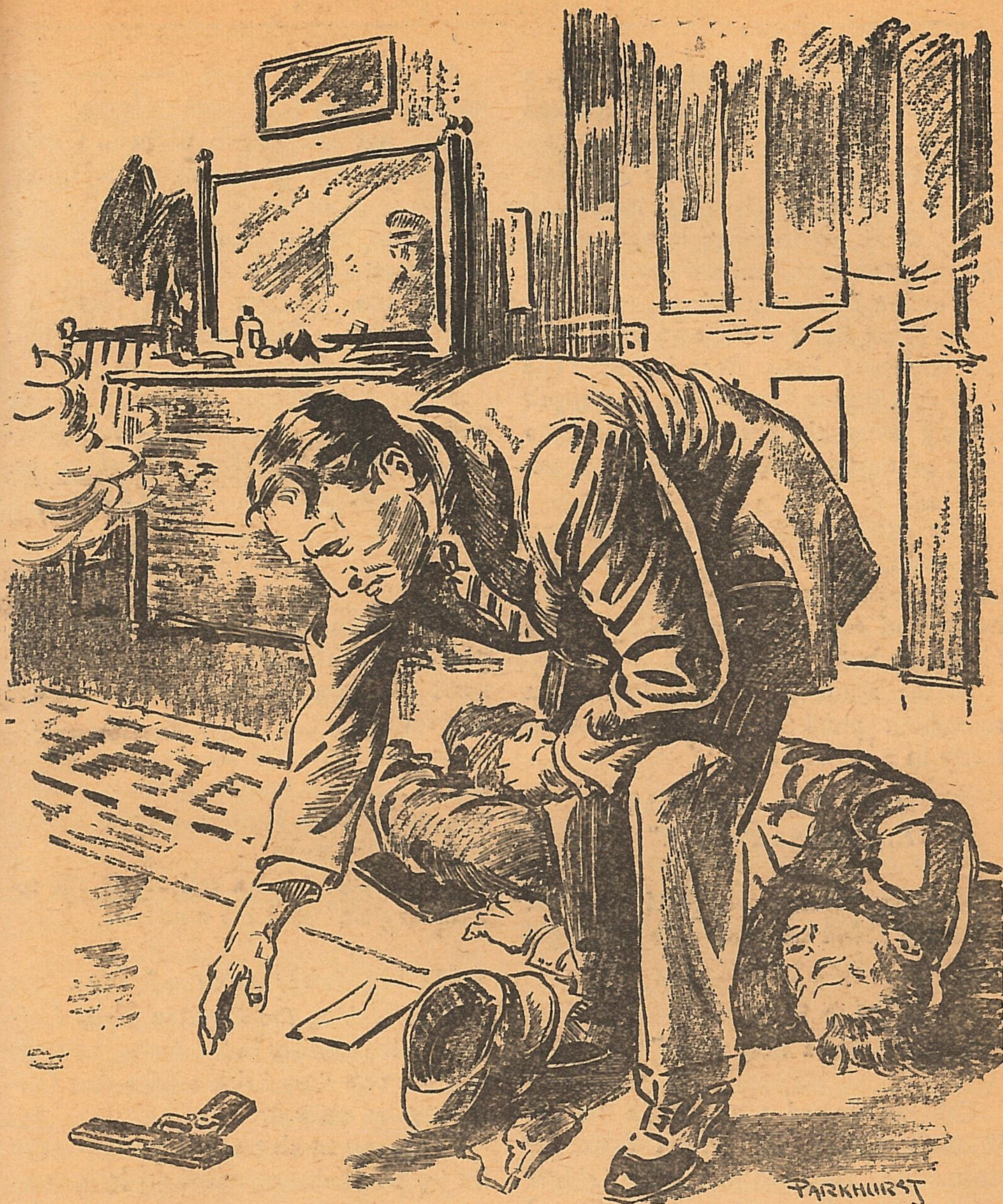
why I'm writing you. This ought to be right down your alley, because if I remember, you hail from that neck of the woods yourself.

Best regards,  
Rixey.

The typed enclosure read:

Westerly Real Estate Corporation  
Chickamauga Building  
Riverton Ohio





Before his hand had reached the gun, six shots sounded like a burst of machine-gun fire.

Advance Investigators,  
Chicago, Ill.

Gentlemen:

Send me your best man down here, or don't waste my time and money. This is a matter pertaining to murder and the imprisonment of an innocent man.

I had an investigator working on this case, but he disappeared. Whether

he got scared and quit, or met with a more serious fate, I don't know.

I suppose the enclosed check is sufficient for a retaining fee.

Urgently,  
Odin Westerly.

Calhoun crumpled the letter in his pocket. "Brother," he said, "You've hit the jackpot! We're going home."



"RIVERTON!" The train jerked to a stop. Calhoun hopped off, checked his bag.

He stepped out on the levee into blazing sun, a cheerfully ugly man with small, sharp, squirrel-like eyes, a mouth that was too large, and not much heft to him except in the shoulders.

On Front Street, a five-man band from the showboat *Betsy Ross* blared "The Stars and Stripes Forever," as he stepped smartly across the levee, followed by a gang of ragamuffins, cakewalking jauntily.

The pungent odors of coffee, ginger, cinnamon, pepper, escaped from the broad warehouses, floated on the hot breeze and sent nostalgic tinglings down Calhoun's back.

In the shade of a high doorway, a roustabout plunked a banjo and sang softly in a minor key:

"If the river were whiskey  
And I was a duck . . ."

As the detective stepped by, the plunking didn't stop, but now the singer sang:

"Just in time,  
For a thin dime."

Calhoun flipped a quarter in the air. Without letting his fingers miss the strumming banjo-strings, the singer caught the coin, smiled, nodded, and sang jubilantly.

Calhoun toiled on up Third. At the corner of Third and Miami began the tableland of business streets, stretching to the semi-circle of hills, on which sat the haughty suburbs.

He turned and faced the South. The muddy Ohio snaked by the levee and the showboat *Betsy Ross* floated into view, bedecked with a flamboyant banner that said, "Playing Now, Uncle Tom's Cabin."

From over the water there came the hooting strains of a steam calliope.

The hot sun smote Calhoun's face, the heat smelling of magnolias, spices, rolling in from the Gulf of Mexico over the plains and high hills of Alabama, Tennessee, and Kentucky.

The sun, a brassy tyrant, paced the middle sky. The sweat poured from Calhoun's armpits.

So far, his greeting had been all music and sun. He had wanted it no differently. He breathed deep, sniffed the air.

"Brother," he said, "you're home."

\* \* \* \* \*

He got in touch with his client by phone, and Westerly made an appointment for noon at Number 42, Buckeye Building.

On the street the air was like a furnace. Calhoun bought a cheap pongee suit, an imitation Panama, leaving his old clothes in the store.

"You don't need a call-check, I'll remember you," said the merchant.

WHEN Dewey sank the Spanish fleet at Manila, the Riverton grain dealers had their offices in the Buckeye Building, the two-story brick edifice that Calhoun now entered.

There was no elevator. A wooden stairs led up to a balcony, railed off by wormy wood. Offices, partitioned neatly like rabbit-hutches, ran parallel with the sides of the balcony.

At Number 42, an orange-colored metallic globe, showing a green outline map of the world, hung suspended from a bracket over the door. The orange lettering on the door read: "Map Reform League."

A folded note was stuck between the frame and glass of the door. Calhoun read it: "Detained until 2:30. Westerly." He put the note back.



OUTSIDE, jagged waves of heat spewed up from the cobbled street. Rivulets of black pitch oozed gutterward over the stones. Above him in the spotless cobalt bowl, a chicken hawk sailed, wheeled and followed the sun.

Calhoun had two and a half hours to kill. He decided to get his bag, locate a room. Walking toward the depot, he was aware that in two decades the pulse of the town had hardly changed.

Where Front Street narrowed into Water Alley, a black delivery van angled close to the curb near Calhoun, came to a stop. A kinky-haired youth leaned over the driver's seat, cupping a watch in his palm. "Hey, buddie," he called, "come here a minute."

"That one's got whiskers as long as Methuselah's beard," chuckled Calhoun. He halted, curious to see how the kid would operate.

"Seventeen jewel," the kid whispered hoarsely. "Gimme a five-spot for it, mister."

"Four bits, if it runs at all," bantered Calhoun.

A shadow fluttered back of him. Something hard jabbed into his spine. "Into the heap, pal. Easy, or it's curtains." The gun rammed into his back.

A voice inside the van said, "Get up next to the driver. Don't try anything."

The kinky-haired kid opened the door. Calhoun stepped up, urged on by the gun at his back. He sat next to the driver. A man with smoked blue glasses and lightish hair slid next to the detective. The man with the blue glasses didn't take his gun away from Calhoun's spine.

"Keep facing the front," said the voice inside the van.

The hot street glared, desolate. No life stirred there. A hand began patting Calhoun's pockets, hips, and legs.

"Hell, he's not even heeled," the voice said back of him.

Down by the levee a steamboat whis-

tled. The kinky-haired driver turned. Something swished in the air and Calhoun fell into blackness.

SOMEWHERE a banjo twanged. Somebody sang:

"I'd go down to the bottom  
And I never would come up."

That's how Calhoun awoke, surrounded by the dank smell of moldy wood and darkness. His head was one continuous throbbing pain. Beyond the pain one thought persisted. "Two-thirty. Must be there. Two-thirty."

The dizziness wore off. He felt something biting into his wrists and ankles. He could move his limbs. He must have been tied and then untied. He got up. Something cracked under his heel. It was his hat. Hand stretched out, he moved forward until fingers touched damp plaster. He moved along the wall, right-angled to another, found a door, opened it, passed through a narrow area-way between two warehouses and then he was out in the hot sunlight. Somewhere a clock boomed twice.

Calhoun hurried on up the steep street. Did they mistake him for someone else or was he tailed and then let go purposely?

UP ON the balcony of the Buckeye Building, Calhoun opened the door of Number 42. In the center of the room a huge globe revolved on its axis. Over near a window, behind a desk, sat a white-haired, ruddy-faced man with horn-rimmed glasses, wearing a Windsor tie. There was a basket of oranges on the desk. The white-haired man curled a finger at Calhoun.

The detective advanced. As he passed the turning sphere, a voice inside it said, "You are treading sacred ground. Remove your hat."

Calhoun grinned, uncovered, came



over to the desk. "Ah, a ventriloquist. Mr. Westerly? I'm Calhoun."

Westerly gave the detective a bony hand.

"I was curious to see your reaction, when I threw my voice to the globe there. Sorry to have been detained. Shall we proceed to business?"

"By all means." Calhoun sat down. The oranges in the basket were uniform in size, their golden skins stenciled in green outline, showing the continents and seas of the earth.

"Before I begin, sir," said Westerly, "I wish to inform you that the previous investigator I hired two days ago has simply disappeared."

Westerly waited for the remark to sink in, his long legs crossed, dangling over his chair. He had a bony Adam's apple, a high arched nose, and humorous mouth.

Calhoun nodded and Westerly went on:

"The murdered man—if it is murder—was a dear friend, Hammond Bassett, a dealer in rare coins. The suspect, whom the police, I assert, are wrongly holding, is Bassett's employee, my own nephew. His name is Nicholls. Mark the name well. Thaddeus *Nicholls*.

"Sergeant McKee found the body. It was this way. This was five nights ago. McKee was on tour of duty on the Front Street district, near the river. Bassett's place is there. Been there for years. He was a bachelor, had his living rooms above the store. About 2 a.m. McKee was testing his store-lock, noticed it had been tampered with. McKee got inside, pressed the buzzer that connected with Bassett's quarters. There was no answer. McKee went upstairs. Bassett lay on the floor with a knife in his back. McKee had a doctor examine the body. It was established that Bassett had died about midnight."

Calhoun settled himself on the base of

his spine and contemplated the ceiling with half-shut eyes.

Westerly cleared his throat noisily. "As I was saying," he said.

Calhoun, reclining at a comfortable angle in his chair, said, "Save time by not repeating."

Westerly removed his glasses, polished the lenses with silk cloth. His eyes, dull blue marbles, thin-lashed, red-rimmed, blinked at the sunlight streaming in. He fixed his glasses, continued:

"Apparently, Bassett had had moments of lucidity before he died, because a penciled note in his handwriting was found clutched in his hand. The note read, 'Dying. The night is dark.'

"There was an orange on the table, one like those in the basket here. A segment of the peel had been loosened from the pulp, but not torn away from the orange. Between the peel and the pulp, McKee found a coin. A rare coin. A *nickel*.

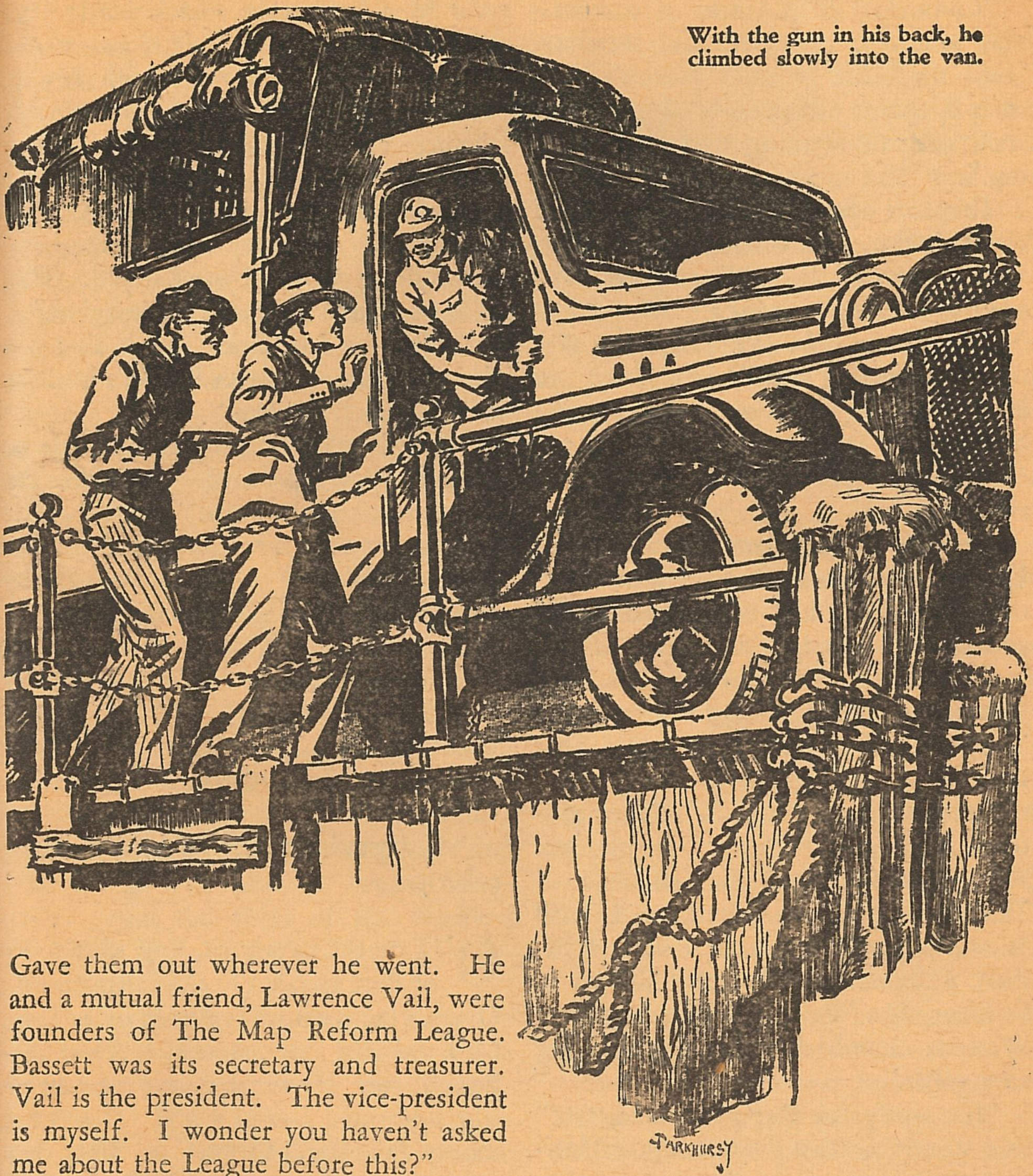
"McKee figured it like this: Bassett had retained enough consciousness before he died to indicate the killer. He did it by placing a *nickel* in the orange showing that it was *Nicholls* who was guilty. A bit fantastic! But McKee, bulldog-like, stuck to his idea. And what made it the worse for Nicholls was this. McKee found a heel from one of Nicholls' shoes. It was in a puddle of molasses which had escaped from a hose that fed molasses into a vat, at a near-by cake factory. The molasses truck had visited the factory about the time Bassett died."

"Of course," broke in Calhoun, "Nicholls offered an alibi?"

"Yes. That he had been home asleep since nine o'clock. But he rooms alone, and no one could vouch for his statement. He couldn't explain the shoe-heel.

**M**AYBE you're wondering how the orange got on Bassett's table? Bassett always carried a few in his pockets.





With the gun in his back, he climbed slowly into the van.

Gave them out wherever he went. He and a mutual friend, Lawrence Vail, were founders of The Map Reform League. Bassett was its secretary and treasurer. Vail is the president. The vice-president is myself. I wonder you haven't asked me about the League before this?"

"I presume it advocates the teaching of geography by the exclusive use of globes instead of maps," replied Calhoun.

"That's the idea. The Map Reform League proposes to do away with those maps, based on the Mercator projection, which fail to convey that the earth is round, and fail to show the true geographic relationship of the land masses.

"The League passes out thousands of oranges like the ones in the basket to school children and others. We have members all over the country. . . . Now,

is there anything you'd like to ask?"

"What were Nicholls' duties?"

"He made up Bassett's coin catalogues and kept the books. And that was the cause of another bad impression. Nicholls had cashed a monthly check—one dated ahead. McKee, looking over Bassett's place, found the stub. Nicholls did not deny it. He'd cashed it with a Shyllock, a fellow Barney Skidmore, who keeps a newsstand on Front Street."

"Any other employees?"



"Consuelo Ortega. Sort of combination saleslady, caretaker, and secretary. Until the court probates Bassett's will, she's in charge of the store. I guess that about covers everything, up to this morning."

The door opened, and a mousy girl of about sixteen, with corn-silky hair, wearing a cheap blue salesgirl's uniform came in up to Westerly's desk.

"Excuse me, Mr. Westerly," she said timidly, glancing at Calhoun, "have you heard anything at all about my missing brother?"

Westerly shook his head. "Nothing at all."

He said to Calhoun, "This is Miss Fowler. Her brother's a private detective—the one I had hired, that I told you about." Westerly turned to the girl, spoke kindly. "Mr. Calhoun has come down from Chicago to try to clear up this business. No doubt, he'll locate your brother."

She turned to Calhoun. Tears glistened in her eyes. "Please," she pleaded. "Oh, please find him. He's all I had—" Her sobbing became unrestrained, until Westerly finally had to lead her to the door. Calhoun heard her say, "I'll try to be brave, Mr. Westerly." The door shut; Westerly came back to his desk, looking very sober.

"It's partly for that girl's sake, too," said Westerly, "that I've hired you. However, as I was saying—"

"That you had covered everything that had happened, up to this morning," Calhoun finished the sentence.

"Yes. Shortly before noon I was in Bassett's place. Miss Ortega informed me then that Skidmore—he's the money-lender—was holding an I.O.U. for ten thousand dollars, signed by Bassett, and wanted payment. I was doubly surprised. First that Bassett had ever been so pressed. Secondly, that Skidmore had been able to advance such an amount. I

told Miss Ortega she should better consult Vail about it, as Vail is—or was—Bassett's lawyer. I went with her to Vail's office. Skidmore was already there. Vail, having something to discuss with me, asked me to wait until he finished with Skidmore and Miss Ortega. He sent his office boy with a note here, informing you that I was delayed. That about exhausts the matter, I imagine."

"What kind of nickel was it, that was found in that orange on Bassett's kitchen-table?" asked Calhoun.

"Dated 1832, showing on one side an eagle holding a pennant in its beak. On the pennant is the word 'Liberty.' The reverse shows a symbolic figure of 'Columbia,' inside of a 'V,' surrounded by fourteen stars," said Westerly.

They stood up, Westerly towered a full foot above the detective. "If you haven't picked a place to stay, the Boone House is comfortable. I can be reached at my real estate office. Good luck," he finished.

"And good hunting," added Calhoun soberly.

OUT on the pavement, tiny whirlpools of dust spiraled in the sultry breeze. Over in the Kentucky hills, thunder rumbled and died away. A hand touched Calhoun's arm. He whirled, into the quivering, up-turned face of a girl. It was the mousy miss he had met in Westerly's office.

"Please, sir," she said, "my brother didn't run off. He wasn't the kind to shirk his duty."

"Now, now," replied Calhoun, placing a fatherly hand on her arm. "We'll do the best we can to find him."

"I just wanted you to know," she said, and walked off, a drab, underpaid little shop girl, whose frail shoulders were already bowed with worry. Calhoun watched her until she entered a corner candy shop.



CALHOUN lay on the bed, beneath the electric fan. His own formula for success was:

"Plenty of leg work and one thing will lead to another." After a while his mind began to click.

"Let's take 'em one by one," he considered. "There's Bassett. He's dead. Okay. Nicholls coming up. In jail. Can wait. At bat, McKee. The cop. See him when we can feed him something. How about the dame? Consuelo Ortega? Sounds fancy. Save her for when we look at the scene of the crime. Where does this Vail horn in, President of the Map Reform League? That leaves Skidmore, the Shylock. A few blocks away. Okay."

He began dressing. In the next room a radio started full blast. "Mayor Ross says all tipster sheets must go."

He finished tying his shoes. Was he sapped on purpose or by mistake? Well, if he was tailed, who would know he was to meet Westerly

Vail knew it. Probably Skidmore and the Ortega girl. And of course, Westerly. And the sister of the vanished detective knew it, too. *Where was this Fowler?*

He snapped his hat down at the angle he liked, and went out. Down at the desk, the clerk was saying into the telephone:

"Here he is now," handed the instrument to Calhoun.

It was Westerly's voice. "Some organization calling itself 'The Save the Shade Tree Society' has just phoned me, after trying to contact Vail. They want to buy the list of the supporting members of the Map Reform League. That list happens to be missing at present. Seems Bassett mislaid it. Their place is in the Sheridan Building. Might not hurt to look them over. A fellow named Henshaw."

Calhoun said he would look him up and rang off.

## CHAPTER II

### The Driving-Iron



EARS of living together had made Mr. Skidmore's tie, shirt, and vest one harmonious ensemble of ancient egg-yolk, mustard, and gravy stain. A dirty, cracked celluloid collar circled the bull-like neck of Mr. Skidmore, and above the neck, Mr. Skidmore's eyes kept ogling out of a berry-brown face, over the edge of his stand, at some one back of Calhoun.

Calhoun turned, but as there was no one back of him, he realized that it was himself that Skidmore was ogling, and what he mistook for an ogle was a cast in Skidmore's eye.

From the smell that emanated from the vicinity of Skidmore's person, Calhoun calculated that not exactly a rat, but probably a good-sized mouse had curled up and died inside of the newsdealer's shack, and Skidmore had forgotten to bury it.

Calhoun sniffed the air. He put his hands on his hips and mimicked in a high, falsetto voice. "Ah! Attar of roses, I believe?" He lowered his voice, "How you manage to prosper in the midst of such stink, confounds me."

Skidmore's smile was literally golden. He had a full set of thirty-two teeth, all fashioned of the precious metal, neatly gleaming in the hot sunshine. He said equably, "It's my merchandise."

Various newspapers and periodicals dangled by wooden clips from a wire strung along the front of the stand. Calhoun said, "In which one will I find the classification on Rare Coins?"

Skidmore ogled him a long time without saying anything. "In the fifth at Pimlico, tomorrow, ain't she? Well, I got 'Jockey Evans Best Three' and 'Rail-bird's Choice'."

Calhoun caught on. Skidmore dealt in



illegal tipster sheets that purported to guarantee the winners at the race-tracks. "Rare Coins" happened to be the name of a horse. He let it go at that, paid Skidmore a dollar for the two tout leaflets, and walked off.

IN THE Sheridan Building office, two men rose up from behind a bare-topped desk as Calhoun strode in.

The bigger of the two was a fleshy-faced, handsome man in his late forties with thick, wavy, gray splashed hair, full sensitive lips, a pompous belly. The type that women with bald-headed senile husbands drool over. He carried enough ham about him to feed the Bulgarian army.

The other was thin, watery-eyed, in shiny blue serge, sleeves frayed over soiled cuffs.

"Looking for some one?" rumbled Mr. Ham at Calhoun.

Calhoun glared. "For a viper's nest," he barked. "They say if you get one mad enough, it'll take its tail in its mouth and make a hoop and roll over you. Where's Henshaw?"

"I am he," said the bigger one. "I cannot make you out, sir."

"Is this the office of The Save the Shade Tree Society?"

Henshaw nodded.

"Somebody's foxing me. It sounds phony to me. Is the offer on the level?" snapped Calhoun.

"Oh, you're from the Map Reform League people? Gelb, show the gentleman a seat."

The watery-eyed fellow slid a chair at Calhoun.

"I say," argued Calhoun, "the name don't make sense. Why not call yourselves just, 'Save the Tree Society'? All trees give shade. What's the idea?"

Henshaw considered the question gravely. Gelb piped up, "What about the eucalyptus?"

"Pardon me, Mr. Gelb," said Henshaw, "our guest is perfectly right. All trees do give shade. We had to particularize our idea, so as not to antagonize the lumber people, you know."

"The only trees that don't give shade are in the petrified forest," insisted Calhoun.

"Ha, ha! Very good, sir. Very good."

Calhoun thought, "If ever an act smelled bad, this was it."

"We are backed," said Henshaw, "by such groups as home-owners, seedsmen, horticulturists, and conservation associations. What do you say, sir?"

"The do, re, mi," answered Calhoun. "How much for our list?"

"One grand," said Henshaw, checked himself, then said, "One thousand dollars."

Calhoun got up. "We'll think it over. Maybe we'll do business at fifteen hundred."

Henshaw piled a lot of money on the desk. "Okay. Let's see your list."

"I don't know," said Calhoun. "I'll have to see my people." Henshaw did not try to conceal his disappointment.

"How late could I find you here?" asked the detective.

"Until midnight. We have quite a lot of correspondence to dispose of."

"I'll be around before that," said Calhoun.

The way the watery-eyed Gelb moved, when he opened the door for him, reminded Calhoun of something he couldn't quite place.

THE detective contacted Vail's home and was assured by a woman's voice that Vail would be in that evening. Calhoun decided if the list of the Map Reform League members was worth \$1,500 of somebody's money, it was worth finding out from the President of the League just where this roster might happen to be.

Calhoun boarded an old-style, open-





"Dead! Dead!" she repeated in a stagy voice.

seated street-car near Fountain Square. After fifteen minutes' ride, the car reached the bottom of a steep hill. The car ran on to a wooden platform. An inclined plane hoisted the platform up the steep hillside.

It was a rise from the torrid to the temperate zone. Below him, the city's grimy buildings diffused the light of the setting sun into a violet haze.

A cool breeze sprung up. He had reached the highest part of Riverton. An hour and half ride and then a half-hour's

walk on a winding road found him near Vail's home. It stood isolated on all sides by groves of trees.

The sky was a painted curtain of blackish blue. A myriad stars sparkled gaily. The earth was silvery. From every cor-



ner the crickets chirped. The leaves of the oaks, a silvery blue, rustled softly as he advanced. Four luminous orbs, two opposite two, hovered in the silvery light. Two cats, fascinated by love, stared at each other.

Up in the Milky Way, a bit of cosmic dust dropped twenty thousand miles, flashed a purple instant and vanished.

Over everything hovered a honeyed, poignant smell, that Calhoun had once known somewhere.

A woman, coming from the direction of the house, emerged from the silvery shadows. Woman and man eyed each other silently. By the starry light, Calhoun could see, that she was wearing earrings of circular gold.

The woman passed. A blood-curdling scream, full of infinite pain, smote the air. The love-sick cats crept close and contemplated each other.

Through fragrant air, Calhoun came toward the house. A riotous growth of honey-suckle screened the porch. The detective walked up wooden steps. A subdued light glowed from inside through the unbolted screen door. He pressed the door-bell.

Inside at the head of the stairs a brighter light flicked on.

A woman's voice in high falsetto caroled up the scale. Calhoun kept his thumb hard on the bell. The scale broke off.

"Welcome to the house of Vail," said some one dramatically and Calhoun opened the door and went in.

AT THE head of the stairs, two silken ankles flitted in and out of canary green taffeta. A dimpled knee showed itself and then a body, exquisitely moulded, swathed in silky green, moved down. The face of the woman was fantastical, possessed. A broad nose, thick lips, staring brooding eyes. Her hair was yellow as wheat.

Diana wearing a mask, thought Calhoun.

She moved toward the detective, and without saying a word, took his hand. Her eyes burned joyously.

"Come, dear friend, I shall recite for you," she began.

"Definitely a wack, or it's marijuana," thought Calhoun. "Is Mr. Vail at home?" he asked.

"In deep meditation," she intoned. "He has plans." She put her finger on her mouth. "Listen." A bare arm, dotted with blue points as if jabbed with a sharp pen, stretched out. Her eyes brightened. She recited:

"The cedar and the sycamore  
"Are daily slaughtered by the score.  
"And the sassafras, alas!  
"Is butchered by the woodsman's adze."

"Beautiful," murmured Calhoun.

She looked at him proudly. "Composed for one of my brother's schemes," she winked, "now cooking." She leered at him, came closer and put her arms around him.

"That'll have to wait," said Calhoun. "So the quicker we see brother the better."

She looked up at him coquettishly. "Impetuous you!" she breathed, and arm in arm walked with him into the library.

Under the glow of a lamp a man slept comfortably in the depths of an arm-chair. A black and blue carbuncle, the size of a pigeon's egg, sat on the man's forehead.

"Brother Lawrence," sang the woman, keeping her arm around Calhoun's middle, "company for you."

The man did not answer, and the way he slumped there in the chair, Calhoun knew he slept the long sleep.

A breeze sighed in through a window. The thin sandy hair on the sleeper's scalp trembled slightly.



"Oh, Law-rence!" The voice slurred up a fifth, dropped a note. "Don't you hear me?"

Against the fireplace tiles a bag of golf clubs stood sentinel. On the mantel-piece above, a driving iron showed its grass-stained face.

Calhoun disengaged himself from the woman's arm. Putting his ear over the man's heart was only a formality. He turned toward her. "Wipe that silly grin off your face," he said. "Your brother's dead."

Some glimmer of tragic awareness came into her eyes.

"Dead—dead!" she repeated in a stagy voice, staring at Calhoun. Then she burst into wild, uncontrolled laughter. "All finished! The pious hypocrite! No more! Lawrence the Last! Good riddance, say I!"

Suddenly stark terror flooded her face. She trembled all over and with an effort controlled her trembling, turned desolate eyes at Calhoun. Not newly bereaved, but eyes long lost to happiness. "I'm afraid," she said hollowly, "let us get out of here. There is my car out on the driveway." She went over to a closet, took out a wrap.

While she slipped into the garment, Calhoun took a rapid survey of the room. It was a combination sun-parlor and library with a door opening directly on to the lawn. Outside the primly-clipped trees showed their silverly limbs above metallic glinting lawn. Through the opened window a breeze came fitfully. Something fluttered by the dead man's chair. Two typed sheets of paper, clipped together, which Calhoun scooped up and slipped in his pocket.

"Come," she said, and dimmed the light above her brother's chair. They moved into the hallway. She clicked a light switch. Darkness covered them like a shroud.

She thumbed another switch and light

flooded the vine-shrouded porch. They moved out.

Twice the gun spoke. Glass shattered above them. Calhoun yanked the woman back through the door. They flattened on the floor. Four more shots followed in rapid succession. Then all was silence. Calhoun on his belly saw the light-switch inside the door. He edged an arm up, clicked it off. The porch was a shroud. Somewhere off in the woods an owl hooted, and then something began to whimper near him in the dark. He felt her shivering body close to him.

"Are you hurt?" he asked.

"No." She gave out a long, low moan.

"Arise, sister, phone for a cab."

He heard her get up, emit a weary sigh, move away.

He heard her dialing, jiggling the phone-hook. Then a scared voice saying, "This is Phyllis Vail. Send a cab right away. Have your driver blow his horn three times, as he enters the driveway. Have him blow it loud, and repeat the signal until he's answered. Tell him to keep his headlight on."

"Sister," thought Calhoun. "I guess I figured you wrong—partly."

THE Front Street police station sat right on the water's edge, its grimy, mud-stained bricks, plainly indicating by starlight that floodline had once reached above the second floor windows. Two motorboats, red-hulled, bobbed sedately, at the station dock.

It was exactly ten o'clock as Calhoun and Phyllis Vail entered the damp-smelling building. Calhoun previously had phoned Sergeant McKee, and when the detective gave his name to the cop out front, he was thumbed through the wicket of a wooden railing, leaving Phyllis alone on a hard bench, nervously biting her nails.

As he went down the corridor, Cal-



houn had an opportunity, for the first time, to scan the contents of the clipped sheets, he'd picked up from Vail's library floor.

It was a list of names and addresses, grouped under the states of the union.

The detective faced a door, lettered "Sergeant McKee," put the papers inside his coat, rapped, and went in.

The man facing Calhoun was Black Irish. Swarthy as a Spaniard but with eyes coldly blue above high cheek-bones. His shaggy, black eyebrows saved him from being handsome and gave an air of truculence to his whole bearing. Thin-lipped, blue-jowled, a livid scar on the right temple of his high forehead.

"What can I do for *you*?" he said, staring at Calhoun.

"I'm Calhoun, representing the 'Advance Outfit' out of Chicago."—McKee's eyes were blue slits.—"Mr. Odin Westerly is our client. I'm working on this Bassett case. Maybe we could sort of, unofficially, of course, pool out ideas." Calhoun grinned.

McKee said: "Sit down, while I get this off my chest. As far as I'm concerned you can go to hell. That's nothing personal, of course. I mean all you private investigating outfits. If they don't gum up the works, get themselves in jams—they hog the glory. No, sir, we don't team up."

Calhoun said softly, "Just *once*, you *could* be wrong, you know."

McKee considered the other a while. "Calhoun, is it? You don't look dumb, my friend. Why act that way? Had I been in your boots, I wouldn't have found it wise to come here at all."

McKee glared. As far as he was concerned, the interview was ended.

Calhoun said. "Maybe you can use this. Somebody bashed Lawrence Vail over the head with a golf club. It's murder. You are getting it ahead of any one else. Do we team up?"

McKee stared hard at the detective, then he asked softly. "What's the exact address?"

"Belding Road, right off Jackson Pike. Place stands alone, surrounded by trees."

McKee spoke into his desk phone, "Steve. Get Rinck at Mt. Walden. Tell him to get someone over to a house on Belding and Jackson. He can't miss it. There's a dead guy there. . . . A dame? Okay . . . send her in."

McKee swiveled in his chair. "The dame with you?"

"Yes," said Calhoun, "it's the dead man's sister." and Phyllis, haggard-eyed, her cheeks over-rouged, walked in. Everybody stared.

**H**ARDLY glancing at the police sergeant she said fretfully to Calhoun. "Can't we go now? Have you reported everything?"

McKee said, "Tell me what you know about your brother's death."

"Oh!" she turned toward McKee, seemed to regard him for the first time, touched her over-bleached coiffure with nervous fingers, went on: "I was sleeping, when the door-bell rang. I answered it." She nodded toward Calhoun. "He came in, asking to see my brother. We went into the library. Lawrence was dead in the armchair. There was a golf club on the mantel-piece. The killer must have used that. When we went out the first time, some one shot point-blank at us. Six times."

The policeman turned to Calhoun:

"What gave you the idea of going out there tonight?"

"Just a matter of routine," said Calhoun glibly.

"Wanted to find out his angles on the Bassett death. But never got the chance."

The phone rang. McKee listened a while, said, "That's right. Stick around." Hung up. He said to Phyllis, "It looks





The messenger fell like a log—but it was the wrong kid!

about like you say. After you got shot at, what happened?"

"We went back inside. I called a cab, got dressed. And came down here with him." She took a mirror from her purse, began smoothing the orange blotches on her cheeks.

McKee said to Calhoun, "It's just too bad if you're holding out. I guess that's

all for tonight unless you can suggest something." He opened the door to dismiss his visitors.

"You'd do me a favor," said Calhoun, "if you'd meet me in Bassett's store tomorrow. Say, ten a.m. I'd like to look over things with you there."

McKee considered. "Okay. But I'm not giving you any credit for anything.



Vail's death was just something you ran into."

"Sure," agreed Calhoun. "But here's an angle. Have someone make the rounds of those golf-practice places, in the vicinity of Vail's home and see if there wasn't a driving-iron swiped from one of them. I imagine the guy that swiped it would be your killer."

Some of the hostility went out of McKee's eyes. "Could be," he admitted. "There was a full bag of clubs against the fireplace, wasn't there? The club on the mantel was an extra one. Was grass-stained—the other clubs weren't. Probably came from the outside. I'll get to work on that at once." He turned to Phyllis:

"I don't imagine you'll be staying at home. Let Mr. Calhoun know where we can get in touch with you."

THE hotel Phyllis had chosen was on North Plum, a quiet side-street that was deserted except for the cab that angled up to the curb.

She gathered her bag and wrap while the cabbie held the door. Calhoun said to her:

"You've told me your answer twenty times before, but I'm asking you again. Have you any idea who would want to kill your brother?"

"I have not," she said irritably. "Not the slightest idea. I know no more than you. But I *do* know something about the Bassett death."

Was he going to get it on a silver platter, just like that, thought Calhoun. "Well, who killed Bassett, then?" he asked.

"*That* I don't know," she shot back at him, "but I know for certain it was *not* Thaddeus Nicholls." She scrambled out of the cab, grabbed his hand awkwardly. "Thanks for a lovely evening," she laughed shrilly and hurried straight into the hotel.

## CHAPTER III

### The Run-Around



WITH the cigarette gummed to the flat of his tongue, the kid yawned and slid the elevator door open for Calhoun. Outside on the street, a newsboy was yelling something. A buzzer sounded impatiently. The cage slid down.

Calhoun walked into the office of "The Save the Shade Tree Society" just as Mr. Henshaw swept the casino deck into the drawer.

"Ah, you did come, after all," boomed Henshaw. "Prepared, I trust to accept our offer."

Calhoun couldn't yet figure the set-up. It looked phony, but purposely phony. "Okay, if that's how you play it," he thought.

Calhoun pulled the two typed sheets, clipped together, from his pocket. "Here it is." It was a shot in the dark. "The list of the supporting members of the Map Reform League."

Henshaw glanced at the papers that Calhoun laid on the desk. "Mr. Gelb should be here shortly," he said, "I would prefer him to look it over."

Outside a door clanged. There was a sound of running feet, and Gelb burst into the room. He stopped short at the sight of Calhoun and obviously, but not too obviously, made a warning sign to Henshaw. A newspaper, folded so that part of the headline could be read, was stuck in Gelb's coat pocket.

Calhoun could readily make out the words:

### PROMINENT ATTORNEY MURDERED

"Mr. Gelb," intoned Henshaw, "the gentleman is here from the Map Reform League with the list."

Gelb rubbed his hands as if nervously,



cleared his throat. "I'm sorry, sir," he said to Calhoun. "I find that your roster of members is a matter of public record at the state capitol."

Calhoun played up to the scene, thrust the clipped papers angrily in his coat. "You mean," he sneered, "*someone* has passed out of the picture, and you and your fat partner are hogging the payoff," turned around and stalked angrily out of the room.

THE motor was purring softly while they waited. Calhoun sat in front with the cabbie, watching for someone.

It wasn't long. A tall, stout man and a thin, skinny man, hurried out of the Sheridan Building to a low-slung car. There was a quicker getaway than Calhoun had expected.

"That car there!" snapped Calhoun to his driver. "Keep on their tail. Not too close."

"Can do," said the cabbie, angling the taxi across the street and following the racing car ahead. The taxi's powerful engine purred softly, and kept at a discreet distance.

At the corner of Front and Third, the car ahead stopped. Henshaw and Gelb got out, raced across the levee.

Calhoun slid out of the cab, telling the driver, "Wait here," and skulked to the water's edge.

Shadowed by a cotton bale, he watched the two edge into the boat, heard the putt-putt of the motor picking up speed. Then he turned and raced back to his cab.

At that time of the night the river was deserted. It wasn't hard for the cabbie to follow the down-stream course of the boat by the cough of the motor.

After some fifteen minutes of bouncing on rutted cobble-stones, the sound which had guided them, suddenly ceased. The detective paid off, got out of the cab.

At this spot, Water Alley descended

gradually, running parallel with Millspin Creek, a sluggish stream, which higher up in the town was called the canal. Calhoun followed the creek to where it debouched in the Ohio River, its final fifty yards flowing between two buildings.

A mist began rolling in from the water, and the sky began to overcast, but there was light enough for Calhoun to read the sign that lettered across the front of the oblong, brick building on his left: "Sperry Biscuit and Cake Company."

A strong, rum-like smell, the odor of molasses, permeated the damp air.

The building on the right of Millspin Creek was a narrow, two-story affair. Calhoun had to move close to its front to read the flapping metal sign that hung over the door:

"Bassett's Old Coin House.  
Founded 1854."

At this close distance, Calhoun saw that the place was of weather-beaten gray stone, and extended back about a quarter as far as the cake factory opposite.

A narrow concrete pileway, that served as combination dock and walk, bordered the Bassett Store on two sides that faced the water. Calhoun walked around to the rear of the place. The back wall was solid stone. Barred and curtained windows at the side walls bore evidence to the fact that someone evidently had used the upstairs as living quarters. On the flat roof a flagstaff was affixed, jutting out over the water.

CALHOUN retraced his steps, and then crossing a little bridge that spanned the Millspin Creek, found himself on a causeway, similar to the one he had just walked, that circled the Cake Factory. Somewhere near here, Calhoun recalled, a heel of a shoe, supposedly belonging to Nicholls, Westerly's nephew, was found in a puddle of molasses.

Proceeding along the side of the build-



ing, the detective noticed at regularly spaced intervals, five metal vents extend-

would have been here. An easy-going sort of guy. Somehow he didn't like the



McKee's wrist flicked delicately. A gun went off. The man slid quietly to the floor.

ing up and out from the walls of the building. The vents were capped with movable brass lids. Calhoun figured these vents led down to the vats in the basement, where the molasses was stored.

A man in dungaree jacket and coat was tying a rope to a stanchion at the water's edge as Calhoun came up. He greeted the detective, cheerfully, "Evenin', gov'ner. Looks like we'll have a bit of a wind."

Some spray whipped in from the river and showered itself on Calhoun's hat. He wiped his eyes, and answered, "From the East. That means rain." He wasn't keen on having met this fellow, yet, he should have expected that some sort of watchman

casual way the man had taken for granted his being there.

Calhoun improvised: "I live over Kentucky side. Been out playing a bit. Missed the last street-car across. Thought maybe I could hire a boat 'round here."

The watchman chuckled. "I say, you only live once. But there's no boat handy, gov'ner, unless you want to wait until I quit about six a.m."

"Thanks," answered Calhoun, "guess I'll just have to get a hotel after all."

Calhoun turned, walked back on the causeway. Then the storm broke with a squall of wind and a sudden straight-down deluge that sent the detective racing for shelter to the lee of the building.





A man sprang out of the shadows and came at him. Calhoun side-stepped, blocked the blow with his shoulder.

He got an arm around the fellow's neck, heard him breathing hard, locked his foot around an ankle. They both fell together but Calhoun was on top.

The only esthetic thing about Calhoun was his hands. He hated bruising them, so he used his knee. There were two sounds. Knee to jaw and skull to stone.

A flash of lightning zig-zagged to earth, illuminating the man he had just kayoed. *The kid had kinky hair.*

Calhoun began feeling the kid's garment. There was a bulge in one coat pocket. Calhoun put his hand in the

coat. "It's about time I'm doing the gun-toting," he decided and his fingers felt something smooth and round.

His hand came out with it, and another lightning flash showed him it was an orange he was holding in his hands. *An orange with a varied colored pattern on its skin.*

As he rose, something came slithering over the smooth stone, looped up about his legs and began tightening itself about his ankle.

The rope grew taut. Grabbing one of the metal vents, that protruded from the building, he held on long enough to open its metal cap, slide the orange down the neck of the vent and continued to hold



on with both hands against the terrific pull at the other end of the rope.

Then for the third time that day he heard a banjo twang. "If the river were whiskey," he heard the song, above the hissing of the rain.

The pull against his angles ceased

*Somebody was signaling the man at the other end of the rope.*

Cursing himself for not having a knife, Calhoun splintered a fingernail sliding back the slip knot, stepped free, and scurried off in the rain.

It was five minutes to three when he slid under the sheets in his room at the Boone House. It was eight o'clock, when he awoke.

AFTER a shave and a shower, Calhoun began his new day by flopping himself on the bed, a Turkish towel knotted around his middle.

"One thing was certain," he pondered. "When I get a look at that orange, I'll know more than I know now. For the present it's safe enough where it is. The set-up inside the Bassett store ought to reveal *something*. Now, how about that dame with the gold earrings, that passed by me before I hit Vail's house? It can't be that easy!" He snickered. "Of course, Kinky Hair is just small fry. Gelb looks like the guy with the blue glasses that held the gun on me. Who was the voice inside the van? Well, when they had me in that warehouse, why didn't they finish the business?"

After a while he got the answer. It was that pongee suit he'd bought when he hit town. That ticketed him as home folks. Just no dice for anybody looking for imported talent. So they let him drift.

AS HE passed the blacksmith shop, sparks flew high and the hammer rang merrily on the shiny, brand new anvil.

"Did an anvil ever ring any way out merrily?" puzzled Calhoun as he crossed Front Street and mounted the steps of "Bassett's Old Coin House."

He was somewhat early for his appointment with McKee, but it would be a good time to make the acquaintance of the Ortega girl, the lass with the fancy Spanish name.

He pushed open the door and a bell jangled above him. A fly-specked bulb hung down by a green cord from the ceiling, casting a billious light over an oblong room, banked on three sides by rows of counter-high, glass showcases. In one corner a staircase spiraled upward.

A re-touched photograph, featuring a bald dome under a skull cap and mutton chop whiskers, hung from a wall.

Across the top of the far counter a red, bristly scalp sagged down over a sprawled arm. Calhoun went over and shook the man's shoulder. The head lifted up. A sharp-nosed face with bleary, red-rimmed eyes.

The man said, "The moniker is Nicholls. I got out of jail an hour ago. I'm drunk. Plastered. Yippee!" He lowered his voice confidentially. "Hear something beautiful?"

"And the sassafras, alas!

Is butchered by the woodsman's adze!"

he yammered. "Wow!"

"If the whiskey don't get you the cocaine must!"

Nicholls' eyes began to pop. He looked like he was gagging. "Soft-pedal it, pal." he whispered.

The bell tingled and a woman, wearing gold earrings came into the store. The woman Calhoun had passed on the way to Vail's house. There were purple glints in her hair, like the plumage of a black bird. Her eyes were the color and texture of amber agate.

In mutual silence Calhoun and the



woman acknowledged the fact that they recognized each other.

Nicholls staggered up, supporting himself on the counter, a maudlin, defiant grin on his face.

She froze him with a look that was all ice. Inside of her, Calhoun knew, she was burning up. It's *you*, she said. "Go over and wash the rum out of your eyes."

Nicholls shuffled over to the washstand and obediently doused his head in the basin, dried his hands, walked back to her on steady legs. Most of the bleariness was out of his eyes.

"Connie," he said earnestly, "if ever I get the whip-hand, I'll have you crawling to me on your dainty hands and silken knees. And then what'll I do?"

"Well, Mr. Nicholls," said Consuelo Ortega, "tell me."

"Aw, nuts, madame," said Nicholls and stamped upstairs.

"Tighten the reins like that and you'll choke the steed," said Calhoun.

"Mister," she said, "I know you, and you know me. If it's agreeable to you, we'll keep secret the fact that we met last night."

"That's not quite fair," replied the detective. "The police know I went to Vail's house. In fact it was I who discovered the killing. But the police don't know yet that you were there."

"You look like a forthright person," she replied, "I take it, you're the detective Mr. Westerly hired. I'll save you a lot of time. I didn't kill Lawrence Vail."

"All right, sister. What was the purpose of your visit?"

"Mr. Vail had asked me to bring him the list of the supporting members of the Map Reform League. He wanted the *latest* list. I remembered Mr. Bassett had asked Thad—Mr. Nicholls—to take care of such a list—to put it in a safe place. I did find a list of names in one of the drawers of Nicholls' desk. Whether it was the one Mr. Vail wanted or not, I

don't know. Anyway, I delivered it to him, and left his house. But I had another reason for going there last night. I would prefer not to acknowledge my last night's visit. For the present."

"For the present, then, I'll string along with you."

HE reflected, "Vail could have been killed between the time Miss Ortega left the house and the time I had arrived there."

"Looks like we've got company," said Miss Ortega.

McKee came over, and for the first time since they had met, gripped Calhoun's hand. "You were right," he said, "there was a golf club stolen last night. From a driving range about a mile off from Vail's house."

The sergeant nodded to the girl. "If you don't mind, I'll show Mr. Calhoun the lay-out around here."

She began taking drawers full of coins from the safe. She said dryly, "How is it you let Thad out?"

"Not me," answered McKee. "I only suggested it. The magistrate reconsidered. Not sufficient evidence." He winked at Calhoun. "Shall we start from here?"

"I imagine we'll find upstairs more interesting."

As they passed the girl, Calhoun asked her, "By the way, what was the weather like at midnight the night Mr. Bassett died?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," she said. Her tawny eyes narrowed. "What in the world did you ask me that for?"

"I wouldn't worry about it," chuckled Calhoun stepping up to McKee.

They entered a room shaped like the one below, fitted up for rough and ready bachelor quarters. A day bed in a corner, a table, and a cabinet, in which were some books and dishes. There was a bathroom, partitioned off by unpainted pine boards. They could hear the shower go-



ing. Iron-barred windows were placed in the center of the side walls. The far wall was windowless. Against it stood five crates, piled on top of each other.

Nicholls came out of the bathroom, toweling his milk-white skin.

The damp, reddish hairs across his chest actually bristled when he saw McKee. "Listen!" he said. "I spend five lousy days—and when I say lousy, I mean just that—in the calaboose. I get dressed down by Madame Queen—I'm all out of soap when I go to take a bath—and now *you* again!"

"I know just how you feel," broke in Calhoun softly. "Actually you ought to thank the sergeant for having had you locked up."

Nicholls took a faded dressing gown from a nail, slid into it. "I can't figure it, brother," he said.

McKee took over where Calhoun had left off. "Because, how would it look if you *weren't* in the can, and the finger being on you for the Bassett business, and this last night's killing happens?"

"What killing?" asked Nicholls, easing himself on the day bed.

"The killing of Lawrence Vail," said McKee.

Nicholls yawned, "I hadn't heard about it," he said, stretched his legs, "don't mind me, men," closed his eyes.

The five crates over by the far wall, contained oranges of uniform size, stenciled with the now-familiar green outlines of the continents of the Earth.

"Some guys have one hobby, some have another," remarked McKee. "Bassett used to pass these things out wherever he went. Now, I want to show you something else. I don't know if it fits in anywhere or not."

**M**CKEE stood there against the wall, dark, sinister-looking. By some quirt of light, his pale eyes were as baleful as a rattlesnake's. Calhoun thought,

"Give him a little less height to his forehead and thin out his lips, and what **have** you got? A killer."

McKee pulled a switch. Bright light flooded in from above. The ceiling was opening up. "Those iron shutters," explained McKee, "painted to look like the ceiling, are operated electrically. They swing back. Put a ladder to the wall and you can climb to the roof."

McKee pulled the switch. The ceiling began to close. "Very interesting," remarked Calhoun. Things were working out better than he had anticipated.

"You see," McKee went on. "Every five years or so the river goes on a rampage. This very building we're in has been under water twice. The last time the flood came, Bassett was almost caught like a rat up in this room. He got through a window and into a passing skiff just by sheer luck. He swore he'd never be caught like that again. He had the ceiling fixed like it is now. There's a rowboat on the roof tied to the flagpole. The river starts to rise. Bassett hikes up to the roof, rows to safety."

"Smart idea," agreed Calhoun. "I suppose he was pretty much attached to the old flood-trap."

"It saved him money, living here. Bassett hated to spend a thin dime, except for one thing."

"What was that?"

"Gambling. I doubt if he's left a penny, outside of the business."

"Now about Bassett's stock. Those rare coins. Were any missing after you found the body?"

"I got the Ortega girl down here at once. The safe was untouched. Coins all there. Checked exactly with Bassett's own inventory. In Bassett's pocket was fifty-three dollars. Evidently robbery was not the idea."

"It could be," said Calhoun. "The killer takes all of it, but the fifty-three. Makes it look like it wasn't robbery."



"It's an idea. Bassett used to bet big dough on the nags. Some bets by checks. We've tallied the recent ones. A few made out to Barney Skidmore, also. Probably to repay loans."

"Now, how about the lay-out at the time you found Bassett?"

"I suppose Westerly told you. I'll repeat it. There was a note in the dead man's hand, in his own writing. It read, 'Am dying. The night is dark.' There was the orange, and the nickel inside the orange. There were chessmen and board on the table. Bassett was in the habit of playing over recorded games. The chessmen and board are in the cabinet there. The note and the nickel, we're holding on to, at Headquarters."

**D**OWNSTAIRS Miss Ortega's slender fingers were flicking through the pages of a coin catalogue, for the benefit of a pot-bellied customer.

"Frankly," said McKee to the detective as they passed out to the street, "I arranged to have Nicholls let out, for the express purpose of tailing him, and we're keeping an eye peeled on the Vail dame."

"Nicholls is important, all right," said Calhoun. "He's the works. By that, I mean he's the works around which everything turns. But he's no more guilty than you or I. Now, here's what I'd like you to do. That is, if you can bear with my suggestions."

"You gave me one good steer. Shoot."

"At night, when nobody's in the store there, have those oranges in the crates replaced by other oranges of identical size and markings. Can you do it?"

"Yes. There's always a supply at hand at the stenciler's place. We can exchange them. Easily enough."

"Good. We don't want anyone to know of the switch. Have the place, here, cased every minute of the day and night. We're looking for orange thieves."

"Okay. What about the oranges in

there now, the ones we're supposed to take away?"

"Have every one of them opened up painstakingly. Take apart peeling, pulp. Open up the seeds. See what you find. Have somebody work on it all night. I want to know the result."

"Anything else?"

"See if there's some sort of a gimmick on the roof that'll make contact and swing that ceiling open. It's got to be there."

"I hope we're getting somewhere," frowned McKee. "What connection is there between Bassett's and Vail's deaths?"

"I'll know more about that in the morning."

"Now here's something you ought to know. "That Vail business looks like a simple murder committed while in the act of robbery. Vail's purse was found on his lawn this morning, stripped of whatever cash had been there."

"I imagine though," said Calhoun, "there was something else in it that hadn't been taken."

McKee's eyes glinted queerly. "What's your system? Don't tell me it's hunches. Yes, there was something else. Folded note on blue correspondence paper."

"Did you spot the scent?" asked Calhoun.

"Cent?" said McKee. "I told you there was no money in the purse."

"The perfume. The paper had an odor, didn't it?"

"Yes, it was perfumed, but—"

"Never mind. That's not particularly important. What did it say?"

"It was dated yesterday morning," said McKee. "Here it is, word for word. 'Dear Lawrence. Looking forward to seeing you this evening to discuss the matter about which you have so kindly encouraged me.' It was signed, 'as ever, Pat.' Does it make sense?"

Calhoun grinned. "Plenty. Well, we'll keep needling everybody; maybe



we'll break it soon. I'm going back to see Nicholls."

## CHAPTER IV

### The Ink-Spot



UPSTAIRS Nicholls snored rhythmically. Calhoun scanned the titles of the books inside the cabinet. Coin catalogues. A bound folio of the *Racing Review*, dated 1939 to 1942. Lasker's Chess Career.

He opened the cabinet, took out the volume on chess. He flipped through the book. A folded sheet printed in green and red ink lay between two pages. It was a racing "Scratch" sheet showing the entries and jockeys at the various tracks, for the afternoon preceding Bassett's death.

The names of three horses had been checked with pencil. *Boy Wonder*. *Zuyder Zee*. *Emporium*.

Nicholls yawned, stretched, blinked his eyes, scratched a rib ecstatically. "How does it all tally up, pardner?" he said.

"So-so," grinned Calhoun. "How about a pow-wow?"

Nicholls fitted the pillow under his head. "I suppose you're the fellow uncle hired. Honestly I think he's wasting his money. There's nothing much to it. The murderer, posing as a customer, makes a date with Bassett, hoping to get away with some swag; he stabs him."

"How about that note? And the orange and the nickel?"

"The note? Just like Bassett. He was no quitter. Right down to his last minute on earth he was fighting. Figured somehow that note might get help. Hell—the man was dying—clutching at the only straw. The orange and nickel?" Nicholls glowered. "Probably cooked up by McKee. At least, it makes him look good for a while."

Nicholls got up, started to dress.

"Did you have any callers in your lodgings during the few days preceding Bassett's death?" inquired Calhoun.

Nicholls considered. "Yes—Barney Skidmore. Lots of people don't like him. But he's okay with me. He's a money-lender, but I know a lot of high-sounding finance companies who will give you a worse deal. Sure, he cashed a dated check for me. But Bassett knew about that. In fact, Bassett would have advanced me the money himself, but he happened to be short."

"What did Skidmore see you about?"

"Nothing to do with murder. Do I have to tell you?"

"Not necessarily, if you prefer to be a fall guy for a murder rap."

Nicholls flushed. "Okay. But forget it if you can't use it."

"I will."

"Skidmore came to see me, because he was booking Bassett's bets on the nags. Bassett was over in Kentucky that night and left the dough with me. And it wasn't hay, brother. And it couldn't have been Skidmore that took the heel—because those shoes were right in this room here, and not at my apartment."

"How did Bassett make out on those bets?"

"I don't know. I gave Skidmore the envelope with Bassett's selections. But, rest assured, if Bassett won, Skidmore paid off. He wasn't a welcher."

"That" grinned Calhoun, "might depend on the size of the wagers, my friend." He showed Nicholls the scratch sheet with the penciled checks against the three entries.

"Does this mean anything to you?" asked the detective.

Nicholls reflected. "I remember Bassett asking me what I thought about the chances of some horses that day. I play the nags a little bit myself. But I didn't recall their names. That was on the last morning I saw him alive."



"Did he play those entries?"

"If he did, I didn't place the wagers for him."

A LONG-LEGGED, white-haired man came hurrying into the store, ran past Calhoun, saying, "See you in a minute," and began pumping Nicholls' hand.

"Congratulations. Double congratulations," Westerly greeted his nephew. "And to you, too, my dear," he added to Miss Ortega. "The will has just been probated, and Bassett has left the business to you both!"

Nicholls looked his surprise, turned impetuously to the girl. "Howdy, partner!"

She smiled, returned his pressure, went on dusting the counter.

"Why, bless me!" exclaimed Westerly, "the minx doesn't seem startled about it one little bit."

"Why should I?" she said. "I knew it all along. I was with Mr. Bassett when he made it out."

"I don't think there was much cash left, but the good-will and stock ought to be plenty to make a decent living for you both," said the elderly man fondly.

Rubbing his hands gleefully, he turned to Calhoun and started out with him, when the phone rang.

The message was for Calhoun. It was McKee:

"Get this. The clubhouse of the place where the driving-iron was swiped, burned down last night. How does that add up?"

"It multiplies," said Calhoun and hung up.

NO ONE could have told by the grin on the cheerfully ugly face upturned to his client, that Calhoun was worried. That phone call from McKee had him in a dither. He needed solitude to work it out. But Westerly was pestering him.

After expressing the appropriate senti-

ments over the sudden demise of Lawrence Vail and some satisfaction in the way events had brought about his nephew's release, Westerly went on:

"We yet haven't found the killer, and my nephew's name still remains under a cloud. I need not point out to you that this inheritance has a disagreeable-looking side to it, also. Now, my dear sir, what songs the sirens sang—"

"What sort of fandango is he giving me?" thought Calhoun.

—"no doubt, could be fathomed out," continued Westerly, "if we had the time and money. But, the killer has already struck twice. And may strike a third time. So time is of the essence, sir."

"You assume, then, that Vail's and Bassett's death are connected?"

Westerly halted in his stride and looked down at the detective. "Hadn't you? Though of course, I have no *tangible* proof. Only the fact that they were both officers in the league got me to thinking that way."

"According to that, you're ticketed for number three," said Calhoun.

Westerly laughed. "Well, young fellow, it's mighty awkward to collect a fee from a dead client, so it's up to you to keep me alive long enough to pay off my obligations. By the way, did you see those people, that 'Save the Shade Tree Society'—the ones who wanted the list of league members?"

"Yes," answered Calhoun. "At first they were eager to pay for it. I stalled them. Afterward they got cold. Of course, at no time did I have what they wanted."

Westerly hailed a cab, got in. "Keep persevering. Let me hear from you," he said.

IN THE office of the *Daily Star*, Calhoun checked back race results. *Boy Wonder*, *Zuyder Zee*, and *Emporium* had won their last times out, which was the



afternoon preceding Bassett's death, at odds of 4 to 1, 3 to 1, and 5 to 2.

A smell, vulpine and sour, assailed Calhoun's nose. Barney Skidmore, gold teeth gleaming, a pile of newspapers under his arm, sidled up to Calhoun. "Remember me?" he ogled.

Calhoun nodded. The effluvia that Skidmore gave off was suffocating. It was like the fox pit at the zoo.

"Outside, man. It's beastly in here."

They went through the door. "I saw you with Mr. Westerly. You're the boy that's gonna solve the Bassett death?"

Calhoun grinned. "That's what I'm down here for. What's your particular angle?"

"Simple as A. B. C.—the yegg comes to look at a coin. He's got a knife. He puts the knife between Bassett's ribs."

Calhoun stretched up his neck for a breath of fresh air. "Well, then, how account for the disappearance of this man Fowler, the previous investigator?"

Skidmore placed a dirty-nailed finger against his thick nose, leaned over the gutter and honked like a Canadian goose.

He straightened up. "Down around the levee the average is twenty bellies slit every day. Like this. A guy gets the come-on from a tout. He trots in the joint about ten a.m. At eleven he's floating down toward the Indiana line. And I don't mean on water-wings."

THE man wearing a flour-smeared apron said to Calhoun:

"You ask me if I want to earn five bucks for doing you a favor?"

"That's it," said Calhoun, lifting up the brass lid of the vent, alongside which they were standing. "I dropped an orange down here. Five dollars if you bring it to me."

"Brother, you've done business," said the man, "I'll get it."

While waiting for the man to return, Calhoun picked up a sliver of wood, be-

gan tapping it against the vent, as he considered:

"If it was Skidmore who booked Bassett's bets on those winners, he'd have a motive. Secondly, the Ortega girl—she knew about Bassett's will. Thirdly, Nicholls probably knew about it, also."

The man came running up with the orange in his hand. Calhoun slipped the sliver of wood in his pocket, handed a five-dollar bill over in exchange for the orange.

"It was no trouble at all," explained the fellow. "The orange was resting right on top of the molasses. If the thing you slid down had been heavier than the molasses, I would have had to wait until the vat drained off. And this one's been flowing very poorly lately. Something must be obstructing the out-take."

A CROSS the street from Calhoun's hotel, a boot-black knelt at the curb, shining a messenger-boy's shoes. The messenger was in uniform and he had kinky hair.

Inside the Boone House, Calhoun strode by the front desk. "I'm expecting a telegram soon," he said to the clerk, "ring my room when it arrives. Send the boy up, there may be an answer."

Up in his room, the detective took the gun out of his bag, weighed it in his hand. The sweat was coming out of his palms and there was a tingling sensation down his spine.

Time dragged. B-r-r-r. Calhoun grabbed the phone. "Telegram," spoke the clerk. "Send the boy up," said Calhoun.

He stood by the door, hand on the gun butt. He heard the elevator cage slide back. Footsteps coming close.

He grinned wolfishly, "*Brother, you asked for it.*" The footsteps grew louder. He stood back a little bit from the door. A rap of knuckles, "Telegram."

"Come in, kid," said Calhoun, and as



the door opened, the barrel of his gun came down on the blue-peaked cap of the messenger.

The kid fell like a log. But it was the wrong kid.

"Throw the gun down, bud." The voice came from the window.

Calhoun's back was to the voice. He slid the gun on the floor.

"Keep your hands just where they are. Don't turn."

Through the mirror Calhoun saw steel nose in from the fire-escape. It was a Smith and Wesson moving in, and holding it was a *kinky-haired* kid in a messenger's uniform.

For the first time since their paths had crossed, Calhoun got a good slant at Kinky Hair's features. True, it was only a reflection in the glass, but it was enough. The eyes were black shoe-buttons, flat-lidded without overtones. The mouth was a cruel crease, half leer, half sneer.

Kinky Hair stepped into the room. "As for bein' a shamus," he said, "my Aunt Annie could give you cards and spades."

"Yes, I muffed that one," said Calhoun.

Up in the sky a cloud shifted off the sun's face. Light flashed ten million miles and smote the mirror Calhoun faced. A hand pointing a Smith and Wesson trembled in the brassy glare.

"Where are those rocks, shamus?" said Kinky Hair.

There was a groan. By the doorway, a hand moved over the blue rug. Beady eyes flicked to the floor, and then Calhoun dived for his gun. Before his hand slapped down on the butt, six shots sounded like a short burst of machine-gun fire, and then Calhoun was up, his gun covering Kinky Hair.

With an incredulous look on his face, Kinky Hair kept clicking the trigger. Calhoun snapped him out of his daze very briefly:

"Slide the gun on the bed and sit down."

The Smith and Wesson plopped on the bed. Kinky Hair slowly eased himself into a chair. Calhoun kept bead on his target, his left hand picked up the empty gun, hefted it fondly.

He stepped close to Kinky Hair. He whipped the gun barrel against Kinky Hair's temple, and as the kid swayed, bashed the steel across his nose.

Kinky Hair went to sleep on the floor. The messenger boy struggled up from the doorway, bewilderment in his eyes.

Calhoun waved a ten-dollar bill at him. "Here, lad. For the mistake I made."

By the time the youngster had tucked the money in his pocket, two chambermaids, an elevator boy, and floor porter had burst into the room, and Calhoun was ringing McKee on the phone.

"WE'VE sweated him a bit," said McKee, "but we haven't got very far. We fingerprinted him. He's done time, under the name of 'Marcus'." He looked at his watch. "We'll give the boys another hour. Maybe he'll talk."

"He's just a working stiff," said Calhoun. "I ran into him last night—I guess I should have told you—on the water front near Bassett's."

McKee said, "Look here. We're not going to get far if you keep holding out. The mugg did say he came to get back something from you. What was it?"

Calhoun took the orange from his pocket, rubbed it between his palms. "He seems to think it's diamonds. I don't figure it yet. Unless they are inside this orange that I took off him last night."

McKee stared at the detective half cynically.

"I'm not ribbing you," Calhoun said earnestly. "This thing ought to break soon, and I'll be needing you. Don't let's mistrust each other."

McKee sighed. "Hell, the thing's got



me strapped. Let's see that orange." He thumbed it, handed it back.

"Oh-oh, what's this," said Calhoun, pointing to an ink spot on the stenciled map that covered the little golden ball.

"Northwestern Missouri. Could be Kansas City," said McKee.

Calhoun's blood was racing. "We're getting somewhere."

McKee was tearing the orange apart, one of the seedless variety, but they found no diamonds inside, nor anything else except what one ordinarily finds in an orange.

"Perhaps," said McKee, "after we examine those five crates in Bassett's place, we'll know more."

"Check up," said Calhoun. "First: What was the weather around the time Bassett died. Secondly: Was any heavy piece of metal stolen from some shop near Bassett's place, within the last few days, maybe an anvil, let us say?"

McKee shook his head. "Oranges, diamonds, anvils, weather reports—put them all together and what have you got?"

"A simple case of murder for profit," said Calhoun.

## CHAPTER V

### The Dog



CALHOUN knew that the place to ferret out the item of information he needed, was bounded, in all likelihood, by the Canal, Millspin Creek, and The Hill. This was River-ton's tenderloin.

The boys there might be short on the particular merchandise you wanted, but they could tell you where it was or get it for you, no matter how devious the way—for a price.

Lavender Lane, where Calhoun now found himself, was a jungle of hock-shops, hooch-joints, flop-houses and

honky-tonks. The detective's eye was attracted by the gilt lettering on the window that read:

### SAM CRYSTAL

#### BUYS AND SELLS ANYTHING

He had his hand on the knob, about to enter, when the sight of a girl passing by made him change his mind. He followed her.

She had the same corn-silky hair as the mousy, underpaid shopgirl he had met in Westerly's office. But now she was bedecked in flower-patterned frock, cafe-au-lait sheer hose, gold-cloth high-spike pumps. Her lips were carmined. Thick mascara shadowed hard little eyes.

She turned and swished through the door of *The Silver Dollar*, Calhoun not far behind.

The detective stepped from blinding sunlight into dim coolness. Shaded lights in narrow booths. Waiters that looked like ex-bruises padded softly about.

Calhoun selected a place two booths away from the girl, facing her back.

A waiter came up to her.

"Make mine rye with a jigger of ice water," she said.

While Calhoun was ordering his whiskey-sour, a man in a powder-blue suit, with a tough, young, intelligent face, sat down opposite the girl. Calhoun could hear them.

"Hello, heart-throb," said Miss Fowler. "How goes it?"

"So-so," said the man, flicking his eyes round the room. "How's it with you?"

"How's it with me?" the girl replied. "Listen, they ain't found him yet. The only smart thing he does since he married me is this disappearing act, and there's not a trace of him. And me ready to collect five grand insurance when they do. Well, what could you expect? They were too wise for Fowler. They're too wise for this dumb lug from Chicago, the one old man Westerly brought in. If he



could fall for the corny sort of an act I handed him, he's not much of a detective."

The waiter slid Calhoun's drink on the table. The detective gulped it down, paid off, slouched out of the place, his cheeks burning.

*The mercenary, deceitful little tramp!*

It took him a couple of turns around the block before he could get the bad taste out of his mouth.

BEHIND the counter a man in a powder-blue suit, with tough young eyes, said to Calhoun, "What's on your mind?"

"I'm looking for a rare coin, an 1832 nickel—one with fourteen stars."

"Nope," said Mr. Crystal. "But I can send you to the one man in Riverton who might know about it."

Crystal took a half-dollar out of his pocket, began bouncing it on the till. Calhoun fanned out two five-dollar bills, laid them on the counter. Crystal kept on bouncing the coin. Calhoun laid a ten-spot over the two fives.

Crystal put the half-dollar in his pocket, rang up a \$20 sale in the register. "Here it is," he said. "The name is Thorwaldsen. Number 3198 Ohio Avenue."

"Fair enough," said Calhoun and turned to the door.

"Wait a minute," Crystal strolled from behind the counter. "Just a piece of friendly advice. The next time you tail a twirl, don't telegraph it to the guy sitting opposite her. Good luck."

OHIO AVENUE followed the winding course of the river from the waterfront slums, eastward, past the cotton warehouses, grain elevators, and stoke ovens, went on past Shanty-boat Hill, snaked around the Hill, became an unpaved road, muddy and wagon-rutted, and came to a dead end on a bluff overlooking the river.

Number 3198 was the last house on Ohio Avenue, planted mournfully in scrubby grass and hollyhocks. Some yards away from the house, on the crest of the bluff, stood a canary-colored cottage. A woman, gray hair peeping under a floppy hat, sat by the cottage in front of an easel.

A typical old maid's cat, a tortoiseshell, rubbed itself against Calhoun's ankles and purred. Calhoun picked the cat up, stroked its fur.

"Ginger has certainly taken a liking to you." The voice was mellow as an old bell.

Holding the cat in his arms, he advanced to the woman, past the tin mailbox that read "Delia Dinwiddie."

The woman was strikingly beautiful, about twenty-five, wide brown eyes, and prematurely gray hair.

He handed her the cat. She smiled. In silent accord they faced the water.

"Yes," she said, "nothing like a high hill above a river."

Ginger put up her head toward Calhoun. The detective scratched the cat's ear. "I suppose that house over there is where Mr. Thorwaldsen lives."

"It is."

He turned. "Good-bye."

"Come see Ginger again. . . ."

SOMEONE inside the house was playing a Chopin ballade. Calhoun rang the bell.

"Step in!"

He opened the screen door. In a large, high-ceilinged room a man sat at the piano, looking straight ahead. He purred up the scale, broke off, turned in his chair and his porcelain blue eyes looked blankly at the detective.

He was past middle-age, sandy-haired, wearing a soft shirt, corduroy slacks.

"This is an unusual time for me to receive visitors," he said. However, since I perceive you are a friend of Miss Dinwiddie, I suppose I shall have to make an



exception." His expressionless eyes gave him a trancelike look."

"Pardon me, am I talking to a blind man?"

"You are."

"I was told," said Calhoun, "that you have a knowledge of rare coins. How can you distinguish them?"

"By touch," said Thorwaldsen. "What are you interested in?"

"Did you ever sell an 1832 nickel with fourteen stars to a man named Bassett?"

"You're asking me about 'old Fourteen.' A famous coin. I will tell you this much. I did not. Bassett was after it. But he had cheated me once in a deal. I wouldn't do business with him."

"Did you sell such a coin to anyone else?"

"I did."

"What was his name?"

"That I don't remember. But I'd know him again, if he were here. I could even describe him for you, if I wished."

"I'll pay you well to do so."

A bumble-bee buzzed in through the open window, circled around the room, and flew out.

THE blind man smiled. "There are certain ethics of the business which prevent me identifying the buyer. He may have his own reasons for not wanting anyone to know."

"But this concerns a suspected murder. I am working in cooperation with the police. Such a coin was found, as you might know, at the scene of Bassett's death."

"I had not been aware of it, sir," replied Thorwaldsen, "I have no radio, can read no newspapers. Have received no business callers for some time. Miss Dinwiddie is my only social contact. We restrict our conversation to the arts. If you are a police associate, you must have credentials. If Miss Dinwiddie can satisfy me that your credentials are bona fide, I shall give you what information I can."

"I will bring her in."

"Very well."

The detective and Delia Dinwiddie stepped up on Mr. Thorwaldsen's porch, Ginger, the cat, began stalking a robin across the lawn.

Simultaneously, Calhoun and the woman ran after the cat. Then came blast after blast. Somebody was using two guns inside the house. Afterward the sound of feet pounding over turf, of sliding rock.

Then came silence. A bumble-bee droned by. The woman was clinging to Calhoun. He held her a little longer than necessary. He said, "I guess I'll go in now. You wait here."

"I'll go with you. He might need me."

The blind man lay on the floor, a red brown stain spreading slowly over the front of his shirt. Mr. Thorwaldsen was beyond help. He had been shot through the jaw, the chest, and the groin. The other bullets had spattered around a wide target. Evidently the killer had tried to cover a lot of territory, thought Calhoun, or maybe it was a case of the jumps.

"My God!" exclaimed the woman, "there's a maniac loose somewhere."

"A maniac is not responsible for his acts. This is worse. A killer who can't cry quits. He's cornered, and that's how he fights back. Is there a phone here?"

"There's one in my cottage."

Waiting for the bluecoats to come, Calhoun asked her, "How is it that Thorwaldsen knew, when I came in, that I knew you?"

"Simple, for him. You'd been fondling Ginger. He smelled the cat on you."

RIDING back to the Boone House in a police prowler car, Calhoun was irritable and depressed. He'd fallen for the messenger boy gag. A kid in her teens had made a fool of him. Her boy friend had handed him some patronizing advice. A man about to give him some valuable



information had been rubbed out. Yet, he considered, in spite of all these mistakes, *perhaps because of them*, he was putting together the pieces of the puzzle.

At the desk there was a curt note from Westerly:

"Please call me."

On the wire, Westerly said: "The police persist in trailing my nephew wherever he goes. This is very annoying. I trust it won't be long before you uncover something."

Calhoun was edgy. "Don't push me too fast," he said. "The killer's tipped his hand a bit too plainly." The detective optimistically asserted, "It won't be long now" and hung up. "I hope," he added.

**S**ITTING in the living room of Phyllis Vail's hotel suite, while she, in her boudoir, was completing her toilet, Calhoun was not acting the part of a gentleman.

On his lap was the lady's purse, and he was giving its contents the once-over. A half-used lip-stick. Twenty-seven dollars in bills. A ten-cent mirror. A pair of black suede gloves. An invoice, which read:

#### HIN WONG LEE

One living room set No. 67B...\$10

He closed the purse, put it back on the tabouret. Phyllis came in, a riot of color, in apricot silk slacks, green chamois blouse, rose-colored mules. Her eyes were large and lustrous.

"I had expected you before this," she said, "why the delay?"

"You look positively devastating." He drawled. "How's this?"

"Phyllis Vail,  
Slays the male."

She laughed, "I hope you're only implying that in the figurative sense."

"Naturally. You know that belladonna—that stuff you use on your eyes

and those marks on your arm, had me fooled. I thought for a time you were slightly—cuckoo, or hyped up. What was the idea of the act?"

"Oh, it amused me." She picked up a flask of Black Narcissus, sniffed it. "I had hoped that your visit wasn't a professional one. But you persist in quizzing me. What else?"

"Did your brother know a woman, who signed her notes 'Pat'?"

"Yes. Mrs. Patricia Ingraham. One of these widows, who's always going on for uplift and good deeds. She was organizing a society—'The Save the Shade Tree Society.' My brother pretended to be interested in it. Idealistically. In reality his idea was to put the squeeze on the lumber interests. Poor Patricia. She begged me to create some sort of slogan for it. That jingle about 'The sassafras, alas,' was the result."

"You didn't think much of your brother?"

"I loathed him. As usual, I suppose, the police are completely baffled by it all?"

"At their wits' end," replied Calhoun. "Sorry to have to hurry away."

"Well," she cooed, "come again some time and rhyme with me."

**H**HEADQUARTERS promised to call him back, when they could locate McKee. Calhoun, waiting, figuring angles, fingertips in pocket, felt smooth wood. He brought it out to the light. A section of bamboo sealed with wax at both ends.

He was dimly aware that he had picked it up somewhere. Then he remembered the place. By the cake factory, while waiting for the orange to be returned to him.

It was heavier than any sliver of bamboo, the length of his middle finger, had any right to be.

He thumbed off a waxed end. Seven blue-white diamonds tumbled out.



Then the phone rang. McKee said, "You were wrong about the anvil, but there was some lead stolen from a plumbing shop, across from Bassett's place. It was bright moonlight the entire night of Bassett's death."

Calhoun tried to speak calmly. "What's the real low-down on this Map Reform League?"

"As far as I know, a perfectly legitimate outfit. Why, my own kid in high school belongs to it. Say, but I got to thinking about that orange with the ink-spot on it. I must have smudged it myself with my thumb. I'd been signing some papers just before I'd seen you."

"Whether that ink-spot got there accidentally or on purpose makes absolutely no difference." Calhoun became excited. "The idea of the oranges is quite evident."

"It's as clear as mud," complained McKee. "Now how do you figure Thorwaldsen's killing?"

"After I pay a certain visit tonight I'll tell you more. Now, about this golf-practice place, where the clubhouse burned down. Did the guy keep tab of customers' time by name?"

"Yes."

"I suppose his records got lost in the fire?"

"That's where you're wrong. The daily journal wasn't even in the clubhouse. It was found in the man's washroom. Some employee must have left it there. I've looked through it. None of the names in it are significant enough to tie up with Vail's death."

"One thing more," said Calhoun, "is there anyone by the name of Hin Wong Lee, who makes toy furniture?"

"I'll call you back on that."

Ten minutes later, McKee was informing the detective:

"Hin Wong Lee is a Chink on Canal Street. He makes slip covers."

"Okay. Now I'd like to look over the

Bassett place tomorrow before it opens up. Can you have one of your men let me in?"

"Come around about seven. I'll take you in myself."

"What did you sweat out of Marcus?"

"Not much, yet. He was hired to steal some oranges out of Bassett's place. He won't give a description of his employer. We shall see."

BARNEY SKIDMORE'S home was a tar-papered shack under the lee of a stony, scabrous hill. As the money-lender put his key in the door, a dog's barking sounded inside, and Calhoun scurried silently across the road into a weedy field.

A dry ravine bed forked upward. Calhoun following the path, a few minutes later was plumped in a patch of briars on top of the hill.

A light flicked on. Calhoun could see inside the shack. A cot with filthy bed-clothes, a table, and a Great Dane leaping up and licking Skidmore's face and neck.

After a while Skidmore appeared with a huge slab of cold beef, which he tore up and shared with his dog.

Calhoun hoped that Skidmore would soon take out the dog for an airing, giving him the opportunity he was looking for. But then Skidmore, filthy in grimy shorts, lay down on the cot. The dog jumped up on it, stretched its muzzle across Skidmore's ankles. Then the light was doused.

"So that's where his carrion smell comes from," reasoned Calhoun. "He sleeps with a dog. If Thorwaldsen recognized me as an acquaintance of Delia Dinwiddie because he smelled the cat on me, then he would be able to remember Skidmore by his doggy odor—if Skidmore had done business with him."

But there was one thing that the detective wanted to make sure of, if possible. It wasn't until dawn that he had the chance.



As the new day began, Skidmore came out of his hovel with the dog.

A minute later, Calhoun was shinnying up the drain pipe. The window surprised him. It was not locked. He raised it and went in.

The stench was thick as pea-soup.

A leprous cot, a rickety table, a rancid ice-box, a three-legged chair, a box of buttons on the chair. There was nothing else. Calhoun searched everywhere. There was no safe, no hidden cache of money or valuables.

"Just a dirty eccentric—but no doubt, a safety deposit box at the bank crammed with I. O. U.'s," mused Calhoun.

On a faint hunch he looked through the button-box. One button had been sewn over with gray thread. He ripped off the thread.

The nickel stared up at him. Dated 1832, showing the symbolic figure of Columbia, inside a "V," surrounded by fourteen stars.

That nickel cleared up a lot of things for Calhoun.

As he was climbing out the window, he heard the dog baying down the street.

## CHAPTER VI

### The Clock



HE crossed Canal Street, a horse-driven milk wagon almost ran over him. Cursing Calhoun for a clumsy lout, the driver gee'd up his horse and clattered away.

The near accident was Calhoun's fault. He had been so absorbed in thinking about something, that he had disobeyed the crossing light. *Why had Thorwaldsen been killed?*

The answer had flashed to him just as the horse's hoof had missed him.

Calhoun grinned sardonically. To be run down by a horse! What an anticlimax!

That got him on a train of thought. Thinking of horses. What about those horses Bassett had bet on? And wasn't there some other spot in which horses showed up in this business? Yes. There were horses' heads on some of those chess-pieces in Bassett's cabinet. They called them *knights*, didn't they? There were white knights and black knights. Oh-oh. *Black Knights*. Where had he seen that? "The night is dark!" That was in the note Bassett had written.

Could it mean the K-N-I-G-H-T is dark? It certainly could!

"Brother," said Calhoun, "today's your lucky day."

INSIDE Bassett's Old Coin House, Calhoun greeted McKee, "Get set for the wind-up." He showed him the piece of bamboo. "This was what Marcus was after. I didn't know it at first, but there were diamonds inside. Those rocks are locked up at the hotel."

McKee examined the bamboo. "There was nothing like this in those five crates of oranges we opened up. Neither diamonds or anything else."

"That all fits in. Have everyone concerned meet here about noon. There's something else I'd like identified. By the way, over at the cake factory, there's a molasses vat that's draining poorly. Order that vat emptied. I believe Miss Fowler will be able to identify what you find there. And have their night-watchman brought to Headquarters. Maybe he'll sing."

"Okay," growled McKee, "I hope this leads to something."

Calhoun went upstairs, opened the cabinet. The chessmen were lined up neatly. The first Black Knight he picked was the one. Carved in two pieces. A horse's head screwed into a wooden base. He unscrewed the head. A piece of paper was crumpled tightly around the pin of the base.



Calhoun read the writing on the paper. His small, squirrely eyes got dangerous. His blood chilled. He grinned uglily.

*If two can play that sort of game, so can three.*

He took his pencil, and on the blank side of the paper made a symbol of a clock, with the hands pointing at nine.

He put the paper between the two parts of the chessman, screwed the pieces together and put the black knight back on the shelf.

CALHOUN held up the two clipped sheets of paper, the ones he had originally picked up from Vail's floor. "The reason I've asked you all to come here was to see if you could identify this list of names."

Westerly wiped his glasses, scanned the sheets, shook his head.

Skidmore gave a cock-eyed glance! "No," he said.

Phyllis Vail said, "I imagine somebody else here can tell you about that."

"Yes," said Miss Ortega, "I brought that out to Mr. Vail's house!"

"I know what it is," broke in Nicholls. "That's the list of people to whom we send the coin catalogues. In that case, I must have sent the wrong list to the printers."

He went over to the phone, began dialing. "Clay? Nicholls talking. When mailing those catalogues, don't use the list I sent you. It's wrong. I'll pick it up tomorrow and bring you the correct one." He turned to Calhoun:

"Must have sent him the list of Map Reform League members by mistake."

Calhoun informed them: "McKee wants all of you here at midnight again. The police are on the heels of a suspect. One of you might know something about him."

In his hotel room, Calhoun had McKee on the phone:

"Go over to Clay's Print Shop. That's

Bassett's printer. You're taking over the joint. I don't imagine anything will happen until after dark. Keep Clay away from the phone. Don't let anyone disturb the Bassett job. I'll see you there later. Get me an extra gun."

In Westerly's office, Calhoun said to his client, "I have good news. Tonight we should know the killer's identity."

"If you mean to bag your man," replied Westerly, "I'd like to watch you do it."

"Come along then."

Into the print shop they came. McKee grunted disapprovingly when he saw Westerly.

"There's liable to be gun-play," said the police officer.

Westerly shrugged. "After all, I'm footing part of the bill. I'm entitled to see some of the fireworks."

"Where's that Bassett job?" asked Calhoun.

McKee pointed to a table, where some catalogues were holding down a piece of paper.

Calhoun and Westerly went over to the table.

"Make anything of that list?" asked Calhoun.

"It appears to be a roster of the members of the Map Reform League," answered Westerly. "Whether it's the current one or not, Bassett could tell you better, if he were alive."

"I feel certain," said Calhoun, "this is the business. This holds the key to many things. I expect someone to call for it tonight. We'll display it so he won't have to look long."

McKee joined them. "What did you want that rod for?"

Calhoun nodded toward Westerly. "Give it to him. After all, we don't know how many guns we'll be facing."

Over on Canal Street a clock boomed ten times. Inside the print shop the



linotype machines stood like shadowy sphinxes.

The three watched the door. A key rattled inside a lock. Calhoun could see McKee's gun shadowing up and pointing toward the sound. Westerly put a bony, nervous hand on Calhoun's knee. The door swung open. Something padded in softly on four feet.

The dog began to bark. "Stop it, Sport!" hissed a voice.

McKee's gun was lined up. "That's not your man!" cried Calhoun, grabbing McKee's arm, "Stop where you are, Skidmore, before you're killed! And quiet that dog!"

Skidmore said, "Quiet, Sport!" The dog quit growling.

Skidmore's voice came out of the dark. "You have surprised me, gentlemen. I suppose there's nothing to do but to admit it."

"What's he talking about?" said McKee.

"Skidmore," said Calhoun, "this is Calhoun talking. Sergeant McKee and Mr. Westerly are with me. We had not expected you. We are waiting for someone else. But explain to these gentlemen, that you have come, as I infer, to pick up illegal copies of your tout sheets."

"That is true," cackled Skidmore, "and I have been caught at it cleverly."

A rank odor of dog and carrion began permeating the atmosphere.

"For God's sake, man, go lie down with that beast under that far table. And keep him silent!"

They waited in darkness. Time dragged. When he came, he came through the window, a huge shadow at first, and then someone with a flashlight cupped in palm, and then a light flickering to the table, and a rustle of paper.

"Put your hands up," ordered McKee, "you're covered."

The man with the flashlight wheeled and fired.

A bony hand held on to Calhoun's knee. Westerly's gun roared three times. The man with the flashlight said, "Ah-h," and then he didn't say anything.

Somebody snapped on the light. The man on the floor had wavy, gray-splashed hair, full pouting lips and a bullet-hole between the eyes.

It was Henshaw.

THEY were all there in Bassett's living quarters. Consuelo Ortega and Nicholls, looking in admiration at Westerly, the lion of the evening who was accepting McKee's praise modestly.

Phyllis Vail, sniffing at her flask of Black Narcissus, breathed, "Isn't it just too thrilling?"

Skidmore and the dog were there, too, sitting somewhat apart from the rest.

"The way it could be summed up," Calhoun explained, "is this. Bassett was a receiver and dealer in stolen diamonds. A fence. He had a racket in which he used those oranges with the maps stenciled on them. We'll explain his system later. It was a big racket. Nationwide. Vail got wind of it. Wanted to take it over. Stabbed Bassett. Planted the nickel in the orange to make it appear that Bassett had been able to tip off Nicholls as the killer before he died. Vail needed some strong-arm boys. He hired Henshaw's gang. Henshaw figured he'd run the racket, killed Vail. But Henshaw needed that list of Map Reform League members. Needed it desperately. Went after it—and with what result, you already know."

"Well, what about those oranges?" broke in Miss Ortega. "You mean Bassett hid the diamonds inside the oranges, and sent them by mail or express to—"

"No. Here's how it worked," answered Calhoun. "Bassett has some stuff he knows that Smithson, let us call him—in New Orleans—can use. So he sends Smithson an orange with New Orleans



marked on the stenciled map. If Smithson has the time, he comes to Riverton, does business. That's okay. Suppose Smithson hasn't got the time to come? He sends an agent. Bassett don't know this agent. But when the agent gives him the orange with the New Orleans mark on it, he's wise. He knows he comes from Smithson. The oranges are an identification scheme. A fool-proof one. Bassett's a big operator. He can't have his contacts swarming into his store. So he uses the offices of the Map Reform League. The set-up looks innocent. Hundreds of decent people are members."

"But how about that bamboo tube in which you found the diamonds?" asked McKee.

Calhoun held up the bamboo piece. "You notice it's not quite the diameter of an orange. Diamonds are put inside of it, the tube sealed at both ends—"

"I think I can figure that," interrupted Nicholls. "A lot of those crooks Bassett was dealing with were afraid to set foot in town. They get a boat. They come by the back of the place here. Bassett stands on the roof, throws the oranges with the tubes of diamonds inside, down to the crooks as they pass by—"

Calhoun smiled. "You've hit on about ten percent of the idea. Bassett does put the tubes of diamonds inside the oranges. But he don't throw them into any boats. He takes those oranges with the diamonds inside only when he makes his own deliveries. Each orange is marked to identify his point of sale. That way he saves time and handling. No doubt, that list of League members contains the names of Bassett's agents. Probably in some sort of code. His source of supply we haven't uncovered yet."

"But it's being worked on," put in McKee grimly.

"That, gentlemen, is none of my concern," said Westerly, taking out a check and filling it in. He handed it to Cal-

houn. "I congratulate you, sir. You have explained everything satisfactorily. I felt all along my nephew was innocent."

Calhoun glanced at the figures, twenty-five hundred dollars. He put the check in his pocket.

"There, sir, is the sum I promised your company," said Westerly.

"Thank you," smiled Calhoun.

"Look here, Calhoun," cut in McKee sourly, "you haven't shown clearly that Vail killed Bassett. That's just an assumption."

"Right. I'm coming to that." Calhoun held up his hand. "Now bear with me a few seconds more. Let us go one step further. Let us assume that Bassett is engaged in a racket and that Vail is tied up with him. A third party knows about it and kills them both to take over. This third party is the one who hired Henshaw's gang for the strong-arm stuff, such as looking for diamonds in Bassett's place and stealing papers from a printing shop. And when Henshaw is about to be caught, what does this third party do?"

"What are you driving at?" asked Westerly.

"I mean," answered Calhoun, "this third party, and I mean you, Westerly, then shoots Henshaw so he won't squeal. You, Westerly are the murderer of Bassett and Henshaw, and you are the murderer or accessory to murder of Vail and Thorwaldsen."

**W**ESTERLY rubbed his glasses vigorously. "This joke has gone too far. Your deduction is preposterous."

"I have proof—in black and white," said Calhoun.

The detective took the black knight from the cabinet, unscrewed the head, took out the piece of paper and placed it on his knee. He said:

"Remember that note found in Bassett's hand. Remember the words, 'the night is dark?' Those words led me to



look for a black knight. And I found this message screwed between the two parts of this chessman."

Everyone looked at the symbol of the clock that Calhoun displayed.

"What does that mean?" asked McKee.

Calhoun said: "That represents a clock, pointing to the hour of nine. Assume a clock could represent the four points of the compass. Then twelve o'clock would be North. Three o'clock would be East. Six o'clock would be South. Get the idea? Then what direction would nine o'clock be, Miss Ortega?"

"Why—*Westerly*, of course," she said, her eyes widening.

Westerly guffawed. "That's pretty far-fetched. But even conceding that that clock indicates my name—as you have so cleverly demonstrated—how does that tie me up with any such thing as murder?"

"That," answered Calhoun, "I shall attempt to do."

"Look here," Westerly went on in a reasonable tone. "If I killed Bassett, why should I try to implicate my nephew?"

"The whole thing must have been long planned. You planted the *nickel* to call attention at first to *Nicholls*. That gave you a very plausible reason for hiring outside investigators to protect your nephew. That initial act immediately gave the police no reason to suspect you. You had planted that nickel, and the shoe-heel in a clumsy manner. The clumsiness was on purpose—to make it evident after a while that it was an obvious plant, *trusting that somebody would trace that nickel, and trace it to Skidmore*. I traced *that* fact through Thorwaldsen. But I went a step further. I found out that Skidmore was in possession of his nickel. That eliminated Skidmore."

"I can explain about my nickel," broke in Skidmore. "I knew Bassett was after one like that. So I bought the nickel

from Thorwaldsen, hoping to sell it to Bassett for profit. I didn't say anything about it after I heard that one like it was found in that orange. I didn't want any trouble. I hid it in the button-box, because I knew the police would search my deposit-box in the bank."

"To continue," said Calhoun to Westerly. "You hired this Fowler. Your strong-arm boys, Henshaw and the others, got rid of him. You would have been content to forget about outside investigators, hadn't the Fowler girl kept pestering you to hunt for her 'brother.' What she was after was his insurance—she was really his wife. All she wanted was the body to be found. So, to quiet her, you had to write that letter to my company—probably in her presence."

"Then when I hit town, your gang almost rubbed me out, but let me go because they thought they had picked up the wrong person. Once I was on the job, you tried to use me to ferret out where that Map Reform list was. You had probably looked for it at the time you had killed Bassett, but couldn't find it. So you faked an office, supposedly representing 'The Save the Shade Tree Society,' so if any dirty work were found out in connection with that list of names it would look like 'The Society' was concerned. I found out from Vail's sister that 'The Society' and Vail were closely connected."

"Here's what I can't make out," interrupted McKee, "why was Thorwaldsen killed, if, through your visit to him, you had established that Skidmore had bought the nickel?"

"That puzzled me at first. But afterwards I got it. Those bullets that killed Thorwaldsen were meant for me."

WESTERLY said to McKee, "Of course, you believe none of this balderdash."

McKee pondered, "There might be something in it."



Phyllis Vail sniffed at her perfume, "What a curious turn of events."

"It's not balderdash," said Calhoun. "Westerly, I've got you indicated in black and white, in Bassett's own hand. Come here, Skidmore." Calhoun gave him the piece of paper with the symbol of the clock on it. "Read what it says on the other side."

Skidmore took the paper, held it up. His pop eyes glittered.

Skidmore's voice said, "It says, 'Consuelo Ortega stabbed me!'"

Miss Ortega screamed, and then Westerly's gun was leveling at Calhoun's eyes.

Skidmore choked out, "I didn't say that. There's a lot of writing—"

"Stand back, all of you," said Westerly, "there's only one—"

McKee's wrist flicked delicately. A gun went off. Westerly slid quietly to the floor.

Consuelo Ortega hid her face on Nicholls' shoulder.

Nicholls kept on repeating, "My God! My God!"

McKee said to Skidmore, "How come you to read that paper wrongly?"

"He didn't read it wrongly," said Calhoun. "Westerly was using a ventriloquist's trick. He threw his voice to imitate Skidmore's." He took the paper from Skidmore, said:

"This is what Bassett wrote on the paper:

"Two men share my secret. One plans my death. I pray to God and Satan, that when his murderous hand strikes, I have left some final seconds of grace in which to revenge myself. The clue to this note will be always with me. If you draw the symbol of a clock with the hands pointing to nine o'clock, it will indicate the murderer of Hammond Bassett."

"You see," went on Calhoun, "Bassett had written this before Westerly struck. At all times, he must have carried that note around with him, the note reading, 'The night is dark.' Before he died, clutched it in his hand."

"Yeah," said McKee grimly, "we've got our man at last."

"And maybe lost your chance to find out how the stuff came in," broke in Phyllis.

"We'll sweat it out of Marcus and the watchman."

A bell jangled. A bluecoat came hurrying up the stairs, leading in a girl with corn-silky hair. The cop was breathless with news:

"Sergeant, we found the guy in the molasses vat. The private dick, Fowler. The molasses acted as a preservative. Like he'd been embalmed. He was loaded down with lead. The little lady here identified him. Says she's his wife. We gonna hold her?"

Miss Fowler wrinkled her nose at the cop. "I haven't done anything."

McKee said, "Let her ramble."

Calhoun asked, "sister, what are you going to do with all that insurance dough?"

"Well, hot shot," she said, "if it's all the same to you, I'm going home to sleep on the idea, then in the morning, spit in the boss's eye. So long."

The phone rang. McKee listened a while. "Fine," he said and hung up.

He turned to Calhoun: "Marcus and the watchman have told everything. They were working with Henshaw. We're on the tail of the other, a guy named Gelb. They used a rope, looped to the flagpole on the roof. There's a gimmick on the roof all right that swings the ceiling open. The diamonds were hidden in the crates. That's one of the things Westerly and Henshaw were after. We know where the diamonds are now. That winds everything up."



The police officer said kindly to Miss Ortega and Nicholls, "You two go home now." He added, "And you, Skidmore, beat it! We'll forget about those swindle sheets—tonight."

"I wish you'd clear up one thing for me," said Phyllis Vail to Calhoun. "Did Westerly burn down that clubhouse? And, if he did, what for?"

"It was his idea, I guess, and a slick one. He purposely kept out the journal of entries—to call attention to the names in the book. The assumption being that someone whose name was in the book tried unsuccessfully to destroy it. Naturally, Westerly's name wasn't there."

Calhoun whispered to her, "Now you

clear up one thing. "Why were you so sure that Nicholls had not killed Bassett?"

"Because," she said, "he had a perfect alibi, and being a perfect gentleman, wouldn't use it."

Calhoun grinned at her, winked to McKee. He said to her:

"I had you figured wrong. I rifled your pocketbook, saw that invoice from the Chinaman. Thought it meant doll furniture made from bamboo. Sort of tied you up with this diamond racket for a little while. But, say—those marks on your arm, they've got me puzzled."

She laughed. "That's fruit rash. I'm allergic to oranges."

## SILLY STATUTES OF THE STATES

*(Continued from page 23)*

cents or more, not less than two-thirds of an ounce of cheese."

But it's an ill law that blows nobody good.

One Mary Hartung discovered this. Little Mary, who had poisoned her husband, was tried and convicted. But, in the New York legislature's revising of

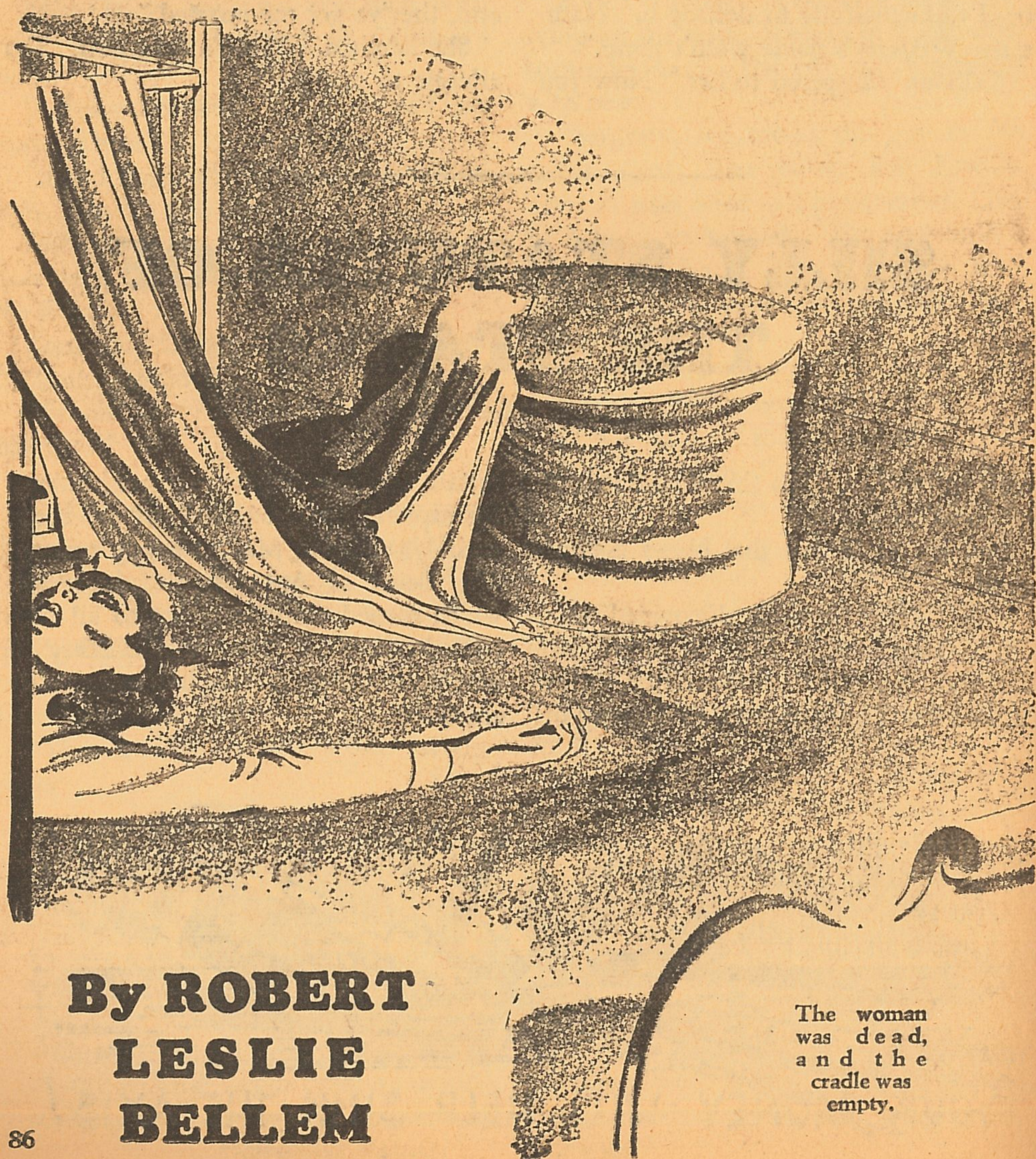
certain criminal statutes, the punishments for capital crimes was left off the books entirely, and was Mary a happy woman. The Court of Appeals, after a review which caused embarrassment to all concerned except the defendant, let Mary off scot-free! Of course, the law was quickly amended.





# COPPER'S COMEBACK

*By way of discipline they'd put Mike Corrigan, an honest cop, to driving an ambulance! And Mike learns, embittered as he is, that an ambulance driver can have as much excitement and win as much glory as any man on the force!*



**By ROBERT  
LESLIE  
BELLEM**

The woman  
was dead,  
and the  
cradle was  
empty.





ATE evening traffic, what little there was of it, scattered curbward along the main stem of Paso Grande as the Emergency Hospital ambulance yowled its siren in demand for a clear path. Red spotlights, glaring, the sleek gray vehicle rocketed onward.

Driver Mike Corrigan's huge hands gripped the wheel hard as a panicky pedestrian loomed in his way. A disaster seemed impossible to avert; but Mike swerved the machine expertly and missed the fellow by inches.

"Close," he growled.

"Too close!" Doc Ledyard, sitting be-



side him, agreed in a shaken voice. The ambulance surgeon was a chunky young man whose private practice was insufficient, so he eked out his income by serving a nightly trick in Paso Grande's small but efficient emergency hospital, which was operated under the supervision of the police department.

This municipal arrangement also made Mike Corrigan a police employee. In fact, Mike wore the blue serge and gold plated badge of a cop, although his duties were solely those of an ambulance driver. You might say he was a copper by courtesy only.

**I**T HADN'T always been that way. Until a month ago he'd been a radio car patrolman, slated for promotion to plainclothes and detective sergeant rank. He made a sardonic mouth as he wheeled the ambulance around a traffic circle and then headed it south along swanky Citrus Grove Avenue.

"Scared, Doc?"

Ledyard shook his head and chuckled wryly. "Since they transferred you, I've grown accustomed to having a crazy man as a driver. Don't mind me."

The jest brought no answering grin to Corrigan's lips. He was not a crazy man; merely an embittered one. In larger cities, if a policeman was to be disciplined, they put him to pounding a beat in the sticks; but Paso Grande, a town of only sixty thousand population on the suburban borders of Los Angeles, had no such beats to be pounded. Not on foot, at least; the department was wholly motorized. When they wanted to slap your ears down, they demoted you to ambulance chauffeur, a berth which scaled you lower than the rawest rookie on the force.

In Mike Corrigan's case, the demotion was unjustified spite-work. He had issued a traffic summons to a drunken driver; made it stick. The drunk turned out to be a personal friend of Harrison Jarboe,

political boss of Paso Grande, who was as vindictive as he was powerful. Jarboe had pulled certain strings and Corrigan wound up behind the eight ball; or rather, behind the ambulance wheel on the night shift.

Doc Ledyard said: "Recognize the address of this call we're making, Mike?"

"Jarboe's house, yet. I wonder what cooks?"

"Five gets you ten that it's something trivial," the surgeon hazarded. "Haven't you noticed how he uses the hospital staff as if we were on his personal payroll? Every time somebody in his family gets a hangnail we go on an emergency run?"

Corrigan made no comment. He liked Ledyard, but doubted the wisdom of criticising Harrison Jarboe to him. Not that the medico might deliberately carry tales, but it was a known fact that Ledyard was on friendly terms with the Jarboe household; had even courted the politician's only daughter in a mild sort of way until she'd married another guy who was in the Navy. Despite this, Doc remained fairly thick with the Jarboes, socially speaking, and there was always the chance that he might accidentally let something drop without meaning to. So Mike Corrigan prudently held his tongue.

Moreover, his mind was suddenly full of other matters. Just as he reached the Jarboe residence and started to turn into its curved driveway, a black sedan came whamming out of the spacious grounds, running without lights and traveling fast. It streaked past the ambulance on squealing tires; the two cars came within an inch of colliding. Corrigan romped on his brakes, twisted his wheel violently. He felt the rear end of his vehicle going into a lurching skid.

"Hey!" Doc Ledyard shrilled. "For the love—"

Then Corrigan regained control of the ambulance. Across his vision the black sedan thundered; made a vicious left turn



into Citrus Grove and sped north with its exhaust belching solid yellow flame. The night swallowed it.

A PREMONITION inched through Corrigan. His police instinct warned him there was something lawless about that roaring sedan, over and beyond the fact that its lights were doused. For an instant he considered jockeying the ambulance around and pursuing the other machine; then he realized it had too big a start. The best alternative was to get inside the Jarboe mansion, see what had happened there.

He headed up the gravel driveway, parked under an elaborate porte-cochere and drew his .38 Special. "Let's go, Doc. I smell trouble here."

The surgeon nodded. They raced to the front door.

It was Harrison Jarboe, personally, who answered their ring. The politician was just as stately as his home: a tall, slender man whose gray hair matched the bleak grayness of his eyes. His mouth had forgotten how to smile, years ago.

He ignored Corrigan and addressed Doc Ledyard. "Thanks for coming. I hated to bother you, but Betty—"

"Just a moment," Corrigan interrupted. "What was the caper in here? Who was in that sedan?"

Jarboe stared at him, frigidly. "Caper? Sedan? I'm afraid I don't understand you. May I ask why you're carrying that revolver?"

"Why, I—I thought—"

"There are times when a policeman should refrain from thinking," Jarboe's tone was silk drawn over ice. Then, dismissing Corrigan with a shrug, he turned again to Ledyard. "Betty fainted," he said. He was referring to his laughter.

You could see the concerned expression on the ambulance surgeon's face; and, seeing it, you realized that he still thought a lot of the girl he had courted

unsuccessfully. "Fainted?" he rasped. "Where is she?"

"Up in her room." Jarboe led the way, and Corrigan followed without an invitation. He was curious about that black sedan's hasty departure; wondered if Jarboe's daughter would be able to throw any light on the subject.

Her boudoir was toward the front of the second floor, next to the room that had been converted into a nursery for her year-old baby. She lay, fully clad but unconscious, on the bed where her father said he had carried her: a fragile blonde girl whose breathing was shallowly stertorous. Jarboe explained he'd found her, senseless, in the library downstairs. "I couldn't seem to revive her so I phoned for you," he told Ledyard.

The surgeon, leaning over the bed, muttered an abrupt curse. "Fainted, hell! Somebody hit her!"

"Wh-wha- what—?"

"Look at this bruise on her scalp." Ledyard probed with sensitive fingers. "No fracture. Minor concussion." From his leather kit he drew a small, padded glass ampule; crushed it under the girl's nose.

She coughed as she inhaled the pungent, volatile medicine; opened her eyes wildly. "That . . . horrible man. . . !" she whispered. Then she recognized the doctor and sat up, clutching his white jacket. "You . . . I . . . what happened?"

"That's what we want to know, Betty," Ledyard said, his tone gentle. "Take it easy, my dear. Tell us."

CORRIGAN cast a swift glance at Harrison Jarboe and made the astounding discovery that he felt sorry for the man. Jarboe had a stricken look, bewildered, frantically worried. His arrogance was gone.

His daughter moaned: "A burglar . . . c-coming in through a window of the library . . . I saw him and started to scream . . . he . . . hit me with s-something. . . ."



"That explains the black sedan," Corrigan grated. He turned and pelted downstairs, his gun ready for action even though the need for it had passed. Presently, after a fast prowling of the lower floor, he returned to the boudoir. "Wall

Reversing the pistol, Corrigan slammed it down on the crook's skull.

safe open and empty. Footprints outside the French window," he succinctly reported his findings to the political boss.

"Good Lord!"

"Evidently the guy lay low after he conked your daughter," Corrigan summed it up. "After you carried her up here, he went ahead with his job. He'd just finished and was making his getaway when we arrived."

Jarboe's lips twitched. "What the hell do I care about that? I don't want a reconstruction; I want action! Phone Headquarters and get some men out here, understand? Give them the license number of this sedan you keep talking about. Tell them—"

"I'm sorry. I didn't get the number. The car was running dark. There won't be much use putting out a dragnet for every sedan in Paso Grande."

The politician's eyes narrowed. "Do





you mean to say you didn't spot the car's tags? You, a cop trained to do that very job? I don't believe it."

"What *do* you believe?"

"That you're deliberately holding out."

"Why should I do that?"

"Possibly because I had you demoted," Jarboe said.

A hot retort swelled in Corrigan's throat but he checked it. Simultaneously, Doc Ledyard turned to him with crisp orders. "I need bandages from the ambulance, Mike. Stay here until I go get them." The surgeon went out of the room.

Corrigan looked at the girl on the bed.





"Could you give me a description of the man that slugged you?"

"I . . . think so." She closed her eyes. "He was . . . t-tall . . . and dark. Swarthy. I . . . I remember seeing a peculiar scar across his left cheek . . . from mouth to ear."

"A knife scar?"

Y-yes. He was w-wearing . . ."

Corrigan waved her quiet. "Never mind that. You've given me enough, thanks. There's a crook who answers that description; a housebreaker named Frenchy Venner. He just got out of stir last month. Where's a phone?"

Harrison Jarboe indicated one on the other side of the room. Then, as Doc Ledyard returned to the boudoir, Corrigan contacted Headquarters; set the dragnet machinery in motion for a pick-up broadcast on the ex-convict named Venner. Finishing the call, he looked levelly at the political boss.

"Now do you think I'm deliberately failing to do my duty because you had me demoted?"

"That remains to be seen. I still think an efficient officer would have noted the sedan's license," Jarboe said stiffly. "It isn't that I care about what may have been stolen from my house. That's unimportant; I haven't even checked it and don't intend to until I know my daughter is out of danger. But I won't allow any man to wear a Paso Grande police badge who wilfully neglects his obligations because of a personal animosity."

**B**ITTER resentment filled Corrigan. The politician was threatening him, saying in so many words that he, Corrigan, was slated to be kicked off the force on an unmerited accusation. He balled his fists angrily; took a step toward Jarboe. The man turned his back contemptuously and strode from the boudoir into the adjoining nursery.

Instants later a harsh, choked cry came

from that connecting room; a masculine sob of sheer anguish. Mike Corrigan catapulted across the threshold; drew up short.

Jarboe was standing in the glow of a small night-light, his face as gray as his hair. He was pointing toward a form slumped on the floor; a woman in nurse's uniform, her head crushed by a savage blow from some sort of blunt instrument. She was very obviously dead.

There was a cradle just beyond her; an infant's crib. There was no infant in it, though. Harrison Jarboe's grandchild, his daughter's year-old baby, had been kidnaped.

**I**T WAS midnight when Corrigan parked the ambulance in the Emergency Hospital garage and left it there without even a word of good-by to Doc Ledyard who remained in the vehicle to gather up his surgical kit and medicine bag before going off shift. Corrigan's trick was up, too; but permanently. Starting with now, he was no longer entitled to wear the badge of his membership in the Paso Grande police deparament.

The news, of course, had already spread. Reporters from the two local dailies spotted Corrigan as he emerged from the garage and descended on him, demanding interviews. These were all second-string men; the more important newshounds were still out at the Jarboe mansion, seeking statements from the politician, his daughter and the higher police officials who were personally investigating the murder and abduction.

Corrigan faced the barrage of questions that were hurled at him. "Yes, I've been fired off the force."

"Jarboe's orders?"

Corrigan nodded. "He accused me of wilfully withholding identification of the snatch sedan so it could have time for a clean getaway."

"For what reason?"



"He claims I wanted to get even with him for having me demoted to the ambulance run."

"Is it true?"

Corrigan choked back the indignant denial that leaped to his lips. Seized by a sudden idea, he gestured the group of reporters closer. "Look, boys. Jarboe's daughter described a guy that might be Frenchy Venner, understand? But she's got no corroboration. He could come up with an alibi."

"You mean a phony alibi?" a newspaperman asked.

"Phony or otherwise, he might make it stick if it's good. On the other hand, it wouldn't be worth a damn if I backed the girl. Suppose I testify I recognized Venner in the getaway car? He'd be a gone goose."

"Sure. The point is, *did* you recognize him?"

Corrigan twisted his mouth in a malicious grin. "I'm not saying anything now. Maybe I know more than I'm telling; maybe not. You don't expect me to play ball with the law when I just got booted off the force, do you? Let them reinstate me, give me my old job back. I might see things differently then. Until that happens, though, I'm dummying up."

The reporters stared at him in abrupt distaste. You could almost read their thoughts. Mentally they were calling Mike Corrigan a lousy heel. He knew this, and his cheeks flushed under the scornful contempt he saw in their eyes. Well, that was okay, he reflected. Let them think it. What did he care if—his scheme worked?

He pivoted, walked away from them; sensed their haste as they scattered and made for the nearest telephones. Presently, extra editions would be on the streets. There would be headlines telling of the kidnaping; and other headlines announcing that a certain discharged copper named Mike Corrigan could probably

finger Frenchy Venner if he wanted to, only he didn't want to for reasons of personal vengeance against Harrison Jarboe.

CORRIGAN called the turn as far as those headlines were concerned. In less than an hour the newspapers were all over town; and he was pilloried on their front pages. He bought one, read it, grinned crookedly, and went home to his bachelor bungalow on El Molino. He was just keeping his front door open when he felt a gun being jammed against his spine.

"Freeze, flatfoot," a voice muttered harshly.

Mike Corrigan froze. "How are you, Frenchy?" he said without turning to look at the guy with the gun.

"Oh," the rasping voice said. "So you know who it is?"

"Of course. When I gave that interview to the newspapers, I figured you'd show up."

"How come you figured?"

"Well, I told the reporters just enough to worry you. You're not sure whether I did or didn't tab you in that sedan. Naturally, if you're guilty, you can't afford to have me running around alive, possibly to testify you into the gas chamber. So here you are to knock me off."

The voice said: "Face this way, wise guy. Before I bump you, I wanna tell you something."

Corrigan turned slowly; saw a tall, swarthy man whose left cheek was marked by a queerly shaped knife scar from mouth to ear. "Speak your piece, Frenchy."

"Yeah, I will," Venner grated. "It ain't gonna do you any good, y'unnastand, on account of you ain't gonna be alive long enough to tell nobody else. But I wantcha to know I never hung the snatch on no brat. I never croaked no nursemaid, neither. I don't care what you or the newspapers says."



Corrigan's eyes were steady. "You deny breaking into the Jarboe house?"

"I don't deny that, no. Sure I busted in and petered his wall safe. I hadda conk the jane when she seen me comin' through the window. But I never went upstairs, get me? I never done no kidnagin'. That's why I'm gonna rub you out, on account of you made it look like I done them things."

"You lie, Frenchy. You're guilty of that abduction. I know it and you know it. Why argue? Now go ahead and shoot me. Maybe you haven't got the guts."

THE ex-convict raised his gun, squeezed its trigger. It didn't belch a bullet at Mike Corrigan, though. Corrigan had moved with split-second timing; had thrust his open hand at the weapon, jamming his thumb between the hammer and the firing pin. The descending hammer chewed into his flesh; sent a fiery needle of agony all the way up his arm. He ignored the pain; smashed his free fist into Frenchy Venner's mouth.

Venner staggered under the impact of the punch; lost his grip on the pistol. Corrigan got it, reversed it, slugged it savagely down on the crook's skull. Venner moaned, sagged, folded forward like a collapsing sack.

"No you don't!" Corrigan whispered as he caught his adversary and propped him upright. "You're not passing out on me. Not yet. Not until I've worked you over." And he dragged Venner into the cottage, made a light, slammed the panting man into a chair. "I want to know your hideout, Frenchy."

"You . . . go to . . . hell!"

Corrigan grinned mirthlessly. "I hoped you'd say that. I've been pushed around for quite a while. It's going to be pleasant to push somebody else around for a change." He raised his right foot; kicked Venner in the kneecap.

A howl came from Venner's gullet. "God—you've crippled me, you lousy—"

"That's just the start," Corrigan said. He lighted a match; deliberately touched it to his prisoner's greasy black hair. A crackle of flame danced across Venner's head and he beat at the blaze with both hands. He didn't look very pretty afterward. Venner got a panicky expression in his eyes.

"You—you can't—"

"I'm going to kill you by inches if you don't tell me where your hideout is," Corrigan answered dispassionately. "That's why I used myself as bait to trap you. I took a chance that you might kill me first. I risked my own life. And I won the gamble. Will you talk, or shall I use my pocketknife on you? I bet you'd look funny with your eyes dug out."

Venner couldn't take it. He talked. He babbled like a condemned man trying to escape the gibbet. He told what Corrigan wanted to know: the address of his hideout. Corrigan nodded and jabbed him outdoors to his car. Presently they were in the cheap, frowsy apartment where Frenchy Venner had been living since his release from prison.

In this apartment Mike Corrigan found the loot that had been stolen from Harrison Jarboe's wall safe. He didn't find Jarboe's grandchild, though.

He studied the cringing Venner. "What did you do with the kid, kill it and toss its body out of your car as you made your getaway?"

"Nix . . . honest to God, I never snatched no brat!" There was hysteria in Venner's voice; a shrill earnestness that annoyed Mike Corrigan. In fact, he was so annoyed that he knocked Venner to the floor with a smashing uppercut and then kicked him on the head. This, Corrigan reflected, should hold him for a while. He kicked him again for good measure, just to be certain. Then he handcuffed the unconscious crook to a water



pipe and walked out of the flat, scowling.

He drove across town, southward on Los Robles. Down near the California Street intersection there was a bungalow court; a sort of combination of professional offices and living quarters. Each cottage of the ten which formed a U was occupied by either a dentist or a doctor, most of them so young they couldn't afford offices in any of the uptown buildings. Therefore they saved expenses by living as well as practising here in these bungalows.

Corrigan went to the rearmost one. It was Doc Ledyard's address. Ledyard himself opened the door to Corrigan's knock. Corrigan thrust his gun into the surgeon's belly and said: "*Hand over the baby, Doc. I mean now.*"

**S**TUNNED amazement crawled across Ledyard's features. "What did you say? Are—are you c-crazy?"

"No. I'm just wise," Corrigan said. "Wise to you, Doc. You kidnaped that grandchild of Jarboe's."

"Get out!" the surgeon panted. "Put up that gun and get out of here."

"Not until you give me the kid. I know you've got it. That's the way it has to be; the only logical way. I caught the prowler who burgled Jarboe's safe, the guy in the black sedan. He wasn't the snatch artist, though. He convinced me he wasn't."

Ledyard's eyes were bulging. "All right, so he convinced you. So what makes you think I—"

"You're the only one who could have had access to the nursery. Remember when you left the boudoir and said you were going down to the ambulance for bandages? I think you must have slipped into the kid's room at that time. I think you grabbed the kid out of its crib. I think the nursemaid caught you, so you caved in her skull to keep her from squealing on you. It was done very

quietly. You lowered her body to the floor and then took the baby out to the ambulance. You probably put adhesive tape over its mouth to keep it from crying."

The surgeon started cursing. "This is fantastic. What would be my motive for—?"

"Money," Corrigan answered. "The hope of collecting enough ransom to let you quit the hospital ambulance and devote yourself to a private practice that doesn't earn you a decent living. Revenge was another reason. Jarboe's daughter jilted you and married another guy. You hated her for that; wanted to make her suffer, although you pretended to stay friendly."

"You're out of your mind!"

Corrigan said: "No; you must have been out of yours. I don't claim this was premeditated tonight. You saw an opportunity and took advantage of it. The Jarboe house had been burglarized; the girl knocked out. You figured a kidnaping would be blamed on the burglar. You took the child to the ambulance; later transferred it to your own car in the hospital garage and brought it home to this bungalow."

Ledyard sucked in his breath. "That's a lie!"

"It's true, Doc. Eliminating Frenchy Venner and members of the Jarboe household, you're the only one who *could* be guilty. I wish you'd give me the baby. I'd hate to dish you what I dished Venner."

The surgeon seemed on the verge of snarling another blanket denial. He never spoke the words, though. From his bedroom came a whimpering, mewling cry; the wail of an infant. It damned Doc Ledyard and proved his guilt more than anything else could have done. In desperation he leaped at Corrigan's gun.

Corrigan shot him in the mouth. Then he circled the corpse, went into the back



room, found the kidnaped baby uninjured and began looking for a phone to call the Jarboe mansion. Later he dialed Headquarters and told them where they could pick up the badly battered Frenchy Venner.

All in all, things were looking up for Mike Corrigan. He'd made a copper's comeback—and presently Harrison Jarboe, much chastened, was shaking his hand.

"I'll see that you're reinstated, Mike.

Not as a patrolman, but as a plainclothes detective sergeant. It's the promotion you deserve."

Corrigan thanked him and went home, thinking how swell it was going to be when they pinned his badge back on him. A sergeant of detectives! Now, that was really something.

He found a letter in his mailbox when he reached his house. He opened the envelope.

It was his draft notice.

## SOME DOPE ON DICE



THE Irish Sweepstakes has been known to take millions out of this country; at race tracks, hundreds of thousands of dollars pour into the mutuel machines in a never-ending stream of greenbacks; millions of bucks have changed hands on the outcome of a World's Series game, or a professional prizefight. But, strange as it may seem, this is all small potatoes compared to the dough that slips from hand to hand upon the roll of a pair of ivory or celluloid cubes, six-sided and dotted.

The game of "craps" is strictly an American affair. While no attempt has been made to estimate how much money is actually "faded" in the countless games, big and small, that are constantly going on, a fair guess would give the game the top spot in gambling.

In the first place, "craps" can be played by prince or pauper. You can shoot a nickel or a million dollars. In the second place, you get a fast reaction. There's no waiting around while the horses go to the post. You shake, they click, you roll, and

you know pretty soon whether they are your dice or the guy's on the left.

But what of the background of these galloping cubes? Well, there was a Greek legend that dice were invented at the siege of Troy by Palamedes. Herodotus, however, ascribes the invention to the Lydians. This latter group, under pressure of a great famine, searched about for a way to hoard their food. They devised dice and bowls and, every other day, for eighteen years, they abstained from food: they spent that day gambling!

Tacitus claims that the ancient Germans not only would hazard all their wealth, but even stake their liberty, upon the turn of the dice; and he who lost submitted to servitude. Though younger and stronger than his antagonist, the loser would patiently permit himself to be bound and sold in the market. The Saxons, the Danes, and the Normans, likewise were addicted to the pastime.

In the reign of Henry the Eighth, dice playing was a fashionable diversion. His Highness, it was recorded by an his-

*(Continued on page 109)*



# HOLLYWOOD'S PRIVATE EYE



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# Bad Water



ED MARTIN was no longer chief of police when he found the body. Jed had been chief for twenty-seven years, but then had been pushed aside to make room for younger men and more modern methods.

He didn't worry about it. To be sure, he was of the opinion that Arnold's Cove had no need for modern methods, but

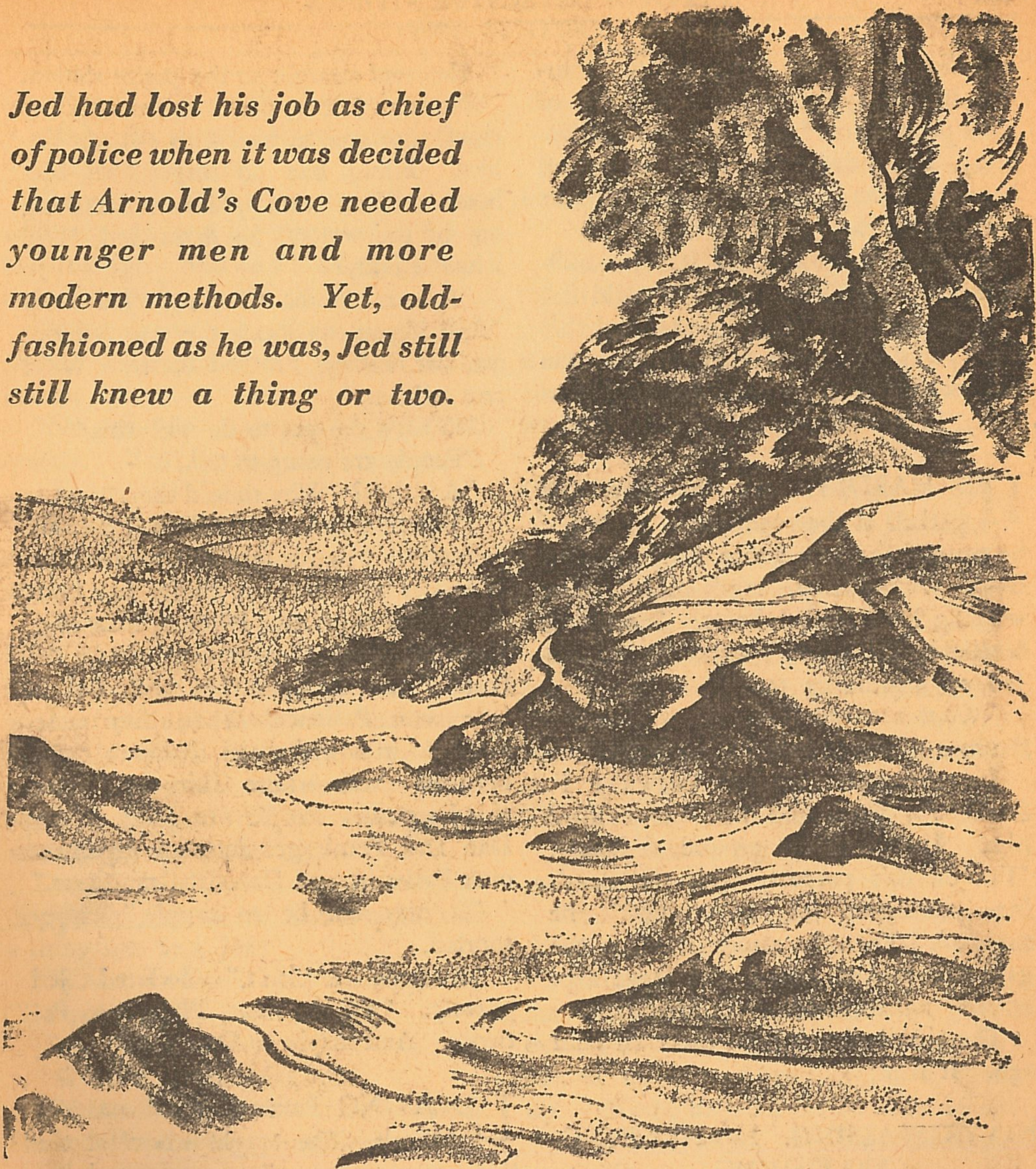


When he got the body to shore and saw that it wasn't Dan, he felt a little better.

**By JUSTIN CASE**



*Jed had lost his job as chief of police when it was decided that Arnold's Cove needed younger men and more modern methods. Yet, old-fashioned as he was, Jed still knew a thing or two.*



at sixty-four he was content to do a little painting and relaxing.

He had to come to Mosquito Brook to paint. Now, his easel neglected, he peered through his spectacles at a human hand that protruded like a stump from the water.

He shed his shoes. The water tugged icily at his ankles as he waded in. A moment later he peered at the body through drifting islands of foam, and recognized the coat and sweater, and felt awful.

The coat and sweater belonged to Dan Higgins, and Dan Higgins—though years younger—was one of Jed's best friends.

Jed towed the body to shore and removed the sodden fly-net that half covered the face. His eyes widened then and he was suddenly limp with relief. The sweater was still Dan's. The brown fishing coat was Dan's. But the dead man was Frank Cleaves.

Jed didn't feel quite so awful. He sat and stared at the dead man's battered head and knew that it was mur-



der, though. It was the Cove's first murder in twenty years. He thought of what people would say. White and trembling, he waded the stream again and began the long walk back to where he had left his car.

"They'll say Dan did it," he muttered aloud. "They'll say Dan did it." He was cold and wet; he shivered; his heart was a heavier burden than the easel which he had gathered up, mechanically, before leaving the scene of death.

HE HARDLY saw the other car parked at the road's end, but when he opened the gate a man strode toward him. A chunky, sandy-haired man wearing hard leather boots. Something hostile in the fellow's approach warned Jed of impending trouble.

"What are *you* doin' here, Martin?" the man demanded without preamble.

Jed stiffened. He had known J. F. Starke for years and had never liked him. He stood his ground doggedly. "I'm on this property with the standing permission of its owner!" he snapped. Then he strode through the gate and looked aghast at a large sign securely nailed to the outer face of it.

The sign had not been there an hour ago. It read:

NO TRESPASSING. NO HUNTING.  
NO FISHING.

By Order of J. F. STARKE, Owner.

"It may interest you to know, Martin," Starke said acidly, "that *I'm* the owner of this property. You're trespassin'." He jabbed a finger at Jed's car. "Now get out!"

Jed's grizzled face was a thundercloud as he drove away, but when he arrived in Arnold's Cove half an hour later, he had forgotten the incident. His mind was too full of murder and murder's potential aftermath.

He went straight to the police station. Norman Ellbey, the town's new police chief, glowered at him with obvious dislike. Ellbey had no respect for has-beens. "You actually fished the thing out of the water," he demanded, "and it *was* a body?"

"It was Frank Cleaves," Jed said. "And if you can locate the spot without me, Mr. Ellbey, I'll find Patience Weld and tell her."

"What's she got to do with this?"

"People are going to talk."

"Are they? Why should they?"

"You're a busy man, Ellbey," Jed said patiently. "You maybe don't have time to bother with ordinary things like love-affairs and rivalries. Point is, Dan Higgins and Frank Cleaves were always the best of friends until they both fell in love with Patience. Then they quarreled. Little while ago, Patience chose between them—chose Dan—and now *this* happens. People are going to say Dan and Frank got into an argument over Patience, and Dan's the murderer."

"It may not be so simple," Ellbey snorted.

"I hope it isn't," declared Jed gravely. "All the same, I'll talk to Patience. And maybe to Dan, too."

LOCATING Patience Weld was not difficult. She taught school at the tiny one-room schoolhouse on Cranberry Road. A bit shy about invading a room full of kids, Jed Martin paused beside his car, then went around back and spoke to a lanky, overalled youth who was weeding the school garden-patch.

"Morning, Douglas," Jed said. "Go in and tell Miss Weld I'd like a word with her, will you?"

They were not overly bright, most of Miss Weld's brood of cranberry-pickers' children. From overcrowded homes where food was scarce and living conditions deplorable, most of them attended



school only because the law insisted on it. But almost without exception, they worshipped Patience.

Douglas Randall, for example, was eighteen. He had the mentality of a boy half that age. And he adored the ground on which Patience walked.

"What you want her for?" he growled at Jed. "If you come here to make trouble for her—"

"No trouble, Douglas," Jed said quietly. "I'm not the police any more, you know."

The boy glared at him suspiciously, then slouched away to deliver the message.

Jed peered at the girl who came toward him and didn't wonder that half the Cove was in love with her. She was as fresh and lovely as a June morning. He braced himself and told her what had happened. He took one of her hands in his and told her what people were going to say about it.

Deathly pale, she stared at him in sudden panic. "But—but Dan wouldn't do a thing like that, Jed!"

"Where is Dan"? Jed asked gently. "Do you know?"

"No, but—"

"When'd you see him last?"

"This morning. He drove me to school. He and Frank were going fishing."

"Together?"

Patience Weld looked into the old man's widening eyes and nodded. "Yes, Jed, together. Dan and I were talking over our wedding plans last night, and there was just one thing wrong, so we righted it. We went to Frank's house and asked him to be best man. Dan and Frank used to be like brothers. I wanted them to be friends again. They—they shook hands and made a date to go fishing this morning."

Jed should have been the happiest man on earth, hearing that news, but he wasn't. He shook his head, scowl-

ing. "That's bad," he muttered. "Bad."

"But why?"

"Does anyone else know they went fishing together?"

"No. I don't think so."

"Then let's keep it a secret," Jed said, "until I look deeper into this and have a talk with Dan." He gave her hand a squeeze. "You run along back to your adoring half-wits now, and I'll get to work."

THE old man was muttering to himself as he drove away. He didn't like this new turn of events at all. If people heard of it, they would immediately jump to conclusions. "So Dan and Frank went fishing together," they'd say, "after patching up their differences! Well, well, isn't that nice? But you can't bury a hate so easy. What happened, they had an argument while fishing. They fought, and Frank was killed!"

"Looks like I got to find Dan," Jed muttered.

That was not so easy. Dan was not down at the wharves; he was not out on his scallop boat; he was not helping old man Maginnis at the oyster house. Jed exhausted all of the boy's haunts without success, and after three hours of it, gave up. "Maybe he went out of town on an errand," he thought. But it was a remote possibility, and he was worried.

The police were waiting for him when he arrived home at his cottage. They wanted him, they explained, at the station. When he got there, Chief Ellbey had a large topographical map spread on the desk and was poring over it with a pencil.

"Jed," the new chief said tersely, "we want you to show us on the map here exactly where the body was when you found it."

Jed put on his spectacles and traced the course of Mosquito Brook with his thumb. "Here," he said, pointing.



"Was it possible, in your opinion, for the body to have drifted down to that spot?"

"Nope," Jed declared. "The water just above is less'n a foot deep. If the body had come down, it would have been trapped there."

covered book with rectangles of felt for pages. "Look at that," he snapped. It was a fly-book. Jed picked it up and found it full of trout flies of all colors of the rainbow, and saw Dan Higgins' name inked inside the cover.

"We found that," Ellbey said, scowl-



"Then in your opinion Frank Cleaves was killed where you found him?"

"Must have been," Jed said.

Norman Ellbey opened a drawer of the desk and took out a small leather-

ing at him, "behind a rock near the pool where you found Frank. It hadn't been



there long. It wasn't wet from last night's rain. And it belongs to Dan Higgins!"

"I see it does," Jed declared, wonder-

ing if he looked as miserable as he felt. "It begins to look like Dan is the man you want, don't it?"

"It certainly does!"



He thrust out a foot and the chief went sprawling.



"You any idea where he is?" Jed asked.

"No! But perhaps you have!"

"I haven't," Jed mumbled. He sat down, staring at the fly-book. "I been looking for him myself, all over, and couldn't find him." Raising his gaze, he studied Ellbey's grim face for a moment. "I wish—I sort of hope, Mr. Ellbey—you won't give this out to the gossipers until you're sure. It will break a certain young lady's heart."

"I'm very much afraid," said Ellbey, snorting, "the young lady's heart will have to shift for itself. When we find Dan Higgins, he'll be arrested for murder!"

Jed sighed, but he was hardly listening. His gaze was fixed on the wall beside the door—on a poster advertising boxing matches at the Cape Casino. Upon it, two sturdy young men were belting each other. Jed sighed again, and stood up. "By the way," he said, "did you find Frank's fishing rod?"

"No," said Ellbey, "we didn't. No doubt Dan took it away with him after killing Frank. The rod wouldn't float downstream any more than the body would. Too much brush."

Jed paused at the door. "But a girl's happiness is a mighty precious thing, Mr. Ellbey. I wish you'd think of that."

He went home, then, and went to bed, because it was too dark to do what he wanted to do.

IT WAS three in the morning when Jed heard a knock at the back door of his cottage. He went downstairs in his night-robe. To the young man who stood on the stoop, he said matter-of-factly, "I kind of thought you'd come, 'fore long. Come in."

The young man's head was high and his shoulders were back, despite the pallor of his face and the twitching of his lips. "The police are looking for me, Jed," he

said. "Far as I'm concerned, you're the police in this town. So here I am."

"Come in," Jed said again. "You look tuckered out, Dan. I'll put on some coffee."

"Am I—am I under arrest?"

"Ain't up to me to arrest you. I'm not the law."

Dan Higgins clenched his fists. "They think I murdered Frank!" he said bitterly. "They think I killed him and ran away! I know what they're saying—and it's not true!"

"Never thought it was," Jed declared, busy with coffee pot and oil stove. "What did happen, Dan?"

"I don't know what happened! We were fishing. We got separated on the stream. When I got to Mosquito Hollow bridge, I waited half an hour or so, knowing Frank was behind me. Then I went on home and drove up to New Bedford, to buy some clothes to get married in, and a gift for Patience."

"You know about the fly-book?"

"Patience told me. But I wasn't using that book, Jed. It was in the coat I lent to Frank. *He* left it there beside the brook—not me! They can't call me a murderer just because—"

"I never said they could, Dan," Jed declared quietly. "You keep an eye on the coffee while I straighten up the spare room for you. It ain't been dusted since Matilda died, I'll bet." He steered Dan to a chair by the stove, but stopped at the kitchen door, turned suddenly and said, "Does Patience know you're here?"

"Yes."

"Was her no-good uncle at the house?"

"Yes, he was."

A scowl twisted Jed's face. "That's bad. Bad. That drunken uncle of hers is apt to tell the police you came here. Nothing would make him happier'n seeing you behind bars, son. It don't set so well, the prospect of losing Patience and



having to shift for himself." Dan Higgins said wearily, "What's the difference? I can't hide out forever."

"Maybe," Jed declared, "we won't need that long."

NO ONE told Jed Martin he was trespassing when he opened the old bar gate at quarter to five that morning. The road was hushed and deserted. There was a chill bite in the air and a wetness underfoot.

Leaving his car, Jed hurried on down the road through the woods. When he got to the place where he had found the body, he began wading with the current.

He had been right, of course, in telling the police that the body could not have drifted downstream to the point where he'd found it. Where he had erred, he realized, was in not guessing that it might have walked *upstream*.

He waded down a quarter mile, and it was hard going. The willows were thick, the bull-briars and black alders thicker. Every so often the beauty of the woods was marred by one of J. F. Starke's NO TRESPASSING signs, solidly nailed to a tree.

One of these signs, not so solidly nailed, adorned an ancient oak close to where Jed finally found the fishing rod.

He plucked the rod from a tangle of alder roots close to the bank, and examined it, then scowled at the sign and turned to go. In the shallow water he stepped on something. It was a hammer. Burned into the handle was a name, and the name was J. F. Starke.

Jed Martin wore a long, thoughtful frown as he tramped back to his car. It was in his power, he realized, to raise a lot of cain. But he was an old man. His cain-raising days were about over. "Feel-in's are easy stirred up," he mused, "but less easy rubbed smooth again. I'll do this my way."

He drove to town and parked in front of the modest one-story building that

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housed the Arnold's Cove *Clarion*. For an hour or so he talked with Jeremiah Tucks, editor and owner. The *Clarion*, a two-page daily, came out that afternoon with bold headlines. And with a story calculated to start a swift spread of gossip. More than any other man alive, Jed Martin knew the power of Arnold's Cove gossip!

He hoped that Patience and Dan would forgive him. He braced himself for the inevitable clash with Police Chief Ellbey. About four o'clock, Ellbey cornered him and shook a crumpled copy of the *Clarion* in the old man's face.

"You're responsible for this, Martin! What's the meaning of it?"

"Why," Jed said with simulated innocence, "you made up your mind Dan Higgins was guilty, so I passed the word along to Tucks. That's all right, ain't it?"

"You fool! Suppose Dan Higgins isn't guilty! I'll be the laughing stock of the State!"

"You said he *was* guilty," Jed retorted. "And I figured you're smart enough to know." He got into his car, leaving Ellbey red-faced on the curb. "Me, I'm goin' fishing," Jed said, indicating a fly-rod on the seat beside him. "Like to come along, Ellbey?"

"You're up to something, Jed Martin!"

"Am I?"

"By the Lord, I *will* come along! I don't trust you!"

With a sly smile, Jed thrust open the car door.

THE black-flies were out in full force on Mosquito Brook. They filled the still air with a continuous buzzing sound, not loud but annoying. Time crawled. Time had been crawling for two hours, and Norman Ellbey was about out of patience.

"I don't like it!" Ellbey muttered. *Slap*. "Confound these bugs!" *Slap*. "If

this is your idea of a practical joke, Jed Martin, I—"

"I'm not joking," Jed said gravely. "I never promised you nothing, Mr. Ellbey. I merely told you what I hoped would happen." He moved a little in the willow thicket, and cocked his head. "Listen. Someone's coming!"

They both saw the fellow at the same instant, when he came plunging out of the woods a little distance upstream and stopped to free his legs from entangling briars. This done, he waded vigorously into the stream, all the time slapping at black-flies buzzing about his head. The flies were so thick about him that recognition from more than a foot away was impossible.

He strode downstream and cut to his right, searched a moment along the bank and snatched up a fishing rod which Jed had placed there two hours ago. He gave the rod but a glance, then turned to retrace his steps.

At this point Chief Ellbey unholstered a gun, revealed himself and shouted, "Hey!"

The fellow stopped short. Ellbey stepped into the brook and advanced upon him through swift, shallow water. "Whose rod is that?" Ellbey demanded.

Douglas Randall, Patience Weld's backward pupil, sent a quick, frightened glance at the bank, decided it was too far, and said uneasily, "Why, it—it's mine. I left it here."

"Let's see it!"

Randall handed over the rod. "I ain't done nothin'," he mumbled. "It's mine, I tell you. I put it here and—"

For a boy of low mentality he was remarkably agile. He thrust out a foot. Chief Ellbey, precariously balanced on a moss-covered stone in midstream, went sprawling, and Randall floundered wildly for shore.

By this time, Jed Martin was in motion.



Jed snatched the fishing rod from the stream as it drifted toward him. A flick of his wrist sent the line whistling back over his head, where by a miracle it cleared the low bushes behind him. A second flick sent it looping forward again.

It fell short, that first cast, but Jed was an old hand with fly-rods. On his second try he put the fly where he wanted it. The barbed hook flashed in front of the fleeing man's face as he scrambled shoreward. It lit, and a jerk of Jed's arm set the hook in his chin. Randall clawed at his chin and lost his footing, and Chief Ellbey, angry and sputtering, caught up to him.

LATER, at the station, Douglas Randall was mulishly stubborn. "You can't prove nothin'," he snarled.

"I think we can," Jed said. "I think you were putting up signs for J. F. Starke, and when Frank came along, wearing Dan Higgins' coat and sweater and a head-net, you mistook him for Dan and attacked him with the hammer. Trouble with you, you imagined yourself in love with Patience Weld and were crazy jealous. Dan says he had to warn you three or four times to stop annoying Patience. You want to deny that?"

Randall didn't deny it. He just glared.

"After Frank was attacked," Jed continued, scowling at Chief Ellbey and J. F. Starke and the others, "he was dazed and walked upstream a quarter mile until he stumbled and drowned. I admit I didn't think of that for a while. Matter of fact, it was the poster there on the wall that put the thought in my head." He pointed to the Cape Casino boxing ad, on which two young men were belting each other. "Fighters sometimes stay on their feet a long while after being hard hit," Jed mused. "When I thought of that, I went downstream and found the rod and the hammer, where Randall dropped them when he ran away."

J. F. Starke passed a hand across his

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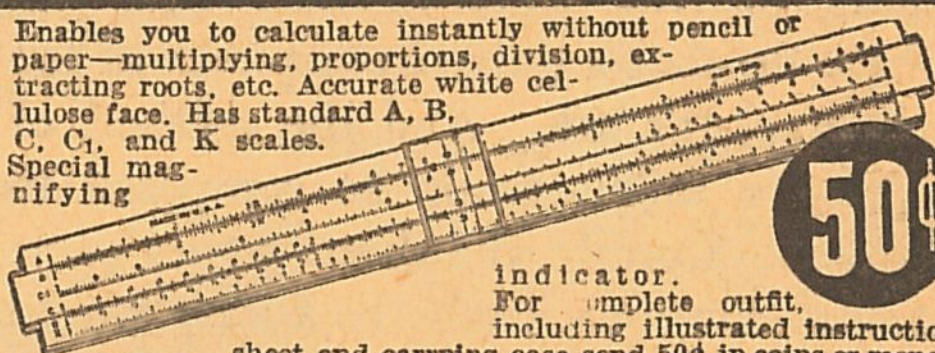
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face and said dazedly, "I suppose *I* should have realized the truth when it happened on my property. But I never dreamed—" He scowled at Jed. "Did *you* know who was guilty?"

"Nope," declared Jed. "I just figured a little gossip would maybe send the guilty party back after that rod. It was a mighty fine rod—maybe not worth quite as much as Tucks said in the *Clarion*, but mighty fine, just the same. And with the guilty man convinced that Dan was under arrest and the case closed, I figured he'd bite."

"But you didn't know it was Randall?"

"Nope. I just knew it wasn't Dan."

"And why," demanded Chief Ellbey murkily, "were you so sure it wasn't Dan?"

"I know Dan," said Jed calmly. "I may be old-fashioned as a petticoat, Ellbey, but I know Arnold's Cove and its people. Besides—" and the old man smiled across the room at Dan Higgins and the girl Dan was to marry—"I been fishin' with Dan lots of times. That stretch of brook is full of suckers. Dan wouldn't fish it on a bet."

---

## BOILER ROOM BANDITS

(Continued from page 47)

service, purporting to give impartial views on the general stock situation. These tip sheets were masterpieces of the typographer's art. And the method of their use might easily be compared to erosion. Steadily, the sheets would come in and, sub-consciously the sucker would be absorbing information on a new stock combining the safety of a government bond with the fantastic profit possibilities of a newly-discovered radium mine.

Silly? Not to the sucker. Nor to Watson Washburn who cleaned up the bucket shops and boiler rooms after instigating some 650 actions under the Federal Securities Act. Washburn discovered the

swindlers were quick to catch the drift of the suckers' fancy. Each new development in the field of science or of invention was capitalized on by the stocketeers: autos, radium, aviation, copper, silver, oil, television, all were used for phony stock issues.

Today, the sucker is protected despite himself. Of course, every now and then, a new crop of swindlers appears on the financial market, but the take isn't what it used to be. However, that doesn't discourage the boys who walk with the golden fleece. There are always the gullible who'll purchase the Empire State Building!





# SOME DOPE ON DICE

(Continued from page 96)

torian named Hall, was quite a sucker; to wit: "The king about this season was much given to play at tennis and at the dice, which latter appetite certain crafty persons about him perceiving, brought in Frenchmen and Lombards to make wagers with him, and so he lost much money; but when he perceived their craft, he eschewed their company, and let them go."

Those boys must have introduced the forerunners of what are now known as "Murder Dice." These are the simplest of phony dice, sometimes known also as "Tops and Bottoms." On these crooked cubes, the spots are incorrect. One type is used to roll "naturals" with deadly frequency; another intentionally mismatched pair will roll eternally and never hit 5-2, 4-3, or 6-1.

Or they could have brought "Heavies" into the game. Loaded with some foreign substance such as lead, silver, gold, or platinum, the dice become top-heavy. Thus, the heavier the "load" the less chance there is of the weighted side turning up at the end of a roll. To illustrate clearly, assume a gambler wished to load a pair of dice to fall a 6-5 natural. The opposite side to 6 is 1. The opposite side to 5 is 2. The gambler would have to load the 1 and 2 sides to make the 6 and 5 sides come up. But let's get back to history.

In England cogged dice were known by the name of fulhams, or fullams, because first made at Fulham. An alternate name was gourds. Shakespeare mentions dice in "Merry Wives of Windsor" when Pistol says: "Let vultures gripe thy guts for gourd and Fullham holds."

The Freemasons are said to profess great veneration for the cubical stone, and point out that the eyes on the two faces opposite to one another always make

(Continued on page 111)



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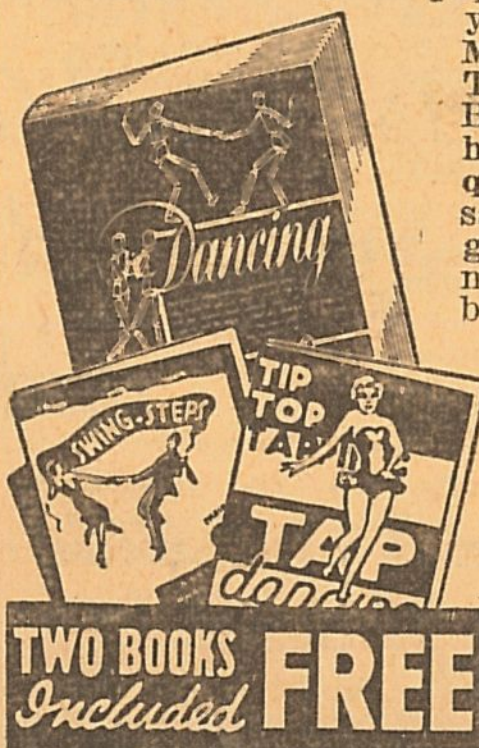
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## SOME DOPE ON DICE

(Continued from page 109)

up the number seven; the six sides of the cube represent the six working properties of nature: contraction, expansion, circulation, fire, light, and sound; while the cube as a whole represents the seventh property in which the six are comprised, or the comprisal of all; the six working days of the week and the Sabbath of rest.

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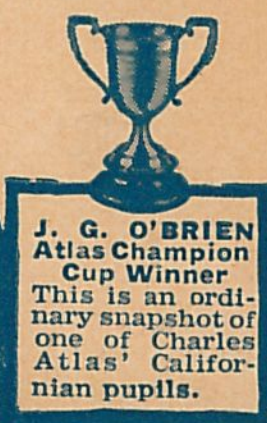
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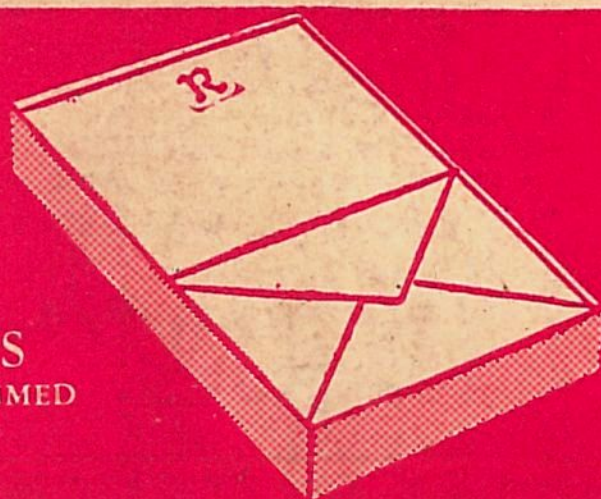
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