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MAGAZINE



The **SUICIDE MURDER**

by
Roger Torrey

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by Roger Torrey

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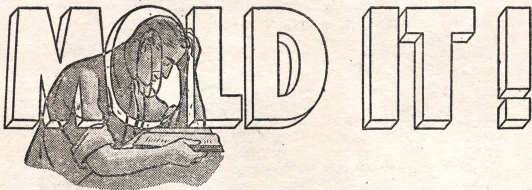
by Harold de Polo

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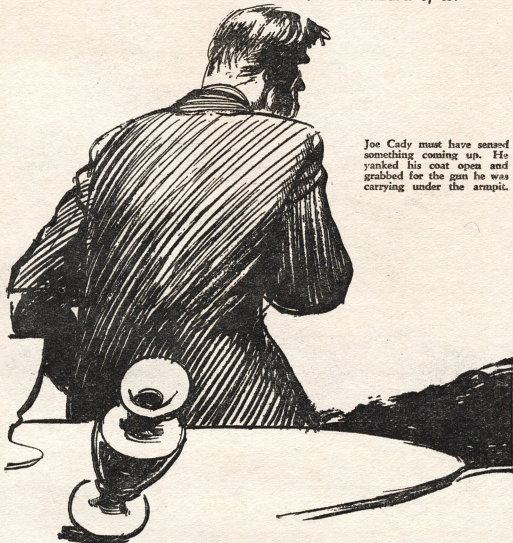
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THE SUICIDE

It seemed to Private-Detective Dolan that this was more than mere murder for insurance—and indeed it was. In fact, its angles were so intriguing and baffling that the shamus almost overlooked the special hazard of it!



Joe Cady must have sensed something coming up. He yanked his coat open and grabbed for the gun he was carrying under the armpit.



JOE CADY was short and blocky and a tough boy, either with his hands or with a gun. Mrs. Jerrold Lengel was plump and blonde and pretty, and looked like a showgirl. She was—she'd done her stint in almost every club in town

before she'd married Lengel. F. Horace Armage was little and thin and as bald as an egg—and as much of a shyster as any lawyer could be and still keep the Bar Association off his neck. He'd been Lengel's lawyer and the two had made a perfect team, Lengel having had a crying need of a crooked

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By ROGER TORREY

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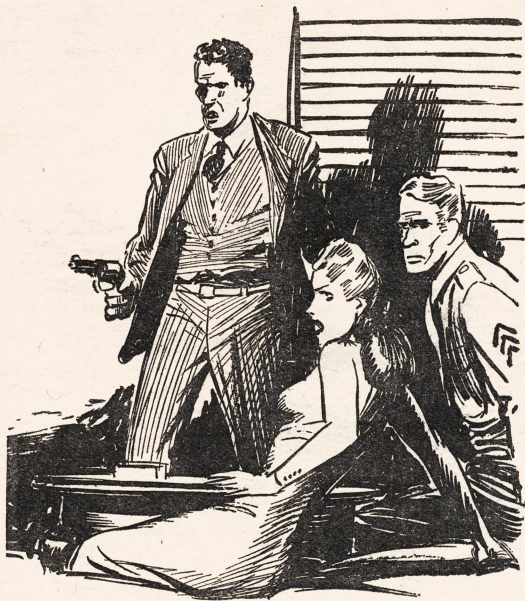


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lawyer every minute of the day and night.

All three of them looked sad and I didn't blame them. Cady had lost a good job bodyguarding Lengel. Mrs. Lengel had lost a meal ticket that was good for real, honest-to-goodness provender. And F. Horace Armage had lost a perfect client—one that probably paid him fifty thousand a year.

I said: "Yeah! I read about Mr. Lengel's . . . ah . . . unfortunate accident in the morning papers. I can only express my sympathy."

Cady said: "Oh, nuts to that, Dolan. It was no accident."

"The papers said suicide, Cady."

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MURDER

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"The papers are wrong."

Armage said smoothly: "What Mr. Cady is trying to say, Mr. Dolan, is that Mr. Lengel's death was not an accident or a suicide. It was murder, of course."

"The police don't seem to think that."

Mrs. Lengel said: "The police are going along with the insurance companies, Mr. Dolan. They're trying to beat me out of my money, that's what they're trying to do. They're a bunch of bums, these cops. The insurance companies are paying 'em off. And they'll take a pay-off, the hogs."

I thought she certainly should know—Lengel had been paying off half the force for the last five years he'd lived.

I said that it might be better if they'd tell me more about it, and I looked at Attorney F. Horace Armage when I said it. He was crooked but he was smart, and I didn't rate either Cady or Mrs. Lengel as much better than half-witted. If there was a story, Armage could make it clear—and clarity is something a man has to have if he's going to make sense of a thing.

Armage said: "Mr. Lengel and Mrs. Lengel were married just a little over six months ago. As you may know, immediately upon their marriage Mr. Lengel took out heavy life insurance, this on my advice."

Mrs. Lengel said, under her breath: "Because I wouldn't have married him if he hadn't."

I nodded.

ARMAGE gave her a reproving look and went on with the tale:

"As you know, no doubt, most life-insurance policies have a suicide clause. Mr. Lengel's policies were no exception—all were voided if Mr. Lengel committed suicide within a year from the time the policies went into effect. The amount is considerable, one hundred and sixty thousand dollars, and this is doubled in case of accidental death. I will say that I have little doubt of being able to convince a court that murder falls in that category."

By then I could see all the more reason for them all to be gloomy. Cady was probably down for a piece of the swag—Mrs. Lengel certainly was—and there was no doubt of Armage getting his cut of it. If

there was a dime involved, he'd get seven cents of it and I knew it.

I said: "Now look! The cops put it down as suicide and they must have had some reason for it. You know and I know that insurance companies aren't paying the police to hush up murder, regardless of the amount of money they stand to lose on the insured. What happened? All I know is what I read in the papers."

"Mr. Lengel was found in his library this morning by Mr. Cady. This was at four o'clock."

"A quarter to four," Cady said. "I had the night off and I got back then and saw the light burning in there. The door was standing open so I looked in and found him."

"Where?"

"Back of his desk. He was on the floor right where he'd tipped from his chair, I guess. The gun was by his hand, his right hand. He'd fallen across his other arm."

"Okay. Where was he shot?"

"Right temple. The gun was a .32 Colt automatic that he always kept in the top desk drawer."

"Nobody heard the shot?"

"Nobody will admit he did. There's a cook and a maid and a chauffeur, but they were all out. The chauffeur was driving Maudie—Mrs. Lengel, I mean—around. The cook and the maid both had the night off."

"And you did, too."

Cady bristled and said: "That's right. Lengel did that every time he had private business to work out with somebody. The guy was no chump—he didn't want witnesses to anything."

That checked all right with what I knew of Lengel, although I didn't say so. Lengel had a finger in a lot of pies, and while a lot of people suspected it, nobody had yet proved he was helping bake them. He'd started as a ward boss but he'd built himself up into a lot more than that. He owned a contracting company as a front, but outside of city contracts it took no work. He was a good-time Charley in the night spots—nobody had liked him but they liked the money he spent—and there was no ques-

tion of his pulling a lot of weight in city and county politics.

A greasy guy, and I'd hated the ground he'd walked on.

I SAID: "There's nothing to show that it was murder, and it's a typical suicide set-up. Did the cops have anything more than that to go on?"

Armage said grudgingly: "Well, there's been some talk of an investigation, Mr. Dolan. Of course it would have fallen through—my clients do not often go past the stage of being questioned by the Grand Jury, I'm happy to say—but the police seem to think that worry over that caused Mr. Lengel to take his own life. That is ridiculous, of course."

"Why, Mr. Armage?"

Armage smiled thinly and said: "Mr. Lengel wasn't the suicidal type, for one thing. He wasn't worried in the least, for another. Did you know him, Mr. Dolan?"

"I've met him."

"Well?"

He was right, of course. Lengel would no more have killed himself than any other pig-headed thug would do a suicide. Mrs. Lengel put the thing in words—and such words.

She said: "That big lug wouldn't do the Dutch. He'd have been the last man in the world to do it. He thought he was the nuts, and them kind of guys don't go out that way. If he'd been jammed, he'd have toughed it out—and he'd have made it tough for the guy that jammed him. No sir, mister, somebody got to him with his own little getter."

Armage frowned at her and said: "And we want you to prove it, Mr. Dolan. As you can see, we can expect nothing from the police. The case is closed, as far as they are concerned. They have written it off as suicide and that's the end of it for them."

"Any idea of who'd have it in for him enough to do a thing like that? One man doesn't kill another unless he's forced, as a usual thing."

"Offhand, Mr. Dolan, I can name you fifty men who've had reason to think of killing Mr. Lengel. Most of them are out of

it, of course. Their trouble happened in the past, and if they'd have been bent on murder, the murder would have happened at the time, not now. I offer that only as a reasonable theory, of course—men have been known to brood about their troubles and revenge themselves long after, but I don't believe that's the usual thing."

He was right on that and I said so—cause and effect usually come together where murder is involved. And I also found exactly what they wanted me to do.

I said: "Then I take it you want me to find who killed Mr. Lengel—that is, if he was killed and not by his own hand."

"We don't care who killed him," Mrs. Lengel said. "We just want to prove he didn't do it himself. The guy that did it should have a medal. I should have one for living with the lug."

It was the same word again—apparently a favorite of hers. I took it Mr. Lengel hadn't been popular even in his family circle, but that was nothing to me.

Or so I thought.

CHAPTER II

Rough Girl, Tough Boy



ERROLD LENGEL, JR., was a fat-faced kid, probably around twenty-five—which made him two or three years older than his step-mother. He talked too much, laughed too much, drank too much, and spent more money than any kid of that age should have his hands on, but I'd never blamed him for that. I'd always thought that if Lengel wanted to ruin the boy by giving him too much spending money, why, that came under the general heading of Lengel's business.

I knew the kid from seeing him around different bars and hot spots, and I neither liked nor disliked him.

This time I found him in the Starlight Club, sitting on a bar stool with a blonde on one side of him and another blonde and a brunette on the other. He wasn't drunk, if you figure a man isn't drunk until he can't wiggle a finger, but he was certainly under the influence.

I said: "Good, Junior! I was looking for you."

He looked my way, too blind even to recognize me, and said, "Hunh! Havva drink!"

I said I'd stick to the regular tippie and the barman slid a bottle of Old Overholt and a glass of water my way. The blonde and brunette on the other side of Junior whispered together for a minute and then the blonde slid off her stool and came over and leaned on my shoulder. I saw then she was almost as drunk as Junior was.

She said: "Hey! Your name Dolan?"

"Sure."

"Marty Dolan?"

"That's right."

"Used to be on the cops?"

"Five years, hon. I've been apologizing ever since."

She stood flat-footed and slapped at my face, and I tipped my head back and her hand whooshed by my nose. She lost her balance and spun half around and started to fall, and I got my arm around her and kept her on her feet.

I said: "Now what was that for, hon?"

"You pinched my brother, you louse."

"If you get clever with your hands and that mouth of yours, hon, you'll wish brother was here to look after you."

"To hell with you, you louse."

There were two other couples besides Junior's party in the place, but they were clear at the other end of the bar. I don't suppose I'd have done it if the bar had been crowded, but I don't like to have my face slapped and have names called me by little girls I've never even met. I leaned back against the bar for purchase, hauled the wench over my knees, and paddled her half a dozen times on the paddling place, and the flat of my hand made a spitting sound that could have been heard half a block away. She was wearing a thin silk dress and little under it, and she just fitted the palm of my hand to perfection.

I set her back and said: "If I'd merely told you that papa would spank you, you wouldn't have believed me. Now you know I will. Let's have no more slaps and no more names."

THE little fuss had snapped Junior out of his daze and he was staring at me almost as though he was in his right mind. The blonde girl opened her mouth until I thought she was going to scream, then turned and almost ran toward the ladies' room, and Junior started to laugh at the top of his voice and to pound on the bar.

"That beats me," he said. "That's something I always wanted to do in a bar, but I never had guts enough. Have a drink, Dolan."

At least he recognized me, which he hadn't when I'd first spoken to him. One of the men from one of the other two couples at the end of the bar came weaving down toward me, shaking a finger at me reprovingly.

"At's no way to treat the little woman," he told me. "Now that's over—m' wife told me to tell you *that*. Shake hands, brother, and if you get any lip from m' wife, you do the same to her."

I shook hands and refused a drink with him and nodded Junior over toward one of the booths against the wall. He was drunker than seven hundred dollars but I had a notion, that might be all to the good—he was also drunk enough to let out what he really thought.

I said:

"Okay, Junior, pay attention. D'ya think your father was murdered?"

"Sure he was."

"Where's your wife?"

"She's home. She says it isn't decent to go out and take a little snifter right after your dad's been killed."

"She's maybe got something there, kid."

"What's the difference? Dad's dead, whether I take a drink or not, ain't he?"

"Well, maybe *you've* got something there. I want to know if you've got any idea of who might have killed him."

"Sure. *She* did."

"Who?"

"Maude! That damn' step-mother of mine."

"Why?"

"His insurance, of course."

"She seems to think she's going to have trouble collecting it. The police are call-

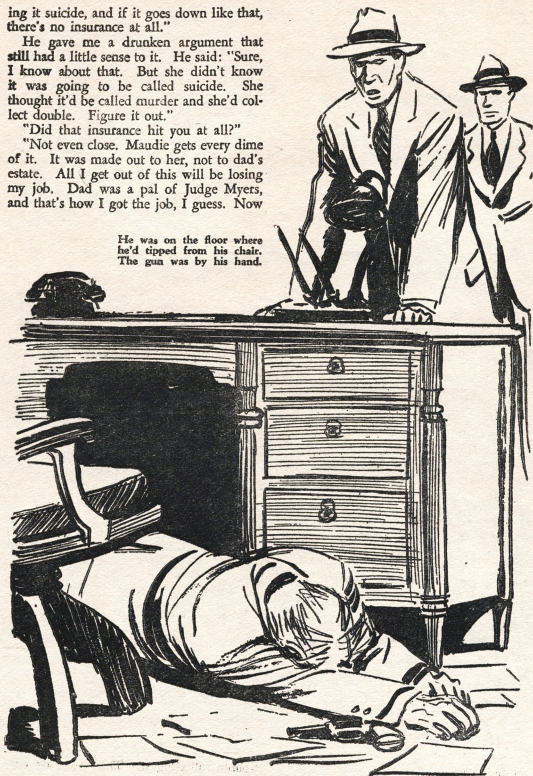
ing it suicide, and if it goes down like that, there's no insurance at all."

He gave me a drunken argument that still had a little sense to it. He said: "Sure, I know about that. But she didn't know it was going to be called suicide. She thought it'd be called murder and she'd collect double. Figure it out."

"Did that insurance hit you at all?"

"Not even close. Maudie gets every dime of it. It was made out to her, not to dad's estate. All I get out of this will be losing my job. Dad was a pal of Judge Myers, and that's how I got the job, I guess. Now

He was on the floor where
he'd tipped from his chair.
The gun was by his hand.



I'll lose it—old Myers never did have any use for me. It's a good job, too."

I FAINTLY remembered that Junior had been appointed receiver to a movie theater that had gone broke when a building-and-loan association had folded up with a bang. The theater, a new one, had been financed by this loan outfit, and when they'd crashed, the theater had been forced into the wall. They'd taken the bankruptcy route, the court had appointed young Junior Lengel receiver in charge, and the theater was trying to pay its way out of the hole.

I said: "Too bad, kid. But maybe your papa-in-law can find you something to do."

He gave me a lurid and profane account of just what his papa-in-law wouldn't do for him. It seemed that Junior had married his bride against the bride's family's wishes and in no uncertain fashion.

Junior said: "The whole damn' crew hates my guts. They hated dad's guts. They hate Maudie's guts, but I'm with 'em on that."

"What about your wife?"

"What about her?"

"You two getting along all right?"

"Sure. Comes to that, we can tell her folks to go to hell, job or no job. I don't get a dime of that insurance, but part of what dad left will come to me. Part of the estate, I mean. Unless that shyster of a F. Horace Armage steals it all. Dad always said he'd break it even between Maudie and me."

"Amount to much, will it?"

Junior shrugged. "Maybe fifty thousand after everything is paid. Dad made it but he also spent it. That damn' Maudie took him like Grant took Richmond. Dad was a fast man with a buck—nobody ever said different."

I told him to go back to his party but he reached out and caught my coat. He said: "You prove that Maudie killed dad and I'll give you ten thousand bucks. I can afford it, I guess—I'd get her share of what dad left, wouldn't I? A murderer can't inherit from the one he or she killed—that's the law."

The blonde I'd spanked had come back

to the bar by then and was watching us like a hawk. She'd also ordered a bottle of Budweiser which was handy by her, and I was watching her as closely. She had that bottle-swinging look, and I'd already found out that she was given to impulses.

I said: "You go back to your harem, Junior, and keep that blonde tigress away from me until I get to the door. I haven't upset a woman today—I don't call a little spank a real upset—and I don't like to start on one of your party."

He giggled and started toward the bar and I started to sidle toward the door. The gal picked up the bottle and heaved it and it missed me by three feet or more, doing nothing but spray me with a little beer as it passed.

And then Junior got to her, and he got down to first principles. He swung from the floor, and by some miracle, managed to clip her on the jaw. At the time I went through the door, both the other girls with him, along with the two women at the end of the bar, were screaming bloody murder, and the barman was dashing toward the end of his bar, to do a little bouncing with Junior as the bouncer.

I thought it a good place to get away from.

CHAPTER III

Cute Cajolery



ALL the way downtown to the dead Lengel's office I thought of my first two suspects: Mrs. Jerrold Lengel and Mr. Jerrold Lengel. Mrs. Lengel was certainly a hard little wench that would stop at nothing if the going ahead meant money in her pockets. The one thing about her that puzzled me was just why Lengel had married her—he was supposed to be a pretty smart guy around the gals.

Junior wasn't as hard, but he had no more scruples than a tomcat and not as much brains. I didn't doubt but that he owed his job to his father—but easy cash money looms higher than money made by working—and it was a cinch that he was hard-up.

Any man that played around the way he did was always hard up and I knew it. Also he had a tough family to consider, that of his father-in-law. It could well be that with a scandal coming up—and Armage had told me that was in the near future—the father-in-law could have brought enough pressure to bear on the kid to make him a killer.

Between catching hell from his wife's family and the thought of the inheritance he would get, the kid could have turned killer, I thought. He wouldn't have been the first son to kill his father, and there's been father-and-son murders for a lot less reason than young Junior could figure. Certainly the boy didn't seem broken up over his father's murder and I put that business down to the old man's being nuts about the boy just taking it for granted, not caring about his father one way or the other.

I was along that far in my thinking when I walked into Lengel's office, and I was thinking hard enough not to realize just what I was looking at for a second or two.

It was the dead man's bodyguard, Joe Cady, and a big, pretty girl in black. There was a big arm-chair in the reception room that opened on the hall, and Joe and the girl were cuddled in this like a couple of kittens. I stood in the door and gawked at them, and the girl got off Joe's lap.

"Was there something?" she snapped. "You might at least knock, mister."

"The door says 'Walk in'."

Joe Cady said: "Hey, wait, Arlie! This is Marty Dolan, the guy I was telling you about. Hiya, Marty."

I said: "Hiya, Joe! And who is big and pretty and named Arlie?"

"I work here, Mr. Dolan," the girl said. "I'm . . . I was Mr. Lengel's secretary."

"Can you really type?"

"Why, certainly."

"I don't believe it."

"Now look here! You can't—!"

"Don't blow your top, hon. I just meant that anybody that looks like you shouldn't waste time on a typewriter. You ought to be in pictures. They were thinking of you when they wrote a song by that name and I know it."

It was corny but it went over. And I wasn't kidding, either—she'd have given a lot of the movie glamour girls a run for their money.

She said: "Oh, you! I can tell you're Irish just by the blarney, Mr. Dolan."

Cady said in a sour voice: "Well, I'll be running along, I guess. Anything you want to ask me, Marty?"

"You still staying on at Lengel's place?"

"Sure. For a time, anyway."

"Then if I think of anything I'll see you there. Or leave word for you or something. Tell me one thing now, though. I heard what Armage had to say about the investigation that was coming up for Lengel. Was he right or was he wrong? Would it have been tough for Lengel if it had gone through?"

"It'd been plenty tough, Marty. The guy was crooked as a snake. The only thing was, he was maybe smart enough to have kept covered up."

"Swell. How do you and the widow get along?"

"Okay."

"They get along too damn' good, if you ask me," the big girl said. "That little tramp's after every man that's grown out of knee pants, and you know it, Joe Cady."

"Now, Arlie!"

"Well, you know it," she said.

CADY shrugged and went out the door, after telling me he'd see me again, and I got down to business with the girl. She hid herself back of her typewriter, which was in a corner behind a cute little railing, and I picked the chair she and Cady had been sitting in. And found it very comfortable—I could see where Cady could enjoy sitting in it with a bundle on his lap like the big girl.

I said: "It's really nothing, Miss . . . uh—?"

"I'm Arlene Adair, Mr. Dolan."

"What's your real name?"

"Well . . . Anna Polivska."

"Polish?"

"Bohemian."

"How long you worked for Lengel?"

"Maybe six or seven months."

I made a long face. "That's too bad—I was hoping you'd been with him long enough really to know something about him."

She snapped: "Mister, I know plenty about him. Everything about him. Believe me. He wanted to divorce his wife and marry me, if you want to know it."

"Were you going to do it?"

"He had money, mister. I didn't give him either a yes or no. I was trying to figure it out when he got himself murdered."

"The cops say it was suicide."

"Suicide, my eye! He might have killed somebody else but he'd never have killed himself. Why should he do a thing like that? He was getting along all right."

"What about this investigation that was coming up?"

"What about it? Suppose they'd pinned some deal on him? With what he's got in this town—or rather with what he had—the most he'd have got was a fine. He'd never have done a day in jail for anything short of murder."

"So?" I said.

I'd thought much the same but I like to have my ideas confirmed.

I said: "All right, who'd want to do him in?"

"His wife for one. That kid of his for another—that kid's no damn' good. That shyster he had, for a third—Lengel had enough on the shyster to send him up for life."

"I wonder what it was."

"Jerry—I mean Mr. Lengel—didn't tell me that. All he said was that he had the guy just where he wanted him."

"Anybody else?"

"Sure. A lot of people. The kid's father-in-law for one. That one came down here and told Jerry—I keep calling Mr. Lengel Jerry, Mr. Dolan—that if he was any part of a man he'd get out of business and give the kid and his wife a break. He said a scandal would kick back on the young folks. I heard 'em talking—or shouting, whichever you call it. Then Mr. Lengel said that his boy was tough enough to stand a little talk and that he'd always thought the boy a fool to marry a wishy-

washy dame like the girl was. This guy's name is Holmes."

"This father-in-law of young Junior's, you mean?"

"Sure. Well, they went around and around and Holmes told Lengel that if he didn't stop the scandal before it started, he'd take steps to see it was stopped himself. And that if he couldn't stop it one way, he'd stop it another. Then he went beefing out of here—I could hear him talking after he'd got on the elevator."

"The scandal would be this receivership business, eh?"

"Just part of it, Mr. Dolan. They were going to ask him questions about this contracting business. I guess maybe some of our deals aren't quite kosher. And then Mr. Lengel did a sort of money-lending business and I guess maybe the D. A. got wind of that, too."

"I never heard of that one."

The girl said proudly: "Oh, it was none of this Uncle Benny stuff. Nothing but real money, Mr. Dolan. Like on whole jewelry collections and stocks and bonds and things like that."

SHE was telling me that Lengel had been a high class fence but she didn't realize that. It's a gold mine as long as the law don't interfere, at that. A poor honest burglar will swipe a hundred thousand dollars' worth of loot and will sell it to a fence for twenty—and the fence will hold it until the heat's off and peddle it for almost what it's worth. The boys out West will peddle the swag in the East and the other way around and it's a hard racket for the cops to work against. A good fence will work with a crooked jeweler who takes the gem stones from their original mountings and resets them. Unless it's a freak stone it's almost impossible to identify it then. And bearer bonds can be passed at almost any bank, if the passer has any connections there at all.

That had made Jerrold Lengel a natural—he was in with the banks and everybody else in town.

The girl went on with: "Ann Judge Myers hated Mr. Lengel, too. I heard Mr.

Lengel tell the judge that he'd see the judge did ten years in jail unless he did something Mr. Lengel wanted him to do, and I know the judge did it. But I know the judge hated Mr. Lengel — I've seen him look at Mr. Lengel in a way that would make your blood run cold."

That tied in with the judge giving young



Junior his receivership job, if nothing else. Judge Myers was an old geezer, at least sixty, and as wrinkled as a prune. I couldn't imagine him looking at anybody in a way to make their blood run cold, unless it was somebody standing in front of him for sentencing.

I said: "The judge always struck me as a killer, hon. You're probably right about him."

"Now you're laughing at me."

"With you, hon, not at you. I couldn't laugh at anybody as pretty as you are."

"Now I know you're laughing at me."

"Not so."

"Will you tell me something? I mean will you tell me the truth?"

"I wouldn't lie to you for anything in the world, hon."

"What do you think of Joe?"

"Joe?"

"Joe Cady, silly."

I stood in the door and gawked at them. "Was there something?" she snapped, quite angrily.

"Oh Joe! Joe's perfectly okay," I told her.

"You don't say that as if you really meant it."

"What d'ya want me to say about the guy? D'ya want me to tell you I think he's a dumb cluck that hasn't got brains enough to come in out of the rain? Or d'ya want me to tell you he's a big thinker that turned down a job on the Brain Trust because it pays only a dollar a year?"

"Now you're sore, Mr. Dolan."

"I'm just trying to please."

"What do you think of Mrs. Lengel?" she asked.

I used caution on that one. I said: "I just met her one time. Not enough to get any idea of whether I like her very much or not."

The big girl said, darkly: "What I know about that female would fill a book. She ain't getting away with her funny business forever, either."

"Why not give me a tip, hon? If I'm going to work for her, I should know something about her."

"If you keep on working for her, you'll know plenty about her, Mr. Dolan."

"What about having dinner with me tonight?"

"Not tonight."

"Tomorrow, then?"

"I've got a date, Mr. Dolan, but maybe I can break it. How'd it be if I called you at your office?"

I told her that would be just fine and left her there, preening herself the way a peacock is supposed to do all his spare time. She was a natural-born man-chaser and I wanted to give her a chance at chasing me—and one of the reasons I wanted this was honestly business. I had a hunch that if I got her a little bit drunk, and a little bit braggy, I might find out a lot of things about the late Mr. Lengel.

And I also thought that getting the gal a little bit drunk might be a lot of fun. In fact, I was thinking of that while I closed up the office and went home to my apartment.

It's a poor sort of job where you can't mix a little pleasure with business.

CHAPTER IV

Rap on the Sconce



ALWAYS lock my door, not that I've got much stuff to lose to any burglar, but just from habit. A sneak thief could take my spare gun, my other suit of clothes, and that's about all. A

single man doesn't have much luggage, unless he's got the instincts of a miser.

Anyway, I put my key in the Yale lock and twisted and the knob turned under my hand. And then the door went fully open and somebody slammed me over the head with the well-known blunt instrument. And that's all I knew until I woke up staring at Mr. F. Horace Armage, though it took me a few seconds to realize just what I was seeing.

He was just as bald and thin and wizened as ever, and all I could think of for a minute was what a honey of a grave robber he'd make.

Then he said: "Are you feeling better, Mr. Dolan?"

I felt my head and found one side of my scalp was sore and a little puffy, but that there was no definite lump or swelling. It meant that whoever had socked me had used a sap—and that put the socker up in the professional class. The average citizen that goes in for free and fancy clouting uses whatever's handy—he doesn't come mechanized like that.

I said: "Where was I?"

"Where you are now, Mr. Dolan."

By that time I'd found that I was on the couch in my apartment. Whoever had hit me had picked me up and tucked me out of sight, rather than leave me half in and half out of my door.

I said: "How'd you get in?"

"Your door was ajar, Mr. Dolan. When I knocked, it swung open and I saw you here. I realized you were hurt in some fashion and so came in to see if I could help you."

I've got a front room, bedroom, bath and kitchenette, and even from the couch I could see the whole place had been searched. I've got the maid coming in twice a week to fix

up the place and that had been her day to work. She's not the best maid in the world, but she'd never stack my few possessions in the middle of the floor, nor would she yank all the drawers out of my dresser, which I could see through the open bedroom door.

I said: "Somebody sapped me."

Armage managed a thin smile and told me he'd figured that by himself.

"And I don't know why."

Armage shrugged and said he had no more idea of it than I had, if as much. He said: "I thought there was something that I should tell you, Mr. Dolan. That's why I come up. I couldn't speak in front of Mrs. Lengel, you see."

"Sure. I see. You want a drink?"

"Oh no, Mr. Dolan—I never touch it." He looked grim.

I SAID I needed a drink. So I got the bottle and ice cubes and some water. I made a highball that was half whiskey, and with part of that inside me I began to feel as though I'd be able to listen to Armage's chatter.

I said: "Okay, go ahead."

"It is about some of the deceased Mr. Lengel's recent activities, Mr. Dolan. You will understand, of course, that this is in confidence. I say recent activities, Mr. Dolan, though Mr. Lengel had been doing this for some little time."

"D'ya mean this receivership racket of his? That's been running only since that building-and-loan business went bust, hasn't it?"

Armage looked pained. "I advised Mr. Lengel against that, Mr. Dolan, I did indeed. But he was a stubborn man. How much do you know of that?"

"Not much. I just ran into it."

Armage shook his head. "I don't understand how he persuaded Judge Myers to give these friends of his those plums. Young Junior, for example. He is paid a salary of six hundred dollars a month and he does absolutely nothing to earn it. Most of the other jobs are as good. Of course most of the other job holders were paying Lengel so much out of each pay check."

"How many of these jobs did he manage to sell?"

"Probably around fifty of them, Mr. Dolan. I don't understand why Judge Myers let that work go to Mr. Lengel's friends."

"The hell you don't."

"Mr. Dolan!"

"You know damned well that Lengel was putting the bite on the old judge. Lengel was blackmailing him, to put it in legal language."

"By George, Mr. Dolan, I believe you're right."

"You know I'm right. D'ya have any idea what Lengel had on him?"

"I have no idea, Mr. Dolan. The idea had not even occurred to me."

Armage was lying and I knew it. He was in on every crooked deal Lengel made—that was why Lengel had kept him. Lengel didn't give a whoop whether the deal was crooked but he took pains to see it was as legal as Armage could make it.

I SAID: "Let it go. What d'ya know about Lengel being a fence?"

"A fence!"

"A receiver of stolen property, again to put it in legal language."

"I am sure Mr. Lengel did nothing of that nature."

He was telling another lie—he knew it and knew it damned well.

I said: "All right, let it go. Any idea where he kept the stuff?"

"The stuff?"

"The stolen property. Look, Armage. I've got a headache and I don't feel like talking around corners. I've told you what I've found out—or part if it, anyway. I've dug up half a dozen people who had reason to murder the guy, and I'll find out the one that did it with any kind of a break. Quit stalling with me and answer the questions I ask and I'll make that break work out."

Armage said stiffly: "A lawyer can't talk about his client's affairs, Mr. Dolan. That isn't ethical. Even if I knew anything about Mr. Lengel's personal affairs, I wouldn't be allowed to discuss them with you."

"Make more by playing it by yourself, eh?"

"Mr. Dolan!"

I said: "All right, get out. I don't know whether I'm working for you or for Mrs. Lengel. If it's for you, I quit. I'll remind you, though, Mister, that you're cutting yourself a slice of something that may not set well on your stomach. If you people are right and Lengel was murdered—and I think he was—you're liable to get a dose of the same. That is, if you try to cut in on his racket."

"Good night, Mr. Dolan. I shall advise Mrs. Lengel of your attitude. I am sure she'll feel she will not require your services any longer."

"Go right to it, little man. Don't slam the door on your way out."

He left and he didn't slam the door. I took another highball over to the couch and drank it while on my back—and try as I could I couldn't think of who would have waited for me in my own place, the way somebody had, and then sap me down when I came home.

The only person I could think of as having trouble with that day was the blonde who'd been in the bar with Junior Lengel, and I didn't think she'd waylay me in my own apartment.

CHAPTER V

Hot-tempered Ladies



MR. LENGEL had company when I called—a big, good-looking army sergeant. He seemed like a nice kid, but he didn't stay long after I got there—he was smart enough to see that I was there on business and decent enough to get out of the way and let me get it over with. Mrs. Lengel followed him out in the hall and took five minutes to tell him good-by, but I've always thought the best was none too good for the boys in the Service and so thought nothing of it.

She came back and said: "A fine boy, Mr. Dolan. And so good-looking—didn't you think he was really handsome?"

"Sure. I want to ask you some questions about sonny boy."

She looked puzzled.

"I mean Junior, Mrs. Lengel. How did his father feel about his marriage to this Holmes chick?"

"Mr. Lengel didn't like it. He said the girl was a stuck-up little fool and that her father was almost a homicidal maniac. Mr. Holmes went to Mr. Lengel's office and threatened him, you know."

"I know. What about Junior? How did he get along with his father?"

She shrugged and said: "Fairly well. He gave Junior money all the time, that I know. I think a boy that age, with a good job and all, should live on his salary and not sponge on his father, but Mr. Lengel was always free with money."

"Did Junior appreciate the help his father gave him?"

"What are you driving at, Mr. Dolan? Are you trying to say that Junior might have killed his own father?"

"Oh no. Though such things have happened."

Mrs. Lengel laughed then. She said: "Oh if you could only prove Junior did it. Mr. Dolan, if you can prove he did, I'll pay you ten thousand dollars—beside the money we agreed on for proving Mr. Lengel's death was murder instead of suicide. Don't you see? Junior inherits under his father's will, though the insurance is a separate thing, of course. That's mine—Junior has no part of the insurance. But you see if you could prove he'd killed his father, why, he couldn't inherit. The court would give me his part of the estate—I could certainly afford to pay you extra, now couldn't I?"

"Great minds run along the same channels, Mrs. Lengel."

"Do you mean to say Junior said that about me? That I might have killed his father?"

"Well . . ."

"Not that the louse didn't have it coming to him," she said viciously. "But I certainly don't want that brat Junior talking about me like that. I'll get dressed, right now."

"Why?"

"We'll go and talk to him about this."

"Maybe you. Not me."
"You're working for me, aren't you?"
"Armage said I won't be for long."
"That sneaky little shyster! And he'll be out in the cold, too."



"He gave me some dope on your husband I'd already found out."

"He was hand-in-glove with Mr. Lengel. Say! Do you suppose Armage could have had Lengel killed? To get Mr. Lengel out of the way, so he could take over the rack ... some of the business?"

"I've thought of that."

SHE said very thoughtfully: "Armage wouldn't have had the nerve to do it himself, but he could have hired it done. The lord knows they know enough people

My blonde was fighting me like a man, claw-fashion, scorning weapons after her first blitz with the glass.

who'd do a job like that. Some of the guys they knew would've done it for free—Lengel had more enemies than friends."

"I've found that out, too. What d'ya know about his secretary?"

"She was making a play for Lengel from the day he hired her. A big tramp, that's what she is."

I grinned at this one—the pot calling the kettle black.

She said: "You've been talking to her."
"Right."

"What did she say about me?"

"Well, she doesn't like you—I can tell you that much."

"I'll fire her tomorrow."

"You can't. Armage is in charge of the estate, at least until the will is probated. He wants to keep her on and keep the office running in a routine way."

"I'll talk to Armage. Now let's go talk to that punk of a Junior."

"Not any."

"Then I'll talk to him by myself."

"I'd advise against it."

"Just why?"

I said: "Well, Junior's just found that he can lower a fist on a lady and upset her in a first-class way. He'll be looking for a chance to practice this new trick and you'll fit right down flat in his scheme of things. Probably flat on the floor—the kid's got a wallop, from what I saw."

"He wouldn't dare hit me."

I laughed.

"I'd call cops on him if he did."

I said: "Now look, hon! If you go up to his place and start a riot, he's got a right to defend himself. He'll call cops on you and charge you with disturbing the peace, and the law will back him up. Take my advice, hon, and skip it."

"What's the idea calling me 'hon'?"

"Just an expression—it doesn't mean anything, Mrs. Lengel."

"But maybe it could, Mr. Dolan. How d'ya know?"

I said hastily: "I don't. Nu-huh! It's just a habit I've got—I guess a bad one."

"I think it's cute," she informed me.

"How old are you?"

"Thirty-six."

"That's about right. I'm twenty-two, that's all, but it's always better if the man is older, don't you think?"

I said: "Then it's decided. You're not going to call on young Junior?"

"Oh, but I am."

I got the hell out of there before she roped me into going with her. I thought at least Junior was entitled to a warning.

JUNIOR LENGEL'S apartment was on the East Side, and he wasn't paying the rent on it from a salary as receiver to a movie house. An apartment such as this one he had taken money from both the families to keep up—he had two entire floors put together; there were probably ten rooms in the place. One was furnished as an old-fashioned barroom and that's where I found him.

Along with twenty other people.

He was just about as drunk as when I'd left him in the Starlight Club, and he had the same three girls with him he'd had there. The blonde I'd spanked—the same one he'd smacked—had a bruise on the side of her chin, but outside of a little swelling around this she looked as good as new.

I saw her but she didn't notice me—at least right then.

The maid said: "There's young Mr. Lengel over by the bar, Mr. Dolan."

I said: "I see him," and went over, keeping my head turned away from the blonde, who was at the other end of the room, gawking up at a life-sized oil painting of Little Egypt. I will say that Junior's bar had atmosphere—it looked quite like something from the Gay Nineties.

I said: "Hi, Junior!" and he gave me a bleary glance and said: "Havva drink, friend."

"I came to tell you your mother-in-law is steaming this way. And steaming is the word I mean."

"What the hell's the matter with Maudie now?"

"She's sore because you hinted she might have killed your father."

"Who told her that?"

"I did."

"What the hell for?"

"You said it, didn't you? You're not the kind of guy that would go back on your spoken word, are you?"

"Certainly not. I'll tell the little creature off if she starts raising hell around here."

"Which one of these is your wife, Junior?"

He looked vaguely around the room, then got a flash of memory. "She's home with mother—she says I act disgracefully. Me, who always is a gentleman, even if I take a drink now and then. She got sore at me, friend. Hey! You're Dolan, again."

"Of course."

"Did you see me knock that blonde bombshell on her ear, when she threw that bottle at you?"

"A noble sock, too, Junior."

EVERYTHING happened at once, then. The blonde must have decided that Little Egypt didn't have anything she hadn't and turned away from this sight and spotted me. And the maid must have taken for granted that Mrs. Lengel Senior was joining the party, or the wake, to be proper, and so brought her directly in to the bar.

Because the first thing I knew I got a highball in the face, glass and all, and the first thing Junior knew Mrs. Lengel Senior was beating him over the head with a high-heeled shoe.

That was her showgirl instinct coming to the front. Most of those kids can slip off a shoe and go into action at the drop of the hat, and they're mostly willing to drop the hat themselves.

My blonde was fighting me like a man, scornful weapons after the first blitz with the glass. She was standing in front of me with her hands spread claw-fashion, and she was doing her little best to scratch my eyes out.

I said: "Somebody take this cat off me before I slap her silly."

One of the other two girls, who'd been with Junior at the Starlight Club, said: "Why not spank her, mister? You do that best."

It seemed an idea at that. I caught the kid's wrists, after a half-dozen bad tries,

and dragged her to an authentic-looking bar table at the side. It also was in period and complete, even to the spilled drinks on its top. I wrestled one of the gal's arms behind her in a hammerlock and bent her over the table so her face was in the spilled drinks, and then I paddled her, and good. She was curved, so I did an even better job than I'd done in the Starlight.

Then I let her up and said: "I should think you'd be getting tired of this. It'll happen every time, hon, so lay off me and save the wear and tear."

She ran for the door that had a sign reading LADIES above it—just as she had in the Starlight.

And then I looked to see how Junior was making out on the Lengel front.

I saw.

CHAPTER VI

Quick Way to Trouble



JUNIOR had done all right, I thought. Mrs. Lengel Senior was sitting on the floor staring up at him with a goofy look, and Junior was rubbing the knuckles of his right hand with his left.

He hadn't won without a struggle, though. He was bleeding from the nose, the mouth, both cheeks, and the forehead, and his lips looked as if somebody had stepped on him. His enemy had got in more than a few good licks with that high-heeled slipper, and one of those things should be classed as a lethal weapon when in the hands of a master such as Mrs. Lengel certainly was.

Junior said thickly: "How's *that*, you?"

Mrs. Lengel sat on the floor and cursed him right back, and she made full use of her favorite word.

I went over to her and said: "Come on, hon, let's go. I don't think you're wanted here."

I was standing in front of her but one of the other two girls who'd been at the Starlight Club with Junior ducked in front of me. She'd apparently decided, like my blonde menace, that direct action was the thing. She reached down and caught a handful of Mrs. Lengel Senior's blonde

mop, and she started lifting Mrs. Lengel to her feet with this handle.

The girl screamed: "You can't come in here and beat Junior up like that! I won't stand for that—nobody can beat Junior up but me or his old lady."

Then she swung at Mrs. Lengel's face with her free hand and Mrs. Lengel kicked her in the shins.

I nodded at Junior, who came nobly to the fore. He took a roundhouse swing at the new battler but had his sights set too high and clipped her on the side of the head above the ear. It didn't even stagger her but it didn't help his hand one bit. He howled like a wolf and started dancing up and down.

Then a couple of the more sober people grabbed the new girl, just as Mrs. Lengel's third or fourth kick caught her on a kneecap, and led her, limping, away.

After that I had no trouble in getting Mrs. Lengel out of there, and downstairs I hailed a cab and got her into it.

She said: "But, Marty! Aren't you coming with me? I'm sorry I didn't do as you said—but I was mad at Junior and I just don't know what I do when I'm mad."

"I've got a date, hon."

"Break it, Marty. You and I can have fun. We'll have a few drinks at the house and then we'll go out and do things."

I said:

"I've got to go home and change clothes, hon. Somebody threw a drink all over these—I smell like a bad Saturday night on Sunday morning."

"Who's this date with?"

"It's business."

"With a girl?"

"It's still business."

She said coldly: "I don't often ask a man to go home with me, Mr. Dolan. Just forget the whole thing."

She tapped on the glass between herself and the driver and he took off, leaving me standing there.

I had an evening coming up with Arlene Adair, or properly, Anna Polivska. Anna had looked as if she'd be an expensive girl to take out in the style she was accustomed to.

WHEN I went into my apartment the first thing I thought of was having a new lock put on the door. The one I had was certainly not doing duty in keeping anybody out.

Joe Cady stood up, glowering at me, and started his gripe.

He said: "Archie tells me you're taking her out tonight."

"Sure, Joe."

"I don't like it. See!"

I shucked out of my coat. Joe said hastily: "I don't like it, see, but I'm not here to make trouble about it. You don't need your coat off, Marty."

"The hell I don't. Some trollop threw a drink of whiskey all over me. I've got to change."

The ex-bodyguard looked relieved. "I'm running around with Archie and I don't want to see her going out with anybody else."

"What does Archie think?"

"She—well, you know how girls are."

"Then there's your answer. Talk to her about it. You can't blame me if I go for a good-looking girl, can you?"

"I'll ask you not to do it, Marty."

"Sorry."

"I . . . uh . . . don't like to make threats, Marty."

"It's as well."

"I'm telling you, Marty."

"How'd you get in?" I asked.

He jerked a thumb toward an open window and didn't answer. He didn't have to—there was a fire-escape running by it and my apartment was on the second floor.

There was a silence.

I said: "I don't like to make threats, either, Joe, but if I catch you in my place again, without me asking you to come in through the door, they'll take you out in a basket. I'm getting sick and tired of coming home and finding company I don't want."

I don't get that. This is the first time I've ever been in your place."

"Somebody came calling last night."

"Not me."

"If I thought it was you, I'd not be talking to you about it."

He got that, all right. He said: "What

happened, Marty? Did you get roughed up?"

"Some."

"Too bad."

From the way he said it I didn't think he meant it. He was sore as a goat because I was taking his girl out, but he was too smart to do anything about it. He had a good chance of losing any argument he started, for one thing. For another, any fuss would certainly make enough noise for the neighbors to call cops on, and he'd be in the wrong, all the way. It was my place and the law frowns on strangers starting a beef on the home grounds. It wasn't a shooting matter, at least not thus far along, and that was a handicap for Joe, also—he was always fast with a gun and prided himself on being that way.

He was fast enough with his fists, too, but I was as big as he was and he was too smart to take a chance unless he had percentage on his side. I thought I was as fast with a gun but that was open to question—usually there's only one test on that business.

And I didn't want to take it, to be honest. Cady was no different from me on that basis—I want the percentage on my side and try to get it that way if I can.

Of course it doesn't always work out the way it should—you take a thing like that the way it comes up.

I had to see Arlene.

ARLENE lived in a shotgun flat, in a poor neighborhood, and while I should have realized that when she'd given me the address, it startled me. She looked as if she'd be the type for a Park Avenue place—even if somebody else paid the rent. And then I remembered her real name and decided she still lived with her folks.

I knocked on the door and it opened and the smell of boiling cabbage almost knocked me off my feet. And Arlene went up ten points in my rating when she told me to come in while she finished dressing, and then did the honors.

"Dolan, this is my father and mother. Papa, maybe Mr. Dolan would like a drink of something while he waits. Mama, maybe

Mr. Dolan would like one of your sweet cookies to go with it."

Papa was little but made up for his lack of size by one of the biggest mustaches I've ever seen. It swung down and then out and up and I swear it was eight inches each way from his nose. He shook hands, saying in broken English that he was glad to meet me—and I really thing he meant this—and bustled out in the kitchen to return with a bottle that had a foreign label.

Mama was big but very shy. She made me an old-fashioned curtsy and blushed like a young girl meeting her first beau. She was as cute as she could be. Her English was even vaguer than her husband's, but I understood her when she asked me if I wouldn't like to have a bite to eat with papa's brandy.

And while I said I didn't, it made no difference. She brought a plate of fancy-looking and very good-tasting little cookies, and I had a couple of those while taking a drink of papa's sweet brandy.

Both of them watched me, just beaming at me, while I did this. And then Arlene came out, dressed up like a circus horse, and they quit smiling at me and turned their admiring looks on daughter.

I said: "You certainly look nice, hon," and papa said: "Our Anna is a pretty woman. She will look even better when she puts on weight."

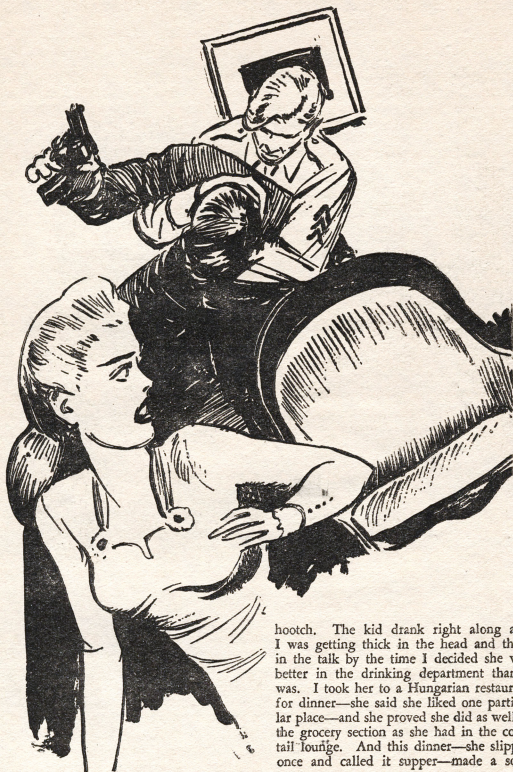
Mama smiled and nodded approvingly.

This with Arlene having a shape that was perfect. I took it the old folks liked a gal well-plushed.

We started out and Arlene said proudly: "My people are old-country, Mr. Dolan. I think it's just wonderful the way they've settled in a new country. Papa has a job being night watchman, and mama manages on the little money he makes. They are happy here."

I thought the kid had something to be proud of, herself.

I TOOK her to the Parisien, and almost lost heart on the original plan. But she took hold herself and started drinking rye, drink for drink with me, and I pride myself on being able to hold a fair amount of



hooch. The kid drank right along and I was getting thick in the head and thick in the talk by the time I decided she was better in the drinking department than I was. I took her to a Hungarian restaurant for dinner—she said she liked one particular place—and she proved she did as well in the grocery section as she had in the cocktail lounge. And this dinner—she slipped once and called it supper—made a solid

Looney came down from the wall like a rag doll. I'd pitched him into it hard.

the tongue and weaved a little getting out of one of the joints.

She said: "It's maybe better I take you home, Mr. Dolan. We can buy a bottle of



foundation for the drinking we proceeded to do afterward.

We made the rounds of the night spots, trying to catch parts of as many floor shows as we could, and of course there were drinks in each and every place. And the only sign I could see of the liquor hitting the kid was that she'd started to mix drinks—trying a different one each time.

This would be dynamite for an iron man but it didn't seem to affect her at all—and she giggled when I made a couple slips of

this and that and take it to your apartment, can't we?"

"Sure," I told her. And then I thought of papa and mama and said: "But maybe you'd better go straight home. I'm the kind of wolf that can really howl in his own den."

"Don't be silly," she said, grinning. "I like howls."

That seemed to settle that.

I should have become wary when she gave the hacker my address without having to ask me for it. And I should have been even wavier when she hung back, after I'd paid the hacker at my apartment-house door.

But I wasn't. I just stepped out of the cab and into trouble.

CHAPTER VII

Journey to a Judge



HE shooter was at sidewalk level—down in one of the entrances to the basement that were on each side of my front door. He waited until I was clear of the cab before he let the first slug go, but he was either nervous or a poor shot because all he did was break one of the whiskey bottles I was carrying by the neck. I was looking right at him when he shot, and I saw the orange blossom of flame from his gun muzzle even as the bottle blew up in my hand.

I heaved the other at him and ducked for the other basement entrance and I made it—almost. In fact, I lost the race by not more than an inch—his last shot clipped me across the thigh. He just wasn't leading me enough—I was like a duck that was flying faster than the duck hunter realizes.

Of course I had no gun. A man doesn't carry a gun when he's out trying to wheedle secrets from a young lady. But I had my hands and I had the neck of a whiskey bottle still in one of them. I held my hat against the glass in that basement door and slammed it with my other fist, and the glass went out with a crash. Then I found that I couldn't reach the bolt that held it, through the upper section where I'd knocked the glass free. I took a chance on a peek then and found the taxi had left in a hurry, but I saw the girl still standing on the curb.

She said: "It's all right, Mr. Dolan. He left in the taxi. He pointed the gun at the driver and told him to get the hell out of here and the driver did."

My leg felt like somebody had laid a red-hot iron bar across it.

I said: "The guy clipped me—just a touch. I've got to go upstairs and get a doctor."

"Here come the cops," she said.

She was right. Two patrolmen were pounding up, one from each direction, and I could hear the open siren on a dolly car whining louder every second.

"I said: 'Let's get the door open. Then I can be talking to them while I'm waiting for the doctor.'"

"You're really shot, Mr. Dolan."

"You bet."

She looked puzzled and I patted myself where it hurt. Then the first cop came panting up.

"Was there shooting here?" he asked.

"Right here," I told him.

"Who done it?"

"I wish I knew."

"Hunh!"

"The guy was shooting at me," I said.

"What for?"

The other cop had got there by that time but he was letting the first cop do the talking.

I said: "Now look! That's the sixty-four-dollar question and I don't know the answer. The guy hit me, though, and I want to get up to my place and call the doctor."

The prowler car drove up then and the cops let me go upstairs and call my doctor while they talked to me, though, and one of the boys from the prowler car was good enough to go out and buy me a couple of bottles of hooch to replace those I'd lost in the shooting.

I thought I needed a drink. And Arlene thought she could stand one, too. I was trying to figure whether she'd put me on the spot or whether she'd just happened to be there at the time something else caught up with me.

BY THE time I was ready to pass out, which was about an hour after the doctor had looked at my wound and patched it up and left, I wasn't happy about it, believe me. The slug had cut a groove about half an inch deep and I had to lie on my

side even while I took a drink. It wasn't serious, of course—it would heal in a week or ten days and I could walk all right, but not being able to move as I wanted to was a handicap.

And Arlene was laughing at me all the time and I had a notion she'd found out more about what I knew than I'd found out about what she had in her bonnet. She was smooth about it—I wasn't too drunk to realize that—but at the same time she was asking leading questions, and, more fool me, I was answering them. And she'd evade when I'd dig for something.

She left about four o'clock—I just barely remembered noticing the time. And I went to sleep on top of my bed, dressed in the pajamas the doctor had put on me when he'd dressed the shot place.

I woke up with a splitting headache and almost fell when I started for the bathroom, but by the time I'd wandered around the apartment, making a cup of coffee and taking a drink for the morning-after jitters, I was just about all right.

The whole performance made me sore and I suppose that was why I decided to call on Judge Myers, before he went to court. It was a fool thing to do, in a way, but I convinced myself that it might be better to put my cards on the table with him.

I dressed, almost busting my cut open when changing from pajamas to pants, what with the twisting around I had to do, and then called a cab and started—and I had to half stand in the cab all the way to Myers' house, up in the Sixties. So all in all I was in a frame of mind when, after ringing the bell, the door opened and showed me a sour-faced old girl who looked me over as though she thought I was selling magazine subscriptions to get through college.

"Judge Myers, please," I said.

The old sister said: "The judge is at his breakfast."

"I'll have a cup of coffee with him, in that case."

She sniffed—and I didn't blame her much at that. I smelled of the dope the doctor had put on my wound so much I could even smell it myself—but I don't think

that's why she put her nose up in the air.

"The judge does not like to be disturbed at his meals, Mister."

I took out a card and wrote on the back of it *About Jerrold Lengel and receiver-ships* and handed this over. I said: "I think the judge will want to see me, hon."

The "hon" got her. She didn't sniff, she snorted. She slammed the door in my face then, but I heard her padding back along the hall and figured the judge would get the card all right.

AND sure enough, in less than a minute the old girl opened up again and grudgingly told me the judge would see me. She led me back along a musty-looking hall and into a dining-room that looked to be as old as Myers himself, and the old boy stood up from where he'd been wolfing away at milk toast and gave me a hard stare.

He was at least sixty, but he was dressed like a youthful thirty-five. Everything matched—socks, shirt, and breast-pocket handkerchief, against a light suit and a too gay tie. Above this outfit his wrinkled, baggy old face looked like a gargoyle. He had shoe-button eyes and they glared at me as though he were looking out at me from a cage.

"I don't believe I know you, sir," he said, and stiffly.

"Thank the lord. I don't like to say good morning, Judge, to anyone."

"You have some purpose in calling on me, I presume."

I nodded at my card which he was holding. "Sure. I'm trying to prove that Jerry Lengel didn't commit suicide. That's all. And I thought you might be able to help me on it."

"I beg your pardon, sir. I knew Mr. Lengel, certainly, but not well. We were barely nodding acquaintances."

"Maybe you didn't read the note I put on the card, judge. The part about receiver-ships, I mean."

He got a little purpled around the wattles and that made him look more like a dried prune than ever. But those little sloe eyes of his were as bright and watchful as ever

—I could see he was the kind of bird who'd never let his temper throw him off track.

I went on with: "The investigation that was coming up would take you in, too, Judge. It's just possible that we could help each other, instead of you just being able to give me a hand."

"I don't understand."

"The hell you don't. I don't know what Lengel had on you. I've got a notion you're going to hear from another quarter on the same thing, but don't quote me on it. But don't tell me that you weren't giving out receiverships on Lengel's say-so, because I know better. Too many people know about that, Judge. Any one of them might have knocked Lengel off, just to save a scandal that would drag them in. You might have done it yourself."

"I see by your card, Mr. Dolan, that you're a private investigator."

"That's right."

"You realize, of course, that a word from me to the police commission would revoke your license?"

"Sure. And you realize, Judge, that a word from me to any newspaper would start an investigation that might kick a lot of people from high places."

He stared and said:

"A threat, Mr. Dolan?"

"A statement, Judge."

He swallowed and sat down, then waved a hand toward the chair across from him.

"Uh . . . sit down, Mr. Dolan. I believe you told my housekeeper you'd have a cup of coffee with me."

"Just ribbing her, Judge. She looked so sour I thought I'd give her something to gripe about."

I sat down then without thinking, brushed against the side of the chair, and got up as though I'd sat on a stove.

The judge looked startled at my jumping-jack act, and I thought I should explain it.

"I got shot last night," I said. "That's one reason I want this thing settled. I'm into something I don't know a great deal about, and it's getting dangerous."

"Indeed. I take it your wound wasn't serious, Mr. Dolan."

"Just inconvenient."

"I think it might be to my advantage to talk this over with you, Mr. Dolan."

"I do, too."

"Suppose you come here tonight, at seven. I'll see that I'm free at that time."

I said that would be fine and the judge rang and told the housekeeper, who answered the ring, to bring me a cup of coffee. The old boy talked about the local political situation while I drank it, standing up. Presently the housekeeper ushered me out, scowling just the way she had when she'd let me in.

I said: "I wouldn't fret about it, sister."

"Fret about what?"

"The world's troubles," I said. "You act like you're carrying them on your own tired shoulders."

She slammed the door in my face so hard I thought it would break the hinges.

Then I decided to call on the shyster F. Horace Armage.

Which I did.

CHAPTER VIII

Reason in the Raw



HERE were four police cars, one ambulance, the morgue wagon, and the big Cadillac that the chief medical examiner used, all in front of the Armage house, and I knew what had happened before I even started trying to crash the place. The uniformed cop at the door was a stranger to me, which wasn't so strange considering I'd been off the force six years and the guy was a rookie that hadn't been on for more than two.

"Who's in charge, Officer?" I asked, making it polite.

"Lieutenant Bascom, Mister. You a reporter?"

"Oh hell no! Even worse."

"Hunh!"

"I'm an ex-cop."

I started past him but he scowled and reached out a hand the size of a ham and clamped it on my shoulder. "A wise guy, eh," he said. "A weisenheimer."

I said: "As soon as you take that paw of yours off me, I'll tell you something.

And then I'll go in and see the lieutenant."

He took his hand away.

"I was working for this guy Armage," I told the cop. "I've got a reason for his being killed and the lieutenant will be glad to hear it. Now do I see him or do you



When I found him, the old boy said: "Mr. Dolan, you grow on one. I'm actually glad to see you."

want to take the responsibility of holding things up?"

"You see him, bud," he said, then turned and bawled: "Hey, Mikel!" at one of the police cars. The driver of this one climbed out, taking his time about it, and came over, stretching and yawning.

My cop said: "Take over for a minute,

will you, Mike? I want to take this lad up to see Bascom."

"What for?" Mike said. "Hey! Ain't that you, Dolan?"

"Sure."

"You remember me?"

"Sure. You're Mike. Mike—?"

"Mike Slocum. That's right. I used to be on the Grand Street beat when you was working on the bunco detail. 'This guy used to be on the cops hisself, Joe."

My cop grumbled: "So he said!" and started up the steps of the house, and I told Mike I'd be seeing him and followed after. I didn't remember Slocum any more than I remembered a hundred other beat cops, but there was no reason for telling him that.

I knew Bascom and rather liked him, though he'd made lieutenant after I'd got off the force. I remembered him as a hard-working lad who did a lot of home work on scientific crime detection—the sort of guy who read all the textbooks on everything from poison on up. Poisoning is the lousiest way of committing murder there is, because it's always connected with a sneak who's afraid to do an honest forthright job of it. Bascom was in the front room of the house, standing with legs apart and giving the bad eye to a good-looking woman who was probably forty or a little older. The woman was laughing at him.

He was saying: "And you say you're the housekeeper. Now just what does a housekeeper do to earn her money?"

The woman said: "Keep house, of course."

My policeman said: "This guy—his name's Dolan, Lieutenant."

BASCOM turned and shook hands with me. I'll always think he was glad to get away from the housekeeper. He said: "Well, Marty! It's been a long time, hey, boy?"

I said: "I was just coming to see Armage. He was the one that got it, wasn't he?"

"He was."

"I knew it was coming. I told him about it."

"Now what's this?"

"Armage was Lengel's lawyer, Bascom. Lengel got himself killed, and this guy Armage got a notion he should cut a bite of Lengel's cake. Or that's the way he acted."

Bascom frowned, trying to remember all he could about Lengel. "I thought that guy was a suicide. It wasn't my case—it was in one of those uptown precincts—but I seem to recall it went in as suicide."

"It did. I'm trying to prove it wasn't."

"And this guy was mixed in Lengel's rackets?"

"Sure. All the way."

"That Lengel was a dilly. He was crooked as a pretzel and nobody could ever prove it on him."

"This guy Armage saw to that," I said. "That's what Lengel paid him for."

Bascom said, with satisfaction: "Maybe it's a good thing he got knocked off." Then he remembered the housekeeper was still standing there, and also his manners.

He said: "Oh, excuse me, Ma'am! I'm sorry I spoke like that about your boss."

"Don't mind me," she said cheerfully. "He was hell on wheels to work for. He was so tight he bought the groceries himself, so that he could save a couple of pennies by walking four blocks to the chain store. He was so tight he hurt all over."

"Was he married?"

"Him! Not with 'em charging two dollars for a marriage license, Mister. If he was married, Mister, I could tell you who'd killed him and no mistake possible. It would have been the poor woman who'd married him."

"Why'd you work for him?"

"I've been trying to figure that out for five years, Mister. I think it's just because I'm too lazy to hunt another job."

"Your honest, anyway."

"Poor but honest, Mister."

"Okay, Miss—?"

"O'Hern, Mister. Grace O'Hern. I'll be in the back if you want me, Mister."

"All right, Miss O'Hern."

SHE went out, swinging herself as though she knew we both were watching her, and Bascom gave me the police attitude in

the average case of that kind in simple words:

"If it wasn't for this angle you've got, Marty, you know what I'd do?"

"I've got a hunch."

"I'd take that wench down and sweat it out of her. That's too good-looking a woman to work five years as housekeeper."

"You'd be wrong, Bascom. All the guy thought about was money. He thought about it too much. Now what d'ya know about Judge Myers?"

"He's an old goat, Marty."

I laughed—I couldn't help it. The idea of that old mummy playing wolf was just more than I could take.

Bascom said seriously: "No fooling, Marty. I was on a raid once—it was a smoker, over across the river, and I got drafted in when one of the boys got himself a stomach-ache—and here was the old boy, big as life and drunker than a skunk. I had a hell of a time hushing it up."

I said: "That'll maybe make a reason for what he's been doing. Lengel would know of that weakness and he was the guy that would work on it."

Lieutenant Bascom looked puzzled and I gave him at least part of an explanation.

"It's like this, Bascom," I said. "Lengel had something on Judge Myers. Lengel made him hand over all plums that fell off the tree, when that big building-and-loan company went broke a while ago. The judge appointed Lengel's pals, and they all collected fat salaries for doing nothing. Of course they kicked back to Lengel for part of the take. Then Lengel got knocked off and Armage either started to take over this receivership thing or something else Lengel was interested in. Lengel was doing a bit of high-class fencing, incidentally. And that contracting company of his smelled pretty high. He was due to be investigated right away, and my idea is that somebody near him couldn't stand a check-up. So when Armage started in where Lengel left off, the same thing happened to him."

"Maybe Armage killed Lengel in order to cut in on the graft?"

"I've thought of that. But I think Armage would have taken him out of the way

legally. All he would have had to do would be give him poor advice, and Lengel would be putting in time in the pokey. That would be the safe way, and F. Horace Armage was a man who'd always play it safe."

"You think Lengel was murdered?"

"I'm sure of it."

"By whom?"

"His wife. His boy. Judge Myers."

Bascom laughed on the last. He said: "That old futz wouldn't kill anybody—unless he had the warden do it for him. I'll admit the old devil would as soon give a guy life as look at him, but he's no killer."

"He would be if he was pushed—and Lengel was pushing him. Don't forget that. And then there's a man named Holmes. Junior Lengel married his daughter and this Holmes hated the Lengel tribe."

"He don't sound likely."

"He made threats. And then there's Lengel's secretary. Lengel told the secretary he wanted to divorce his wife and marry her. So the secretary might have blown her top and done him in, that is, if she thought he was just fooling with her."

"Any reason for thinking she did?" Bascom asked.

"I like the girl, Bascom. I'd hate to think she did. But she either got my pants burned or knows who burned 'em, and she's too damned curious about what I am and am not doing and what I do and don't know about what's going on."

BASCOM asked: "What d'ya mean you got your pants burned?"

"What I said. Burned by a bullet." I told him what had happened up to then, and finished with at least an honest thought.

I said: "Mrs. Lengel is no good. Junior Lengel is little better. Old Judge Myers is a dirty old goat, if you're right about him being a chaser, and he's a cold-blooded fish if ever there was one. He wouldn't stop at murder if it meant keeping his seat on the bench. The secretary, this Arlene Adair, comes from a decent family, but that doesn't necessarily mean she's kept that way herself. I know she's not too loyal to anyone—she

(Continued on page 85)



The snake-eyed man jolted Kenzie and bolted out after the girl.

TEMPER,

Kenzie had a very bad habit for a private detective—he became boiling angry on extremely slight provocation. And now he was twice as mad as ever, for this strange murder involved a fast and furious pace—and Kenzie wasn't built for speed!



OLD MAN MACGONIGAL raved in throat-searing rage: "You damned stumblebum! You punch-drunk lamebrain! You barroom brawler!"

Kenneth T. Kenzie didn't look like a stumblebum or a barroom brawler. He was just a neat little roly-poly man standing with bowed head before Old Man MacGonigal's wrath. "I'm terribly



AVENUE BUS TRAP

By DALE CLARK

IT'S TERRIBLE!

sorry, sir," Kenzie pleaded, and his voice was a silken whisper. "I lost my temper for a moment. I assure you it won't happen again."

Old MacGonigal rolled his bloodshot eyes to the ceiling, told the ceiling loudly, "He's sorry. I send him out to shadow a two-timing dame, he doesn't like the gigolo she's playing with, he busts a champagne bottle over the gigolo's head. Result—they all three wind up in police court, the dame learns she's been tagged by a MacGonigal dick, her husband gets sore, and we lose the case."

The Old Man gripped the arms of his office chair, heaved his heavy body erect, pounded words hoarsely at Kenzie's bowed head:

"You said it, brother, it won't happen again! You're fired! Sooner than I'd send you out on another case, I'd cut my throat from ear to ear. It'd be cheaper, anyway, than paying you to ruin me!"

Kenzie sighed, slowly stroked the brim of his gray fedora with a battered hand, adorned with white tape. "If it's a question of pay, I'd be willing to accept . . . er, a slight reduction." Hopefully, his gentle, spaniel-like eyes sought MacGonigal's flushed, angry features. "You don't know how much I've enjoyed this job, sir. If you'd only give me one more chance—"

The Old Man's voice became deadly. "Not on your life. I've checked your police record, Kenzie. You were a drug clerk your last job—until you quarreled with a customer about his change, jumped over the counter, and strangled him with a rubber syringe tube until two cops pulled you off."

"He wasn't a customer," Kenzie murmured appeasingly. "He was a crook, a professional short-change artist."

"I know—that's why I hired you. I didn't know then you lost your next-to-last job as a furniture salesman after smashing a chair to smithereens on a floorwalker. And the job

before that, in a bookstore, because you hurled an unabridged dictionary at your employer, knocking him cold. You're a congenital hothead, Kenzie, a born trouble-maker."

Kenzie said in his mild, silken whisper: "It's all true, sir. I lose my temper, I can't help myself, I grab the nearest weapon and sail in. In the future, however, I promise to restrain—"

MacGonigal scowled, snarled. "The hell with your future, it won't be around here. Get out! I don't want to see your face again! You'll be sent your week's salary in the mail!"

Kenzie's roly-poly shoulders sagged, and his face lost color. "Very well, Mr. MacGonigal. It's good-by, then. I don't blame you a bit. I say good-by to you and good luck to the MacGonigal Agency."

KENZIE'S bus—the West River bus—was jammed, packed. Kenzie, meekly waiting on the curb until the women passengers boarded it ahead of him, squeezed up the steps and had to stretch his arm between several bodies to offer his half-dollar. "Tokens, please," he requested.

It happened to be a woman driver, new at her job and flustered by the late-afternoon rush.

"That's all," she was saying to the crowd on the curb. "You-all will have to take the next bus. . . ."

Her inexperience showed in the fact that she paused, now, to accept Kenneth T. Kenzie's coin before levering shut the twin folding front doors. So another passenger fought his shoving, squirming way into the vehicle—just in time to butt against Kenzie's arm at the exact instant the driver was dropping the tokens into Kenzie's palm.

Naturally, the palm moved, the tokens rained onto the floor.

Kenzie's voice wasn't a silken whisper, it was an erupting bellow. "Hey, you—!"

What the newcomer had been trying to do was drop a dime into the fare-box, and he dropped it. Turning, he faced Kenzie chest-to-chest. He wasn't pretty. He had a narrow, tight, bony face with the sneakiest, snakiest eyes Kenzie had ever looked into in his life.

"Gangway!" he growled, spilling licorice breath into Kenzie's face.

Kenzie's pudgy fist curled shut, his arm tried to cock itself, but the elbow was jammed to his ribs by the pressure of the surrounding passengers.

"I'm sorry!" he heard the woman at the wheel wail.

"Not *your* fault," Kenzie panted. He meant the driver, of course, but Snake-eyes seemed to think *he* was being apologized to. With another growl, another push of the licorice-laden breath at Kenzie, he squeezed and sidled past.

Kenzie just stood there, with his jaw slack and the hot color draining from his cheeks. It had been close, too hellishly close. Only somebody leaning against his elbow had saved him from pitching the punch, from probably getting pinched and going to jail! "Step back in the bus, please," the driver's voice appealed, while helpful bystanders tried to bend over and pick up the scattered tokens—eventually they returned three of the six to Kenzie.

Kenzie fed one of the octagonal chips into the box and stepped back in the bus—just like any other untroublesome, law-abiding citizen who keeps off the grass, who reads the World's 100 Best Books even though he would greatly prefer a detective story.

Stepping back in the bus, he finally reached a favorite spot next to the rear exit doors; favorite, because it possessed a polished steel post a man could brace against. Kenzie braced, and dipped a hand in his pocket, fetched forth a small paper-bound book called *How to Master Your Emotions*.

The bus jolted, started.

Kenzie, turning the pages, reached the chapter entitled *Your Terrible Temper*. Sagely it advised: "Before giving way to impatience, try to put yourself in the other man's shoes." He nodded, remembering he hadn't been angry with Old Man MacGonigal, figuring he probably wouldn't have been angry with Snake-eyes, either, if he'd only stopped to realize the fellow was doubtless a nerve-jangled war-worker hastening home to his wife and kiddies.

Then came the girl's scream.

It wasn't a loud scream, but it was right beside Kenzie, almost in his ear.

Jam-packed in the bus as they were, the girl's silky blonde hair almost brushed his cheek.

A man behind Kenzie ejaculated, "Pick-pocket!"

A fat woman in the aisle bawled, "No, he's a masher, I saw him trying to paw her!"

Someone else implored, "Stop the bus—call a cop!"

Kenzie couldn't see what it was all about. After the scream she'd pressed closer to him, and her perky green hat barred his view. Kenzie craned his neck, got a glimpse of the offender as the hoarse words came:

"Aw, the damn' bus jolted! Can I help it if the bus throws me against the dizzy dame?"

It was Snake-eyes, the licorice eater.

Kenneth T. Kenzie forgot how to master his emotions. All he thought of was he'd been jostled, he'd lost half the tokens he'd paid for, and now the rat was picking on a girl. . . .

Kenzie's curling fingers squeezing the paper-bound book into a billy-like roll, he sidestepped around the blonde, said through his bared, gleaming teeth: "Why, you son—"

That fat woman was in his way, Snake-eyes was saying over her shoulder, "Honest, can I help bumping against her?"

Sobering, Kenzie remembered himself. His fist relaxed from the book, his charging body braked to a sulky stop, he grumbled, "Yeah, well, bump against me if you got to bump, mister."

It was all over, as suddenly as it had started. The man who'd cried "Pickpocket!" was burying his embarrassed face in a newspaper. The fat woman, sniffing, fixed her eyes on a bus advertisement. The bus was rolling as if the driver had heard nothing, and Snake-eyes had turned his thin, ratty face and his licorice breath the other way.

The whole thing had been a false alarm, a mistake, not worth bothering with.

Kenzie glanced reproachfully at the girl whose scream had started it all.

He caught her stretching a slim, gloved hand to the bus cord. The oval face in its frame of silky blonde hair was starch-white, her tight drawn mouth looked like a lip-sticked wound, and if he'd ever seen terror anywhere it was in this girl's blue eyes.

Kenzie gulped, "Huh? What ails—?"

The harsh *bran-~~nk~~* of the bus buzzer jangled through his query. The girl didn't answer. Her blue eyes, avoiding Kenzie, fixed on the rear exit doors as the bus swayed in next to the curb of a downtown intersection.

THE doors pulled apart, and her slim form literally plunged to the sidewalk.

The bony jolt in Kenneth T. Kenzie's ribs was the snake-eyed man's elbow as he bolted after the girl.

There was no time for Kenzie to think of any book rules or indulge in it's-none-of-my-business reflections. On the heels of Snake-eyes, he thrust his own roly-poly person through the bus doorway onto the pavement.

Ahead of them both, the blonde's green-cloaked figure darted through the stream of passersby and into a chain cigar store on the corner.

Snake-eyes, pulling up to a halt, was shaking a black pellet from a cough-drop box, palming it, tossing the palm to his mouth.

Ten yards away a burly policeman, with pearl-stocked revolver bulging from his harness, blew a whistle as the traffic lights changed.

Through the cigar-shop window, Kenzie's glance followed the girl's hurrying rush into a phone booth. Light flashing up inside showed the frantic stabs her gloved hand made at the dial. Kenzie, watching her clean-cut, pretty profile, would have sworn her lips weren't moving.

The cop's whistle shrilled, started pedestrian traffic cross-flowing over the intersection.

Snake-eyes seemed boredly interested in the headlines of a stack of newspapers at the corner stand, weighed down by a horseshoe.

Kenzie waited, fanning both hands around the apparently difficult process of lighting a cigarette.

The girl came out of the doorway, fast. It was what Snake-eyes had been waiting for, he slued around to confront the blonde. Kenzie overheard the growled, derisive words.

"Come on, baby, quit stalling. Let's get together on this—"

It was all he had time for, because it took Kenzie's roly-poly form just that long to

whirl and snatch up the convenient horseshoe, and whirl toward the fellow.

Kenzie was mad, he couldn't help himself, he had every intention of wrapping the horseshoe around the masher's neck and then tying a knot in it.

CHAPTER II

Dead-Locked



NAKE-EYES saw it coming, was seemingly too paralyzed to save himself from the on-charging, tense-faced Kenneth T. Kenzie.

It was the blonde girl who came between them, reached her gloved hand toward Kenzie, said shakily, "Oh, hello, there you are!" Her hand tucked itself into Kenzie's arm, and she stepped adroitly close to conceal the horseshoe—as, beyond Snake-eyes, Kenzie glimpsed the cop's open-mouthed stare.

The cop couldn't have heard anything; it was probably just the abrupt movements of the trio that had flagged his eye.

Kenzie heard the girl's urging voice, "Come on. What are we waiting for? Let's go."

The pressure of her hand turned Kenzie, guided him up the side street away from the watchful policeman. Kenzie glanced back, made sure Snake-eyes wasn't tagging along, then remembered to let the horseshoe slide down his pants leg to the pavement.

That done, he threw a glance at the blonde's disturbingly attractive profile. "Relax," he muttered. "The louse won't bother you any more. What was he after, anyhow?"

"Him? Oh, he's just one of those wolves, those straphanger pests."

Kenzie didn't believe it; he didn't figure she'd been that afraid of a mere rush-hour Romeo.

He muttered, "Look, I'm not trying to pick you up. I'm going to put you in a ctb, is all. Only, you'd better tell me if it's anything worse—"

The girl interrupted: "There's no need for a cab. I'm only going around the corner here."

Around the corner was one of those tiny, hole-in-the-wall establishments which manage to exist in the crannies of a big city much

as spears of grass manage to push up in a brick-paved alley. It was just wide enough for its door, for one thin window filled with keys.

The inscription H. TYLE, LOCKSMITH ran up and down the window because there wasn't room to print the words across, horizontally.

The blonde girl opened H. Tyle's door, turned, gave Kenzie a strained smile.

"Thanks for everything, but I'll be all right now. My uncle—"

She broke off at the look on Kenzie's face as Kenzie stared in the partly-opened door. Exhaled sound surged from the ex-Mac-Gonigal operative's lips.

"Hey! He's hurt *bad!*"

It was worse than that, he discovered as he plunged in past the girl in the doorway. H. Tyle, locksmith, lay as dead as a big-caliber bullet between his eyes could make a man.

SPELLBOUND, Kenneth T. Kenzie stared down at the spectacle of violent death.

"One . . . one of us better stay here," he heard the girl's stifled, panicky voice saying. "I'll run back and get that policeman!"

Kenzie nodded, added an abstracted, "Yeah, hurry up." His brown eyes, alert now, scanned the tiny seven-by-twelve shop—the walls displaying key blanks plus a few padlocks and patent locks for sale, the floor divided by a work bench down its middle with an electrically operated key-filer and hand files displayed there, and the bench itself divided by a swinging gate.

H. Tyle's body had tumbled through this gate, leaving the feet and knees behind the work counter while head and shoulders sprawled out into the public part of the shop. Kenzie noted that the victim was elderly, that a black glove was on his left hand, and that this glove was partly peeled from the wrist to reveal pitifully scarred flesh. The hand, in fact, was little better than a misshapen talon.

Kenzie's searching brown stare came to rest on the victim's awry black string tie, the collar front gaping open, the sprouting, torn threads of a now-missing button.

Kenzie peered around for the button. It



Kenzie heard her urging: "Come on! What are we waiting for?"

was nowhere in sight. On tiptoe, bending over the work counter, he pushed an exploring glance over every inch of that portion of the floor.

No button.

"Funny!" Kenzie moved. "Darned funny!"

He looked a second time; hesitated, finally stepped over the body in the gateway, inserted himself into the trifling space back of the work bench.

And it was here, at the end of another search, that he discovered the till-box among the various tool drawers. It pinged open at his touch, revealed bill compartments and coin-cups swept bare of all—except a white bone shirt button.

Kenzie stared at that bemusedly; and then, lips pulled worriedly tight, he realized that all this had taken time, that the girl had been gone three minutes at least.

He sidled from behind the counter, broke into a sprint as he wheeled out of the little shop. A dozen striding paces propelled his roly-poly person to the corner.

A block away, the cop was directing pedestrian traffic as before.

But Kenzie couldn't, anywhere, catch a glimpse of the girl. Or of Snake-eyes, either.

He reached the officer's side breathlessly, tugged at the blue tunic sleeve, spilled words into the cop's blankly astounded face:

"I want to report a murder!"

OLD MAN MACGONIGAL fumed, "It's after closing hours. Why come back and annoy me with your damned troubles?" He stretched a thick white hand, snapped off the desk light. "It was robbery—the button in the cash drawer proves it. Tyle was being stuck up, he thought he saw a chance to grab the gun while the heist-guy was scooping up the dough. They tangled, the robber grabbed him by the throat while the till was still open. Then Tyle broke loose and the booster let him have it."

Kenzie was a dim, gloom-wrapped figure in the darkened office. "But the girl? What happened to her?"

Old Man MacGonigal was a bulky silhouette against the twilighted window. The silhouette shrugged. "She didn't want to be called as a witness in a murder inquest and

trial, I suppose. A hell of a lot of people don't."

"She wasn't an ordinary witness. She said Tyle was her uncle."

"She lied," MacGonigal was flat-voiced. "Tyle had no relatives."

"You knew him?"

"I was on the Businessmen's Christmas-Basket Committee. I tackled Tyle for a subscription; he chipped in fifty bucks. It surprised me coming out of a little two-by-four shop like his. I asked, and he said don't worry, it was his only Christmas expense. He didn't have a relative in the world, nobody to send even a Christmas card to."

Kenzie thought back, and said carefully: "Wait, she didn't say *he* was her uncle, she just mentioned an uncle. But she must have had some reason for picking out that particular shop. . . ."

"Yeah. She'd let you pick her up to get rid of one masher." Old Man MacGonigal stood, yawned, stretched his grizzly-bear arms. "She didn't know you from Adam, she merely stepped into a handy doorway to get rid of you, she'd have spent two-bits having a key copied so you'd scam. The girl figured that once you got her in a cab, you'd start throwing passes yourself. Saying Tyle was her uncle was the easiest way to ditch you, Kenzie—but then, her imaginary uncle turned out to be dead, and she had every reason to take to her heels."

"You don't think it's worthwhile looking her up, sir?"

"How can you look her up? You don't even know her name. Let the cops round up blondes in green coats, if they're interested."

Kenzie said in his softest, silkiest voice: "The cops don't know about her, Mr. MacGonigal. I told them I happened to glance in the shop window as I walked by."

The Old Man's silhouette seemed to swell in the gloom. He dropped a hand to the desk light, snicked it on. His bloodshot eyes were moltenly metallic under their lowering white brows.

"You lied to the law, you damned fool? What was the idea?"

Kenzie's cheeks were strawberry crimson. He shuffled his feet, said pleadingly, "Well, Mr. MacGonigal, by slugging that gigofo I

lost you a case. I wanted to give you first chance at another case. . . ."

The Old Man scoffed, "You dreamed you'd get your job back, hey? Kenzie, you're insane. Your theory is crazy. This girl, if mixed up in murder, wouldn't lead you to the corpse! And if she did, she wouldn't run away and thus point suspicion at herself! Besides," he grunted, snapped off the desk light with an air of finality, "Tyle is dead. He can't hire the MacGonigal Agency to meddle in this mess. The girl certainly won't pay cash for being dragged back into it. There's no client, no possible pay-off."

With heavy, plodding steps, the Old Man circled his desk, made shooing motions with his hands. "Beat it, Kenzie. I'm locking up for the night."

The roly-poly ex-operative stepped ahead, sighing. "Yes, sir, good-night—I mean, good-by."

Old Man MacGonigal snarled, "You said that before! This time try and make it stick!"

KENNETH T. KENZIE returned forlornly to the bus-stop corner where his adventure had begun. A West River bus was loading, but he boarded it only to ask the driver how long the round-trip took. Told two hours, he descended to the pavement—it would be an incredible stroke of luck if the lady operator remembered a blonde in a green coat. She would do so only if the blonde had offered a large bill to be changed, for instance. Kenzie didn't really believe he could be that lucky, still he couldn't pass up the chance that the driver *might* remember where the girl had got on the bus.

Therefore, he was willing to kill time so as to get on that same bus again.

He headed off slowly in the direction of the cigar store. He knew, though, it would be a miracle if the blonde had opened a phone book inside the booth, marked her number for easy visibility with lipstick or something, and if the book was still lying open at that page. Kenzie hardly dared hope that such was the case, because as he recalled it the girl had simply raced into the booth and started dialing a number she must have known by heart. As a matter of fact, her

profiled face hadn't been turned down as if following a number printed in a directory on the booth shelf. Her attention had seemed fixed levelly straight ahead. . . .

"Hell afire!" burst from Kenzie's lips. His short legs urged themselves into a trot. He'd just realized you can't dial any number, no matter how familiar, without *looking up at the dial*.

He reached the cigar emporium, rounded into it, and into the booth. There was a directory inside, all right, but snatching it up and fanning its pages got him nothing. Transferring his attention to the instrument itself, his eyes were caught by the coin-return aperture. He crooked a forefinger into it, found a folded slip of paper pressed up against a side of the channel where it wouldn't interfere with a falling nickel.

Smoothing it open he read: 1L43-2R15-1L26-R5.

Kenzie tucked the bit of paper into his gray fedora's sweatband. He delved into his wallet, found an oblong business card imprinted with the MacGonigal Agency's address, slid this up into the coin aperture.

CHAPTER III

No Spik Slang



KENNETH KENZIE started a cafeteria dinner with soup, salad and steak and ended without dessert, since the closer he got to the cash register the more he realized he was, after all, a jobless ex-dick playing a blind hunch. The slip of paper in his hatband, while an encouraging clue, wasn't a check he could endorse for cash at a bank window.

The last mouthful of steak forked away, he leaned back and surveyed the future through a haze of cigarette smoke. At best, he figured, the blonde girl would eventually revisit the phone booth, find the MacGonigal Agency card, and—if she wanted the paper badly enough—be forced to appeal to the Old Man. MacGonigal wasn't in the habit of letting possible clients slip through his fingers.

Recalling the girl's panicky flight from the bus, her frantic haste in concealing the bit of paper, and her disappearing act after

The froth of liquid seemed to blend with the gunshot.





finding the murdered locksmith, Kenzie felt reasonably certain she needed the confidential services of a high-class detective agency.

"Damned if I can puzzle it all out," Kenzie brooded. "But then, MacGonigal won't be able to, either! He'll need help. And I'm his best bet, since I've been in on it from the beginning."

He couldn't, though, count on this hotsytotsy outcome. Momentarily, he wondered whether it wouldn't have been smarter to have posted himself outside the cigar store until the girl returned.

"She might send a friend, though. She doesn't know I kept mum to the cops about her, she might be afraid the cop on the corner would remember her," Kenzie mused. "Fifty people a day must use that public phone. I couldn't shadow them all."

He started to snub out his cigarette, rising from the table to go, then settled back as a newsboy entered the cafeteria with an armful of the bulldog edition of tomorrow's morning papers.

Kenzie beckoned, "Here, sonny."

The murder of H. Tyle wasn't on the front page. Or on the second or third. He found it away back next to the classified ads, an obscure slaying attributed by the police to a small-time stick-up artist.

A passing diner bumped the edge of a steel tray against Kenzie's ear. Automatically incensed, the roly-poly ex-dick snarled resentfully. "Why don't you watch—"

He swallowed his wrath in time, remembered he had sworn off these public spat. His glance groped back to the newspaper page, landed on the Personals column instead of the item he'd been perusing.

It was right at the top. Obviously it had been inserted at the last possible moment before the paper went to press:

Will gentleman who assisted young woman on W. River bus Thurs. P. M. kindly phone W-6-4300? Reward.

THIRTY minutes thereafter, Kenzie crossed a yard cluttered with elegant shrubbery, climbed impressive stone steps, thumbed a push-button imbedded in the hand carving of a handsome door frame.

The door opened, revealed a figuresome redhead in maid's white.

"This where Nicholas Weikler lives?" Kenzie asked.

"He does, but have you an appointment?"

"My name's Kenzie, I'm here about that Personal advertisement."

Behind the redhead a voice boomed, "Advertisement! But . . . but . . . well, Katie, let him come in."

Kenzie stepped in, found himself facing a stork-legged pot-bellied man with vast stooped shoulders — on top of which balanced a florid, fleshy, black-browed face.

"I'm Nicholas Weikler," the stork-legged man boomed. "But what's this about the advertisement? It was to appear in the morning paper—"

"Sure. But that hits the street before eight p. m.," Kenzie pointed out.

"Of course. Of course. I was alluding to the fact that the advertisement conveyed only a phone number, yet you suddenly appear with my name on your lips, at this address."

Kenzie said silkently, "It's all in knowing how. Most telephone companies have a service—a special number—an information operator who will supply the data on any listed phone. I took advantage of the fact because I felt we'd get farther, meeting face-to-face."

The big man's voice boomed, "Very well, if you'll step into the study." He stepped ahead into it, waded on his long stork-legs past the fat club chairs and bridge lamps to an ornate desk. He opened a drawer, reached wrist-deep into it, and when he turned to Kenzie he held a bulky bundle of banknotes in his hand.

"I want to reward you for your services, you know. I insist upon it," Nicholas Weikler said heartily. "That is, after you establish your identity. After all, anybody *could* answer a newspaper advertisement. As a normal business precaution, I want to feel certain I'm dealing with the proper party. You don't mind answering a few questions?" The voice wasn't so hearty—it took a sharper, quizzing edge. "For instance, I suppose that the young lady told you her name?"

Kenzie shrugged. "You're wrong, she didn't."

"Oh, dear," Weikler said. "That's bad. I had hoped—"

He broke off, moistened his lips, studied Kenzie from under furrowed black brows.

"You're sure?" the big man persisted.

Warning color flamed in Kenneth T. Kenzie's features. The roly-poly ex-operative controlled his reply with an effort. "I said, so, didn't I?"

The stork-legged man thought it over; said finally, "Well, in that case, you'd better describe the incident, how it happened?"

Kenzie asked, "Wouldn't it be simpler to let her in on this, let her look at me and say if I'm the right guy?"

WEIKLER looked nettled. He said sniffishly, "I'd prefer to handle this in my own way, if you don't mind." He rifled the banknotes, made them seem to whisper, *And you'd better not mind, because I'm the guy who pays you off.*

"Stop snapping your damned cabbage under my nose!" Kenneth T. Kenzie was getting mad, he couldn't help it, there was something about this set-up that stank in his nostrils. "Get this straight, big boy! *You're* the bird who's doing the advertising. *You're* fishing for information, not me. It's nothing in my life; I'm under no obligation to dance to your tunes!"

The stork-legged man became expressionless. He said, "I'm sorry. It's a personal matter. I had hoped to avoid this discussion. But sit down."

He lowered himself into a club chair facing Kenzie's, hitched his trousers at the knees, started explaining, "The girl is my ward—her name's Helen Fouser. She's the niece of my late partner, Mr. Claude Fouser. It was under the terms of his will that I became Helen's legal guardian. Claude and I were in business for many years—I notice you're wearing one of our products."

"I'm huh?"

"Your wrist-watch."

Kenzie said, "But mine's a Swiss watch."

"Exactly so. The Swiss are a great watch-making people, they have scores of small factories turning out watch mechanisms under contract; that was the end I managed. I shipped the mechanisms to the United States, then Claude had them assembled in

American cases, and he had charge of the sales department. It was an extremely satisfactory and lucrative arrangement, but then tragedy struck in the form of that governmental enterprise which so often hampers private enterprise! In fact, two governments interfered. Switzerland, alarmed by the unfavorable position of her franc in foreign exchange, clamped down a quota restriction seriously reducing our potential supplies, while at the same time ceiling prices on the final product seriously threatened our position here."

Kenneth T. Kenzie had listened in irate, nail-drumming impatience to the monologue. He burst out, "Hell, I don't care what makes the watch business tick! The election's over, why don't you cut out making speeches, and get down to cases?"

The stork-legged man said stiffly, "I'm merely explaining why it was necessary for me to hasten back to the United States to confer with Claude Fouser. However, I had barely arrived when fire swept through our American assembly plant, wiping out the business. In addition to that, Claude Fouser and my secretary, a poor chap named Joel Ikkin, perished in the blaze."

Kenzie rapped, "Fire? Accident—or sabotage?"

"It was accidental. The insurance investigators traced it to faulty wiring." Weikler screwed up the flesh-pads under his eyes; asked, "You're sure Helen said nothing of all this to you?"

"Huh? Why should she?"

Weikler said heavily: "The girl seems to be under the delusion that her Uncle Claude was murdered!"

"Aha!" muttered Kenneth T. Kenzie.

"I beg your pardon?"

"I just said aha."

THE stork-legged man snorted, "That isn't all! She is apparently convinced the same killer, or killers, are on my trail—and hers. When I point out the entirely accidental circumstances of Claude's death, she insists that merely proves the diabolical cleverness of the assassins."

"You figure she's minus some of her buttons?"

Weikler looked startled; said, "Good

heavens, no, the girl isn't a nudist. What-ever gave you that idea?"

"Missing buttons," Kenzie interpreted, "means bubbles in the think tank, dazed in the dream department, or plain scrambled brains."

The big man gave a headshake. "Helen isn't mentally deficient. Her uncle's death was a fearful emotional shock, but I'm sure she's sane enough. I sometimes suspect somebody is deliberately playing up to her fears, though for the life of me I can't imagine why." He came to his feet restlessly, glowing. "Damn it, I'm worried. The girl hasn't come home tonight. . . ."

Kenzie snapped with swift, electrified suspicion, "*She hasn't*— Then how the hell did you know about—?"

The other lifted the palm of his hand in open, wooden-Indian style. "She telephoned, she babbled some wild tale of being beset on a bus, of being saved by a bystander—presumably you." Weikler's eyes appraised Kenzie. "I'll be frank with you. I expected a younger man. A more romantic type. I thought perhaps Helen had confided her imaginary fears to you—and you, taking her story at face value, might have offered her a refuge, a hiding place. In short, you might know where she is."

Kenzie handed it back to him. "In short—the answer is no."

"That's bad news. I'm legally and morally responsible for my ward, you know. I'd gladly pay five hundred dollars for the information." The stork-legged man licked his thumb, started sheafing through his bankroll.

"I said no," Kenzie reminded shortly.

"I understand. I want to pay you fifty dollars for your trouble, anyway. And remember—five hundred should you chance to locate Helen Fouser."

"Put away your money," Kenzie said surprisingly. He added after a pause, "I'll take a check instead—payable to the MacGonigal Detective Agency."

THE check and Kenneth T. Kenzie proceeded straight to the Parkview Arms Apartment Hotel—a grimly commonplace warren of kitchenettes and in-a-door beds, utterly unstylish, by having one important

recommendation in Old Man MacGonigal's eyes. The Old Man owned the dump, so he lived here.

His was a basement apartment, reached by a narrow stairway and then a subterranean hall letting onto furnace and storage rooms.

Kenzie pounded on a door, was rewarded by a smothered groan and then a suppressed oath.

"Mr. MacGonigal!" the roly-poly ex-employee shouted alarmedly. This time he heard just another pathetic groan.

Kenzie clenched his fist onto the door-knob, found that the door was locked. He drew back and threw his shoulder against the panel. His pint-sized physique lacked the poundage to do more than rattle the door. After the third try, he gave it up as hopeless, looking almost helplessly around.

Hesitating, he heard another faint moan, and then the *clop* of a blow.

"Mr. MacGonigal!" he gasped.

No answer now.

Kenzie's aroused brown stare caught the metallic sheen of a fire extinguisher a few yards down the economically dim-lit hall. It was five-gallon size, tugging at his arm sockets as he lifted it. Taking a firm grasp on the handles, he whirled his roly-poly person around in hammer-thrower fashion.

The catapult force of the flying extinguisher striking the doorknob punched out the lock like splintering a penny matchbox. The door flew open, the extinguisher sailed on into the apartment with Kenzie sprawling behind it.

Losing his footing probably saved his life. The two quick blossoms of flame which opened up in front of him merely whammed lead over his prostrate body.

The only light in the place was street-lamp light sifting in through the undersized basement windows. There was light from the hallway, of course, but it centered on Kenzie for the benefit of the gunman. All Kenzie's bulging eyes could make out was a crouched, faceless figure, a pointing arm, and the glimmer of a gun barrel.

The fellow was taking his time—Kenzie distinctly heard the click of a hammer being thumb-cocked for accurate, single-action style shooting.



The detective gaped as an interior bulb revealed her trussed in there beside the spare tire. She was dazed.

CHAPTER IV

Mouse at Work



OWN on the floor, Kenneth T. Kenzie cursed incoherently even as he fish-floundered for some weapon to hurl. His frenziedly hunting fingers grappled onto the brassy cold of a metallic object—one that couldn't be hurled: it was the nozzle of the extinguisher hose.

In the shaved second while the gun barrel was drawing its bead, Kenzie realized that this type of extinguisher doubtless needed only to be turned upside down to do its stuff. Probably some type of trick valve kept it from spewing forth its chemicals when, as now, it lay toppled on its side.

His other hand flailed, snagged onto the lower end, yanked the cylinder up on end.

The gunshot and the frothy whizz of liquid ejected from the nozzle seemed to blend. More likely, the gunman received a squirt in the eye just as his trigger finger tightened into the squeeze-off.

Kenzie, at any rate, was still unhurt. Rising on one knee, he played the nozzle stream onto his dimly visible foe. As nearly as Kenzie could fathom, the fellow was engaged exclusively now in trying to shield his face.

Kenzie's mistake was in lowering the nozzle to seize the cylinder with both hands. Now that he had recovered from the first shock of being shot at, the little man was rapidly raising himself a temper. It occurred to him that the extinguisher would serve handily to break a couple of legs with—and the memory of the three shots made him mad enough to break legs, too.

However, the moment the chemicals stopped foaming into his face, the gunman flung around and dashed desperately from the room. He crossed Old Man MacGonigal's kitchenette in a couple of leaps, tore open a rear door, and jackrabbitted up a flight of alley steps into the night.

Kenzie stopped short in the weirdly illuminated kitchenette. The blue glow suffusing the room streamed from a gas flame in an open oven. The pair of naked feet roasting in the broiler compartment belonged to

Old Man MacGonigal, limply a-sprawl in a wicker armchair.

Kenzie dived to drag the wicker chair back from the stove; then, cursing, he sought out a light switch. The switch was right next to the phone, and suspended from the phone was a list of emergency numbers—radio repairs, ice-box, plumber, and, finally: *Medical emergency, call Dr. Shallus.* . . . Kenzie shot a look at the unconscious victim tied in the chair, and decided it was a medical emergency.

AFTER the doctor left, Old Man MacGonigal tested his weight on his bandage-swathed feet. He declared dourly, "I can walk . . . but I'll be damned if I can put on shoes for a week."

Kenneth T. Kenzie had fidgetted as inconspicuously as possible in the background while the medical treatment went on. Now he ventured, "What was it all about, sir?"

"Search me!" The Old Man scowled. "The bozo knocked on my door. I naturally thought it was one of my tenants come to pay his overdue rent. I opened up and he shoved a gun in my ribs. He said he'd kill me unless I handed over that paper!"

"What paper, Mr. MacGonigal?"

"That's the trouble—I didn't even know what the hell he was talking about!" Angry color stained the Old Man's cheeks at the ugly remembrance. "He clotheslined me into that chair at the point of a gun, partly plugged my mouth with a towel so I couldn't let out a scream, then he lit the oven. The so-and-so promised to toast my toenails black unless I talked—and I couldn't talk except to say I didn't know what the hell he was gabbling about, and he wouldn't believe me! What a hell of a spot I was on!"

Kenzie offered silkenly, "That paper, whatever it is, must be mighty important. . . ."

"It evidently ain't wastepaper! Anything that a hood goes after with a shooter is important—to him, anyway." MacGonigal was staring at his ex-operative. He cracked out suspiciously, "What are you looking so smug about, you fat headache? Come to think of it, you haven't explained what brought you to my door tonight!"

Kenzie fumbled in his hatband, said gently, "I've got something here for you, Chief. I think it may be the same paper—"

"What? I might have known it!" Old Man MacGonigal became, for the next three minutes, a volcano erupting red-hot profanity. He tapered it off with the malignant assertion, "It's all your fault, you squirrely stumblebum! It's thanks to you I've been trussed up like a Christmas goose and roasted alive. You're a Jonah, a—what's that?"

Kenzie, head bowed to the storm, had out a sea anchor in the form of a blue oblong of bankpaper. "It's a fifty-dollar check—a down payment on a possible five-hundred-dollar fee."

The Old Man snatched the check, breathed hard over it. "You've found a cash client in this unholy mess? Why in hell didn't you say so in the first place?" His bloodshot eyes absorbed the signature. "Nicholas Weikler, hey? Come on, come on, tell me all about it."

Kenzie drew breath, launched into detailed explanations.

MACGONIGAL heard him out, then said scornfully: "You're a prune-brain if I ever heard one! What you've told me isn't a report, it's a nightmare. The whole thing can be boiled down to a couple of sentences. Helen Fouser hid this scrap of paper in the phone, later your snake-eyed fella caught up with her and forced her to admit where it was. He went there and he found the MacGonigal card. That's why he called on me!"

The Old Man scowled, added:

"You kicked it away when you hung around here instead of tagging that guy. He's the key to the whole riddle—he'd have led you straight to the girl if you'd shadowed him!"

Kenzie spread his hands, said apologetically: "I'm sorry, sir, but—"

"You *ought* to be sorry! You should have realized Weikler's wrong, the girl's right, her Uncle Claude no doubt was murdered. This 1L43-2R15-1L26-R5 proposition is what worries the killer. Obviously it could be used against him. Everything points to it—the girl's fear on the bus, her

failure to reach home, the crook's brazen attempt to procure the paper by force."

Kenzie said softly, "I meant I'm sorry, but I don't look at it that way at all. I have a feeling those things aren't so very important."

MacGonigal gaped. "Well, I'll be—! Maybe you'd like to tell what you think is important?"

"Tyle's hand," Kenzie said eagerly. "The one he always wore the black glove on."

The Old Man reacted huffishly, "Oh, you're dizzy! Tyle was okay. He'd have to be, in his line of work. The cops keep tabs on those lock-and-key specialists. The wrong man in that business could get away with—"

He broke off, swallowed.

"Get away with murder?" Kenzie filled out the stock phrase.

MacGonigal purpled, "No! But plenty else. A man like that would know how to pick practically any lock. Hell! I'll check on it, just to show you you're wrong." The Old Man's bandaged feet limped toward the phone. He dialed, grumbled, "Head-quarters? Give me the Safe and Loft Squad—Sergeant Harding, if he's in. . . ."

THE conversation was brief and mostly one-sided, ending with MacGonigal hanging up and turning to Kenzie:

"You're dead-wrong. Tyle was as clean as a hound's tooth, never arrested or in trouble in his life. He was a naturalized citizen, took out his second papers twenty years ago, but simply because he had a foreign accent they've watched him especially close. Harding says there was never even a whisper of anything wrong, and he'd been in that location the last twelve years."

"And"—the Old Man scowled—"your notion about his hand meaning anything is absolutely foul! It was an industrial accident, he got tangled up with a moving belt, and infection set in. That's why he switched to the lock-and-key line; it didn't need quite the delicate touch. Before then he'd been a watchmaker. . . . What the devil are you grinning about?"

Kenzie urged with good-humored confidence, "Add it up yourself. Naturalized—a watchmaker—isn't it even money he was a Swiss, originally? There wouldn't be

more than two or three watch factories here, so again it's almost even money his job was with Fouser and Weikler's company! If he learned his trade abroad, most likely he'd tie up with an outfit handling imported watchworks. . . . I could be wrong, but I think it's something to go on, worth gambling a bus fare."

Old Man MacGonigal rolled bloodshot eyes as the roly-poly little operative started toward the door. "Damn it, what're you up to now?"

"There was an address in the newspaper story of Tyle's death—his home address," Kenzie murmured.

MacGonigal thought briefly; said, "I'll go with you. Scare us up a cab."

THERE'D been nothing ostentatious about H. Tyle's private life. His home address turned out to be a roominghouse, and according to the landlady he'd inhabited the same room for the past dozen years. Drying her eyes on her apron, she declared she didn't know where she'd ever get another like him. "Never missed a rent day in his life, didn't drink, didn't smoke, never played his radio after nine o'clock," she eulogized the murdered locksmith. "You don't find many such tenants nowadays."

Old Man MacGonigal had sacrificed comfort to appearances to the extent of forcing his bandaged feet into a pair of pre-war rubbers. Painfully climbing the stairs, he agreed that tenants nowadays were a caution. "They seem to think wallpaper was put there to scratch matches on and furniture is something to leave beer-glass rings on. I've even known 'em to raise a duck in the bathroom!"

"You don't know the half of it," the landlady responded with pessimism. "Why, the other day I found a hole right through the baseboard in my Mr. Polo's room—he said his pet mouse must have chewed it. I declare it's no wonder he's plagued with his colds. Nobody can tell me a pet mouse is sanitary."

She opened a door, opened her mouth, screamed.

Kenzie asked, "Tyle didn't keep pet mice in here, did he?" as he pushed into the room. It looked more as if wild boars had

been at work on the bed, tusking the mattress to shreds. An easy chair gaped bare springs from its lacerated padding, the carpet had been taken up piecemeal, but curiously the bureau drawers were intact and a doily remained neatly aligned under a washbasin and ewer.

He turned to the woman. "Which is Polo's room—the one on the right or left?"

"Neither. It's upstairs." She gestured, froze the gesture. "Good heavens, look! There's another mousehole in the ceiling!"

Kenzie ignored the ceiling. He persisted, "Well, who *does* have the rooms on the right and left?"

"The bath is on the right. The left is the new man, Mr. Ikkin."

Kenzie looked enlightened; said, "Would this Ikkin be a thin sliver of cheese—ratty cheese—sort of snake-eyed?"

He got a definite headshake. "Good heavens, no, he's a fine strapping man—as big as your friend here. He's a perfect gentleman, and anyway he works nights." Lips acurl, the landlady sniffed. "If you ask me, I'm betting that girl is at the bottom of this!"

Old Man MacGonigal's voice boomed, "Girl? What girl?"

"I never saw her before in my life. I try to run a decent house—it was just pure luck I caught her sneaking downstairs this evening. I yelled at her, and of course, she took to her heels, the trollop!"

Kenzie sighed. "Come on, chief. That's it. That's the score right up to now."

CHAPTER V

Murder, European Plan



OLDED down into the cab cushions, Kenzie counted up the score. "You see, sir. That room was searched—"

"I'm not dumb!" the Old Man rasped. "It's been going

on for days, maybe a week. All the ordinary hiding places had been accounted for—all that remained tonight was the rough stuff that couldn't be concealed before, tearing up the mattresses and upholstery."

Tensely, he braced his feet against the side-sway of the cab's rounding a corner.

"Now," Old Man MacGonigal resumed, "that pet mouse is the bunk. The guy upstairs drilled that hole, either to peep directly or to use a small toy-periscope device. Counting in the girl, that gives us three suspects mixed up in Tyle's affairs."

Kenneth T. Kenzie murmured, "Or the other way around, sir. Perhaps he was mixed up in *their* affairs."

"That's just playing with words," the Old Man rebuked.

"No, I'm playing with names. One of that woman's roomers was a Mr. Ikkin—it was a Joel Ikkin who perished in the same fire with Claude Fouser."

"That isn't all. She likewise mentioned a guy named Polo."

"With a sore throat," Kenzie nodded. "I expect he's the Mr. Snake-eyes who goes around eating ticorice cough drops—"

The burst of profanity might well have blistered the older man's lips.

"You noticed that, too?" Kenzie muttered. "Well, then, I never did get a look at his face in your place, but it was Polo who tied you up."

Again the cab took a corner. Kenzie turned his head to the window, presently leaned forward and tapped the glass back of the driver's head. "You can let us off right here."

Crossing the sidewalk, the two detectives entered the shrubbery-clotted grounds of the Weikler property. "Let's look for a back way in," Kenzie whispered.

As they detoured in darkness, a sudden, horribly animal snarl made Kenzie fling around. He expected a watchdog at least, but it was only Old Man MacGonigal standing on one leg, nursing one of his feet in both hands.

"Lawn sprinkler," the detective-agency boss managed. "I stubbed my toe on the hellish thing!"

"I'm sorry, sir. We'll go single-file. You fall in right behind me."

Kenzie scuffled ahead, like a pudgy little minesweeper clearing the way for the looming bulk of his big employer. He negotiated the corner of the house, had almost gained a rear service door when another choked sob—not so loud this time—spun him around.

"Please, Mr. Mac—"

"Shut up!" the Old Man hissed. "I didn't say—*Listen!*"

THEY strained their ears. Somewhere at the back of the house a radio was playing. For an overlong moment, it was all they heard. Then the choked sob came again, and more clearly this time.

"Garage!" MacGonigal interpreted.

The garage door was locked, of course.

"Smash the window?" Kenzie wondered.

"Too noisy . . . Wait a minute." The Old Man was down on one knee, pulling off one of his rubbers, fumbling with the foot bandage. He straightened with some tapes of adhesive dangling in his fingers. These he criss-crossed over the pane, than tapped the patchwork with his fist inside the discarded rubber.

Clearing away the broken glass adhering to the tape, he reached in and manipulated the sash lock. "All right, Kenzie, in with you."

Several moments passed before Kenzie manipulated the patent door lock on the inside. "I can't find anything wrong in here, darn the—"

The match he held high showed nothing out of the ordinary in the building. But then another moan twirled him around, exclaiming: "The luggage compartment!"

He sprinted around the garaged car, flung up its back-compartment lid, and gaped as an interior bulb flooded over the blonde Helen Fouser. Cramped in beside the spare tire, she was trussed hand and foot. A gag had bound her mouth, but she'd worked it partially loose.

No answering recognition flared in her dazed, terror-drunk eyes. "Don't!" she wailed hysterically. "Don't kill me—I won't tell. . . ."

Old Man MacGonigal thrust his fancy agency gold-plated shield before her face. "We're detectives," he encouraged. "Now, who are you afraid to tell on?"

Helen Fouser seemed mesmerized by the badge. She whispered, "Weikler—he killed my uncle, Claude Fouser."

The Old Man was astounded. "He tied you up like this?"

The girl hesitated. "It was dark, and I

was struck from behind, but who else could have done it?"

"Untie her, Kenzie." MacGonigal was puzzled. "Young lady, your guardian offered five hundred dollars for your return. You're sure you know what you're talking about?"

"I'll show you. There's a safe in the study—a wall safe behind the paneling. Uncle Claude kept his personal papers there. After I discovered it, I had a man come and change the combination so Weikler couldn't possibly destroy the evidence of his guilt." She changed color, stammered, "Only, I haven't got the combination with me . . . I had to hide it—"

"We know all about that," the detective agency boss grumbled. "Come on!"

Kenneth T. Kenzie had to support most of the young woman's weight across the yard—Old Man MacGonigal hobbling on his unbandaged foot had all he could do to carry himself.

They entered the rear service door, slipped quietly along a hallway, eased into the study.

THE girl tottered to the wall, pressed aside a section of paneling, exposed the gleaming steel eye of a vault dial. "One turn left to 43," Kenzie interpreted from the slip of paper. "Two turns right to 18—" He tugged at the thing, and the circular door opened out soundlessly at him.

"It's right here." The girl slid a slim hand inside. "A series of letter Weikler wrote from Switzerland. Overseas mail, since the war began, is censored, so no one of them means much, but taken together they tell the story. Weikler had been evading the Swiss quota by shipping watchworks through his secretary, Joel Ikkin, to South America. Then the United States government imposed a price ceiling based on the cost of direct imports. The trans-shipped watches cost more than they could be sold for. Weikler's answer was to burn up the stock and collect the insurance. Uncle Claude was too honest to agree—so obviously Weikler killed him. It was to commit murder that Weikler suddenly returned to this country when he hadn't been here for twenty-five years."

Kenzie interrupted, "The letters don't say that—about the killing—do they?"

"No," she admitted. "It isn't *legal* proof, that's why I didn't go to the police. . . ."

"So you resorted to psychological warfare?" Kenzie diagnosed. "You led your guardian to believe you were receiving information from some mysterious source?"

Old Man MacGonigal said in high, beet-colored annoyance, "Shut up! Let *her* do the talking!"

The blonde nodded. "That's exactly what I've been doing, I've felt all along sooner or later he'd crack and show his hand. Of course, to make it look good, I had to pretend I thought my own life was in peril! He'd know I was bluffing if I said I knew Uncle Claude was murdered, since I was five hundred miles away at the time. But if I babbled enough about strangers hanging around the place, faces at the windows and so on, I believed he'd fly into a panic. He'd begin to believe he *had* left a loose end, a threat for somebody to snap up."

Kenzie flared, "That's why you sicked him onto poor old Tyle?"

Her eyes fell. "Tyle was an accident. I never intended Weikler should catch Tyle in this house—"

"But he did? And therefore—"

Helen Fouser opened her mouth, shrieked.

Kenzie spun around.

IN THE doorway stood the snake-eyed man—Polo. His hair was still plastered down damply, the drying extinguisher fluid had left his suit soggy and streaked with chemical brine. He gestured with a belly-gun: "Get 'em up! Or this time I'll really burn you down!"

Old Man MacGonigal, dead-faced, raised his arms. Kenzie lifted his, too, but rising blood was tinting his cheeks, turning his lips a raw liver hue.

SNAKE-EYES said to the girl: "Okay, peroxide, I'll take those letters. You played Tyle for a sucker, but this ain't amateur night any more! I . . . I—"

He seemed to flinch at the gun sound. In fact, he probably never even heard it. The big-caliber slug must have blacked out his brain before his eardrums caught the

warning. The shiver that twitched his crumpled body was his death throes.

"Helen!" Nicholas Weikler's voice boomed. The stork-legged man loomed in the doorway. "She's fainted!" he exclaimed.

Kenneth T. Kenzie clapped a hand over his mouth, gurgled, "I . . . I guess I'm gonna be sick!"

"There's a powder room at the end of the hall," the stork-legged man offered. "I want you to witness I had no choice in the matter. I heard Helen scream for help. When I reached the hallway, I saw this gunman. For days our lives have been terrorized by this sort of thing."

Kenzie reeled, caught at a floorlamp inside the doorway with both hands.

Weikler's voice ran on, "Anyway, he was a killer. He undoubtedly killed Tyle after forcing him to disclose the combin—"

Kenneth T. Kenzie leaped, hurling the floorlamp in a vicious, two-handed swing. The flying base of it poled the stork-legged man in his middle. The victim dropped, his gun skating from his wrist.

Kenzie shouted, "You damned slaughterhouse on shoes!"

He sprang astride of the writhing figure, lifted the lamp and brought its base down on the other's head—and repeated the stroke, like a farmwife churning butter.

Old Man MacGonigal rasped: "You stumblebum! You punch-drunk lamebrain, you want him to stop payment on his check?"

Wrapping bearlike arms around his assistant's roly-poly figure, the agency boss hauled Kenzie off the now-unconscious client. "Another case you've kicked to hell for no reason at all!"

KENZIE'S struggle slowly subsided, an apologetic expression softened his tensed features. "I'm sorry, Mr. MacGonigal, but his check isn't worth a nickel, anyway. He didn't hire me to find Helen, just to find out how much she'd told me. It's like I told her, those letters don't prove anything. No court would convict a man of murder merely on account of a hint of arson pieced together from a flock of letters. That can't be why he ripped Tyle's room to shreds—killed Tyle—killed Polo

here—and was going to knock off the girl, too."

Old Man MacGonigal stormed, "Listen, you fool! It's damned risky business accusing a respectable man like Weikler of—"

"That's just it. He isn't Weikler at all. His right name is the one he used at Tyle's roominghouse—he's Ikkin, Weikler's secretary."

MacGonigal gaped.

"What happened," Kenzie said in his usual silken tones, "is that *both* partners agreed, all right, to have a fire and collect the insurance. This fellow Ikkin simply saw a chance to leave a couple of bodies in the holocaust, after which he borrowed Weikler's identity—and Weikler's wealth. I figured that as soon as Helen said Weikler hadn't been in this country for twenty-five years—she or nobody else had seen the man for so long that Ikkin could borrow his name by simply switching passport pictures."

The Old Man's answer was a dissatisfied scowl.

Kenzie said quickly, "It fits, doesn't it? It explains why he was afraid of Tyle, assuming Tyle had been in the watch business in Switzerland himself and possibly held a grudge because of his maimed hand. Then there was the psychological warfare Helen was carrying on—Ikkin would have added all that up, and concluded perhaps Tyle knew he wasn't Weikler at all. So he moved into the roominghouse—was there daytime only—because that gave him a chance to sneak into Tyle's room."

"What for?"

"To destroy everything which might indicate to the police there was a connection between Tyle and himself," Kenzie supplied. "The other stuff—the slashed mattress and so on—was Polo's work. I make Snake-eyes Polo just a crook lying low in that roominghouse, accidentally seeing Ikkin sneak into that room of Tyle's. He jumped to the conclusion there was money in it, bored that peephole for observation, shadowed Ikkin and found out who he was—or was supposed to be. A wealthy man prowling Tyle's room would mean just one thing to a crook, would mean grounds for

(Continued on page 95)

ACTION IN



AFTER the *Fayetteville* went into drydock at Brooklyn, they took a diathermy machine aboard to use on my hand. In a few days, the mitt felt almost as good as new.

Down in the sick bay, Doc Barry was giving my fin the final once-over. "Take it easy at first. You're lucky, Mead, that it

wasn't your right hand that got mashed."

"In the business I was in before I joined up, the left hand rated as high as the right."

Doc gave me a friendly, sour grin. "Truck-driver or bruiser?"

I guess a lot of people would figure like Doc Barry did. I'm six feet two, and tote over two hundred pounds of meat.

"You'd never guess it, sir. I played the piano. Ran a band."

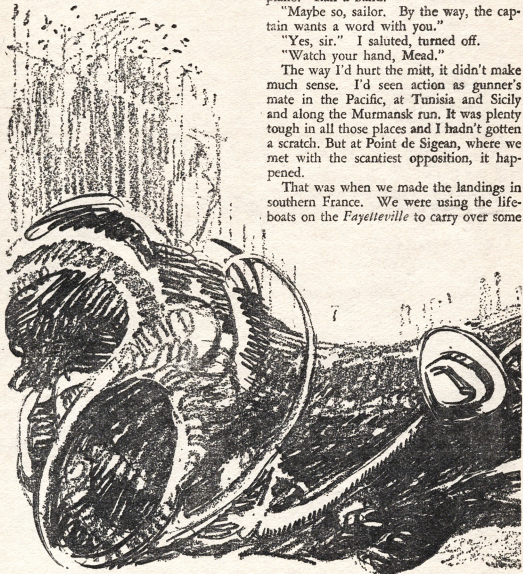
"Maybe so, sailor. By the way, the captain wants a word with you."

"Yes, sir." I saluted, turned off.

"Watch your hand, Mead."

The way I'd hurt the mitt, it didn't make much sense. I'd seen action as gunner's mate in the Pacific, at Tunisia and Sicily and along the Murmansk run. It was plenty tough in all those places and I hadn't gotten a scratch. But at Point de Sigean, where we met with the scantiest opposition, it happened.

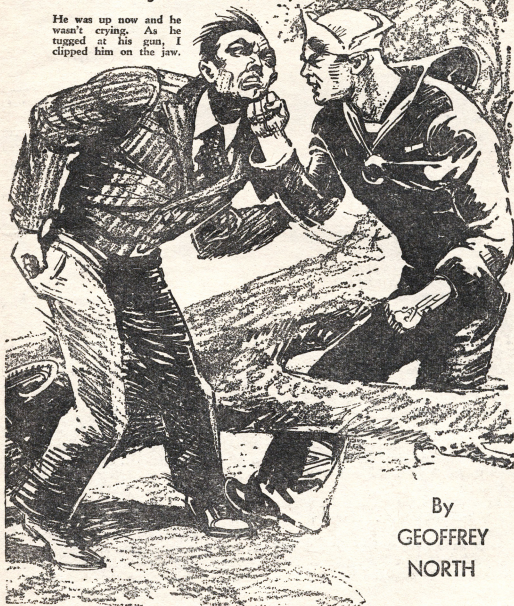
That was when we made the landings in southern France. We were using the lifeboats on the *Fayetteville* to carry over some



MANHATTAN

Chasing tough gunmen in a hurricane isn't exactly my idea of the ideal way to spend a furlough—but the evidence made it look as if I was part of the gang, and I knew this was rougher than war!

He was up now and he wasn't crying. As he tugged at his gun, I clipped him on the jaw.



By
GEOFFREY
NORTH

engineers after the first infantrymen had swarmed up the sands.

I was at the starboard ropes, lowering away, when some rigging fouled. A boat full of soldiers swung crazily in mid-air. The boat bumped against the ship's side, bounced off and then swung back hard. That's when my hand got jammed between the lifeboat gunwale and the ship's hull. I don't remember much pain, just my hand going numb all over. I remember pushing the boat clear of the ship's side, and the boat lowering properly and hitting the water true and shoving off to the beach.

Then I got the call to my gun station. For a while things were too busy with me to bother about the crushed fin. A gunpointer doesn't use his left hand much, anyway. When there was a lull in our firing, I looked at the hand. It was like a small cantaloupe.

The mitt got better slowly, but I had it in a sling for three months. The accident was due to my own clumsiness, nothing to rate the purple heart or anything like that. I never lost a day on duty.

I KNOCKED on the captain's cabin now. "Come in."

Captain Griffith was a hard-boiled, cocky little oldster. Maybe sixty years old, but he carried himself like a young man. He had a lined face the color of old brick, and a cold little eyes.

I touched my cap smartly. The corner of the captain's mouth began twisting queerly. "You're about to go on furlough?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, here's something that you might want to take with you." He stepped forward and pinned a piece of red ribbon with a medal dangling below it, onto my blouse. "For meritorious service," he said. The old codger started to grin. "Here's what they say about you."

I stood stiffly at the prescribed attention while he read the citation. Part of it I remember:

"—for an act of courage beyond and above the line of duty. During the landing operations at Point de Sigean, gunner's mate first class Timothy Mead, in spite of suffer-

ing from a crushed hand, bravely averted the fouling of a crowded lifeboat. Mead, with his one good hand, was able to keep the boat steady until the lowering ropes were unfouled and—"

I don't recall the rest of it. I don't believe I heard the other words. I wasn't feeling good about any part of it. They were pinning something on me I didn't deserve. I hadn't done anything to rate a hero's medal.

I was about to protest that there had been some mistake when the captain gripped my fist. "Mead, I admire the modest way you carried on after the accident. I'm proud of you."

So what could I say? I just saluted and went off.

I went to quarters, got ready for shore leave. I shaved, put my campaign ribbons on my best blouse, but the red ribbon the captain had just given me I put in my pocket, thinking: "Brother, that's one you don't rate."

The man in the glass grinned back at me. It was my own reflection, but anyone who had known me before I joined the Navy wouldn't have recognized the face in the mirror. One side of my cheek was livid with scar tissue where steam from an exploding boiler had drenched me. There was a kink in my nose, the handiwork of some cantankerous Australian in a Cairo bistro. My hair, which once affected a triple-tier blond wave, was cropped short.

I HAD a couple of drinks in a Sand Street saloon. I left there about noon. The radio behind the bar was broadcasting: "Gales of severe intensity due to hit New York this afternoon." The hurricane was moving up from the Florida Keys. It was a gloomy, muggy day.

I headed for Manhattan and Brennan's Silver Dollar Club. That was a night club in Greenwich Village where I'd gotten my start as band leader. They had an afternoon restaurant trade, too, where they served the best food in New York.

The Village looked the same as ever, peaceful and quiet. A sad-faced Chinaman mooched along Macdougall Street, trundling

a baby carriage full of laundry. Some spindly-legged girls were playing hopscotch across from Brennan's place.

Near the kids, a man with a pasty face, wearing a brown borsalino hat turned up all around, leaned against an iron balustrade. His sharp nose, buried inside a Racing Form, tabbed him for me. He was Ace Hewlett, a tinnhorn gambler and racing tout. He looked up as I passed, but he didn't recognize me.

I walked across the street to the Silver Dollar Club. A sprinkle of rain spattered lazily over the sidewalk dust, but no wind stirred. I stopped in front of the entrance.

My heart did a few loops when I saw the framed picture of the blonde torch singer that flanked the doorway. The picture was captioned: JOAN ELLISON, THE GOLDEN GIRL WITH THE GOLDEN VOICE.

Joan and I had started out in show business about the same time. She got into the big money about the time that I started working for the Navy.

I went inside. Nothing had changed much. The only new feature was a sallow, skinny waitress padding over the linoleum. Pat Brennan, stocky and dark, tight-mouthed and stingy-looking as ever, was rubbing the bar top briskly. Brennan's cashier, Carolyn Devany, a slim brown-haired chit, pale with wistful round eyes, was making up her bank deposit. The Silver Dollar Club opened around one in the afternoon and the custom was to bank the previous night's take soon after opening.

I got seated. The waitress came and I ordered. I was finishing my coffee when Joan Ellison breezed in, wearing one of those new-fangled high coiffures. Amethyst earrings swung tingly from her tiny ears. She was wearing something in dark brown with a gold belt. Something simple and short enough to give you a look at the prettiest knees in show business. "Hiya, Pat," she greeted Brennan and took a table near the piano.

I gulped down my java and waltzed over to her. "How's every little thing, Joan?"

She stared at me with blank, green eyes. "Take the air, sailor. I don't know you."

She looked me up and down, slowly and with distaste. She gave my scar a particularly penetrating inspection. "Don't step out of your class, matey." She took a cigarette from a jade case, lighted up. "Now shove off."

"So you don't know me!"

She contemplated the tips of her magenta nails.

I shoved off toward the cashier's desk. I paid up, said to the brown-haired Devany chit, "Is it all right to try your piano?"

She winked at me. "How are you, Tim? You look swell." She said it soft and low, not making any high-voiced fuss over the recognition; as if it were the most natural thing in the world to see me in a sailor's garb. I stood there, getting warm all over, watching the friendly glints in her hazel eyes, basking in her smile.

She snapped a rubber band around a wad of greenbacks on the desk. "How about some music now?"

I moved to the piano. She called softly after me: "Come back later and talk to me."

I sat at the keyboard. Blonde Joan, sipping her orange juice, ignored me pointedly.

I was leery about how my injured mitt would strike the first octave. To get the feel of the keys, I first riffed off a treble figuration with the good fin. I saw Joan's eyes fluttering at me.

A man edged through the side door near Joan's table. He was a runty guy, wearing a handkerchief mask and pushing a Smith & Wesson in front of him. He said: "This is a stick-up. Everybody take it easy and nobody gets hurt. Everybody stays where they are."

He held the gun tightly. The broken nail of his trigger finger glinted under the amber light.

UP AT the bar I could see Brennan with his hands spread on the counter, his dark face scowling. Up there, a thin man with a snapped-down hat, with a handkerchief mask under his eyes, was covering Brennan with a rod. The thin man said: "Get the dough."

The runty man moved over to Carolyn Devany's cage and scooped up the wad of money. "Keep your hands away from that buzzer!" he snarled at her, then he moved back to his partner near the bar.

The gunman backed to the door. Suddenly Brennan ducked behind the bar and came up with his gun blazing. There was a burst of fire like machine-guns answering each other. The gunmen ran out. Brennan slumped over a barrel top with the blood gushing from his arm.

Outside, a motor started up, roared loud, raced away.

Joan scrambled up from under her table, ran to the door, crying, "Police!"

Carolyn and I ran behind the bar and made a tourniquet with a clean towel and fixed it over Brennan's arm. Brennan kept groaning and cursing until Joan joined us with a bluecoat in tow.

The cop was a sharp-faced, nervous fellow. Just a rookie. He'd come in, toting his .38, but when he saw Brennan he put the gun away, said: "What's it all about, Pat?"

"I'm standing behind the bar," said Brennan, "when the two hoods come in. As they went out I gave 'em a taste of lead." He jabbed a thumb at me. "This guy signaled for their entrance."

Officer Ross gave me a quick, neutral appraisal. "How do you figure that, Brennan?" he asked.

"He's sitting at the piano," said Brennan, "doodling something with one hand. A three-times-repeated melody, I remember. Just letting the hoods know it's all set for the take."

The cop said: "So why didn't he get away?"

Joan broke in excitedly: "Yes, Officer, this sailor came in here, looking mighty suspicious to me. And he knew he hadn't made a good entree. He pretended to know me. I gave him the brush-off. He went to the piano and it all happened like Brennan told you."

"You fools!" said Carolyn Devany, "this is Tim Mead, who has played a piano in this place many a time."

Brennan's face darkened. "Why, so 'tis."

Joan's mouth dropped. Then her lips curled disdainfully. "Well—imagine! Sailor-boy on leave! Where's all your hair?" She laughed. It was a mean laugh and meant to be mean. She was trying to toss off the frosty way she'd treated me, as if nothing had ever been between us.

"What the hell are you laughing about?" said Brennan.

"Thinking how he'd look under a spotlight," said Joan.

"Nuts," said Brennan. He swore loudly. He said to the cop "Ross, I got the setup now. He knew this place. Knew the layout. He was talking to my cashier before the rods blew in. I think it's a four-way job."

Carolyn Devany said hotly: "You're either delirious or crazy! They got my money, too. Money that I've saved up for more than a year. Over five hundred I was taking to the bank to buy bonds with."

Patrolman Ross said to me: "Sailor, how do you stand on all this?"

I showed him my furlough papers.

"This guy's all right," said Ross to Brennan.

I said to the Devany chit: "I'll be seeing you later." I went outside.

THE sky was a black canopy. Somewhere a clock struck two, but all along the street the store lights began winking on. The air was heavy and ominous. A little spiral of dust came skipping across the cobblestones, dancing a lonely pirouette down Seventh Avenue. I followed the dust spiral and at Barrow Street I turned east.

I was puzzling about the thin gunman, the one with the turned-down hat. The light at the bar hadn't outlined him sharply enough for me, but if his hat had been turned up I'd have laid two to one that the guy was Ace Hewlett. I figured he'd been casing Brennan's place when I first spotted him outside.

Hewlett had his favorite Village hang-outs, and I knew them all. I didn't find him in the first three places I visited.

Now the rain was falling hard with a hurricane wind whooshing in from the south. The gale whipped aslant my back,

tumbling me in a fast hurdle down the steps that led to the Green Lantern. This was a basement dance-hall and beer parlor near Washington Park. It wasn't patronized by the uptown swells; just a hangout for cabbies, dockmen and petty racketeers. It did mostly a Saturday-night and Sunday-night business with two dance bands going in the barnlike place.

The wind howled and tore a sign from a cornice above me and sent it skittering at my ankles. I got my hand on the knob and a blast lifted me up and hurled me through the doorway. I had to fight to get the door closed.

I turned to the front room where a dim light showed over the wormy beer-tap. And there was Ace Hewlett playing casino with Tony Tuffani, who ran the joint.

HEWLETT was wearing his turned-up brown hat tilted back from his narrow forehead, and his eyes flicked up from under his hatbrim as I came in. He dealt out the cards. Tuffani rubbed his hook nose, swept up big casino from the table. "Lookin' for girls?" he said. "In the back room."

"Maybe later," I said.

The joint boasted two pianos. The up-right was near the entrance. The grand was in the back room. I wondered if my left hand could still boom out those bass chords the way I used to do it. I slid a chair at the music box, poised my hand above the keys.

Hewlett laid little casino and three spades on the table. "Your play," he said to Tuffani.

I hit two tenths in rapid succession, down low in the bass, and it sounded lousy. My tone was dull as ditch water. Choked off. There was no resonance, no brilliancy to the chords. It would take time, I figured, before the mitt would get well enough for me to play in the manner I'd done before. I got up disgustedly from the keyboard and ambled into the back room.

A fellow with a shock of long black hair sprawled on a bench and dawdled with a guitar. At a corner table sat a girl with hennaed locks and gypsy eyes, talking in low tones to a short, pimpled man who kept one hand under his coat.

THE girl smiled at me. I went over to where the big Steinway stood and sat down before it disconsolately. With my right hand I began to pick out a blues. The guy with the guitar started chording along with me.

The girl swished over, perched herself on my knee. "Will you buy a drink, sailor?"

Her perfume reminded me of a dame I'd known in Algiers. "If you'll go for beer," I said.

She called out, "Oh, Tony. Draw two."

The guy with the guitar got in a couple of hot licks and I jammed through with a boogie-woogie roll in the bass. My tone was rich, full-throated like a Sunday-morning bell.

"So that's it!" I figured. I was pretty sure I knew now why my bass had sounded so punk when I'd tried the ivories out in the front room.

The wind rattled at the windows and the rain made a steady trio with guitar and piano. Somewhere a door slammed. The dame on my lap yelled out: "Hurry up the beers, Tony, oh!"

A sharp-nosed cop came into the room with a nervous, rookie's walk. Officer Ross sang out:

"All of you into the front room and line up with your hands high."

The girl slid off my knee. I went along with the dark-haired fellow, who lugged his guitar with him. We followed behind the girl and the pimpled runt.

In the front room, Ross lined us up with our hands above our heads. He lined us up in front of the piano. "Beat it to cover, sister," he said to the girl.

When she left for the other room, he slid out his gun. "I'm searching you—all you punks. Don't try anything."

One of the runty man's fingers, the finger with the broken nail, began a jittery tremble. Tuffani's fat cheeks broke out in perspiration. "I don't know nothing about nothing," he whined. Hewlett and the dark-haired guitar player stood thin-lipped and beady-eyed. I figured rightly that the dark-haired lug was one of the mob.

Ross went through our pockets. He didn't find any money or guns on anybody.

"Tough luck, punks," he said, "I'm marching you all to 'quarters.'"

Now the wind outside howled with such cyclonic fury, I had to yell to make myself heard. "I figure the money is inside the piano!"

Ross kept us covered. "Open the lid, sailor!" he yelled.

I stepped out of rank, walked to the piano and put a hand on top of the box. Ace Hewlett brushed his hat off his brow and his gun streaked out. I heard two shots. Patrolman Ross fell. The runty gunman sagged to the floor. The dark-haired lug snatched up his guitar from a chair and bashed it over my skull.

I stumbled and Hewlett ran against me, knocking me sideways. He snaked his hand inside the piano and it came out with a roll of money. He yelled: "Get the other rod, Frankie!"

The black-haired Frankie filched a gun from the piano's gut and ran out with Hewlett.

A SHEET of rain whipped through the banging door. The bar bottles began dancing crazily. I couldn't see Tuffani anywhere. Ross was groaning on the floor. The runt was huddled in a motionless ball under the table. A little bubble of blood began oozing across his pimpled jaw. I snatched up Ross' gun and ran outside.

I had to fight my way up the steps against the wind, one step at a time. At street level the rain swirled in a blinding maze. A gust of wind skittered a rift through the downpour and I could make out a car parked across the gutter and Hewlett and Frankie at the wheel trying to start the car.

I blasted away with the .38—blasted two shots at the front tires. The two gunsels tumbled out of the heap and began staggering toward the park. I tried to double-time through the howling gale after them, but the wind beat me to my knees. I had to fight for every forward step in the same way that the hoods in front were battling the hurricane.

Hewlett was trailing a little behind Frankie and when I reached the park walk I made a flying tackle and got Hewlett back

of the knees. I tumbled him, but he was tough and wiry. We did a falling roll, catch-as-catch-can over the slippery sward.

There was a double crack of a gun. Hewlett went limp above me. A hand frisked Hewlett's pocket and then I got the dead man off me and was up and fighting my way through the gale after Frankie and the money.

I stumbled on, a step behind Frankie. He must have thought he'd killed me. We moved as if it was in a slow-motion nightmare. There was a drawn-out, tearing sort of noise and then a crash that sounded above the wind's howling. A tree fell and blocked the path ahead. Frankie turned and zig-zagged across the oozy ground. He slipped and I almost had him then, but he staggered up and bored ahead.

The wind pounded north as if spewed up through Hell's hinges. The cyclone turned Frankie around so that he faced me and when he saw me he brought up his gun and fired pointblank. I didn't hear the gun sound but there was a great, rending noise as if a brick wall was falling. And then I saw the tree crash and someone crying, "Help me!"

Frankie was lying belly-down in the mud, an arm pinned down by the fallen tree. I got my back under the trunk and went to work. If I had tried to raise the trunk up straight it would have been useless, but I managed to roll the tree sideways just enough to get Frankie's arm free and drag him out.

He was up now and he wasn't crying. He tugged at his gun. Before he found the trigger I clipped him on the jaw. Not too hard. Just enough to knock him out.

He had the money on him. I carried him back through the gale to the Green Lantern.

There were two more cops there besides Ross and Tuffani and the girl when I lugged Frankie through the door.

"This guy's got to do the talking," I said, "Hewlett's past all that."

AFTER Patrolman Ross had been fixed up and things straightened out, and Tuffani and the girl had proved their inno-

cence, they called up Brennan and the money was identified.

So I went back with one of the cops and the money to Brennan's place. The rain had quit and only the tail-end of the big wind was flitting up Connecticut way when I eased through the door of the Silver Dollar Club.

Joan and the Devany chit were waiting near the entrance.

Joan said to the Devany chit: "Here comes your hero."

The Devany kid marched me into the back room where Brennan was resting easy on a cot.

He said: "I've been a damned fool." He pressed his good mitt on me. "When you get through with the ships, my boy, I've got a place here for you. Permanent. If they don't like your piano I'll make you bouncer." He turned his back and started dozing off.

Carolyn Devany leaned in the crotch of my arm. She made a mock shiver. "How

wet you are." She ran slim fingers over my head. "I like your hair that way, Tim."

She fiddled with my blouse, found the red ribbon with the medal in my pocket and said: "I like those colored ribbons you're wearing, but what's the matter with this one?"

"All right, baby, pin it on me," I said.

"What did you rate this one for?" she asked, brushing the red silk with her fingertips.

"Action in Manhattan, I guess," I said.

She nestled cozily in my arm. "You say the craziest things." She pursed her lips and looked up at me foxily. "Tell me, is it true what they say about sailors?"

"How's that?"

"That they have a sweetheart in every port?"

"That's what they say."

She winked. "Well, New York is a port, isn't it?"

So what would you have done? Okay, then!

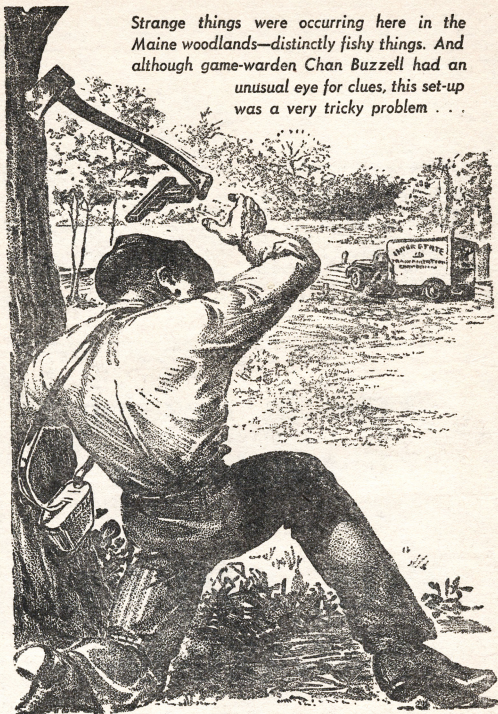
Tops in Reading Entertainment



THE SPEED MAGAZINES

CHAN HANDLES

Strange things were occurring here in the Maine woodlands—distinctly fishy things. And although game-warden Chan Buzzell had an unusual eye for clues, this set-up was a very tricky problem . . .



By CLARK NELSON

AN AXE . . .



HAN BUZZELL drew up at the Loon Lake Junction filling station behind a big red van, that had just pulled in to get gas, with large gilt letters on each side of it saying Interstate Transportation Corporation.

"In a hurry, Chan?" called out the at-

The man had the strength of desperation. He hurled the axe violently, end over end, at Chan.



tendant, who was beginning to unscrew the cap from the other tank. "I'll fill you up first, if you are. These men won't mind."

"Not a bit," said the burly truck driver, turning around and glancing back with an affable grin.

"No, thanks," said Chan. "Take your time. I got plenty of it on my hands, to-day."

Chan lolled back in the seat, yawning, as if he wouldn't mind spending the rest of the afternoon there. Chan was the Loon Lake game warden, and he was suddenly glad that he wasn't in uniform, wasn't in an official department car.

"Another trip back from Little Loon,

eh?" the station attendant was saying to the two men on the seat of the truck. "Boy, but that Metcalf family sure does have a lot of furniture to move up from Boston, I'll say."

"Yeah," said the helper alongside the driver. "Hell, we got three or four more loads. Bringin' up another next week, I guess."

"Glad to get your business. Keep stoppin' by, don't forget. . . . Check the oil, water?"

"Sure. Go to it."

As the man poured in oil, filled the radiator, he stooped down and glanced under the large hood:

"Say, you got a leak in your radiator?"

"Naw. That's from some ice meltin' we got in the truck." The lad beside the driver laughed as he pulled out gas coupons and cash. "We got a case of beer back there. Me and Bill travel in style. We like our beer cold."

"That's right, Slim," agreed Bill.

"So long. See you next week," said the attendant with a wave of his hand, as the truck started and churned away.

Chan got out of his car, when he saw the truck take the turn at the corner on the road that led to Boston, and strolled over to where the van had been standing. He stood there, for a moment, looking at the puddle of water that had dripped down from the body. Then he leaned over and picked up a piece of reddish, clay-like dirt that had come from one of the huge tires. He examined this briefly, and tossed it aside. Then he nodded at the gas attendant, waiting at the pump, and walked into the office.

He faced the man, in his grave manner, when they were inside. Chan was long and lean and tanned, with a loosely knit figure that hid his superb muscles as completely as his air of lazy detachment hid his amazing swiftness of action. He had wide gray eyes with an odd somberness in them. Somehow, they seemed to be looking at and into and through a man. They were looking that way now, as he asked in his slow and deliberate drawl:

"Know anything about them fellers, Joe? I mean anything outside o' their bein' furniture movers or whatever else they're supposed to . . . to transport?"

"No, Chan, I don't. They been stoppin' off here an' gettin' gas an' oil. Seem like mighty pleasant guys. Movin' furniture up to that big Metcalf camp. Boy, but he sure has got a slew of it. . . . Nice to be rich, eh, Chan?"

"Might be, at that," conceded Chan. Then he said, with one of his quick, contemplative frowns: "I see 'em come through here about—yes, six days ago. Remembered the truck. See it leaking then. . . . How many times they stopped here?"

"Oh, five or six, I'd say."

"Always about a week between times?"

"I—yep, just about, I'd say. . . . Boy, that Metcalf camp he's buildin', that he calls a camp, must be about the swellest log palace in all Maine."

"When did they make their first trip?"

"I'd say early in May. When the ice went out. When Metcalf first come up. Didn't stop here, then. I saw 'em go by." Joe thought for a second and said: "Say, there were two trucks that time."

"Happen to recall how soon they came again?"

"I do, Chan. Let's say three days later."

"Two trucks?"

"Uh-huh."

"Able to lug a heap o' furniture, in four truckloads," mused the game warden. "Let's see. I want to get this straight. Those weekly trips began about a week after the last two truckloads went up, eh?"

"That's right, Chan."

"Thanks. . . . By the way, Joe. I haven't talked to you. Keep all this under your hat. That's official. Understand?"

"Sure, Chan. Say, what's the trouble?"

Chan shrugged uncommunicatively in his characteristic fashion and eyed the other again, very solemnly and very quietly:

"I mean to keep all this under your hat, Joe. Don't say a word about it to those two fellers, don't act different, when they show up again. I expect to be around. If you don't see me here, call my camp fast as you can. If I'm not there, call the fish-and-game commissioner at Augusta. Have someone get *hold* of me, though. I'm saying all this, remember, in case they happen to show up *before* a week. I'm counting on it being a week and I'll be on hand then. . . . So long, Joe. . . . No, I didn't need any gas."

CHAN stepped on his own gas and drove out to Little Loon Lake to beat all hell and halleluyah. Little Loon was connected to Loon Lake by Loon River, but it was a long way around there by road. It was rough going the last few miles in, to the Metcalf camp, and the Boston man had been forced to rebuild a piece of the road, Chan knew. He got there before sundown,

though, and found the city newcomer superintending a gang of five guides who were expertly putting up log buildings.

"In the neighborhood," Chan explained. "Just thought I'd drop in and see how things were coming along with you."

"Mighty nice of you," said Metcalf, a big, middle-aged man who had the stamp of extreme prosperity on him and who had favorably impressed the game warden as being a genuine sportsman.

Chan sauntered down to the lake shore, to get away from the hearing of the workmen, after giving Metcalf a significant glance. Apparently the latter understood it, for he fell into step beside Chan:

"Nice site you got here, Mr. Metcalf."

"Certainly is, Mr. Buzzell."

Very definitely it was. On a grassy slope with tall, virgin pines behind it, that ran down to a sandy bay, a series of cabins were being erected—a large main one, another for servants, two guest houses, a woodshed and tool house and garage. All of them overlooked the wilderness water of Little Loon Lake, where wealthy out-of-State folks had their fishing-and-hunting lodges.

"What I wanted to ask you was if you got all your furniture an' things here?" said Chan.

"Yes. Under cover in those two guest cabins that are finished. I'm living in the midst of it. Sort of cramped." The other smiled.

"It all came through on those first four loads?"

"Why . . . yes. Yes, it did."

"Haven't had any more dealin's with that Interstate Transportation Corporation?"

"Not a bit."

"Thanks. I just wanted to be sure. . . . Don't let none o' the boys know about my questionin' you, please."

"Not if you ask me not to." Metcalf laughed. "Any trouble? Any way I can be of help?"

"Not quite sure about the trouble," said Chan in his grave way. "Think you've told me part o' what I wanted to know already. You're a sportsman, Mr. Metcalf, and I know you believe in conservin' fish and game. That's all I can say now. I . . .

well, I don't like to leap to conclusions, too fast," he added.

"I'll be here if you want me."

"Thanks. So long."

CHAN stepped on the gas again. He didn't hit for Loon Lake Landing or his home camp. He took the northwest and little-traveled road that led to Horseshoe Pond, one of the tributaries that fed the Loon Lake chain. The road ended there, and beyond it were over a hundred miles of wild lands going clear up to the Canadian border. There were only two camps on Horseshoe, one of them belonging to a New York man who hadn't been up since the war started, and the other to Mort and Cliff Wade.

Chan didn't have to make another personal visit, this trip. He had to drive to the second road, though, the one that was a couple of miles beyond that leading to the camp of the New York vacationist. Chan, as he had told Metcalf, didn't like to leap too fast, liked to be sure. He was fairly sure, when he got to the old logging thoroughfare that went to the Wade place.

That was where there was a stretch of reddish, claylike earth, and heavy truck tires had quite plainly passed through it. The headlights of his car showed him this immediately.

He took it more easily, on the way back to the Landing before making for his cabin on the east shore of Loon Lake. He'd never tangled with Mort Wade and his nephew Cliff. Never had had any cause to. The two men hunted and fished and trapped some and seemed to get by, but there had never been any hint of their slaughtering fish or game for the market. Maybe they'd shot an occasional deer out of season, maybe taken a few salmon, but they'd done it because they needed food. Chan, like most sensible wardens, wasn't so much against this if a man or family really needed food and didn't overdo it. Chan was rabidly against what he called money killers, and it looked to him now as if the Wade pair had become this type.

He was more positive of this, after he'd gotten to the store at the Landing and

spoken to the proprietor alone and privately. "Think you told me you been dunnin' them Wade men for the last couple o' years for a long-standin' bill. Mind my askin' if they paid you up? If they're spendin' any money? . . . Mort always did like to spend, if he ever had any."

"They got real foldin' money now, Chan, like these city folks call greenbacks." The other chuckled. "Yep, Mort paid up a few weeks ago, an' since then him an' Cliff has been expendin' their currency like a couple o' drunk sailors. Sure, they been outfittin' themselves like all caution an' fit to kill."

"Thanks, Sam. Blessin' not to have a feller ask questions," he said dryly as he turned and went out the door.

CHAN was now pretty sure of what he wanted to know. He just had to sit back and wait. During the wait, he made a couple of telephone calls to Boston, one to a police official, the other to the owner of an exclusive restaurant. Chan, like a lot of Maine game wardens and guides and others interested in fishing and hunting, had a lot of city friends among visiting sportsmen. He'd always helped them with advice about the best places to fish and hunt, and there is nothing that will make a man more grateful than this. He was *dead* sure about the set-up he had to face, after communicating with Boston.

He'd found out that the truck operated by Bill and Slim, this information coming from Joe at the gas station, always spent a night up here before returning the next day. Chan was all prepared. He was going to go in by water, this time, and he had his canoe ready at the inlet connecting Loon Lake with Little Loon. When he got a message at his camp from Joe, saying the truck had passed through the Junction ostensibly bound for Little Loon and the Metcalf camp, the game warden made for the inlet and started paddling.

Chan liked paddling, liked this sort of work, just as much as he disliked the strictly official part of his job where he had to travel in a spick-and-span uniform and a shiny department car. It was good to get into old breeches, old moccasins, an old

shirt. He liked the wilderness, too, taking the trails and streams and lakes the Indians and early settlers had opened up. The only modern thing about him, the only official one, was the automatic he carried. He didn't like that so much, either, but a fellow had to carry it. That and a pair of handcuffs.

He gave an instinctive grimace of distaste, as he swept his craft up the last rapid and entered Little Loon. Although the shores weren't exactly dotted with them, although there were no more than a couple of dozen of them, Chan sometimes felt disgusted at the elaborate "lodges" or "camps" of wealthy Summer residents. He'd have liked to have seen the country remain as it was in the beginning. But in that event, he told himself with a smile, probably there would have been no need for a fish-and-game department and its game wardens.

He made the best time he could, through Little Loon, and Chan knew how to do that when he felt like it. He didn't head up northwest to the stream that led to Moose Pond and then to Horseshoe; he skirted the southeast shore and decided to try the trickier, more winding and narrower little river that would eliminate Moose Pond and take him to Horseshoe direct. It would bring him out onto that body of water not much more than a mile away from where the Wade home was. It would keep his appearance from being known to anyone on Moose Pond, into the bargain. Mort Wade had an old crony on Moose, a veteran trapper who hated everything connected with the law, and Chan knew that the news of a game warden's approach can sometimes travel mighty fast.

Chan beached his canoe, when he got there, at the wide outlet of Horseshoe, pulling it up and expertly hiding it beneath some low-hanging alders. He'd picked a good vantage point. Diagonally across the lake, a trifle over a mile away, by squinting through the bushes and trees he could see the Wade camp. It was a log structure, like most of those lived in by Main trappers and guides and outdoor men, and it was on a narrow peninsula that jutted out into the water for a good quarter of a mile. Through

the dense pines surrounding the building he could catch the setting sun glinting on a big red truck with bright gilt letters on the side of it, just behind the cabin.

Chan was always in pretty fine physical condition, and he firmly believed that



Chan expertly beached his boat across from the Wade man's camp.

one way to keep so was to eat fairly regularly. No matter where he was on the job, no matter how hard the trail, he usually had some food in his pack. Now he got out sandwiches and the inevitable vacuum bottle of hot coffee he toted with him. Probably

he'd have to sit here for a couple of hours, until after dark, before the Wade outfit got busy. Most poachers put out their set lines, their gill nets, at night.

Chan, munching his sandwiches and sipping his coffee, noticed the crude ice-house of the Wades had been greatly increased in size since he had been to Horseshoe last fall. Rough boards nailed to upright cedar posts had lengthened and widened it to at least twice its former dimensions. He remembered, now, that he had heard gossip, at the Landing, that Mort had ordered a dozen loads of sawdust from the mill. He'd wondered about it, idly, at the time. Now he knew. They must have put up a good many tons of ice to need that much sawdust for helping to preserve it.

Chan, as the sun began sinking, thought he saw signs of activity around the ice-house. He got out the pair of powerful binoculars he carried on jobs of this sort. He could see instantly that his guess had been right. Mort and his nephew Cliff, with Bill and Slim, were loading up the truck. They must have put in two full layers of ice cakes, he figured. Then he saw Cliff lug out the carcass of a big doe and toss it into the truck, and immediately his uncle followed him with the body of a medium-sized buck. So they were killing illegal deer meat as well as fish, were they?

Chan tensed with the anger he could never subdue whenever he saw concrete evidence of the out-of-season killing of venison or the unlawful taking of fish. It was getting darker, and he leaned forward and peered more intently through the glasses. He was rewarded by seeing what he had expected. The two truckmen began to carry out fish from the ice-house—big lake trout that Chan judged ran from five to twenty or more pounds, silvery salmon that would have tipped the scales at far less. While the two Boston men were putting these into their truck, Chan was able to discern that Mort and Cliff were bringing out and beginning to bait up a long set line and unroll a large gill net.

Obviously they didn't have enough fish on hand to fill the truck, and they'd start to remedy this pretty soon.

All Chan could do, just now, was to sit back and wait.

CHAN didn't have to wait too long, at that, to see the start of operations. As darkness closed in, he saw a lamp go on in the cabin, saw the headlights of the truck break out and cast their bright rays over the placid, black waters of Horseshoe. Mort and Cliff got into a rowboat and went out into the lake, dropping the set line, with heavy sinkers that would carry it to the bottom, as they rowed. They had already attached one end of it to a tree on shore. Lakers, a deep feeding fish particularly at night, would hit the baited hooks that would lie on the bottom.

On their way back, thanks to those headlights, Chan could see the Wades putting out their gill net. It was a deep one, he saw, at least a good thirty feet, and it was also heavily weighted but with substantial cork floats to keep the top end of it on the surface. They were rowing over to the north side of their peninsula, as they layed this out, doubtlessly to cover the channel made by Spawn Brook that was another of the feeder streams. The salmon were thick there, Chan knew, and it wrenched his heart to think of the slaughter that would occur.

Horseshoe Pond was one of the best breeding grounds in the Loon Lake chain for lake trout and landlocked salmon. It hadn't been fished much in the past few years, since the war, with Summer vacationists and camping parties having been cut down to a minimum. The Wades, Chan figured, hadn't been able to do too much damage, as yet. They'd only begun their illegal business for market, he was quite certain, this Spring. He wished, in a way, that he could start out right now and capture them and so save the haul they'd make tonight. But he decided that he'd better wait.

When he did get busy he wanted to put them and the Interstate Transportation Corporation out of this racket for good. He felt that he could. Their case would come up before Judge Marvin at the Junction, and he was one of the few judges who always sided with a game warden—provided

the latter was *right*—and gave the full limit that the law allowed to culprits. He'd fined the last two men Chan had taken before him an even twenty dollars a fish for those they had unlawfully caught. If the fine wasn't paid, too, he gave them a day in jail for every dollar they had been assessed. Yes, he certainly ought to be able to put the Wades and the Boston people out of this racket for good, he reassured himself with one of his rare smiles.

When the gill net was laid, the end of it fastened to another tree on shore, Chan saw the headlights blink out. Shortly afterward, the lamp in the cabin was extinguished. Probably they were going to get some sleep before starting to take in their haul an hour or two before dawn. Chan, anyhow, played it that way, and he let a full hour go by before he slid his light canoe into the water and noiselessly propelled it over to the north of the Wade peninsula, a few hundred yards from the cabin. When he got there, he again pulled it under cover. Then, believing in getting in some rest on a trip, he got under his canoe and immediately took advantage of his fortunate habit of being able to get to sleep without any delay.

Although Chan had the faculty of sleeping soundly in the open under any and all conditions, he was also able to set an alarm clock in his head, so to speak, and wake up whenever he wished. He set it for three o'clock, this time, and when he opened his eyes and glanced at his wrist watch, he saw that he'd been right on the dot. He'd judged it about right, too. A light went on in the cabin and a thin spiral of smoke began to curl up from the chimney. They were getting breakfast, most likely. So would he have some, he told himself, and got out his remaining two sandwiches and the half bottle of coffee that was still left.

IN ABOUT ten minutes Mort and Cliff came out, going directly to their wide rowboat. The older man took the oars and began to push the boat out into the lake while his nephew, with a lantern, started to haul up the set line and remove the lakers from any of the hooks, hanging about five

or six feet apart, on which they had become impaled. Chan, counting as closely as he could under the circumstances, figured that they must have boated somewhat over twenty big trout before they got to the end of their line and pulled in the last hook and started back to their camp just as a roseate gray dawn streaked the eastern horizon.

Again Chan tensed. This time he shook his head in anger and shut his jaws hard as he saw the two truckmen come out of the cabin to meet the returning poachers. It was plain hell, in plain words, to have to squat down here and watch this slaughter. He'd have to watch more of it, too, he knew. Bill and Slim began taking the fish from the boat and lugging them to the truck, and when they'd finished the job, Mort tossed out the set line and ordered his nephew to row to the end of the gill net that was deep in the water on the other side of the channel made by Spawn Brook.

It was slaughter again, all right. Worse, this time. The salmon didn't run as large as the lakers, but there were more than twice as many of them, most of them still alive and gasping and squirming as they tried futilely to pull their heads back from the net meshes. The more they struggled the more hopelessly their gills became entangled. Without even a fighting chance, this fish that to Chan was the gamest of all fresh water species went to their doom.

Again Chan watched them boat the last salmon, take in their net, row around to the tip of the peninsula where Bill and Slim were waiting. He once more was forced to see the men from Boston load their purchase onto the truck, and when they'd completed the task, he himself got busy. With his automatic out, he began to dodge his way through the trees over toward the cabin and the moving van. When he got there, and just as he saw the man called Slim handing a wad of bills to Mort, he stepped out from behind a big hemlock:

"Stick 'em up, you four low rats," he said crisply. "This is Chan Buzzell tellin' you to."

If Chan had deliberately called out his name in order to shoot fear into the

Wade tribe, he'd been correct. Chan was known all over this territory as a mighty tough man to buck, and Mort and Cliff proved it by instantly throwing up their arms, high and with very decided finality. The two hoods from Boston, although they may have heard about the game warden

since their buying of illegal fish and game, maybe were more accustomed to facing lawmen in a tight spot. Bill, the driver, started to stick his own hands up, in a gesture of slow yet resigned surrender, as he began to walk toward his captor and blot out his companion from Chan's sight.



"Stand quiet," snapped Chan, at the same time taking a fast jump to his left.

He wasn't in time. Not quite. Not by a fraction of a second. Slim had edged over behind Bill, like lightning, and gotten his gat from his shoulder holster. He'd thrown himself on the ground and shot from between Bill's legs. He could shoot

in a hurry and in the clutch, all right, but he didn't seem to be able to make it sure death every time he squeezed a trigger. He



Slim dropped his hardware with a howl of pain and ran for the cab of the truck.

took Chan in the arm—in the fleshy part under the right bicep—but he didn't hit him hard enough to make him drop his pistol.

Chan recoiled at the impact of the bullet as it spun him partially around. He fell to the ground. He was just as fast as Slim—a heap sight faster, in fact—and he was a far, far better marksman. When he pressed the trigger of his own automatic, and waved the barrel where he wanted the slug to go, he clipped the hood from Boston clean through the elbow of his gun arm. That kind of medicine, in any clime or country, is calculated to cause a man to drop his hardware.

Slim did, with a howl of pain, and made a run for the cab of the truck.

"Don't do it," yelled Chan. "Lay down flat with your hands and your legs out or I'll drill you through the head."

Slim complied.

That didn't stop action behind Chan, though. Mort had taken a dive for the woodshed adjoining the cabin and came out with a shotgun, but just as he started to raise it Chan had to use his automatic again.

He felt that he had to use it for real business, this trip—four-to-one odds are tough—and he took Wade spang through the heart.

As Mort pitched forward, Chan got to his feet, leaping for the protection of a giant pine. Just as he made it, just as he thought he was getting control of the whole situation, Cliff made a lunge for his uncle's shotgun and blindly, in complete panic, pulled both triggers.

A few of the pellets seared into the calf of Chan's left leg, but the wounds were trifling. The game warden, in reply to this, leaped around to the other side of the tree and took Cliff through the right ankle as he'd been making a dive for the woodshed. He fell across the threshold of it and lay there sprawled out.

Chan had to duck again, to another tree. Bill had backed away when Cliff had been hit and had made the cab of the big van. From there, Chan saw, the driver had apparently flattened out on the leather seat and was sticking a gun out of the opened door. Chan couldn't get a good enough

sight of the fingers holding it—not enough to take a chance on shooting—and he didn't dare get out from behind the tree. He tried words instead:

"Better not try no more stuff, you fellers. In bad enough already and there's a jail sentence for attackin' a game warden. . . . Better come out with your hands up, all o' you."

THEY didn't. Slim, by this time, had also gambled. He'd gotten to his feet, grabbed his gun with his left hand, and dodged around to the other side of the truck. From there, behind a wheel, he sent a bullet clipping into the tree; it tossed bark into Chan's face.

Chan, watching the truck cab, watching the wheel protecting Slim, glanced to the side of him to see where Cliff was. Cliff was trying to crawl into the woodshed, but Chan didn't want to waste another bullet on him. Didn't want to use up this clip, unless he had to, and lose time in sticking in the extra one he always packed with him. He tried words once more:

"Stay where you be, Cliff. Stay there layin' down an' don't make one more move."

Chan had to watch sharp, then, for he could see that Slim had come up to one of the front wheels, to get nearer, get a better view of his opponent. Chan didn't get a chance to shoot.

"You fellers goin' to be sensible an' quit," he called out.

"Go to hell," yelled Bill, and as he did so he stuck out his arm and fired.

It was another close one, but Chan had pulled back in time. He didn't return the fire.

This must have given Bill hope. It made him a mite reckless, anyway. He stuck out his arm to the shoulder, as well as the left side of his face, and that was when Chan edged out from behind the tree trunk for a better shot at the driver.

Chan shot to kill. He saw a splotch of red on the side of Bill's forehead where his bullet had struck, and then the hood dropped his gun and his arm and head slid out of the cab seat and his shoulders and torso followed. He stayed there dangling,

his fingers clutching grimly at the running board.

Triumph went through Chan. Another one out of the way. Now he only had Cliff, with a bum ankle, and Slim with a wounded arm. Slim was a hard man, though, the most resourceful of the lot. That's the way Chan felt, at least, for he never in his life had allowed himself to underestimate an enemy. Still, even with two wounded men against him, wounded though he was himself, he was willing to call the battle even, call things fifty-fifty as they stood now.

Chan Buzzell, however, *had* slightly underestimated just one of his enemies—hadn't, perhaps, counted on about a hundred-to-one break going against him.

The danger, the hint of it, came to him with that odd functioning sixth sense that so many experienced woodsmen possess. He literally felt, possibly heard a slight whish, of something coming at him through the air, at his back. Turning his head, rapidly, he saw that Cliff Wade had gotten inside the woodshed, staggered to his good leg, and secured an axe from a chopping block. This was coming at Chan now, end over end, with all the speed of a desperate man's strength behind it. Chan threw up his arm with the automatic in it, instinctively, to protect his head, dropping to a knee at the same time. The handle of the axe caught the barrel of the weapon and knocked it from his hand, out in front of the tree, while the steel head imbedded itself in the trunk of the pine and stuck there firmly.

Two shots, at the same time, nicked bark from the tree close to Chan's head, from Slim's gun.

Chan Buzzell thought and thought fast. The odds had suddenly shifted in Slim's favor. Chan couldn't get to his weapon without making himself an easy target. There was also Cliff to think about. Probably, seeing that he'd missed with the axe, he'd go into the cabin and get another gun. Chan, in that event, would have armed enemies in front and in back of him, or even on either side of him if he switched his position. It was up to him to make a move.



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He made it. Grabbing the axe — any weapon was better than none—he backed away toward the front of the cabin before Cliff could come out of the woodshed door. Another bullet—then a second—came from Slim. Chan, though, was able to keep trees between himself and the line of fire. He was figuring to get to his canoe.

All at once, as he got around the cabin, he changed his mind. Slim would naturally figure he was trying for some sort of escape, by land or water, on the north side of the cabin. He could already hear the Boston man, who knew he didn't have a gun, come charging after him. Chan, with a rumpus that was strange in a veteran woodsman, crashed noisily for the north side of the peninsula. Then, bending low, taking advantage of the cover that bushes and trees gave him, he turned around, went for the back end of the camp, and then abruptly cut due south.

He traveled silently, of necessity slowly, for the first couple of minutes. Then, still gripping the axe, he started running. Chan could run as silently and deftly and swiftly as a deer, when he had to. He felt that he had to now, especially as he heard Slim continue to rush through the woods in the direction of the north shore of the peninsula.

CHAN'S brain, as he ran, was working just as fast as his feet were going. He knew that he'd eluded Slim, knew that Cliff Wade was out of the picture, knew that he could make the long trek back to Little Loon and get to a telephone and a car. But he knew, also, that this Slim man, in the meantime, would be able to start up his truck and get away. Slim, he figured, would have sense enough not to go through the Junction. He'd probably take one of the four roads, above the Landing, that would take him in any direction. Two of them would take him out of the state, into New Hampshire. Chan didn't want that. Chan wanted to bring him to justice here in Maine. Chan, in fact, had to stop him *before* he got to the crossroads.

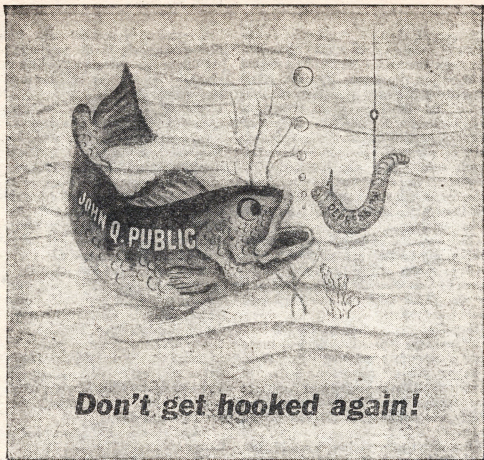
Then, as he again realized that it was an axe that his fingers were clenching, an idea

came to him. As it did, he veered off further east, making for Horseshoe Hill. It would be a tough climb through rough country, an equally tough descent through equally rough country, but if he could get down to Loon Hollow fifteen or even ten minutes ahead of Slim and the truck he was sure he could keep that big red moving van and the Boston fish and game racketeer from getting out of Maine with the evidence.

Chan, knowing he had a steep ascent ahead of him, slowed up his pace a bit. He could turn it on again, harder, when he'd be able to start down the other side of Horseshoe Hill. His arm wound felt all right—the pellets in his calf didn't bother him at all—but he nevertheless pulled out a handkerchief from his hip pocket and bound up the bullet hole as he loped along. As he made the crest of the hill, for a moment he paused and listened. On the still morning air he could hear an engine starting. The wind, he was thankful, was coming in his direction.

Then he really turned on the juice. He had about a mile to go to the spot he'd settled on, but Slim would have fifteen or sixteen of 'em to get there with the truck. That wouldn't have meant much, on a cement road or even a good dirt one. It meant a lot, though, over old logging roads that were corduroyed in a few swampy places and where a big truck with a heavy load would have to creep along in low. It meant that Chan was certain that he could get to the tall, thick spruce at a bend in the Loon Hollow road in plenty of time.

He didn't waste any time, either, when he got there. Like most Maine outdoor men, like practically all game wardens, Chan was close to an expert with an axe. Thumbing the edge of the one he had, that had been the cause of his losing his automatic, he was glad to see that it was sharp and in good repair. He found out that he liked the heft of it, the balance, when he started to swing it into the butt of that towering, big spruce that was growing back from the road perhaps a dozen feet or more. Chan, when he'd been younger, had once won a chopping contest in a guide and lumberjack Fourth of July celebration.



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A United States War message prepared by the War Advertising Council; approved by the Office of War Information; and contributed by this magazine in cooperation with the Magazine Publishers of America.

He proved, right off, that he hadn't lost the art of wielding one. It didn't take him even the minimum ten minutes he'd figured on to get that tree down. It crashed across the roadway in a trifle over six minutes. It blocked the thoroughfare completely, as he'd wanted, and there was no getting around the woods on either side of it in a truck or any other kind of a car. Tall bushes, smaller trees, also hid from view the evidence that it had been chopped down. It looked as if it had simply toppled over.

He had Slim and the van trapped here in Maine, anyway.

Chan was tired and sweating, when he finished, and he went and sat down behind the huge stump, certain that he would be unseen by Slim when the latter arrived with the van. Then he hoped that the breaks would come to him.

They did.

He heard the approach of the long truck, heard it come to a grinding stop. Then, as he saw Slim get down from the cab to examine the fallen spruce, he heard language—a gorgeous stream of it—that most assuredly was not used in the best Boston circles.

Chan didn't even let him finish his sulphuric tirade against Maine and forest trees and the world in general. Chan stepped out from behind the thick stump, leaped nimbly to the roadway, and let the racketeer have the heel of the axe behind his right ear. As Slim went down, pitching forward like the proverbial stunned ox, Chan got out his handcuffs. Then he sat on his captive's back, twisted his arms behind him and slipped the manacles over his wrists. After that he picked him up and tossed him onto the truck seat. Chan hadn't hit him too hard—hadn't desired to—but he imagined he'd be out for a fair quarter of an hour or so.

Chan had more work to do, though, he reminded himself with another of his infrequent smiles. He had to chop away some of that tree so that he could get the truck through.

So he got to work.

CHAN was driving the truck toward the Landing with Slim slumped beside

him, some forty minutes later, when the Boston man spoke for the first time:

"Taking me to a hospital? This damned elbow— Need a job on your own arm, too, don't you?"

"Got to stop at the Landin', first. Got to send back a deputy to pick up Cliff an' tell the coroner to go look at the bodies o' Mort an' your pal Bill. . . . You'll see a couple o' hospitals, after I show Judge Marvin an' some other witnesses the evidence. We take illegally killed fish an' game to hospitals, here in Maine. We don't like to have out-of-state hoodlums take 'em to high-toned restaurants an' sell 'em the way your Interstate Transportation Corporation has been doin', like I learned on the 'phone. . . . But don't go to worry about your *elbow* done in patchin' it up, later. You see, we hit the Landin'. I'll have a real good job done in patchin' it up, later. You see, we like to have you fellers in perfect health—all bodily fit, the way it's called—when we aim to send 'em to jail for a long time. . . . You—you got a long, *long* stretch ahead o' you, too, Mr. Boston Slim," the game warden ended dryly.

"Who squawked? Who tipped you off, Buzzell?"

"You did. Knew you wasn't goin' into Little Loon when I see that reddish sort o' clay on your tires. No roadbed like that, into there. Still, that wasn't really it, all alone. Thing that really tripped you was that you didn't use a piece o' material that all you truckin' companies has got slews of."

"How's that? What's that?"

"A tarpaulin—a canvas tarpaulin."

"*Tarpaulin*?"

"Yep. That's the word. Dictionary gives the definition somethin' like that it's a piece o' waterproof canvas—soaked in tar, I think—for coverin' merchandise an' protectin' it from rain an' water. . . . Had you—"

"What the hell has that—"

"Had you used one o' them *under* your layers o' ice water wouldn't have leaked through your floor. Hadn't water leaked through your floor, I wouldn't have seen the silver fish scales that come with it from the salmon."

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OLLIE HEARS A CRICKET

By HAROLD de POLO

The robber had already heisted a big stack of payroll money from Sheriff Ollie Bascomb's friend and a murder attempt lay ahead. Too, this bad galoot was tricky—and Ollie would need more than his outdoor cunning if . . .

OLLIE BASCOMB, in his capacity of sheriff, was depositing some official county funds in the Derby National Bank when Lester Heald, the cashier and vice-president, called out to him:

"Del Brown calling you from the lumber camp, Ollie. Seems in a hurry. Tried to get you at the courthouse and they shifted him here when he said it was very important."

"Hope it *don't* come to be trouble," complained Ollie as he ambled over to the railed-in private office where Les sat at an imposing desk. 'Judas Priest, I were countin' on doin' some huntin', this mornin'."

The banker compressed his lips in a condemnatory fashion and glanced at the customers about the various windows.

Ollie took the receiver, put it to his ear, and listened with an occasional nodding of his head:

"Sure be a bad day to git robbed, Del," he finally commented. "Crimus, I were cal'latin' to hunt me some rabbits. Nice trackin' snow on the ground for 'em . . . Oh, all right, I'll be up to camp whilst I'm traipsin' 'round . . . Yep. Be lookin' for me. G'bye."

"Robbed? Del Brown's been robbed?" cried Heald.

"Yep. Seems as though some feller come 'long an' stuck up him an' his bookkeeper. Got the payroll. Couldn't git clean away. Still there, barricaded in the tool house with a gun, Del said. I—"

"Poor Del," said the banker, but an odd light had come to his eyes.

"Umm. Don't reckon he were insured. Be needin' more money, mos' likely."

"Perhaps you could save his money for him, if it wouldn't interfere with your hunting," replied Les sarcastically, while most of the other people there nodded their sympathy for the lumber boss.

Lester Heald was Ollie's most implacable political enemy. He had been beaten in the last three primaries by the sheriff, and he never failed to get in a dig whenever he could.

Ollie, known as the greatest birdin' an' troutin' fool in the whul' State o' Maine, gave no immediate answer. Ollie was short and squat and rotund, with a round face and wide, china-blue eyes. Now he slowly pulled off his battered black felt hat and brushed a hand over his utterly bald head. Then he rubbed at his jaw reflectively and drawled:

"My soul an' body, folks, but I *got* to hunt me some rabbits. A feller don't often git as good a day as this un'. I—"

"By all means, by all means," cut in the banker. "Bring me back a nice bunny, please. It would come in very handily, with this meat rationing."

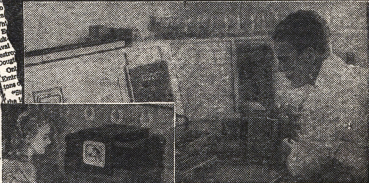
Ollie didn't seem to notice the looks of annoyance, a few of them of anger, that were cast at him. Del Brown was a popular man.

"Trouble there be, Les, that I already promised a couple o' fr'en's a rabbit, do I git any. I . . . Land sakes, I seem to be runnin' into all sorts o' jams t'day, don't I? . . . I . . . oh, all right, if I have any

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luck I'll try to remember you, Les."

"Much obliged. That's another reason I hope you don't let Del's misfortune keep you from enjoying your noble sport," said Lester with his grating little laugh.

"Try not to," Ollie hopefully assured him as he waddled out of the bank.

BUT if Ollie had been slow in leaving the bank, slow in walking down to the courthouse and jail in the rear of which he had his comfortable living quarters, he was far from slow when he got to his own home. He yanked the receiver from the telephone and told central to get him Del Brown at the lumber camp as fast as all Sal Brookes and the Devil or even faster.

"Try to keep that crook holed up till I git there, Del," he said when he'd been connected. "I'll be travelin' jest as fast as my bus'll go."

"Knew you would." Del laughed. "Thought you were talking for our friend Heald's benefit. Thanks, Ollie."

Ollie clapped a hand against the right pocket of the frayed canvas shooting jacket he wore all year. The ancient .45 Colt revolver he carried was there. Then he pulled out a desk drawer and slipped a pair of handcuffs and keys into his other pocket and hustled outside. He didn't take a shotgun or shells for any rabbit hunting.

His venerable coupe may have been a weather-beaten and battle-scarred object in appearance, but it had an engine in perfect condition under its hood. So was the rubber on his wheels, and he had sound chains on these for the tough Winter going in northern Maine. They kicked up a scurry of snow as he started the machine and was off up the road at a pace that was close to fifty an hour in less than a hundred feet.

He continued at this clip, up the cement road, for the four miles or so to Saltash Corners. There he had to turn west on a rutted road that led to Lower and Upper Saltash Lakes. The snow was packed down pretty well from the passage of lumber trucks, luckily, and he was able to keep going at close to forty, even if he had to do some skidding and jumping.

Del needed that payroll. Del was an old friend, and he was also about the best-liked woods boss that this timber section had ever known. He was a few years older than Ollie—around sixty, now—but they

had been pals since boyhood. Del had played in hard luck, in recent years. One thing or another—the elements, men leaving him, broken contracts—had caused him to suffer loss after loss in every venture he undertook. He had told Ollie that this contract he now had with The Sapphire Match Company, of getting out ten million feet of pine, would put him on his feet, if he made good. The logs had to be down at the Saltash River, at the Derby mill, by April first, and it was now the middle of February.

Ollie knew just a little more than Del did, he figured, about some of the inside business going on. Heald's bank had lent Del close to thirty thousand dollars, and, if Del failed, the bank could take over the lumber contract from the Sapphire people. They, too, were under obligations to the Derby National, and they would have to play ball with Les. There would be a nice profit for Les Heald and the bank—if Del Brown failed.

The sheriff also knew, from talking with Del, that this would be the last payroll money that Del would have to borrow until his operation was completed. When it was, the contract read, the Sapphire Match people would settle up with him instantly. This payroll, of which he had just been robbed, had been exactly six thousand two hundred dollars. Ollie knew that, if Del couldn't meet the payroll, his lumberjacks would quit. The riffraff a man had to take these war-time days were not the type of old north-woods lumberjacks that would stick with a square boss until the last gun.

As Ollie came to the logging road between Upper and Lower Saltash, where Del was cutting the tract on the south slope, he didn't know just yet what he was going to do.

DEL BROWN came hurrying to meet him, from the boss's cabin next to the long bunkhouse, before Ollie had even brought his car to a stop:

"Mighty glad you're here, Ollie, old friend."

"That rat still holed up?"

"He is, Ollie." Del nodded, pointing to a shack hastily thrown up with rough lumber to house the saws and axes and other implements and the usual dynamite that might be needed.

"Still got a gun, I call'late?"

The lumberman smiled. He was a tall, lean man, square-shouldered, and with that outdoor look that denoted good physical condition. He had thick black hair and a beard, both flecked with gray, and his keen black eyes looked quizzical:

"He wouldn't still be in there, if he didn't. Haven't even got a rifle or shotgun in the camp. You know I don't like to keep 'em during lumbering operations. Some of my men might get on the prod. I always did like to keep the law about not serving deer meat or any other game in a lumber camp . . . sheriff," he finished dryly.

"Not my job. Up to the game warden. Good law, howsomever . . . How'd it all happen?"

"Sent my men off in the trucks before sunup. Cutting that southern slope about four miles in, you know. Tim Keith and I were here alone and I was helping him with the books, making up the payroll, when this fellow showed up. Came into the office, here in the cabin where Tim and I bunk. Said he wanted a job. Lord knows I was willing to give him one, especially as he looked like a seasoned lumberjack. Suddenly he pulled out a gun and told us to stick 'em up and grabbed the payroll. Tim was game. He went for the automatic we keep in the top desk drawer. Just when he got it out, the crook tried to shoot his own gun—revolver—but it didn't go off. Then he made a dive for Tim. They seemed to mix it up and the gun exploded. Tim didn't get hit, luckily. Next thing I knew, this crook was out the door with the office automatic. Of course I tried to bluff. I yelled after him I'd shoot if he didn't drop the money and give up. I didn't have anything to shoot with. He fired back at us twice. Then he made the tool house and he's been there ever since. I've kept on trying to bluff him but it hasn't gone any good. That's . . . I guess that's all I can tell you, Ollie."

There was a somewhat hopeless note in Del's otherwise firm voice as he told his story, and Ollie, with a glance at the tool house of which they could see a corner only, asked anxiously:

"Sure he's still there?"

"He was about ten minutes ago. I called out he'd better give up because I'd sent

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for reenforcements—that's you—and he told me to go to hell."

"Let's git to your office, let's see his gun . . . Hey, keep out o' the line o' fire, Del."

In the crude small office with a desk and a table and a few bunks in it Keith handed the sheriff the crook's weapon:

"There's his gun."

"Hmm. Broken firin' pin," said Ollie a second or two later after he'd fingered the firearm.

"Lucky for Del and me, I reckon," said Keith, a little wisp of a man with pale gray eyes and an eager face who'd done bookkeeping work in lumber camps for years and was also a boyhood friend of Ollie's. "He most likely would've killed us both and got the money in the bargain, eh, Ollie?"

"Mos' likely," agreed Ollie. Then he asked: "Ever see him 'afore t'day, Del? Anythin' familiar 'bout him?"

"No."

Ollie had his own Colt out, by then, and had moved to one of the windows:

"Jest watchin' the tool-house door," he explained. "What's he look like? Think careful, Del, please."

"He's . . . well, a big man, anyway. Taller than I am, and more rugged. Could have been around forty. Dressed like a lumberjack. High calked boots, plaid mackinaw and cap to match. Had the earflaps down. Spoke with a slight accent that might mean he was a Canuck. I . . . yes, I'm sure I can remember he had a bad scar from his right cheekbone going down to the outside corner of his jaw. Seeing I could see that, of course he was clean-shaven."

"What color plaid mackinaw, Del?" asked Ollie, after blinking and frowning for a moment or two.

"Green and black," said Del instantly.

"Hmm. . . . No food out in the tool-house, o' course?"

"Not a bit."

"Could he have been hit when the gun went off?"

"Don't know. Didn't see any blood on the floor or on the snow outside." Del shrugged. "You're wondering why he's staying there, I suppose. Well, he may think we've got shotguns and rifles, you know."

"Umm. Window in back o' that tool-

house frontin' on the ravine, if I recall right. That the only one?"

"That's all."

"Wonder why he ain't made a break, even if he does come to think you got guns?" mused the sheriff. "Funny, if it happens to be Vic. . . . O' course, we could starve him out—might take days—or we could send for some rifles an' shotguns an' surroun' the place at safe distance when your crew gits back from the woods . . . Hmm. Wait a minute."

OLLIE raised the office window, and as Del and Tim crowded close behind him he called out, in the French patois that most Maine residents close to the border can use:

"That you in there, Victoire Pitou? Better come out, if it be. This is Ollie Bascomb speakin', sheriff o' the county. You know me an' know I mean business, I reckon."

Silence.

Then, as Ollie called out again, he hadn't used more than four or five words before there was a terrific explosion and the tool-house went up in a cloud of smoke and thousands of pieces of flying metal!

"Duck," yelled Ollie, dropping to the floor, and starting to crawl hurriedly over to the door.

But Del Brown and Tim Keith hadn't ducked quite fast enough. Decidedly poor Tim hadn't. For as Del cried out in pain, and Ollie turned, he saw that the woods boss was holding onto a shoulder where a broken piece of a crosscut saw had entered it. At the same time, he saw poor Tim Keith. He was stretched out on the floor, lifeless, with a wedge lying beside him that had crushed in his right temple.

"Shot off the dynamite, eh? Where's your med'cine kit, Del?"

"Go and see if he escaped, first."

"The devil with him for a minute. Lemme 'tend to that shoulder, fu'st."

Del, obviously in great pain, pointed to a large cabinet on the wall, and Ollie got busy. He got out bandage gauze and iodine and a pair of scissors and picked up a pail of drinking water and set it on the oblong heating stove.

"Try . . . try to get that payroll, Ollie. I can fix myself up."

"Nasty cut, Del. Hanker to clean an' bind it 'afore I leave, an' even then I don't

like to leave you alone. Cook up in the woods with the men!"

"Yes," Del smiled in rather bitter amusement. "These lumberjacks are so finicky today you've got to serve 'em a hot midday dinner right on the spot."

Ollie nodded understandingly and kept on at his nursing job. He worked quickly and deftly, but it was a good twenty minutes or more before he had extracted the piece of saw blade, washed out the wound, filled it with iodine, and bandaged it up. Then he made a sling for his friend's arm, with a neck muffer and a piece of board, and excused himself:

"Want to look the ground over. Back soon."

"Get away!" Del asked when Ollie returned a few minutes later. He added, with another grim smile: "Money would be gone up in the explosion even if he hadn't, I suppose."

"Yep. He got away. Looks like he'd went out that back window an' set a fuse an' lit her when he were over t'other side o' the ravine. One thing, Del. Means your money ain't blowed to pieces, leastways."

"I . . . I guess I've lost another couple of thousand dollars with all those tools," said Del slowly, a trifle sadly.

"Might p'raps mebbe git that back, if that come to be this Vic Pitou."

"What's your move now, old friend?"

Ollie, in answer, took out a pair of fur ear muffs and adjusted them. He didn't like caps that had flaps you pulled down and tied on under your chin. A fellow needed something on, though, when he was apt to be out for quite a spell in below-zero weather.

"Aim to trail him, Del. I sure do hope to bring back your money. . . . Tencac'tridge clip in that aut'matic you had? Know if it were filled?"

"I'm sure it was a ten. Yes, it should have been filled. No one has used it in—oh, in a few years. What's that got—?"

"Jest like to know. Take it easy, Del. I'll be moseyin' 'long. Stall the men off on their pay. Reckon they'll listen to sense under the circumstances, with a man like Tim Keith murdered. Hope to be seein' you soon."

"You're a good friend, Ollie," said Del, with deep feeling in his voice.

"My job, you dummed galoot, ain't it?" blustered Ollie as he went out the door.

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OLLIE, once on the other side of the ravine behind the tool-house, saw that the murderer's tracks—he was a killer, now—led due west. Over in that direction, between Upper and Lower Saltash Lakes, over Saltash Mountain, lay the nearest chance of escape. Close to twenty miles away, over dense wilderness country without a single town, was the railroad that went south to Bangor and north into Canada. That was the place for which a retreating criminal would make.

Ollie figured that the killer, at most, had a forty-minute start on him. This didn't bother him too much. Ollie may have been in his middle fifties, may have been of seemingly cumbersome build, but he could travel through the woods as fast as any trapper or hunter in Maine. After all, he'd been birdin' an' troutin' all his life, and this hadn't exactly softened up his muscles.

He had added incentive behind, now. Del's getting robbed had been enough, but now it was also a matter of Tim's murder. That was done, though, and the thing to do now was to get back his friend's money. He had a vast respect as well as a deep liking for the lumberman. Del had been in last year high school when Ollie had entered, and he had been a poor boy, yet he had gamely worked his way, all unhelped, through college after graduation.

If it happened to be Vic Pitou up ahead of him, as Ollie'd hinted to Del, he'd get that money back for the ruined tools if he could catch him. Pitou, last Fall, had held up a remote camp of the Amalgamated Northern Lumber Company, decidedly the biggest timber outfit in Maine. The payroll had been a small one—under two thousand—and he had not killed a man. He had, however, wounded a cook's helper who had come to the assistance of the office man. The Amalgamated Northern, immediately, had posted a reward for his capture, dead or alive, of two thousand dollars. The crime had taken place far out of Ollie's bailiwick, but Ollie always kept track of such things. The man had had a scar running from his right cheekbone to his outer jaw, and he had been wearing a black-and-green plaid macinaw.

Ollie, as he trudged along at his even, easy gait that nevertheless could eat up ground realized this tracking job might not be too easy. The Canuck was a season-

ed woodsman, who knew this particular section of the country. He had worked a few winters ago, the Canadian authorities had informed him, over on the other side of the Saltash Range.

AS OLLIE paused to take off his mittens and roll a cigarette, he found himself frowning. Lead-colored clouds had suddenly appeared in the north, and Ollie knew what they meant. They meant snow, and from the wind that was rushing them along they meant snow mighty quickly. If it came before dark, and it got dark early in February, it also meant that Pitou's tracks would be obliterated. As Ollie finished rolling his cigarette and lighted it, got his mittens back on and started going again, the first swirling flakes started to wet his face.

Ollie didn't believe in hurrying, on a job like this, but he told himself that he just *had* to, now. As he lengthened his stride, put more speed into it, he found himself frowning again. Hopefully, this time, and a trifle thoughtfully. The fugitive's steps were growing shorter, and twice, in succession, the left foot had lagged, the tip of the boot dragging in the snow. But, if the snow was going to tell him anything, it would have to be soon, for it was now coming down in great, thick flakes—almost a solid sheet of it—that would make tracking a virtual impossibility in a few minutes.

Then, a couple of hundred feet farther on, Ollie let out a little whoop of glee. The snow was trampled in a circle a few feet in diameter, and Ollie could plainly see the marks where a man had sat down. As he himself crouched on a knee for closer scrutiny, he could detect a little spot of dark red on the snow, with a few other drops around it. Blood, undeniably. That was why the man had stayed in the tool-house. He had been shot, no doubt in the leg or foot, when he had wrested the automatic from poor Tim Keith. He had been fixing up his wound before he had tried to make his escape and blown up the building.

But, if Ollie had been elated at his discovery, he was equally depressed as he got to his feet. The sky was invisible, the snow was coming down so that he couldn't see a half-dozen feet ahead of him, and he knew that further tracking—that further

pursuit of any sort, just now—was utterly senseless. No use getting lost yourself when following a wounded man who might also get lost. So, being an old campaigner, Ollie got out the hunting knife he carried in his belt and started gropings to cut some balsam limbs for a lean-to and most likely a bed for the night.

He had one consolation. His quarry wasn't any better off than he was. In fact, the quarry was a heap sight wuss off.

BEING a tried-and-true old camper, Ollie had been able to sleep. It wasn't precisely comfortable sleep, and it wasn't warm sleep, but he slept, and rested and stored up energy, until some sixth sense told him that a change had occurred. When he opened his eyes, at last, he saw that it had stopped snowing, that it was clear and crisp and much, much colder. A good two feet of snow, however, lay on the ground. All tracks had been obliterated. He was, so to speak, in an untouched wilderness world.

Ollie brushed and shook off the snow from his body, and got to his feet. Naturally he felt a bit hungry—felt like having some good hot coffee, mostly—but he was a veteran camper accustomed to going without food or java when he had to.

Dawn was coming, as he stood there with his arms akimbo while he thought and thought hard, and like a flash an idea dawned upon him. Vic Pitou knew this section—knew it well—and Ollie tried to put himself in the fugitive's position. If he'd been in this same position, with a wounded leg or foot and still fourteen or fifteen miles from a railroad or even a traveled thoroughfare, what would he have done? He wouldn't have lain down—not with a murder behind him—and given up all hope. He'd have gone on and on, even if he hadn't been sure he'd murdered, until he'd had to drop.

All right. What would a feller do? What would Pitou do?

Ollie had a hunch what he'd do. He'd make for a camp not much more than a mile off from the place where he'd have to fix up his leg again. It was plumb east, well off the trail to the railroad, but if a man had known about it, and had happened to be a good woodsman, he could have made it last night even after the

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snow had come. Ollie, anyway, played it that way, played it that Vic Pitou if it was Vic Pitou, had made for this haven.

The sheriff, switching his own direction, turned east. He knew that log camp of Seth Whipple's—knew it well—for he'd used it as a hunting base a good many times in these past twenty years. So had a lot of other folk used it. Seth had set it up, on the cellar foundation of a farmhouse abandoned close to fifty years ago, when he himself hadn't been much more than a young squirt. Seth had been and was a true sportsman, though, and he'd certainly acted like one. He'd left the camp open and stocked with wood and food, and had merely latched the door and hung a printed sign on it saying that anyone was welcome to use it if he just closed the door again and left a mite of *kindling* for the *next* occupant.

Ollie could see the cabin, after he'd topped a short rise a quarter of a mile away, outlined against the sky in the midst of a long-dead apple orchard. No smoke was coming from the chimney. Even so, he kept on. He came up to the cabin and looked at the door. The drifts of snow piled high on the north, where the entrance was, meant nothing. This would have covered all footprints if anyone had entered before the storm had started. But the door was still latched.

WITH a sigh, Ollie pulled the latch back and went inside. The camp looked familiar and cosy, cold though it was, and it also looked as if he had played it wrong. There wasn't the slightest sign that anyone had been there and then left and again latched the door. No footprints or remains of snow were on the clean, swept boards of the floor; no signs of cooking were in evidence, or any sort of eatings; no fire, apparently, had been built in the stove. But, before he himself started to make a fire, and brew some coffee, Ollie sat down to roll himself a cigarette and do a speck of thinking.

He heard a cricket chirp in the chimney, as he leaned back in the chair and took his first puff, and a smile came to his lips. It was always a friendly sound, the chirping of a cricket, and Ollie liked friendly things, liked to hear them. But suddenly, instinctively, he stiffened and took the cigarette from his mouth and

gazed about the room without moving. Then he got up, humming a tune, and began walking up and down the cabin. That door, he was certain, *had* been latched, and no tracks had led *away* from the house. He'd have seen *some* evidence of them, even with the heavy snow drifts.

He looked at the trapdoor, in one corner of the room, that led to the deep cellar below. He looked at the stove, again, and then felt the top of it. Cold. He put a palm against the fieldstone chimney. Also cold. That would be so, of course, on the outside, even if a small fire had been going on fairly recently. He stood still.

He listened to that cricket again, to be dead sure. The chirping was fast, fast. Then, all at once, he remembered that there was a window to the cellar, on the outside of the building near the door, wide enough to allow a man to enter. Yes, even a big man. The snow, too, would have covered all traces of that.

The cricket went on chirping, rapidly.

Ollie played an idea once more. He picked up a broom from a corner and got a pillow from one of the bunks, tying this to the broom handle with a dish cloth he found on a towel rack. Then he took off his rusty black hat and jammed it over the end of the pillow. After that, he unlatched the trapdoor, yanked it open with a bang as he stepped back, and stuck the broom handle and pillow and hat over the opening while he cried out lustily:

"You come on out o' there, Vic Pitou! You dirty murd'rer, you come on—"

Four shots, faster than the cricket had chirped, boomed out from that cellar, and Ollie's keen eye saw that two of them had gone through his beloved hat. So had a few other holes been put in that same piece of headgear, in past years, and the men who had put them there had received lead in return. But just now, although the family Colt was in his right hand, the sheriff didn't use it. Instead, he let out a groan, tossed the broom handle and pillow and hat aside, and fell heavily to the floor and lay there without moving.

He moved a wrist and a forefinger, though, when he saw a hand come up out of the trapdoor opening, with an automatic in it and a green-and-black plaid mackinaw sleeve about the arm. He waited, however, until he saw a head appear—a head that showed him a face with a livid

scar that ran from the right cheekbone down to the outside jaw.

Then he gently squeezed the trigger.

OLLIE was an extremely humane man, but as the dead body toppled back down the cellar stairs he didn't feel the slightest qualm. He did not believe in coddling criminals, most especially killers. Most especially wanton money killers. Saved the State o' Maine a pile of cash, handling 'em that way. Cost a heap, keeping men behind bars for life where they didn't believe in capital punishment. Besides, he could still envision poor Tim Keith, lying dead.

Ollie, with a shake of his head, turned away and went to the door and flung it open. He stood there, for a moment, and opened his mouth wide and pulled in a few lungfuls of the crisp cold air as if to rid himself of some unpleasant taste. As he looked out at the deep snow, looked at the defunct orchard he had remembered in full bloom as a boy, a slow smile of amusement, of infinite satisfaction, came to his round, weather-beaten face.

A jackrabbit, a couple of hundred feet away, was sitting up as still as the proverbial statue.

Ollie never did believe in taking standing game of any sort, so he let out another of his whoops. This time it was a warning one. As the jack started to leap, Ollie let him have it. When he saw him turn a somersault in the air and flop down onto the snow, he allowed himself a faint grin before he went down to the cellar and got the payroll from the body of Victoire Pitou.

Then he started to build a fire in the stove. He'd need some hot coffee before he took that hike through the deep snow back to Del's camp and then drove to Derby and sent out Doc Appleby, the coroner, with a few men to bring in the corpse. He had to pick up that rabbit on the way, too, and take it home with him.

Ollie couldn't help laughing, when he thought why he'd shot that bunny.

OLLIE got another laugh, when he presented that same rabbit to Lester Heald, the banker. Ollie timed his entrance into the bank, and he had to hustle some to do it, for it was just before three o'clock in the afternoon. Always crowd-

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ed, the financial institution, come that hour.

"Sorry I couldn't git you a pair, Lester, but I got you this un'," he said, as he tossed in onto the banker's desk.

"Thank you, thank you," was all that Heald seemed to be able to say.

"My soul an' body, Les, don't thank me," contradicted the sheriff. "Thank a cricket."

"A . . . a cricket?" asked Lester, plainly taken aback and showing as much astonishment as did the crowd of customers.

Ollie removed his battered black felt hat with the two new bullet holes in it and began to run a stubby forefinger through them. He nodded his head very, very solemnly:

"Yep. A reg'lar, ord'nary, garden variety o' cricket. Hadn't been for him, chirpin' away, I never *would* have had this bunny for you. Neither would I have captured this Victoire Pitou cuss—I wouldn't hav' been able to kill him in self-defense, I mean. I wouldn't hav' been able, at the same time, to git back Del Brown's stolen payroll o' six thousan' an' two hummerd dollar that the Derby National Bank won't no more have to lend him. I—"

"You got back Del's money?" gasped Lester.

As Ollie hesitated before replying, possibly looking for a better lead to a come-

back, one of his strongest supporters presumably thought he saw a chance of helping him:

"How'd you do it, you flea-bit ol' son of a gun?"

"P'raps mebbe that fool birdin' an' troutin' o' mine helped me do it, Lemuel. You know, a feller that hunts an' fishes is ap' to know suthin' 'bout *all* living wild things. Birds an' beasts, fish an' even insect's, like they say . . . Well, you'll hear the whul' story when they git the corpse here an' you come to the inquest, but if it hadn't been for that *cricket*—"

Ollie paused, and if he'd aimed to get his audience on its toes he'd done it. He continued, as if expounding an excessively rare bit of natural history:

"Well, folks, if a cricket chirps twice or three times as fast, there don't come to be no doubt whatsoever that he's in a warm place. . . . That's how I come to know, for certain, that *someun'* had been in Seth Whipple's camp an' built a fire since that storm set in. . . . Stove were cold, chimney to feel it were cold, but it must 've been hot *inside*. . . . Cal'late that's where the cricket were, inside the chimney where it were warm. . . . Much obliged, ladies an' gents. Do you desire another lesson in natural hist'ry, toddle home with Mr. Heald an' watch him try to skin a bunny!"

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THE SUICIDE MURDER

(Continued from page 29)

admitted it and seemed a little proud of being that way. She's playing with Joe Cady right now, letting me take her out on the side, and she told me she was considering Lengel's offer of divorcing his wife and marrying her. I've just about got old man Holmes ruled out of the thing because he hasn't got as strong a motive as the others have—he doesn't stand to make a cent by Lengel's death and all the others do. So there you are."

"There *you* are, Marty. I'm right here. *This* killing is mine—the Lengel thing belongs to the boys uptown."

"They're connected killings."

"Maybe. I think maybe this housekeeper knocked this guy off."

"How was he killed?" I asked.

"Shot in the head. With his own gun."

"That's the way Lengel was killed. Could this have been suicide?"

"Hell, no. Not unless he wiped all the prints off the gun after he shot himself. The gun was clean, and if he'd done it himself, his own prints would show on it."

I said: "Mind if I use the phone?" and when he told me it was all right with him, I got the uptown precinct on the wire, then got the sergeant who'd made the investigation into Lengel's death, in turn. I told him who I was and then got down to business.

"Did you check Mr. Lengel's gun for fingerprints, Sergeant?" I asked. "Something like that has come up in connection with a friend of Mr. Lengel's."

The sergeant was as Irish as Paddy's pig, but not the brightest soul in the world. He said: "Now you know, Mr. Dolan, that was sort of a funny thing. I checked that gun, or had it checked, and y'know there wasn't a print on it. I guess maybe the guy had just cleaned it up, and when it was fired, it jumped out of his hand in such a way as to destroy his prints."

I said: "Thanks, Sergeant."

"Sure, Mr. Dolan, but for what?"

"You just made my client a cinch for three hundred and twenty grand."

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"I don't get it."

I said: "You'd better reopen that case, Sergeant. It's turning out to be a murder, and a suicide on the books won't look so good. It's just a tip."

Bascom said: "Gimme the phone," and took it and introduced himself. He said: "Sergeant, Dolan's got something there. I've got the same sort of thing right here, but I'm calling it murder, believe me. I'd do more checking on that one if I were you."

Bascom hung up then and turned around, looking satisfied. He said: "I've wanted to get something on the boys at that precinct for some little time, and baby, have I got it on them now. Imagine, passing a thing like that as suicide."

I said: "Imagine you passing this one off as having anything to do with the housekeeper. It's just as dumb."

"I'm not dumb now, Marty. Lengel was murdered—no prints on the murder gun proves it. The gun was wiped clean after the man was shot and no man shot in the head could pull a caper like that. So that means two murders instead of a suicide and murder, and that means they're probably tied together in some way."

He acted like he'd figured it out all by himself and I let it go at that. I didn't want the credit—I just wanted to get hold of Mrs. Lengel and take her down to the insurance offices—or have her get a lawyer to go down for her.

I was already planning on how I'd spend the bonus promised me for proving Lengel's death was murder.

Then I departed.

CHAPTER IX

Solid Suspects



MRS. LENGEL was out, according to the maid, and I decided the soldier I'd met was probably making hay while the sun shone and while his leave was still good. And I hoped he'd make a lot of hay—I wasn't thinking too kindly of the way the widow was rolling her eyes in my direction.

So I dropped up to Lengel's office. I

wanted to tell Arlene about F. Horace Armage being killed and I wanted to see if I could find out more from her sober than I had when I was drunk and she was half-way the same.

And I walked in and busted up just about the same kind of party I'd broken up once before.

Joe Cady, who'd been Lengel's bodyguard, stood up and the gal almost went on the floor. He hadn't bothered to lift her off his lap—he'd just stood up.

He said: "I'm getting good and sick of you butting in my business, Dolan."

I said: "Well, if you want to pick on a poor old cripple, why, you go right ahead. And keep your hands in sight. You're the kind of buster that'd pull a sap on me."

"Maybe I'll pull more than a sap, Dolan."

I was getting interested, even to the idea stage. I said: "Okay, Joe! Put up or shut up."

He stood there, going red and white in turn, and I laughed. I said: "Then trot along, little man. And the next time you shoot your mouth off, do it with somebody you can run a whizzer on. That isn't Mrs. Dolan's little boy."

He mumbled: "Be seeing you!" to Arlene and went out the door, and, for the first time since the argument started, I took a close look at her. Her eyes were snapping and she looked mad enough to bite nails.

I said: "Hey! I haven't done anything."

"Who said you had? It's that Joe Cady I'm sore at."

"Oh, Joe's all right in his way."

She knew the gag. She said: "But he don't weigh enough—I know. How's your wound?"

"I've never spent so much time on my feet since I walked a beat. And that was the first year I was on the cops."

"You made detective-sergeant, didn't you?"

"I did not. First-grade detective was the best I could do. There's more dough in this private business, even if it comes in spotty."

"I guess so," she said thoughtfully. "Joe's thinking of starting a detective agency himself."

"With what? It takes money, and Joe never struck me as the saving type."

"There's that," she admitted. "But Joe thinks he knows where he can get some money."

I didn't think Joe Cady could borrow more than ten bucks anywhere in town, and he'd have to put up his watch to get that. The idea I'd started with a few minutes before started to get bigger and bigger.

I said: "One thing, hon. When Lengel made his deals in the money-lending business, where'd he make 'em?"

"Why, here, of course. At least he made some of them here."

"None at his house?"

"Well, some, I guess. Because he brought down some of the things he'd loaned money on and put them in the office safe, until the bank was open, that is. He had a safe-deposit box, you know."

I HADN'T thought much about it but it was a cinch that Lengel had held at least one deposit box and probably more.

I said: "Which bank, hon?"

"The Manufacturer's Trust."

I happened to know the Manufacturer's Trust and how they worked their deposit boxes.

They had a key word for each banking day in the year. For instance, if a man rented a box on May 15th, the key word for that day might be "Savings." If he rented it on the 16th it might be "Commercial." Just picking those two words as an example.

The boxholder would have to stop by the guard and tell him the proper word, and the guard would check it against a slip. Then, if it was right, he'd go with the customer and use his master key at the same time the client used his private key, and the two of them together would open the box. It took both the guard and the customer to open up.

Then the customer would take his little box to a little cubbyhole and clip his coupons or what have you.

I said, and tried to make it casual: "Did he make you do his banking for him, too?"

"Just deposits, Mr. Dolan. If you mean



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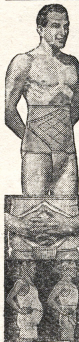
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did I have anything to do with the safety-deposit box, the answer is no."

She caught on fast—there was no question about that. So I let it go and talked for a few minutes and tried to make a date for the next night and got turned down. And then I telephoned the Lengel house, to see if the widow had returned, and found she hadn't as yet. But I got other news to offset the widow's absence.

The maid said: "Mrs. Lengel hasn't returned yet, Mr. Dolan. But there's been a call for you—a Lieutenant Bascom asked that you call him at the station—in case we heard from you."

I told her thanks and got the station and then Bascom. And I could tell he was sore and excited, even over the phone.

"You, Dolan!" he snapped. "What time was it you saw Judge Myers?"

"Just before I saw you down at Armage's place. I went from the judge's house directly to Armage's."

"What time would that be?"

"Probably nine-thirty. Around there."

"Did he have anything to say about where he was going?"

"Sure," I said. "He was going to meet me at his place at seven, tonight."

Bascom said:

"He's dropped out of sight. He left his house to go to court and that's the last seen of him."

"How'd he go?"

"His car and his chauffeur."

"Did you check the chauffeur?"

"Sure. A stranger—a new man on the job. Been working for the judge about two months is all. I hear the judge had trouble keeping help—he acted like they were in front of him for trial all the time, and so the help would quit him and go to work in a war plant."

"I'd figure that, Bascom. Now what d'ya think about the Lengel business?"

He told me that what he thought of it couldn't be said over a phone and told me to keep in touch with him and let him know if I ran into anything or got any ideas about the thing.

And I hung up without telling him about the idea I already had — it seemed

a bit too early to spring as wild a one as this brainstorm was.

I didn't think I was wrong but there was always that chance—and I didn't want to clutter up Bascom with any false notions.

MRS. LENGEL apparently was making a stay of it so I stopped at Junior's apartment instead—and I found either the same party going on or another starting just like it. And it was only about three in the afternoon then. I saw that my blonde menace was there, as usual, but she was taking a nap on a couch and so seemed safe enough, at least for the time being.

At that I kept my fingers crossed. I was getting a little tired of spanking the kid.

Junior, for once, wasn't past the halfway stage on his drinking. He said: "Hiya, Dolan! You got that hellcat of a Maudie trailing you this time, too?"

"I have not—I can't find her."

"I'd like to lose her for good."

"Where can we talk?"

He led me over to a sort of alcove and I followed him, making sure the wild blonde was still sound asleep.

I said: "It's this, Junior! Joe Cady worked for your old man quite a while, didn't he?"

Junior said:

"Sure. Five, maybe six years."

"Did he ever go to the bank with your dad?"

"He did if dad was carrying anything worth real money."

"He'd stick close then, wouldn't he?"

"Why, sure."

"Close enough to hear what was said, you think?"

Junior said: "If what you're driving at is whether Cady could go to the bank for dad, the answer is he could."

"Could he get into the safety-deposit vault for him?"

"Sure. He ran errands like that all the time."

"You . . . uh . . . know about your father lending money, then?"

"Sure. It was legitimate, Dolan. Dad and Armage saw to that."

"It looks like that would be taking quite a chance. I mean letting Cady have his

hands on that stuff in the deposit box."

Junior laughed. "Dad was no chump, Dolan. He's the one that got Joe Cady out on parole. A word from him and Cady would have gone back and finished a ten-to-twenty stretch that he'd put only two years on. Cady knew which side of the bread had butter, believe me."

"Armage got himself killed, you know."

Junior said he *didn't* know, and I believed him. He might have heard the news over the radio, but if anybody could have heard a radio over the din in that place he'd have had to have ears like Superman.

I said: "And that isn't all. Judge Myers is among the missing."

Junior thought that was funny. He said: "Maybe the judge is out with Maudie—I've seen the old geezer out whirling 'em around in some pretty lousy spots, Dolan."

"That what your old man had on him?"

"Hunh!" He stared at me and then he laughed again. "I bet you hit it again, Mister. Dad would have used anything like that on the old boy in a second. I wish I knew what it was—I'd be damned if I'd be fired from my job then."

"By any chance, did you have an in to your father's deposit box? I mean, if Cady could get to it, could you?"

"Hell, no! Dad couldn't very well send me back to jail—so he wouldn't trust me with his dough and you damn' well know it."

"He wouldn't have trusted Cady, except that he had Cady where he wanted him."

"Your step-mother is going to collect on the insurance, kid."

"The hell she is. D'ya know my wife's on her way to Nevada?"

"I didn't, no."

"Sure. Let her go, I say. There'll be another one coming along."

"You ought to marry Maudie, kid. She'll be in the money and she's looking for a man."

He said: "That ——!" but there was a thoughtful look in his eyes when I bowed out.

And I bowed out just in time—the blonde was stretching herself and starting to look around and see what she'd missed.

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CHAPTER X

Tough Trap



RS. LENGEL was in her big front room and she had both her big army sergeant and Joe Cady with her. The sergeant was at the side, looking embarrassed, and Cady was standing in front of Mrs. Lengel and looking sore.

All three of them stopped whatever they were saying or doing when I followed the maid in, and I thought Mrs. Lengel, at least, looked glad to see me.

I said: "You win, hon! You get your insurance, but you'll have to get somebody besides Armage to collect it for you. He's dead and gone."

"What happened to him?"

"Ask Cady."

Joe Cady was standing flat-footed—he must have sensed something coming up. He yanked his coat open with his left hand and grabbed for the gun under that armpit with his right, but I carry a gun on a belt holster for a cross-draw, and that's twice as fast as a shoulder rig. And I proved it. Cady looked at the muzzle of my gun and took his hand away from his gun as though the butt had burned him.

I stood there.

Mrs. Lengel gave a little scream and the army sergeant stood up and said: "Hey! What goes on?"

I said: "One thing, Mrs. Lengel. What d'ya know about Judge Myers' chauffeur? Did your husband put him on that job? Did he get the judge to hire him?"

"Why, he's a friend of Joe's," she said. "Joe asked Lengel to get him a job with the judge, and Lengel did. It was nothing to him, one way or the other."

"Did you know him up in the can, Joe?"

Cady told me what I was or what he thought I was, and it wasn't favorable. The sergeant decided he should take a hand then, though he didn't have the least idea of what it was about.

He said to Joe: "You cut the mouth, Mister. That's no way to talk in front of a lady."

I said: "He'll be talking to a judge pretty soon, Sergeant. Let him have his say."

Cady talked some more and then I broke it off.

"Let's check it, Cady. You wanted to cut in and you had to get rid of Lengel to do it. Lengel had the business on you—you couldn't afford to take a chance on him putting you back in the pokey. Between you and the girl you knew just what he was doing and how he was doing it, and the stuff he had in the deposit box was enough to finance the new concern. You had what Lengel had on Judge Myers—Lengel would have kept that evidence there in the box along with the stuff he'd fenced. The contracting business could go hang—it would have folded up anyway, without Lengel's connections swinging it. All you wanted was what you could get out of Judge Myers and the fencing racket, and that would have been a very good thing. What I want to know is what you did with the judge."

"You talk a lot, Dolan—it'll take proof in court."

"Bascom will have it, Joe. D'ya think that girl of yours will stand up under questioning? The cops will take her folks down to her, and she'll crack wide open the minute she sees them. She just thinks she's a hard-boiled wench—she's really a pretty nice kid."

Cady said: "You say a word against her, Dolan, and it's you and me for it, gun or no gun. I mean it."

"Did you know Myers' chauffeur up in the can, Joe? What did the two of you do with the judge?"

"I don't know anything about it. I can prove where I was all morning."

"I wonder if the chauffeur can. Bascom will certainly see if he can—you can depend on that. And if the guy's on a spot like you—out on parole—he'll spill to Bascom and you can bet on it."

Joe stared at me.

I WAS watching Cady but I could see both Mrs. Lengel and the big sergeant from the corners of my eyes. I saw the sergeant's eyes get big, saw Mrs. Lengel open her mouth as though she wanted to

scream and couldn't, and then something poked me in the small of the back.

It couldn't have been anything else than a gun—and the man who held it told me that was just what it was.

He said: "Drop it, Mister. Or I'll blow your backbone through your belly."

I dropped the gun, of course. Then the man said: "Over to the wall and then turn around. I want to see your ugly mug."

I did as I was told, and when I turned I saw a little dark man, dressed very neatly in uniform. He wore his visored cap well back on his head, and looked like he was about half high on marijuana, and held a Colt Police-Positive as though he knew how to use it and wanted a chance to do just that.

I said: "I was just talking about you, Mister. This won't get you any place. Lieutenant Bascom's on his way here right now."

"Nuts to you," he said, then spoke to Cady. "I heard it all, Joe," he said. "I was just outside the door. The old boy's snoozing along and I come up to see what gives. Just in time, hunh, Joe?"

Joe Cady snarled: "You fool!"

"Hunh, Joe?"

"This breaks it," Cady said bitterly. "You had a lot of guesses, Dolan, but this breaks it. I didn't want it this way. Lengel was a lousy no-good rat and so was Armage. So okay—who cares? Maudie may not be such a much but I never knocked off a woman yet. You was in it for the dough—I don't blame you. And this big guy ain't got a thing to do with it. It ain't my fault at all."

He took his gun from under his arm, then walked to where I'd dropped mine and picked it up. I looked over at the army sergeant and saw he'd caught wise—he was looking a little sick, but he was on his toes and ready to fight at any break. Mrs. Lengel sat where she'd been, with her mouth open and a disbelieving look on the rest of her face.

I said: "You've got the judge in the basement, Joe?"

"Sure. The louse turned honest when Loocy propositioned him. There was nothing else we could do. The old geezer said

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he'd be damned if he'd be blackmailed all his life—he said it was bad enough to do Lengel's bidding, but that he'd be damned if he'd keep on that way for a couple of ex-cons."

"Looney was with you all the way, then?"

Looney, the judge's chauffeur, said proudly: "Sure. It was me that sapped you down, Mister Dolan. We figured you might have something up in that joint of yours—a lot of you snoops hold out evidence until you get it all together before you turn it to the John Laws. And Joe's wife said you were smarter than you look and that we should keep an eye on you."

Cady said: "You got it, Dolan. Arlie and me have been married since right after she went to work for Lengel. We kept it quiet because she was working the old boy for spending money plenty. So there you got it."

BOTH Looney and Cady were watching me and the big sergeant was a little behind them and between them. I nodded, and he went into action like one of his own army's tanks. He got to Joe Cady and hit him on the back of the neck so hard that Cady slammed clear across the room and almost took me with him.

He'd have hit me center unless I'd moved, but I'd started when the sergeant did. As soon as he'd picked his target, I picked mine, and I had Looney up in the air and into the wall almost by the time the sergeant had Cady started on the downgrade. Looney came down from the wall like a rag doll—I'd pitched him into it head-first, and I got his gun and swung toward Cady, just in case.

By that time the sergeant was on top of him and giving him a course in the judo the army teaches very well. I collected both Cady's gun and my own, and then stopped the sergeant before he broke the guy into pieces.

"Don't kill him, Sergeant," I said. "He'll have to be in one piece if he's going to say 'Good morning, Judge!'"

Mrs. Lengel said: "Oh, Joe!" and waited until the sergeant turned her way.

Then she fainted very prettily and let the sergeant pick her up and put her on a couch.



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Then I gave the sergeant Cady's gun and told him to watch the two guys while I went judge-hunting.

I found him in a little room back of the furnace—and the old boy actually cracked a joke.

He said: "Mr. Dolan, you grow on one. I'm actually glad to see you."

I LOOKED ahead to telling Junior about the thing and I certainly didn't want to go with Lieutenant Bascom when he picked up Arlene Adair, or Anna Polivska, or Mrs. Joe Cady—which ever name they'd be trying her under. I'd really liked the kid—but about the only excuse I could find for her was the old one about bad company. As far as that was concerned, Junior Lengel was picking about as bad company as he could find for himself — to my certain knowledge he hadn't been sober since his father had been killed.

I went in and the first thing I saw was the blonde. She started toward me, very purposely, and I got set and ready. And then tried to talk my way out of it.

I said: "Look, hon! Let's not play rough. At least not until I'm a well man again."

She'd started to breath hard, working herself up into a rage, but that got her curious.

She asked: "What the hell's the matter with you?"

Junior staggered up and said: "Nothing a drink can't cure."

I said to the blonde: "I got shot, hon," and to Junior: "There are developments, kid. We got the guy that did for your old man. It was a plot—the guy's wife was in it with him, also Judge Myers' chauffeur."

"Who was it?"

"Joe Cady. He was married to your father's secretary."

Junior said thoughtfully: "So that's the reason the Arlene wench wouldn't ever go

out with me. I've always wondered. That means that Maudie gets the insurance with no chance for a slip, eh?"

"Sure. And she won't have to cut it with Armage, either. Cady killed him, too, because Armage would have cut in on the graft or would have cracked it open if he'd been frozen out. Cady was going whole-hog or none. He had this dopehead chauffeur he'd served time with to help him, and the two of them were going to town."

"Three hundred and twenty grand," Junior said, still thoughtfully.

"Well, not quite. There'll be a lot of that out for taxes, of course. And I get five percent of it as a bonus for proving your dad's death a murder. That's sixteen thousand out in one piece."

Junior wet his lips and said: "It still leaves a big hunk of money, Dolan. Maudie wouldn't be so hard to take if a man kept an eye on her."

I'd been watching the blonde, ready to get my guard up in case she came for me. But the gal had been listening and she'd heard what I'd said about sixteen thousand dollars. She gave me one of the sweetest smiles I've ever had in my life and moved in and took my arm.

She said: "It's silly of little me to be mad at great big you. Let's you and me make up and have a little drink to show we're not mad any more."

We had the drink and we weren't mad any more. For that matter, I like a girl who's got a little spirit.

Joe Cady got life and Looey, the chauffeur, and Mrs. Cady, or Arlene Adair, or Anna Polivska—all her names came out at the trial—got twenty to forty years apiece.

Junior and Maudie waited until the case was through to get married—I gave them credit for it. They both said it wouldn't be decent to hurry things.

BACK The Attack—
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TEMPER, IT'S TERRIBLE!

(Continued from page 49)

blackmail. He imagined at first Tyle had stolen some compromising document or other from this safe. It was only at the last minute he figured out the right answer, somehow or other learned of the changed combination, and went after that."

HELEN FOUSTER sat up groggily, wiped blonde hair away from her blue eyes. "It's the first thing I thought of when I saw Mr. Tyle murdered—that he might have kept a record of the new combination when he changed this safe's combination. That's why I hurried to his room. There was no office space at all in the shop, so if he kept books it must have been at his room."

Old Man MacGonigal said, "That part's all right. But why in hell would Ikkin—if he is Ikkin—use his own name to rent a room there? Why not call himself Smith or Jones?"

Kenneth T. Kenzie's brown glance twinkled.

"Were you ever in Europe, sir?"

"Me? I never even got to Yellowstone Park yet!"

"It's different in Europe. This bird didn't understand American slang—or American ways."

"An American doesn't think a damned thing of signing Smith or Jones on a hotel register, for instance. But over there, a hotelkeeper or a landlady always has had to turn in her guest list to the police, and moreover, everybody carries his papers at all times. If you're caught without 'em, it's the clink."

Kenzie shrugged his roly-poly shoulders and said:

"That's the pay-off. Weikler would have known better, but Ikkin didn't stop to think. He'd kept his own passport along with Weikler's, he used his own name because it seemed the safest thing to do. It was a case of crime on the European plan."

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